



LHP *Bulletin* 78, April 2020

ISSN 1175-3064

The Labour History Project Inc.

PO Box 27-425 Wellington

Aotearoa New Zealand

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

Cover: Jared Davidson (Image: [scitechdaily.com](http://scitechdaily.com))

Design: Jared Davidson

Editor: Paul Maunder

# Contents

## FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

Editorial .....	4
Chair's Report .....	5
News and Events .....	6

## FEATURE ARTICLES

Bright Stars, Comets and Union Activism <i>John Ryall</i> .....	9
Christine Clarke (1954-1999): Social Activist, Champion of the Underdog, Labour Martyr <i>Peter Clayworth</i> .....	14
The History of a Riot: Class, Popular Protest and Violence in Early Colonial Nelson <i>Jared Davidson</i> .....	17
The Working Life of a Unionist <i>Ged O'Connell speaks with Paul Maunder</i> .....	23
The History of Building Te Runanga in the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions <i>Syd Keepa speaks with Catherine Delahunty</i> .....	30

## REVIEWS

<i>Helen Kelly – Together</i> <i>Therese O'Connell and Claire-Louise McCurdy</i> .....	33
<i>Helen Kelly – Together</i> <i>Paul Maunder</i> .....	33
<i>Harriet Morison: Fighting for Fairness</i> <i>Claire-Louise McCurdy</i> .....	34

## OBITUARIES

Dick Scott <i>Mark Derby</i> .....	35
Gerry Hill <i>Richard Hill</i> .....	36

## Editorial

It has been an extraordinary first week of the lockdown, a week when history has become tangible. The only other time I have experienced something similar was the week of the Springbok Tour from Hamilton to Palmerston North with the Molesworth Street batoning in between.

But even as we experience the abnormality of the lockdown we begin to think of the return to the normal, and what will have changed and who will be dictating that normal. Do we want to return to that normal of neo-liberalism with its inequalities? Will we want someone to blame? Who will pay the bill? Now that the state has taken full control will it want to relinquish that power? The full flower of the border has bloomed, with the accompanying fear of the polluting outsider. This is easily used by the neo fascists. A new authoritarianism could be waiting in the wings, with accompanying mantra: we live in a competitive world and must wall ourselves in; or one using the rhetoric of science and the common good. We are getting used to citizens dobbing in those who are not obedient. The agricultural sector, recently under the environmental spotlight, is promising to be the engine of a recovering economy. The technology sector will have grown more powerful; the logistic and surveillance and data collection empire on offer to states and corporations, organising us into what one writer describes as a neo-feudal society, 'an algorithmic world of data and risk management where only a few enjoy the benefits'.

On the other hand, there are the positives: we are seeing governments take measures that a few weeks ago would have seemed impossible; measures that reveal the lies of the neo-liberal regime. As rents are frozen, tenants protected, banks instructed not to foreclose on mortgages, universal basic income measures introduced and corporates told what to do and not do, the god of the free market has fallen. At the same time we are discovering whose labour is truly important: health and care workers, supermarket checkout operators and shelf fillers, rubbish collectors, service station attendants... and we question why they have been so underpaid. We are also discovering the power of local co-operation and mutual aid. Competition, mistrust, and the endless hustle of the entrepreneur have small place in this world. This level of government action would also be possible in order to tackle the climate crisis. These are the elements that we would hope can make up the new normal.

Meanwhile, within the lockdown it is possible to produce the April edition of the LHP *Bulletin*. Aptly enough, it pays homage to a group of activists who have either retired or who have passed. As well, there is a very interesting snippet from the settler past and a sparser roundup of reports and reviews. Take care.

In solidarity  
Paul Maunder

# Chair's Report

Kia ora tātou,

Who would have thought that the new normal would be to live in a bubble? And here we are in the final few days of the lockdown at level 4 – the Homestay as I've come to call it. Others call it the Rahui.

Helen Kelly's mantra: "Be kind" – to others, to ourselves – enables me to steady a course through this pandemic and rubs off the hard edges of anxiety I carry because I love. What I have come to accept is that I would rather care about people and suffer anxiety, than not.

I worry about those I do not know – who do not have homes, or enough to eat, or live in fear of violence, or don't have a regular income, or those who work but have no protective gear and don't complain because their boss says they'll lose their job if they do. I worry about my students whose only offer of financial help from the government to date is to increase their student debt and I worry about the staff I work with, especially those who usually support and teach international students – redundancies are a very real prospect. I worry about the cleaners at Victoria University of Wellington because OCS Limited NZ, who contracts those cleaners, refused an offer from the university to top up the wages of cleaners at home during the lockdown (I am furious at OCS). I worry about my Mum on her own in her bubble at the other end of the island, and sometimes I worry for myself when my asthmatic cough appears. I love, therefore I'm anxious, I'm anxious therefore I love. And in that calm of knowing this, there is room to act, in kindness. In whatever form I am able, we are able.

The LHP Committee had our first ever zoom meeting last week. We lamented the passing of our dear comrade Dean Parker. For some beautiful tributes to him, please go to: <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2020/04/21/1137196/dean-parker-has-left-the-building>. His incredible Rona Bailey lecture from last October is on our website in video form.

We also began a brainstorm on what topics we would like to discuss at our AGM, which usually occurs in July, and who would be ideal to present on those topics? The pandemic has revealed the deep inequalities in our society, and the climate crisis remains – what would we like our new normal to be as we gradually come out of

Homestay? If you have ideas, please send them to us. We are contemplating how a zoom AGM could work, so stay tuned...

I want to thank all of you who contributed to this issue of the Labour History Project Bulletin – what incredible people you are.

Cybèle Locke, Chair



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:

Labour History Project Inc.

Kiwibank

38 9012 0672630 00

Please include your name and "Sub" as references so that we can identify your payment, and please email treasurer [@lhp.org.nz](mailto:@lhp.org.nz) when the deposit has been made, including your contact details. That way we can send you the *Bulletin*.

# News and events

## **'Activism, Struggle & Labour History' 16th Biennial Conference of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History', 3-5 October 2019, Perth Trades Hall Building, Australia**

Cybèle Locke

Bobby Oliver, representing the Perth Branch conference organising team, welcomed about 90 historians, unionists, activists and supporters to Perth Trades Hall on 3 October 2019. Whadjuk descendent Vaughn McGuire welcomed us to Country in the Noongar language, paying respects to his Whadjuk elders, traditional owners of the land in Perth, Fremantle, Joondalup, Armadale, Toodyay, Wundowie, Bullsbrook and Chidlow for over 45,000 years. This lyrical and generous welcome set the scene for many presenters to begin their conference papers by acknowledging the traditional owners of Australia, paying respect to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledging that sovereignty was never ceded. I followed suit in te reo Māori when delivering my own paper on the last day of the conference. Across the three-day conference, we were generously hosted by the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) for no charge at the beautifully-restored Perth Trades Hall.

The conference was anchored by three keynotes given by Emeritus Professor Ralph Darlington, Professor Diane Kirkby and a panel of trade unionists led by Australian Council of Trade Union secretary Sally McManus. Apart from the keynote there were always three parallel sessions, which means you get my particular journey through the conference.

Ralph Darlington gave the first keynote – 'The Pre-First World War British Women's Suffrage Revolt and Labour Unrest: Never the Twain Shall Meet?' – and went looking for interconnections between these, at times, frustratingly separate suffragist and trade unions/socialist left movements. It may not surprise you that Ralph found them at the grass roots, amongst unionised working-class women or those who had brothers active in the labour movement.

The first panel I attended was 'The decline of British slavery, and Aboriginal dispossession: the making of colonial Western Australia'. Historian Jane Lyndon traced how those who had made their fortunes in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, as it was abolished, became involved instead in overseeing the transportation of working-class British convicts to Australia – commonly

understood at the time as white slavery. Jane focuses on the WA Swan River colony where a racialised, classed labour hierarchy was established. Historian Jeremy Martens investigates how, after violently dispossessing Aboriginal communities of their land in the 1830s in York, the York Agricultural Society was instrumental in bringing convict labour to Western Australia in the 1840s, and later, indentured Chinese labourers. Historian Ann Cuthoys rounded out this remarkable session by strongly arguing that labour history should be put into conversation with settler colonial studies. She rejected the idea that colonialism was about dispossessing indigenous people of their land rather than their labour, and advocated historians should attend to all forms of unfree labour bound up in the process of colonisation.

I was excited to see a New Zealand history focus in the paper I next attended, 'Stirrers and galley slaves: the mobilisation of women in Australia and New Zealand broadcasting in the 1970s', by media historian Jeannine Baker. She described two strikes – by ABC television script assistants in 1973 and TV2 production secretaries in 1977. Women challenged gender discrimination – their low status, low pay and lack of career opportunities in the industry – and won better wages and conditions, but struggled to gain real parity. If any *Bulletin* readers were involved in the 1977 strike or know people who were, please contact Jeannine at:

[leannine.baker@mq.edu.au](mailto:leannine.baker@mq.edu.au).

Another talk I really enjoyed was Noah Riseman's 'Work, Respectability and Framing Transgender Rights in 1990s Victoria and NSW'. Noah argues that the 1990s saw the beginning of sustained transgender activism in Australia to challenge discrimination, particularly in employment. It was fascinating to recognise the similarities with what Will Hansen has found in his thesis research on trans resistance in New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s.

I finished the first conference day by joining a group of conference participants to go on the Radical Fremantle history walk, hosted by Charlie Fox, Riley Buchanan and Paul Reilly. It was fantastically designed and orchestrated, and involved us singing Solidarity Forever in a very public setting (those who know me will not be surprised to know I enjoyed that a lot). The walk put me in mind of the fabulous 1913 Wellington History Walk organised and run by LHP people in 2013. The day ended with fish and chips and beer – what could be better?

Day two of the conference began with Diane Kirkby's excellent and thought-provoking keynote 'Maritime Labour, Men of Power and the Dynamics of Activism', which applied a gender and race lens to maritime work and unionism. She explores the patriarchal nature of the solidarity culture that informed shipboard and shore life and the longterm affects of the Australian Navigation Act 1912, demarcating between free and unfree – white and 'lascar' – maritime labour.

During the conference, Iain McIntyre recorded some sessions for 3CR community radio, a media space for progressive groups 'to voice ideas and build their power to create social change', and the next panel I went to was recorded, so you can listen (links below). Phillip Deery spoke about 'International Activism and the struggle to save the Rosenbergs' in the early 1950s – a fascinating case study of Cold War politics; well-known political scientist Verity Burgmann explored the relationships between 'Trade Unions and the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement' with three case studies in 1999, 2000 and 2001, to help us grapple with the way 'far-right populist demagogues' are currently attempting 'to exploit legitimate working-class discontent with neoliberal globalization;' and historian Rae Francis gave an excellent talk on 'Sex trafficking, labour migration and the state.'

I was supposed to Chair the next session, but because I had an awful chest cold, Jeannine Baker kindly offered to do this for me and I went for a rest. The panel focused on gender history – Bri McKenzie and Clare Davison examined midwives' struggles in the face of state intervention to medicalise childbirth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Sarah Fulford discussed the experiences of female nurses in war zones. As I write this I am acutely aware that if I exhibited the kind of chest cold symptoms I had then today, I would have been calling the Covid-19 Healthline and staying in my hotel room – but this was 'in the time before', and so I went back to the conference for the last session of the day, without any thought of where my germs would spread.

Heather Goodall, Julia Martinez and Claire Lowrie discussed the International Labour Organisation in different historical contexts. Heather explored how the ILO has been useful to Australian industrial and social justice activists – as a way to apply political pressure at the local level and as an international platform where

activists from around the world could meet and voice their demands, and at least be heard by each other. She also prompted us to think about the ILO as a potential archive. Julia Martinez's exploration of Australia's administration of Chinese labour in mandated Nauru in the 1920s was eye-opening, because New Zealand and Britain were co-trustees of this mandate. The ILO asked questions about slavery in Nauru in 1923 and Australian Administrator General Griffiths replied that slavery did not exist on the island, because indentured labour was not understood as a form of slavery. Julia explored how protections were established for islanders but not for Chinese indentured labourers working four-year terms in horrific health conditions. Claire Lowrie took us to Singapore with her paper 'An end to indenture? The ILO, the continuation of penal sanctions and domestic worker activism in Singapore during the 1920s and 1930s'. In 1914, Chinese indenture in Singapore was abolished and by 1927 the ILO found Singapore was in compliance, apart from domestic servants. It was extremely satisfying to hear how domestic workers became rebellious and highly organised as members of the Malayan Communist Party and transcolonial networks in the late 1920s.

Day three opened with a keynote panel of incredible trade unionists, chaired by UnionsWA secretary Meredith Hammat. ACTU secretary Sally McManus, Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union WA secretary Steve McCartney, Community and Public Sector Union branch secretary Rikki Hendon and United Voice (service workers) secretary Carolyn Smith described the adverse political times for workers in Australia – only 15% of workers are unionised – and the need for new strategies to connect working people and struggle for justice. Key issues for the ACTU are the rights to: bargain across all sectors and industries, have access to all workplaces, strike; unionise all workers (including labour hire and others in insecure work), and pay equity. I was particularly impressed by the delegate-based, community-centred organising strategies on key issues, such as wage theft, being trialled by United Voice.

Lunchtime saw Stuart MacIntyre launch the book, *Radical Perth, Militant Fremantle*, edited by Charlie Fox, Alexis Vassiley and Bobbie Oliver, published by Red Swan. Thirty four radical moments from the historical past are laid out geographically (as if you were on that walking tour) – check it out at:

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/50181394-radical-perth-militant-fremantle>.

My session was next and all our papers were recorded so you can listen by following the links below. Iain McIntyre gave an excellent paper about squatting movements during a massive housing shortage in 1940s Australia, I spoke about why the Northern Drivers' Union had anti-racism policy (in regard to domestic racism and apartheid South Africa) in place from 1960 and Vashti Fox discussed Melbourne 'Fascism and Anti-Fascism in the 1990s'. The last paper of the conference was delivered by Fran Haynes who introduced me to rap artists La Bruja and Nitty Scott who explore Puerto Rican liberation through their productions and social media posts – check them out. Awesome mahi.

Bobbie Oliver and the rest of the conference-organising team did a superb job – thanks from the bottom of my labour-history-filled heart.

To listen to recorded talks at the Labour History conference, go to:

<https://www.3cr.org.au/summerspecials2019-2020>

### **Activism, Struggle & Labour History**

Talks from the 2019 Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Conference (City Limits Summer Break) The program will cover Australian and NZ scholars giving talks on topics such as union, anti-fascist, anti-racist, housing, anti-globalisation and other campaigns and struggles. Presented by Iain McIntyre.

**Episode 1:** Phillip Deery, 'International Activism & the struggle to save the Rosenbergs'; Vashti Fox, 'Fascism and Anti-Fascism in Melbourne in the 1990s'; Verity Burgmann, 'Trade Unions & the Anti-Corporate Globalisation Movement'.

**Episode 2:** Charlie Fox, 'Chinese seamen at Fremantle during WWII'; Cybele Locke, 'The Northern Drivers' Union. An anti-racist organisation in the 1960s'.

**Episode 3:** Nick Everett, 'The Campaign to defend native rights 1946-49'; Rae Frances, 'Sex Trafficking, Labour Migration and the State'.

**Episode 4:** Iain McIntyre, 'Squatting's place in Emergency Housing 1946-48'; Phoebe Kelloway, 'NSW Northern District Coal Lockout 1929-30'.

**Episode 5:** David Faber, 'Safety First, the 1934 Ingham Weil's Disease Strike'; Michael Pearson, 'The First Motor Mechanics, 1900-1920'.

# Bright Stars, Comets and Union Activism

## John Ryall



Alan Wakefield with pickets outside Wellington Hospital. *Dominion*

In my long experience as a union organiser I have met many memorable people who became great leaders in their workplaces, in their communities and in wider social movements. Some of these leaders were active in the union for decades and some of them for only a short time. While I have fond memories of all of them, the ones that appeared like comets in the night sky, shone brightly and then disappeared, have always fascinated me. One of these people was a Wellington Hospital orderly called Alan Wakefield.

I had been appointed as an organiser with the Wellington Hotel and Hospital Workers' Union in June 1982 and the largest site in my organising patch was Wellington Hospital. Wellington Hospital, along with three other public hospitals in my patch (Porirua, Kenepuru and Paraparaumu Hospitals), were run by the Wellington Hospital Board.

The Hotel and Hospital Workers Union had about 700 members in these four hospitals working as food service workers, orderlies, security workers and cleaners. The Wellington Hospital orderlies were an interesting male-dominant group who complained about everything, but unlike the female-dominant cleaners and food service workers were reluctant to take collective action to get their issues resolved.

My first experience of them was of them moaning about why they had to be in the same national award as the cleaners and food service workers. They felt their jobs were more important and valuable than cleaning or kitchen work and they would do better by themselves. Much of this was in response to the equal pay settlement in the 1970s, where the female rates had been removed affecting the historical relativities between cleaners, kitchenhands and orderlies.

The day after I commenced employment with the Hotel and Hospital Workers' Union the then Prime Minister Muldoon imposed a wage freeze, which lasted until his Government was defeated in June 1984. During this period it was illegal to negotiate awards or other collective agreements that increased pay rates.

The wage freeze did not mean that there were no workplace disputes. The orderlies had issues about the interpretation of their current award conditions and about their increasing workloads as the Wellington Hospital Board tried to make savings by non-replacement of staff who left employment.

In late 1984, with the incoming Labour Government's removal of the wage freeze, the union was gearing up to renegotiate the Hospital Domestic Workers' Award, which covered the Wellington Hospital orderlies.

I arranged meetings at the public hospitals in the Wellington area (including the Hutt, Silverstream and Elderslea Hospitals) in order to discuss the improvements that members wanted to make to the award conditions. There was a separate paid meeting for the Wellington Hospital orderlies, held by arrangement with the management at the shift changeover time in the afternoon. Prior to the meeting I had discussed the importance of the meeting with the workplace delegates and relied on them to ensure all of the 60 orderlies attended the meeting.

When I turned up to the meeting there were only five members present, including three who were elected delegates. To my disappointment the delegates didn't seem too concerned about the turnout saying that the Head Orderly wouldn't release members from their duties and they would simply relay any information back to the members.

I continued the meeting, which was held in the orderlies' tea room, with the five members. Near the end of the meeting an orderly walked into the tea room heading for the change area. He stopped and said "what's going on here?" I explained that this was a union meeting in preparation for the union negotiating improvements to wage rates and working conditions. He asked why he hadn't been told of the meeting. I looked at the delegates and said "never mind, you are here now, so let's go back and quickly give you a briefing on what is going on."

At the end of the meeting I introduced myself to the new orderly, whose name was Alan Wakefield. He had only commenced employment as an orderly in July 1984 but was full of energy about the action that was needed to improve the orderly wages and employment conditions.

I indicated to him that nothing was going to change unless we developed some delegates who were able to excite the members about winning better conditions. He had been a workplace delegate for the Drivers' Union at a previous job. He agreed with my assessment and said he would talk to others and see what he could do.



Alan Wakefield. *NZ Times*

A week later he phoned me to say that he had talked to the members, held a meeting in the tea room and they had elected him as one of the orderly delegates. He had a list of issues that the orderlies wanted to pursue in the award negotiations, which were due to take place in Auckland in January 1985.

Alan and a number of other delegates from Wellington were keen to attend the award negotiations in Auckland and so I arranged with the union secretary for us to hire a van and to transport eight delegates to Auckland, who would be "observers" at the award negotiations.

The appearance of our eight Wellington delegates was a shock to the Hotel and Hospital Workers' Federation National Secretary and award advocate Russ Revell, who was not used to having a boisterous contingent of members in the back row while he was politely advocating our position to the Hospital Boards and contractors.

At that time the Government covered the accommodation costs for the small number of union negotiators, who were called assessors, but not the costs for observers. We made up for this by changing the rooms around and doubling up on people in the rooms so that the observers had somewhere to sleep and also smuggled them in a hotel breakfast.

What made it worse from Russ Revell's perspective was that our contingent at later negotiations became even bigger as the other observer delegates from other parts of the country started pushing for more representation from their own areas.

The award negotiations occurred after a three year wage freeze and the 80 separate claims for improvements that the union put up to the Hospital Boards and hospital contractors did not impress them, especially when they thought there had been agreement between the central bodies of employers and unions for a "compressed" wage round.<sup>1</sup>

The Hospital Boards and hospital contractors argued that because the award was "state-linked" and domestic workers in the state sector were paid less than the rates in the existing 1982 award that a wage reduction was in order. They followed this up with a demand that the union's existing role in having to give consent to the introduction of part-time work must be removed. After two days the negotiations broke down.

I think the employers thought that they had the power to get what they wanted and that the union would eventually rollover to their demands without them having to offer any pay increase that was greater than the tiny increases that were then being applied in the core state sector.

Alan didn't wait for the union to call meetings to consider the outcome of the award negotiations. On his first day back at work he called a meeting with the orderlies and they rejected the employer position. He phoned me to report on the meeting and said the orderlies wanted to immediately put 24-hour bans on certain duties, including transporting dead bodies from the wards to the mortuary.

I gave him advice and encouragement and told him to go ahead and I would meet him at the hospital the next day.

By the time I arrived at the hospital the next day it was all on. I was summoned into the Head Orderly's office and asked whether the union had given authority for the mortuary ban. I said that the ban was in line with us seeking an award allowance for the transportation of dead bodies and the action was a protest about the employers' position.

They said they would not accept any bans unless notice was delivered to them in writing from myself or the union secretary, Peter Cullen. I said I was happy to do this.

The orderlies were excited about the action that was being taken and were in favour of extending it. They had full confidence in Alan's leadership and felt proud of standing up for improved employment conditions.

Alan was always on the move taking up issues on behalf of members and calling meetings when the response was not positive. The Head and Deputy Head Orderlies had previously operated the department as if they were running a slave ship and when the slave mutiny commenced they were not happy. Any minor complaint about Alan was escalated to a major event and the disciplinary meetings and warnings started running thick and fast.

They complained that Alan did not come into the Head Orderly's office for a quiet chat as the previous delegate had done and that there were too many meetings. Alan was direct and whether you were the lowest paid person in the hospital or the highest paid he would tell you what he thought. Telling the Deputy Head Orderly to "shut up" when he was being lectured about what he should or should not be doing led to a warning for verbal abuse. Another one followed near the end of February 1985.

As the award dispute continued the orderlies implemented a series of rolling bans on the keeping of records, the transfer of bodies to the mortuary, the movement of supplies from the stores and the handling of dirty linen and rubbish.<sup>2</sup> Alan played a prominent part in directing these activities and made frequent appearances on the radio and other media outlets talking about the dispute. The action at Wellington Hospital started spreading to other parts of the region and the rest of the country. The union's intention was to place pressure on the hospital management, but not to stop the operation of essential services.

During the middle of this action Wellington Hospital management employed some students as temporary nurse aides. These workers were not union members and had been employed specifically to do the work covered by the bans. Tension arose with the orderlies and Alan, as the main delegate, was right in the thick of it arguing that the strike breakers should be removed and he held

orderly meetings to get support for this demand. One of these meetings ended with the orderlies walking off the job for the rest of their shift causing chaos and confusion but leading to the hospital management withdrawing the strike breakers.

Alan was also involved in trying to stop the hospital management using volunteers to get around an orderly ban on the delivery of flowers to wards. His discussion with the volunteers was resented by the management and led to threats of further disciplinary action.<sup>3</sup>

The Hospital Domestic Workers Award was finally settled on 6 March 1985 with a substantial wage increase and some improvements to allowances, including the creation of a new allowance for the transportation of dead bodies to the mortuary. While the ratification of award settlements was not required under the existing employment legislation, Alan and I both agreed that a report back meeting and vote by the members was important.

Alan approached the Deputy Director of Administration John Joyce about holding a paid stopwork meeting to discuss the award settlement and some other issues about sick leave and weekend rostering. He agreed that a meeting could be held on Friday 22 March 1985.

However, when Alan talked over the details with the Acting Head Orderly an argument ensued over how the hospital would be staffed during the half-hour paid meeting. The Acting Head Orderly insisted that in addition to the Head and Deputy Head Orderly a further nine orderlies would need to remain on duty to cover the 30 day-shift orderlies who were on duty on that day. Alan argued that this was too many for a half-hour meeting and that the orderlies would keep their pagers on in case of any emergencies.<sup>4</sup>

The arguments over the relief staffing during the meeting continued up to the time of the meeting, with no agreement. Alan was warned that if the meeting went ahead without the nine orderlies remaining on duty he would face disciplinary action. With no agreement in place all of the orderlies went to the meeting.

Very wisely, at the commencement of the meeting Alan told the orderlies of the arguments about the staffing levels and about the threat that he could be dismissed if the meeting went ahead without the relief staffing that

the management required. He asked the orderlies whether they wanted to go ahead with the meeting or for nine orderlies to go back to their posts. The orderlies moved a resolution that given there was no agreement reached on the relief staffing they would go ahead with the meeting involving all union members.

At the end of the meeting Alan and another delegate George Kahu went to John Joyce's office and met with him, the Acting Head Orderly and the Hospital Personnel Manager. John Joyce asked Alan whether he had complied with his instructions about the relief staff and when Alan replied that he had not, Alan was dismissed. Alan and the other delegate returned to the room where the orderlies had remained following the meeting and informed them of his dismissal. The orderlies voted to strike until Alan was reinstated.

The orderlies strike went on for 11 days, the longest strike of orderlies that I have ever been involved in.

While the orderlies picketed the hospital and had support from both the cleaners and the food service workers refusing to carry out their duties and donating money to keep them fed, the hospital management was organising staff and outside volunteers to carry out the orderly work and running the line that Alan had been dismissed because of his alleged outrageous behaviour and aggression towards other staff members.<sup>5</sup>

While Hotel and Hospital Workers' Union members at both Porirua and Hutt Hospital took limited strike action to protest Alan's dismissal the nurses and other workers at Wellington Hospital were not unionised in the same way as they are now and there was little support. The union was looking for other options to get Alan and the orderlies back to work.

The then Minister of Labour, Stan Rodger, was approached by the union and after much negotiation between the union and the Wellington Hospital Board, he called a compulsory conference under the chairmanship of Dunedin mediator Walter Grills, to enquire into all the circumstances of Alan's dismissal and decide whether the dismissal was justified.

The terms of reference, which had been agreed between the parties and was confirmed in a formal Ministerial letter, stipulated that Alan would be off-the-job on full pay during the compulsory conference and if he was

judged to be unjustifiably dismissed he would be immediately reinstated to his position at the hospital.<sup>6</sup> The terms of reference also gave the power for the chair to make any other recommendations about relationships between delegates and the orderlies department management.

When the Wellington Hospital Board agreed to put Alan on full pay during the period of the compulsory conference they must have been confident that this would only be for a short period and that Alan's dismissal would be upheld.

The union and employer parties met with Walter Grills for four days at the beginning of May 1985. The union argued that the compulsory conference was not about the dismissal of an orderly but was about delegate victimisation and the refusal of the Wellington Hospital Directorate to accept independent union organisation at Wellington Hospital. The union presented statements from 10 witnesses supporting Alan Wakefield and condemning the approach of Wellington Hospital management towards union representatives.<sup>7</sup>

While the Wellington Hospital Board was expecting a quick decision, Walter Grills did not send out his written decision until 18 October 1985. By this time Alan had been off work on full pay for nearly eight months.

The decision of the compulsory conference was that Alan Wakefield had been unjustifiably dismissed because as a union delegate he was merely carrying out the instructions of his members in going ahead with a union meeting without leaving an appropriate level of relief staff. If he was dismissed as a result of carrying out his duty as a union delegate, under instruction from his members, then he would have been discriminated against because of his union position.<sup>8</sup>

The decision though came with a backhanded slap to the union about allowing strike action without the union's general secretary being involved, about not pursuing arbitration in resolving disputes in essential services rather than resorting to strike action and indicating that if the Wellington Hospital Board had sought damages against the union, they would have been awarded.

However, none of this mattered as Alan Wakefield had been reinstated. While the Wellington Hospital management were appalled at the reinstatement, the orderlies

assembled outside the hospital and carried Alan back into work on their shoulders, accompanying him to the Head Orderly's office to sign in for work.

Alan had not enjoyed being off work for eight months as he was a very active type. Orderlies need to be fit because their job requires walking for long distances every day. When he came back to work it was not quite the same.

While he had been off work another orderly, Jock McMahon, had stepped forward to take over the delegate's role. Jock was just as staunch as Alan but had a longer trade union history and had the negotiation and leadership skills to match it. Alan recognised his able replacement and stepped down as the delegate. Alan worked at the hospital for another couple of months and then quietly resigned.

The comet had shone brightly, the role of the union and its delegates had been reinforced and those who followed were in a far better position than if the light in the sky had never appeared.

1. See Walter Grills, *Compulsory Conference Report*, 18 October 1985, John Ryall personal papers, Lower Hutt, 5.

2. Bans described in Grills, *Compulsory Conference Report*, 6.

3. Incidents described in Grills, *Compulsory Conference Report*, 7.

4. Incident described in Grills, *Compulsory Conference Report*, 10.

5. Letter to Wellington Hospital Orderly Staff, Wellington Hospital Directorate, 26 March 1985, E tū files, John Ryall personal papers, Lower Hutt.

6. Minister of Labour Stan Rodger to Wellington Hotel and Hospital Workers' Union Secretary Peter Cullen, 2 April 1985, E tū files.

7. Peter Cullen, "Opening Union Statement to Compulsory Conference", Wellington Hotel and Hospital Workers' Union, 3 May 1985, E tū files.

8. Grills, *Compulsory Conference Report*, 40-42.

# Christine Clarke (1954-1999): Social Activist, Champion of the Underdog, Labour Martyr

## Peter Clayworth



Christine Clarke with her husband. *Tui Motu Interislands*

The Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Christchurch was crowded to overflowing on Wednesday 5 January 2000, as mourners gathered for the funeral of Christine Elizabeth Clarke. Large numbers of port workers from Lyttelton attended the ceremony, having stopped work for 24 hours as a mark of respect. Christine died on 31 December 1999 from injuries received on a picket line at a Lyttelton industrial dispute.<sup>1</sup> Her death received wide media coverage at the beginning of the new millennium. Twenty years on, however, Christine Clarke is probably less well-known than her fellow labour martyrs; Frederick George Evans, killed during the 1912 Waihi strike, and Ernie Abbott, murdered in the Trades Hall bombing of 1984. Christine deserves to be remembered, both for her life of compassionate activism and for the circumstances of her death.

Christine Clarke was a highly respected worker for peace and social justice, with a belief in socialism firmly based in her Catholic faith. Father Jim Consedine was a longtime friend of Christine's family and was parish priest of the Church she attended in Lyttelton, the Church of St Joseph the Worker. He wrote, "She would be the last to see herself as a heroine in any sense. She was far too modest for that. She would see her commitment to justice as something normal which everyone should do."<sup>2</sup>

Christine began campaigning for social justice at an early age, when she was a pupil at Sacred Heart College in Christchurch. In the turbulent years of the late 1970s and 1980s she was involved in a wide range of causes. She was an anti-apartheid activist, a staunch environmentalist

and a peace campaigner who protested against nuclear ship visits. Christine supported workers and those on low incomes through the years of attacks from the Muldoon regime and during the subsequent era of Rogernomics. In particular she was actively involved in supporting the struggles of the Lyttelton Waterside Workers' Union. Disillusioned with the Labour Party, she joined New Labour and then the Alliance. Christine later became the electorate secretary for Green Party co-leader Rod Donald.

Christine had worked for Marriage Guidance and for Catholic Social Services, jobs where she saw the direct impact years of economic changes had on the ordinary people of New Zealand.<sup>3</sup> As Jim Consedine wrote:

“After almost 20 years of New Right economic reforms, Christine knew that individualism and individual advance should always be tempered by the requirements of the common good. She understood the enhancement of the common good to be measured by how well or otherwise the poorest were treated. She knew that the common good had taken a hammering over the last two decades, that ordinary people like herself had been disempowered and shut out of the economic reforms.”<sup>4</sup>

Christine was married to Glen Cameron, a supervisor at the Lyttelton port. The couple had two children. Their daughter Justine was sixteen at the time of Christine's death, while their son Joseph was ten. Jim Consedine reflected:

“Christine was a wonderful wife and partner to Glen, a great mother to Justine and Joseph. She was a much loved part of her wider family which includes her mother, sisters and brother. She was extremely loyal to her friends. She was fun-loving with an impish sense of humour. She loved gardening and flowers, books, poetry and reading, Celtic music and surprising people with little gifts.”<sup>5</sup>

In December 1999, Christine's commitment to social justice led her to support the Lyttelton branch of the Waterside Workers' Union (WWU) in their ongoing dispute with their employers, the Lyttelton Port Company (LPC). The Christchurch City Council was the 68% majority owner of the LPC, which was the largest employer in Lyttelton. By the late 1990s, containerisation and economic reforms had reduced the workforce on the wharves to around 150 workers, down from the 700 or so

watersiders employed in the early 1970s. In late 1999 the LPC made an agreement with a West Coast company to load coal at Lyttelton using non-union contract labour. The Lyttelton WWU responded on Tuesday 28 December by setting up picket lines at both entrances to the port. At this time the contractors had yet to start work; the picket was a symbolic protest rather than a blockade. Vehicles were only to be delayed for five minutes each before being allowed to cross the picket line. The union had a good relationship with the local police force and consulted them before setting up the picket. The police agreed that the picketing could go ahead on the assumption that this would be a peaceful protest. Throughout the picketing on Tuesday and on Wednesday morning only one or two constables at a time were assigned to attend the picket. The Lyttelton police applied the tactic of low-key policing, in the belief that it would help keep things calm and avoid any violent confrontation with the picketers.<sup>6</sup>

On the second day of picketing, Wednesday 29 December 1999, neither the picketers or the police expected any trouble. The first day had passed with only a few minor incidents. It was now expected the picket would soon be lifted, as the union and the LPC were close to reaching an agreement. Christine Clarke joined a group of around 140 picketers at Gladstone Quay to express her solidarity with the watersiders. The picket line followed the same practice as on the previous day, delaying traffic for around five minutes and then letting it through. Around noon, Derek Powell, director of a boatbuilding company, drove up to the picket line in a Toyota Landcruiser. Powell, impatient to get through, became involved in a verbal and physical confrontation with a group of about eight picketers. He then drove straight through the picket line. Christine Clarke, who had not been involved in the altercation, was knocked to the ground and run over by Powell's Landcruiser. She was taken to Christchurch Hospital, but died two days later from head injuries.<sup>7</sup>

In a rather cruel irony, union leaders reached an agreement on 29 December with the LPC to resume negotiations and lift the picket, but the line was still in place at 12 noon. The union and the LPC reached a temporary agreement on 30 December. The WWU committed itself to more talks with the LPC, while the port company agreed not to bring in the contractors for at least another month.<sup>8</sup>

In May 2001, Derek Powell stood trial in the Christchurch High Court for the manslaughter of Christine Clarke. Despite the fact that the jury convicted Powell, Judge Panckhurst, who presided over the case considered Powell was not the only one to blame. He declared that lax policing and “aggressive” union picketing were factors in Christine’s death. Panckhurst imposed a light sentence of nine months periodic detention on Powell and disqualified him from driving for two years. Powell appealed his sentence and was acquitted in a 2002 retrial. Members of the jury congratulated him afterwards, hugging or shaking hands with him.<sup>9</sup>

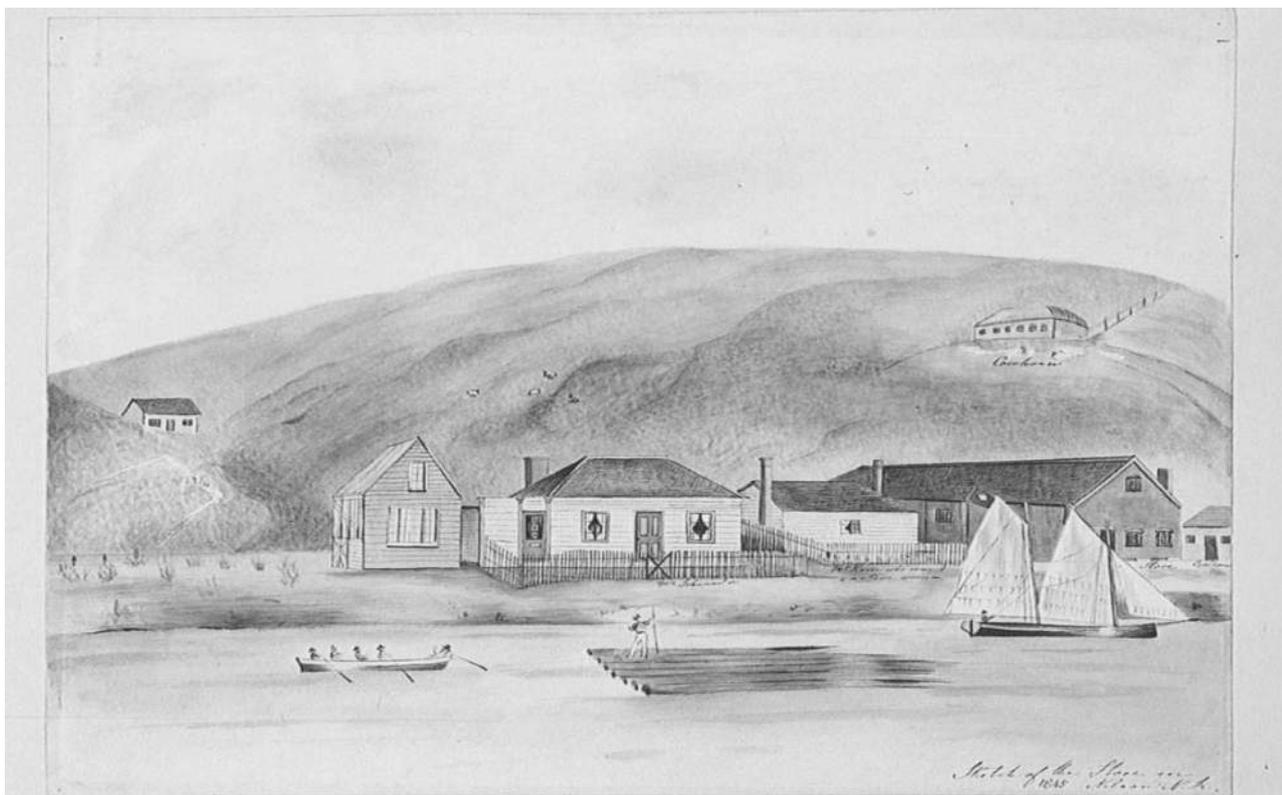
Christine Clarke, Frederick Evans and Ernie Abbott all lost their lives in the class struggle. They were all modest people, who acted to improve the lot of working people. Ernie Abbott’s murderer has still not been found. The men who killed Fred Evans were exonerated by the state. The man responsible for Christine Clarke’s death was given a light sentence and later acquitted. Christine’s mother, Marie Chirnside, later speculated on the role of anti-union prejudice in the treatment of her daughter’s killer. “If Chris had been on the nurses’ picket line a couple of months later and she’d been killed, New Zealand would have shuddered to a halt. But she was with the watersiders, the lowest beings on earth. It lets some people off the hook.”<sup>10</sup>

We must remember Christine Clarke, along with all those who died fighting for social justice. As Joe Hill noted many years ago, their best memorial is to continue their struggle; “Don’t mourn, organise.”

1. “Death on waterfront picket line in Lyttelton, NZ coal contracting dispute, 2 Jan 2000,” <http://www.labournet.net/docks2/0001/lyttel1.htm> accessed 24 March 2020; Murray Anderson, “NZ unionist killed on picket line,” <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/nz-unionist-killed-picket-line> accessed 24 March 2020; “Cathedral overflowing for service,” *NZ Herald*, 6 January 2000, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=108168](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=108168) accessed 24 March 2020.
2. Jim Consedine, “Christine Elizabeth Clarke RIP,” *Tui Motu Interislands*, February 2000, 31.
3. “Death on waterfront picket line in Lyttelton”; Consedine, “Christine Elizabeth Clarke RIP.”
4. Consedine, “Christine Elizabeth Clarke RIP.”
5. Consedine, “Christine Elizabeth Clarke RIP.”
6. David Baker, “A Tale of Two Towns: Industrial Pickets, Police Practices and Judicial Review,” *Labour History*, no. 95, November 2008, 153; Judge I. A. Borrin, *Report of the Police Complaints Authority on a Complaint about Police Conduct in Respect of Industrial Protest Action on the Waterfront at Lyttelton on 29 December 1999 during which Ms Christine Clarke Suffered Fatal Injuries after being Struck by a Motor Vehicle driven by Mr Derek Powell*, 29 April 2004, 1-2, 5-6.
7. Baker, “A Tale of Two Towns,” 156-157; Borrin, *Report of the Police Complaints Authority*, 5-7; Anderson, “NZ unionist killed on picket line.”
8. “Injured Woman Remains Serious,” *NZ Herald*, 31 December 1999, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=107569](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=107569) accessed 28 March 2020.
9. Baker, “A Tale of Two Towns,” 157, 160-3; “Driver cleared of causing picket line death,” *NZ Herald*, 2 August 2002, [https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=2348223](https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=2348223) accessed 27 March 2020.
10. Bruce Ainsley, “Searching for Peace,” *NZ Listener*, 21 April 2006, <https://www.noted.co.nz/archive/archive-listener-nz-2006/searching-for-peace> accessed 27 March 2020.

# The History of a Riot: Class, Popular Protest and Violence in Early Colonial Nelson

**Jared Davidson**



Nelson Port in 1845, with the Company Store on the right. AC804, Nelson Provincial Museum.

This extract on the 1843 labourers' revolt in Nelson is taken from a new section of the LHP website called 'Features', where we aim to publish content created for an online audience or is too long for the *Bulletin*. To read the entire article or download a PDF version, visit <http://www.lhp.org.nz/index.php/category/feature/>. If you are interested in having your own work featured on the website, please get in touch.

As the future gang-men and their wives crossed gangplanks and boarded ships bound for Nelson, their understandings of class and its antagonisms immediately found fertile fields.<sup>25</sup> Protesting the poor provisions and the conduct of their captain, steerage passengers aboard the *Phoebe* signed a joint statement demanding redress. After throwing their bouilli soup overboard on route, sixteen passengers on the *Indus* did likewise. These were signs of things to come. Five of the *Phoebe* and five of the *Indus* signatories were members of the Waimea East gangs that revolted on 26 August 1843.<sup>26</sup>

The assertion of demands was a precedent that continued in Nelson. On their first Saturday ashore, the labourers of the first ship to Nelson protested at working beyond 1pm that day. Their protest resulted in the establishment of a 9-hour day, 50-hour working week with an hour for lunch, despite the Company's Chief Surveyor Frederick Tuckett refusing an 8-hour day and wanting longer hours from the men.<sup>27</sup> Carpenters 'combined' to fix wages, resolving at a meeting on 6 May 1842 that no carpenter should work for less than 12s a day.<sup>28</sup> At a time when acts against combination had only recently been repealed in England and persecution of nascent workers organisations was common, these were considerable wins.

For a while labour was king. "Wages are at present ruinously high" wrote a colonist in April 1842. "A common labourer cannot be had under 6s. a-day, carpenters 12s., and sawyers 15s. Of course, while this lasts very little can be done, but when we have more emigrants labour will certainly become more reasonable,

though never perhaps so low as at home. It is a splendid country for the working classes.”<sup>29</sup> Arthur Wakefield believed the rates were exorbitant and looked forward to more labour in the settlement to bring the rates down.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, William Cullen suggested colonists should bring out their own labourers. “It is hard to get a person here that cares anything about work; at least they won’t do a master justice. Here are a great many pigs running wild and catching them suits many better than work.”<sup>31</sup>

The situation did not last. The Company had banked on capitalists migrating to Nelson to become the employers of working-class emigrants. Yet many land purchasers were absentee landowners who never left England. Of the 432 sections of 150 acres sold, 352 were owned by absentees.<sup>32</sup> The land owners that did emigrate were either delayed in getting onto the land or did not have enough capital to become large-scale employers. As more and more ships filled with the proletariat arrived in Nelson, they faced decreasing wages and very little employment opportunities.

For many emigrants, a major drawcard of the Nelson scheme had been the Company’s promise of employment. Yet “this promise was, for some time, weakly and dishonourably denied; but was soon proved by the production of the Company’s printed papers, and enforced by a demonstration of overwhelming physical force.”<sup>33</sup> Arthur Wakefield was forced to provide employment and organised a system of relief work, “which was expensive for the Company and demoralising for the men. All, without regard to their physical conditions or previous training, were offered road work under the Company at the uniform rate of one guinea... although some useful drains were dug and some necessary trunk roads formed, the price was too high both in terms of cash and the human spirit.”<sup>34</sup> Wakefield was aware of the problem, writing to his brother that “the expense however is not the only inconvenience: it is creating great discontent amongst the labouring class... I am convinced that this surplus of one class is very injurious to the settlement.”<sup>35</sup>

From April 1842 onwards there were always at least 50 men without employment.<sup>36</sup> By November 1842, there were 120 men on the Company’s pay roll. A month later there were over 300.<sup>37</sup> Relief work was costing the Company over £1000 per month.

The Company’s Directors in England were aghast at the amount being spent and attempted to reduce costs in several ways. In July 1842, Company agents in England and elsewhere were ordered to drop the pledge of providing guaranteed employment to emigrants. And in Nelson, Arthur Wakefield was told to cut costs or avoid providing any relief at all. “Nothing short of actual physical suffering from destitution should induce you to relax the rule in this respect.”<sup>38</sup> Yet the Company did not want to stop public works completely, for it had cut a deal with the British government. If the Company spent £40,000 on public works before the end of 1844, the government would grant the Company 100,000 acres of additional land.<sup>39</sup> Despite the financial cost, the Company was eager to reap the landed reward that came with it.

The Company also faced a disappointed, well-organised and increasingly hostile proletariat that actively resisted any worsening of their situation. “The state of things in Nelson is disheartening” wrote Stephens on Christmas Day in 1842. “There is no money in circulation, consequently many labourers are unemployed excepting by the Company – who are under engagement to employ the emigrants for twelve months after they come out. Scarce any capitalists have come out and very few purchasers of land.”<sup>40</sup> After Arthur Wakefield reduced rates to 14s in cash plus 7lb rations of meat, flour, tea and sugar, “a few firebrands organised a strike for higher wages in September 1842, but after the men had abstained from roadwork for about 10 days without effect, they returned to their picks and shovels.”<sup>41</sup>

There was more serious strike action in January 1843, beginning with the drafting of a petition on Sunday 14 January, the gang-men’s only day off. “We the working men of Nelson earnestly request you to take our case into serious consideration” began their petition to Wakefield.<sup>42</sup> Written in a sarcastic, confident and at-times metaphoric language, the Petition of the Working Men of Nelson is a fine example of (gendered) working-class voice in colonial New Zealand. As well as showing their class consciousness and knowledge of other colonisation schemes (citing the Canadian example), the petition represented a veiled threat to Wakefield and the Company despite its deferential talk of law and order:

*“We have been seduced from our fatherland our homes and friends by the flattering pretensions of the New Zealand Company, we have endured considerable hardships and*

*exposed to the dangers and perils of the deep... merely to gratify the ambition and add to the wealth of the New Zealand Company...The Company's 16th Regulation guarantees to us Employment provided that we cannot meet with it elsewhere, it does not guarantee subsistence but expresses the word Employment distinctly. Now sir, we are not total strangers to the somewhat unpleasant nature of the situation you hold, placed as a daysman between the working class and the pretended landowners poor unfortunate Victims they have fell a sacrifice [sic] the tongue of flattery about this Splendid country as well as we have. They have contrived by what Means it is not for us to say to raise the wind when they were in England on order to purchase a section or 2 of land to get the Splendid name of Landowner and a cabin passage free to this place but alas for them as well as for us their hopes are vanquished on beholding the Shore that their destined to land upon for instead of finding Elysian fields and Groves adorned with every beauty of Nature, they have found unsightly and barren Hills and Mountains covered over with fern which has fed on the Soil for ages. Then instead of the bread fruit tree there is the flax tree in a Swampy piece of ground...*

*The Company as well as we the working men are imposed upon by these pretend capitalists who forsooth we are informed have been endeavouring to persuade you that you are fighting against their interests by giving us such High wages ...Now Captain Wakefield If you do not stretch forth your hand to the working class in Nelson you will never have a Colony and will not that be a burden on your breast to bear. It is a well known fact that many of these pretend Capitalists are reduced already to all but starving point and In order to get their flesh again they want you to permit them to feed upon our blood and vitals. Shiners with them are something like Angels Visits few and far between in fact there is little or no money in the Colony except the Company's, and we at present are the only circulating medium. On you Sir as you are the (Visa : Versa : ) success of the Colony depends. If you refuse to stand by the working man of Nelson you sign its Death warrant and seal its doom as a Colony. Does any reasonable man think taking into consideration the state of everything that 14/- p. week with 7 lbs. rations for a family a man his wife and 2 children, the man 9 or 10 miles from his mud home keeping two tables then where is the clothes to come from and as for shoes there is no end to the wear and tear of them from the nature of our work and the travelling from port to pillar and back again. Before we left England we were told that if we could not get work nowhere else they [sic] Company would give us one guinea p. week with rations, and this we consider our lawful rights & of this is refused our Confidence in the company will be so far abused we only*

*want a Right and Legal thing and our Motto in endeavouring to gain this right shall be peace, tranquillity and concord... we hope you will examine these things minutely and all for grievances sink into oblivion.*

The petition has no named author and simply ends with: "We remain yours in Peace Law and Order, The Working Men of Nelson."<sup>43</sup>

The next morning, a Monday and workday, the 300 gangmen struck work, assembled as a body and marched through the township to the Port. The procession would have crossed Saltwater Creek Bridge and headed along Haven Road towards the Company store beyond Auckland Point (on Wakefield Quay), passing the Māori trading site at Matangi Awhio. Were they noisy? Orderly? Did they repeat the rumour of an impending wage cut or discuss the petition and their demands? Wakefield met them near the Company store, where delegates went forward and addressed both Wakefield and the strikers. Threats of leaving for Sydney were made. Wakefield replied they were free to go but questioned whether such a move would improve their lot, especially without having knowledge of the situation there. One of the gangmen then spoke up and said "he could not live upon the wages he now had and his rations."<sup>44</sup> Wakefield answered bureaucratically, itemising the prices of various necessities and argued they were all affordable at 14s per week. He refused their demand of one guinea.

The strikers then assembled in a nearby brickfield where people had their say. "Strong language was used and resolutions were passed, including one to ask the Governor of New South Wales to send a ship for them."<sup>45</sup> It was decided to continue their strike and march on the Company store again the following day, which they did. The demand for a wage rise was repeated and again Wakefield spoke to them as before. Except this time he held out the possibility of acquiring land "they could call their own, and so eventually raise themselves above the condition which necessitated working for wages at all."<sup>46</sup>

There are conflicting accounts of what happened next. According to the *Nelson Examiner*, the crowd thanked Wakefield "for the kind manner in which he had met them, and separated. On Wednesday morning the whole of them, without exception, we believe, returned to their work."<sup>47</sup> Yet Nelson colonist Alfred Saunders wrote later that many of the gangmen were armed and were "only restrained from robbing the Company's store by the calm

of Wakefield, and from looting the town by the moderating eloquence of John Perry Robinson”, a Birmingham woodturner and gang-man who had participated in Chartist agitation before emigrating, and who would go on to become Superintendent of Nelson.<sup>48</sup> It is possible Saunders conflated the January strike with the events of 26 August. It is equally possible that there were both armed gang-men and differences of opinion throughout the January strike – differences over tactics, what action to take next and how far to push their struggle. Guns were certainly present at later events.

It is also unclear whether women were present. William Pratt recalled how:

“amusing scenes sometimes occurred at the attempted reductions referred to; upon the men being informed that the wages at the next pay-day would be so much less than hitherto, they would quietly smile at the information, and proceed to their work as usual, feeling confident their cause was in good hands. And when Saturday noon, the pay-time, arrived, the men’s wives would muster about 200 strong, and in true Amazonian style, march in a body down the beach to the pay-office at the port, and sturdily refusing to submit to any reductions, keep up such a clamour that the officials, after sustaining a two or three hours’ siege, would receive orders to pay the old rate, and matters would go on again in their old groove until the next fit of retrenchment came on, when a similar scene would be enacted and generally with the same result.”

Pratt may be alluding to the occupation of Tuckett’s office one Saturday in July 1843, after he attempted (unsuccessfully) to change weekly payments to fortnightly ones.<sup>49</sup> For three hours a “disorderly mob” armed with clubs and guns threatened Tuckett with violence if he did not pay them (he was finally rescued by the intervention of a magistrate “in fear of a Riot”).<sup>50</sup> Or Pratt could be hinting at a cycle of struggles involving gang-men and their wives that have not been documented in other sources. As Adrian Randall notes, “overt protest was not the first response to hardship and to exploitation and oppression but often the final stage of what we may describe as ‘community micro-politics’ in which different forms of pressure, persuasion, and sanction might long precede direct action.” Such negotiations rarely leave records. They form “the unseen iceberg to which riots were but the tip.”<sup>51</sup>

The January strike signalled an increase in militancy, the numbers of those involved and the construction of meaning to justify their struggle. Through their petition and mass assemblies, the gang-men were rehearsing and reiterating constructed narratives in the tradition of popular protest.<sup>52</sup> Wakefield replied with a narrative of his own. Yet despite his reported calm during the January strike, the demonstration of workers power both frightened Wakefield and checked any cuts he may have planned. As his brother William reported to his Company superiors, “at the hint of any suggested reduction of wages, a general combination took place to oppose it.”<sup>53</sup> The organisation of the gang-men “rendered it unsafe for the Company’s servants either to refuse to employ them or to make deductions from the stipulated wages for neglect or inefficiency.”<sup>54</sup> It wasn’t until mid-April 1843 that Arthur Wakefield was able to reduce rates to 18s per week without rations for the married, and 16s per week without rations for single men.<sup>55</sup>

Nelson workers resisted in other ways. By January 1843, the wages offered by private employers had dropped to the same rates as those of the Company or in some cases were even less. Labourers not on public relief (around 100) enforced their own wage demands by threatening to take relief work.<sup>56</sup> Some did leave for the gangs – Company relief offered a working environment relatively free of supervision and safety from dismissal. Others left Nelson altogether.

Many gang-men ‘went ca’canny’ and instituted a go-slow by refusing to put in maximum effort. “The employment of men on public works has been for the last half year almost a farce” reported Tuckett in July, “especially since the reduction of wages. The turbulent, contumacious and indolent have openly obstructed and prevented the reputable and industrious labourers from doing their duty.”<sup>57</sup> The gang-men “considered the wages much less than they had a right to” complained William Wakefield, and “entered into extensive combinations not to give more work than they thought their weekly stipend was worth.”<sup>58</sup> One of the gangs never completed more than seven cubic yards per man per week, whereas the Company expected 60 cubic yards of work per man.<sup>59</sup> Stephens also blamed “disreputable characters”, but for one historian the system of weekly rates, “which made no distinction between the idle and the diligent, the skilled and the unskilled, all being paid the same wages whatever the amount of work done”, was the cause of both idleness and demoralisation.<sup>60</sup>

By June 1843, Arthur Wakefield had tried and failed to break the power of the gangs. Although he managed to institute lower wages in April, his dispersal of the gangs across different areas of Nelson had little effect. His scheme to get men off the Company's payroll by offering them a six-month contract of higher wages but with the requirement to give up reliance on the Company once completed also fell flat: "the terms he offered were contaminated by the doctrine that it was a great evil to allow labourers too easily to become landowners."<sup>61</sup> Then on 17 June Wakefield was killed during the Wairau Affray. Not only did it throw the town into panic and further labourers onto Company relief (many worked for the surveyors killed during the affray), it claimed one of the few Company officials the men respected.<sup>62</sup> His successor, who was tasked with carrying out a major restructure of the gangs, was Frederick Tuckett.

Having been accused of cowardice for fleeing Wairau and rattled by the occupation of his office in July, Tuckett was in no state to deal with unruly gang-men. Stephens thought events had unhinged his mind. According to Allan, Tuckett's "unfortunate manner made him generally unpopular" while his "overbearing tone" failed to mask his absolute fear of the gang-men, "so that he was despised as well as disliked."<sup>63</sup> Tuckett hoped to break their organisation by offering piecework contracts and sections of land to wean them off relief; providing rations but not relief work to encourage the cultivation of land; offering certain mechanics free passages to Australia; and deporting 50 of the most disorderly.<sup>64</sup> Supervision was also to be increased. "In order to discourage idle habits" wrote William Wakefield, "I cannot too strongly recommend a vigilant superintendence and some examples by dismissal of those who will neither work fairly themselves nor permit their fellows to do so."<sup>65</sup>

On 14 August, Tuckett offered 38-year old surveyor and landowner Phillip Valle the position of superintendent. The position came with a salary of £200 (a weekly wage almost four times that of the gang-men) and a set of secret instructions. "It is proposed to place on the 21st instant under your control and inspection all the men who have not land in cultivation in other districts and to concentrate them in one force."<sup>66</sup> Valle was to "become acquainted with the character of the men and you will mark such as are indolent, insolent and contumacious, without however taking any immediate measures with them other than strictly deducting all loss of time... we shall get rid of the most troublesome characters and you

will be in a position to offer as a boon to the remainder an arrangement by piecework."<sup>67</sup> Tuckett also issued orders to John Swinton Spooner, the Surveyor of Public Works who until Valle's appointment had compiled the pay lists and whose sympathies with the gang-men Tuckett believed "has done us more harm than good."<sup>68</sup> The plan was to consolidate the gangs at the swampy mudflats of Waimea East. They would come under the watchful eye of Valle and his two timekeepers, who would have the power to penalise slow gang-men. The rest of the dispersed gangs were to be consolidated and moved to Wai-iti Valley under the control of Spooner. The stage was now set for a major confrontation.

On 19 August, Tuckett trooped out to the Wai-iti Valley gang of John Sloss and told them to merge with the gang of John Spittal. The 20 gang-men rushed Tuckett "in the most violent manner", made it clear they were not going anywhere for at least six months and sent him packing with curses.<sup>69</sup> Meanwhile, Spittal's gang also refused to move. Relief work was not work, they argued, but "confinement to one place for eight or nine hours, and they meant it to last for twelve months more."<sup>70</sup> The Motueka gang showered Tuckett "with the same spirit of violence and insubordination."<sup>71</sup> A shaken Tuckett hastily drew up a proclamation: any gang-man on the public works already cultivating their own land would be allowed rations to work exclusively on their land for the month of September. Although this was not sanctioned by Wakefield, Tuckett felt it was necessary "to prevent a general combination amongst the labourers to resist and defeat the contract of Mr. Valle."<sup>72</sup>

No proclamation could have helped Valle at that point, for he and his timekeepers had walked into a hornet's nest of discontent. On Thursday 24 August, they made their way out to the three newly-consolidated gangs at the swampy ground of Waimea East, where at "three-quarters past 1PM, the men of Ryall's [Roil's] gang rose in open rebellion against me and the time keepers."<sup>73</sup> Valle was threatened and pushed into a muddy ditch as gang-men lobbed stones at him, hitting him twice. Staggering out of the water, Valle's attempts to reason were drowned "with groans and noise", and he beat a desperate retreat to the gang of John Walker. Men from the gangs of Roil and Thomas Nock chased him through the swamp, and as Walker's gang rested on their spades and watched, Valle and the timekeeper were forced to flee. Valle's tent was destroyed in a final act of defiance.

Continue reading at <http://www.lhp.org.nz/>

26. The gang-men aboard the Phoebe were Richard Hartley, Thomas Harvey, William Nesbitt, Thomas Kite and John Perry Robinson. Letter, 6 April 1843, NZC208 Box 1/ 2/18. The gang-men aboard the Indus were Charles Clark, Adam Cockroft, Elisha Round, Thomas Nock and Henry James.
27. Ruth Allan, *Nelson*, p.80.
28. Allan, *Nelson*, p.183.
29. Extracts from a Letter dated Nelson, 27 April 1842, *Letters from Settlers and Labouring Emigrants in the New Zealand Company's Settlements of Wellington, Nelson and New Plymouth: from February 1842, to January, 1843*, available online at <http://www.enzb.auckland.ac.nz/document/?wid=862>
30. A. Wakefield to W. Wakefield, 27 August 1842, NZC104 Box 1/2, ANZ.
31. W. Cullen, 10 April 1842, *Letters from Settlers and Labouring Emigrants in the New Zealand Company's Settlements of Wellington, Nelson and New Plymouth: from February 1842, to January, 1843*
32. M.F. Lloyd Prichard, *An Economic History of New Zealand*, Collins, 1970, p.45. For an interesting view on absenteeism being necessary to the Wakefield scheme of colonisation, see Michael Turnbull, *The New Zealand Bubble: The Wakefield Theory in Practice*, Price and Milburn, 1959, p.14.
33. Alfred Saunders, *A History of New Zealand*, Whitcombe & Tombs, 1896, p.173.
34. Allan, *Nelson*, p.184.
35. Allan, *Nelson*, p.184.
36. Allan, *Nelson*, p.184.
37. Allan, *Nelson*, p.184.
38. Secretary NZC to W. Wakefield, 22 June 1843, Colbert, 'The Working Class in Nelson under the New Zealand Company 1841-1851', p.31.
39. See Allan, *Nelson*, p.189; New Zealand Company, *Report of the directors of the New-Zealand Company: presented to the ... general meeting of the shareholders – 12th Report – Appendix H*, p.94, P ATL NZ 325.341, ATL.
40. Stephens, 25 December 1842, 'Extracts and Letters', MS-2053, ATL.
41. Allan, *Nelson*, p.184.
42. Petition of the Working Men of Nelson, NZC208 Box 1/ 2/2, ANZ.
43. Petition of the Working Men of Nelson, NZC208 Box 1/ 2/2, ANZ. For a similar petition from labourers in early New Plymouth and a discussion of petitioning in England, see Dalziel, 'Popular Protest in Early New Plymouth: Why did it occur?', p.18.
44. *Nelson Examiner*, 21 January 1843.
45. Allan, *Nelson*, p.188, citing the *Nelson Examiner*, 21 January 1843.
46. *Nelson Examiner*, 21 January 1843.
47. *Nelson Examiner*, 21 January 1843.
48. Martin, *Honouring the Contract*, p.40; Allan, *Nelson*, p.188. Saunders was a supporter of Robinson's campaign for Superintendent and his comments must be read in this context. For more on the role Robinson later played in Nelson, see John Griffiths and Vic Evans, 'The Chartist Legacy in the British World: Evidence from New Zealand's Southern Settlements, 1840s–1870s', *History* 99, 2014, pp.797-818.
49. Writing on 25 July 1843, Tuckett states "on the suspension of one pay day my office, Saturday week" which could be 15 July or 22 July. Allan gives the date as 15 July, but I lean towards 22 July as that is the last weekly pay list compiled by Spooner before the August restructure.
50. Tucket to W. Wakefield, 25 July 1843, NZC104 Box 1/ 3, ANZ.
51. Adrian Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.19.
52. Randall, *Riotous Assemblies*, p.11.
53. W. Wakefield to Secretary NZC, 13 January 1843, Colbert, 'The Working Class in Nelson under the New Zealand Company 1841-1851', p.26.
54. W. Wakefield, *Report of the directors of the New-Zealand Company – 12th Report – Appendix H*, p.89, P ATL NZ 325.341, ATL.
55. Colbert, 'The Working Class in Nelson under the New Zealand Company 1841-1851', p.34.
56. Allan, *Nelson*, p.185.
57. Tuckett to W. Wakefield, 25 July 1843, NZC104 Box 1/ 3, ANZ.
58. W. Wakefield, *Report of the directors of the New-Zealand Company – 12th Report – Appendix H*, p.89, P ATL NZ 325.341, ATL.
59. Fox to W. Wakefield, *Report of the directors of the New-Zealand Company – 12th Report – Appendix H*, p.128, P ATL NZ 325.341, ATL.
60. Colbert, 'The Working Class in Nelson under the New Zealand Company 1841-1851', p.27.
61. B.J. Poff, 'William Fox: Early Colonial Years, 1842-1848', Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1969, pp.75-76.
62. A few gang-men were injured at Wairau and three were killed: James McGregor (who led a Maitai Valley gang), Isaac Smith, and Thomas Tyrrell.
63. Allan, *Nelson*, p.276.
64. Tuckett to W. Wakefield, 25 July 1843, NZC104 Box 1/ 3, ANZ.
65. W. Wakefield, *Report of the directors of the New-Zealand Company – 12th Report – Appendix H*, p.95, P ATL NZ 325.341, ATL.
66. Tuckett to Valle, NZC208 Box 1/ 2 (49), ANZ.
67. Tuckett to Valle, NZC208 Box 1/ 2 (49), ANZ.
68. Tuckett to W. Wakefield, 25 July 1843, NZC104 Box 1/ 3, ANZ.
69. Tuckett to W. Wakefield, 30 August 1843, IA1 Box 27 1843/1958, ANZ.
70. Tuckett to W. Wakefield, 30 August 1843, IA1 Box 27 1843/1958, ANZ.
71. Tuckett to W. Wakefield, 30 August 1843, IA1 Box 27 1843/1958, ANZ.
72. Tuckett to W. Wakefield, 30 August 1843, IA1 Box 27 1843/1958, ANZ.
73. Valle to Tuckett, 25 August 1843, IA1 Box 27/ 1843/1958, ANZ.

## The Working Life of a Unionist

### Ged O'Connell, recently retired from E tū Union, speaks with Paul Maunder



*Paul: You were brought up in Christchurch?*

Ged: Yes. My initial connection with labour history was family, my maternal grandfather was Dan Sullivan, a Mayor of Christchurch and an MP in the first Labour Government. He had been involved in establishing the Canterbury Furniture Workers' Union and the Canterbury Journalists' Union. He died before I was born but obviously through my Mother and a lot of newspaper clippings which the family had kept, I was able to learn about him. We were a rather large Catholic family of Irish heritage, there were five of us kids, so there was not a time I was not on the Labour side of the fence and grew up on the socialist side of the spectrum.

*So, it was a union family and a labour family. You went through high school?*

I went to St Bede's College. I wasn't very academic and when I left, I worked in retail for a while, then went off

overseas to Australia. After I came back, my first real Union involvement was in a company called AHI Metal Containers in Christchurch. It was a conservative working group and we were members of the Engineers' Union covered by the Canister Workers' Award. I showed an interest in the union and a chap by the name of Jack Ewing took me under his wing, I attended the Award negotiations, Jack retired and for the next five or six years I was the delegate.

*You were reasonably young?*

Mid-twenties. AHI Metal Containers was part of a national group, so the Canister Workers was a small Award mainly covering one or two companies and it brought me into contact with union colleagues in Auckland and Wellington. It gave me a national perspective early on.

*This was the compulsory union era.*

Yes, this was 1976 to 1980, Muldoon required us to have a ballot on the unqualified preference clause. There was one vote against in our workplace. I found out who it was.

*And you were still part of a national award system?*

Yes, the Metal Trades was the leading award for the Engineers' Union. There were four Major Awards at the time. The Hotel Workers, The Clerical Workers and the Drivers Union all had one. They tended to follow a pattern and the Canister Workers Award followed along.

*Then what?*

I became an Assessor on the award. That brought me in touch with other activists in Auckland, Rex Jones and a couple of guys in Wellington and the next thing I was attending monthly branch meetings and stood successfully for the Regional Executive.

*What was the role of the assessor?*

We had an advocate and an assessor from each area attended the annual negotiations and eventually signed off on the deal. Auckland and Wellington delegates were very political. Interestingly, in the Engineers' Union at that time there was a movement of younger people. My boss was Bob Todd, he was a very good guy, certainly of the older age bracket but not as conservative as Brian

Landers (Wellington) and Ernie Ball (Auckland). Jim Boomer was the National secretary. They were aging men from a particular era, who ran the place with a pretty tight rein and were moderate and traditional.

*This was still the Federation of Labour period?*

We were affiliated to the FOL. Landers was under siege from a lot of young guys in Wellington. Ernie Ball was a bit more relaxed and replaced Boomer as National secretary. Jim Butterworth was on the scene by then and we had a changing of the guard in terms of the moving out of the older conservative ones. Then Rex Jones moved from being an organiser in Auckland to National secretary. He was only thirty. I became an organiser when I was 28, quite young at the time, as most of my local colleagues were 20-30 years my senior.

*Did you just apply for an organiser job?*

I applied two or three times. I was interviewed by the full executive. On one occasion I was asked which church I went to. The guy who asked me was an Anglican, Catholics held sway in the Engineers' Union in the early days. I didn't see much of it but became aware of people like Patrick Neary – who once I became active, gave me a call and I finally realised that there was some conservative church politics going on here too.

*There was a definite church connection?*

Yes. It was waning by the late 1970s and early eighties. I started employment with the union in 1980. Bob Todd often talked about it. It had dissipated by then, but those things linger.

*So, if you were a Catholic, you could get a job more easily?*

Bob would tell us in the 1950/60s generation the Catholic influence was strong and prevalent, but more on a conservative moral basis. When I became an official, I did notice the challenging-of-authority ethos those of Irish heritage tend to have. I became aware of the number of Irish Catholics in the movement. Names like Kelly, O'Reilly, O'Neil etc.

*So, you became an organiser.*

I had a couple of goes then finally got a chance when my predecessor, who had come to the union via an amalgamation got arrested for possession of drugs. A vacancy arose and I finally got a job. I thoroughly enjoyed being an organiser. I worked out of Christchurch. One of my areas of responsibility was the West Coast, so I spent

quite a bit of time in Greymouth, Hokitika and in Westport.

*At the mines?*

No, we didn't merge with the Miners until 1996. Over here we had engineers generally. We had a local branch run by Ray Burrell and the local secretary Owen Anderson lived in Blackball. He worked for the Grey Council. They had their own local Branch structure. We had members at the Power Board and a lot of small factory engineers. The Greymouth Foundry – that was amazing. They had more apprentices than tradesmen in those days. Up in Westport there was a big contingent at the cement works. I married a Westport woman in February 1981. It was pretty good to have that connection, because Coasters want you to establish your credentials. I had to study up my labour history, rugby league and all sorts of local issues to talk about. They were a bit anti us from "over the hill" in those days, independent. They certainly didn't put up with being told what to do from outsiders.

*Work was reasonably run of the mill stuff.*

The first decade was operating under the Award system, so through to 1991 I had a patch of a couple of thousand members and it was generally servicing member's needs, regular visiting, signing people up, making sure they had a copy of the award and dealing with any disciplinary issues – stuff like that. I enjoyed it. I recall working very hard, but it was nothing like the next decade. Around that time, I became involved in the Canterbury Trades Council of the FOL and then carried on as part of the merger to form the NZCTU. I was the first Convenor of the Combined Canterbury Unions. The two organisations FOL/CSU worked together for a couple of years before the merger in 1990. Paul Corliss was the co-convenor, John McKenzie from the PSA the Secretary.

*So, we're up to the ECA?*

May 15, 1991. That was harrowing. Absolutely harrowing. We mounted a pretty good protest campaign. The debate still goes on as to the decisions that were made. In Christchurch with marches, demonstrations, to raise awareness about the unfairness we gave it a good shot. I think we made a difference constantly highlighting the impact on working people. In some respects we were quite successful.

National were elected with a 33-seat majority in 1990, three years later they were re-elected by one seat. I like to think it was our campaign around employment law that contributed to that turn around, along with the “Mother of all Budgets”.

It subsequently led to MMP being introduced. I think the work we did to try and overturn the ECA was, in that context, successful. Of course, that “hung government” was around for another 6 years. With MMP the ability to make radical change politically had gone. If successive governments can abuse democracy in the way both Labour and National governments did in the 80s and 90s then the electorate decided to take that power away from them.

Through the nineties it was very interesting being part of the Engineers’ Union. Under Rex Jones’ leadership we had been through an extensive Policies & Strategies review in 1989 – we reviewed the whole organisation and structures – it was an amazing exercise that ironically set us up very well to adjust to the ECA – we simply went back and reviewed the work and re-set it, to take in the ECA environment.

#### *Can you be specific?*

For example, the Metal Trades Award, that was the mainstay of the Engineers’ Union Collective Agreements, we were able to reinstate it under the ECA by getting groups of employers to sign up to it. We had a North Island and South Island version initially and it still exists today. It’s been going for 19 years and when you consider it, employers need to touch base as well. They need to know what’s the going rate.

#### *So, you wrote into the award what you needed and therefore bypassed the ECA?*

We got the Metal Trades, modernised it, made it easy to read, adding Flexibility by Agreement and stuck rigidly to a no surprises policy – we were seeking inflation plus a bit and got it established. We’d start off with ten employers who’d sign up to the negotiated outcome as original parties, then we’d go around and sell it to other employers via an additional party clause. Pretty soon we had a couple of hundred employers party to it. We tried to get a bit radical later in 1996 when membership was growing – we sought paid rates, but unfortunately rates had become quite varied.

#### *So, it was basically a MECA.*

Yes, we established a MECA, the “Metals” and it still exists today,

#### *You had a monopoly within a workplace?*

As a Union pretty much. Often our people were influential in workplaces because they were moving around. The ECA saw the Clerical Workers’ Union collapse, so we provided for them. We couldn’t put in a stores function other than engineering stores. The Storemen and Packers didn’t want to be part of it, then the Christchurch branch merged with us, so we were able to do it in the South Island. This initiative held the Engineers’ Union in pretty good stead. Rex Jones was a reformist in terms of new ways of doing work. The employers were interested in what we had to offer and didn’t attack us, as they did some other unions and agreements. They listened. They were pretty interested in working together. We’re talking a collaborative model and we certainly tried our best to deliver one. As you’d expect some of our members didn’t like it but looking back it was a very clever strategy to keep the worst of the employers’ behaviour at bay.

#### *This was the partnership model?*

Yes. Well, not partnership as we know it by the PSA model – we could never get to that level, but certainly collaborative. There was a long serving NZ Engineers Employers Federation and they were going to very quickly go out of existence if they didn’t find some relevance, so they worked with us. Eventually they merged into the Employers’ Association which merged into the Chamber of Commerce and God knows what eventually, but by then the “Metals” was entrenched and our members were prepared to defend what they had.

#### *Did you lose membership?*

We certainly did in the first two or three years but then we came back, never to the same level, but we did get membership growth in the mid-90s because the economy was growing and we had instituted a very systematic visiting programme, making sure the union was visible and relevant. What we realised was that when the economy grew, we could grow within our established workplaces, but establishing unionism in new workplaces in a hostile environment was bloody difficult.

*Was there a change of consciousness among workers?*

Marginally. The difficulty was that you'd had that Labour Government where work practices changed dramatically for members and their families, even old institutions like the Railways Prebble broke up, so while we might have hoped there would be a raising of consciousness among working people, the reality was that they had partners, families and mortgages to look after. Douglas, Prebble and the like had said to Business, there's no point in manufacturing in New Zealand, that's not our thing, so a lot of traditional industries that the Engineers Union was founded on were really taken out of business by that economic strategy. It took a decade or so for it to happen, but once things got tough a lot of employers and manufacturers decided to import products and become servicing agents. There was a fundamental change to our manufacturing base. The Engineers' Union was also looking to merge with other unions. In the mid-90s we merged with the Journalists and Printers Union and then the Miners came to form the EPMU. We had a merger strategy trying to maintain the economies of scale for working New Zealanders.

*Those mergers were okay?*

They were very successful, particularly the Printers merger. Their National Secretary was Paul Tolich. He still works for E tū today. Tony Wilton (Journalists) was his deputy. A lot of work was put into it and it stood the test of time. Miners were much the same. They were in a difficult situation because they had merged with the NZ Workers' Union who effectively went bankrupt. We ended up talking to the Miners who had taken a quarter of a million dollars into that merger and lost the lot. They survived by getting all members to sign over their clothing allowance in advance from Coal Corp and re-established the NMUNZ, but then the threshold of a thousand members came along and they were too small.

The Miners merger was a bit of a surprise, but we spent a lot of time working to maintain their culture, setting up a relatively independent Miners' Council and tried not to immerse them into the EPMU culture. It worked. We employed Ray Urquhart their National Secretary. Garth Elliott, the current West Coast organiser, comes from the Mining industry.

Our mergers were very successful, Rex Jones was very insistent making sure the mergers were set out on a genuine basis and that we had a very thorough and fair Deed of Arrangement. Around the same time the old Post

Office Union merged into the CEWU. We got close to merging with them, however, on close inspection their finances were a lot worse than we expected, leading us to decide we couldn't manage it. We picked up the remnants of the membership mainly in NZ Post and Telecom.

*What position were you in?*

In 1993 I was appointed as the Assistant South Island Secretary and then a couple of years later I won a membership ballot to become the South Island Secretary of the EPMU. The South Island Branch operated on its own budget and represented approx. 25% of the Union's national membership.

*The establishing of the Trade Union Federation impact much?*

It had minimal impact in Christchurch. It was mainly Wellington. It was a good ginger group. I remember Ken Douglas coming to a CTU meeting and he was asking us what we needed to do on behalf of our membership. That was a sea change in leadership. The CTU normally had a clear strategy of where it was going. In hindsight, TUF gave a good edge to trade unionism in NZ. We needed a conscience. The nineties were a tough time. We had to realise that some of the leaders who were respected were burnt out and lacked the energy for this type of fight.

*A bit directionless?*

Yes. There were a lot of tensions in the CTU as to whether we could/should collaborate or not. Some of us could collaborate because we'd put in the hard yards and established relationships, but to adopt it as a strategy in an unbridled environment for employers would have led workers to the slaughter quicker than the ECA was doing.

*And a growing precariat.*

Developing. Absolutely. They were tough times. Work was changing, individualism, contracting out, independent contractors becoming prevalent. I was in my forties, and worked for a large, well-resourced organisation. I imagine if I had been older the changes would have been a great deal more challenging and threatening.

*And then the Clark Government?*

Well, in hindsight we took whatever we could get, through a feeling of relief mainly, which was a mistake.

*So, talk about that.*

Well, when they reviewed the ECA I think the leadership of the CTU were worn out and tired and felt that the movement was looking for a breather. Forgetting about regeneration. So, we ended up with a fairly moderate situation. The ERA never really delivered. I suppose it delivered a pause in terms of bad behaviour but once employers had figured their way around it, they just dressed it up a bit.

*Can you be specific?*

Well, de-unionising strategies under the ECA were sudden and brutal - under the ERA they became strategic and longer term, but equally effective. Employers didn't renew Agreements. They were courteous, talked through, met, did all the right things, but made settlements very difficult. After 12 months the Agreement lapsed and inevitably Individual Agreements were offered.

The ERA provided a MECA law which looked good but had no process in it. It described how unions could initiate for a MECA but there was no process – employers went along but didn't participate. It was benign, pat you on the head stuff and employees get pissed off after a while and approach the employer directly – or the employer would let them know that there was an alternative available. The game just changed. It was a longer game.

The EPMU was in reasonably good shape. At the time I argued a lot with the Service Workers because they were looking for different concessions off the government and got some, but the concessions didn't work. We got a complex law about vulnerable workers, but it didn't pan out as we lost the first legal case. It was a lost opportunity.

*Have you seen much industrial action?*

Sporadic. The most active strike I witnessed, was the Alliance Freezing Works Tradesmen. It was over two things. The company tried to contract out the tradesmen – get them to work for themselves and the members wanted a 2% roll over of their Company Collective Agreement. It was in the South Island, five plants from Invercargill to Christchurch. Picketers smashed bus windows carrying scabs... the company bought scabs in by helicopter in Oamaru, but when the last tradesman left, he had welded up the gates and the bosses couldn't get into their own plant. The tradesmen's response to the offer of contracting was to put the paperwork into a rubbish bag, march into the boss' committee room and dump it on the table. The strike lasted five days and we got our 2%. It felt like a 20% effort.

*The push for diversity in the 2000s?*

In the EPMU it was a struggle for sure. The CEWU collapse brought formal women's structures into the EPMU for the first time. We were a boys' club there's no doubt about that. We'd taken a bit of a battering around the Trades Hall in the previous decade or so by strident feminists, same with our Runanga – we got there but it took us a bit longer.

*And it was necessary to broaden the spectrum?*

By the time the EPMU got women's structures the battle had been well won. When I started in the 80s, we got equal pay, I didn't realise the significance of it, at the time. We were followers in all that stuff. By the time it came to the EPMU there was plenty of precedence. We were vilified in the movement. It didn't help, the way some of our boys behaved. The big debate about girlie pictures in smoko rooms, that sort of thing. One of our leaders stood up at a FOL conference and said he enjoyed looking at them. Not smart, reinforced the stereotype of a blokes' union.

*So, we're up to John Key's government.*

Duplicitous bastard.

*Not a lot happened?*

Well, it did. Peter Conway said to me, this is death by a thousand cuts. There were over thirty changes to industrial law during his reign. So, every three years they'd come in with a cutter. And the next three years the employers would want more so they'd go in again. He was clever at dressing it up as minor changes, clearing up ambiguities...

*Specifics?*

The Holidays Act. The thing with the holidays which really pissed me off is not that he made great changes, he just made it so complex that no one could understand it. What was interesting is that the mixture of those changes meant that employers did not bother to observe what their responsibilities were. They just didn't do it. Recently, the NZ Aluminium Smelter had to pay \$20 million dollars in back pay. What does that suggest? Employers were so confident and arrogant of their rights and entitlements they didn't have the courtesy to read the law and treat their employees justly. It also happened in Government departments; it was everywhere. I imagine in private industry workers would have lost millions of dollars. As Pete said, this is death by a thousand cuts. And each cut was significant.

*So not a hell of a lot has changed really has it?*

I don't think so.

*Access has improved.*

Yeh, like in mining at the moment, while I'm retired, I'm still involved in an advisory group. We've got Ross Wilson who's chairman of Work Safe. They are a lot more conscious of workers' rights and worker participation in Health and Safety because Wilson leads it.

The current Chief Inspector of Mines is a guy called Paul Hunt, Paul is an ex member of the Mining Council, he's a mining electrician out of Huntly and a real hands on guy so what we're getting in mining in Health and Safety is a greater awareness of worker's rights and participation because it's led by two people who are knowledgeable and determined. Take them out and I'm not so sure we would have the same focus.

We've got to make sure the legislation and regulations are right. I say that because with a Labour government you get a bit of a law change and you might get the right people in the right places – they're a lot more generous to workers under a Labour Government, but how to embed this in the law.

*If you could change the legislation tomorrow what would you change?*

I'm not sure how you'd do this but maybe a closed shop. It's more important than just unions, it's about the fair distribution of our economic resources.

*So, you don't work if you don't belong to the union?*

No, the ability of unions to have a democratic vote to turn a workplace into a union workplace where everyone pays their dues. It's about the right of unions to take up their place as a legitimate part of the economy, a re-distributor of wealth in the economy. That's what's missing now.

*That's another term for compulsory unionism?*

Yes. If a society values a fair distribution of its economic resources, I don't know of any other vehicle other than unions to do that, so unions need to be empowered to play a broader role than just represent members in the work place, as many decisions that affect their income and livelihoods are made elsewhere. It must be legislated for.

*EPMU etc has had a close relationship with the Labour Party?*

Yes, very close.

*Has that been rewarded properly?*

No, we don't have the influence inside the party we should have. For Labour to get into government, compromises must be made so you just do your best. That's a wee bit sad.

*How about the environmental stuff?*

Again, we're a late comer to the table but certainly like in mining for example you've got to find a way to work through the environmentalist impacts on coal miners. We've worked very closely with the Australians, the CFMEU and adopted a Just Transition policy. So, the union's policy around oil and gas or coal is Just Transition. That means that workers and their communities need to know well in advance of changes being proposed to enable them to prepare for a future. In coal mining that's already happening. Coal for steel will still be needed for another forty years but other energy sources will replace coal for other purposes. The union hasn't conceded that but the writing's on the wall. We must have an alternative strategy.

The strategy is that you would have well-funded training programmes so that workers can plan to change their career. All that's happened in NZ is that the workers get redundancy, if they are lucky. Redundancy provisions have by and large been stripped out of Collective Agreements and now only 30% of Agreements contain them. The Government will need to legislate that companies in Sunset Industries are levied into a Just Transition fund for their industry.

*And it requires a long-term vision from the other side.*

*The market is a terrible planner?*

The Aussies still have regional development units. People in Taranaki know they've got twenty years to move on from Oil & Gas, so their City Council has set up planning units. Generally, what happens is three months and it's all over. People must be cared for better than that. Something for the provincial growth fund?

*So, what are the main things you've learned in this long career?*

I learned that a lot of us were all mouth and trousers, that was my first lesson, going to meetings and listening to people spout off and I'd work my butt off for what I thought was a common goal and many others never walked the talk.

Being honest with yourself and with workers. Workers are so forgiving and trusting. They trust us with a whole lot of things in their lives. When their livelihood, health, rehabilitation programs, life's fundamentals are under attack they trust us to do a good job. We need to get those fundamentals right before swanning off on aspirational campaigns.

You get the big disputes, and often those people can look after themselves, and do lead the fight for a better deal all round. We had a six week strike up at the Cement company in the late 80s, they were able to look after themselves. The truth is that when Governments whip away legislation whether it's in health and safety, ability to earn an income or instability of work, huge pressure goes on families – no wonder our families fall apart, and drugs become prevalent. The security that I had when I started work and which my parents had, it's now non-existent for a great many of our people.

The importance of politics and unions must be paramount in our thinking because you can work hard and get a few steps forward, but it can all be undone by legislative change. With the cycle of National then Labour we get little sustainable industrial legislation, which is surprising in a country like New Zealand with our history.

I learned many lessons through acknowledging “You don't know what you don't know”. As a union official becoming responsible for mining, there was a lot of stuff I didn't know, and the miners often didn't help me. They bull-shitted me. I came over here after the Mount Davey outbursts. I went to a bathhouse meeting and I was bullshitted – they were afraid for their jobs. They didn't know or understand the severity of that compressed coal. We had to get advice from Germany to find out. That was extraordinary. We had to get our knowledge up as quick as possible. Again, we assumed for a long time that Solid Energy was best practice in health and safety – after Pike blew up, they reviewed their practices and had to close down some of their mines for six months.

It's great to be retired, free from the responsibility, because it's a big weight. I didn't realise it until I retired. I'm fortunate that I've retired in good health and can enjoy my life which is now relatively stress free.

*Interview conducted on 20 November 2019.*

# The History of Building Te Runanga in the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions

## Syd Keepa (Ngāti Maru, Ngāti Awa), CTU Māori Vice President, kaumatua FIRST Union, speaks with Catherine Delahunty



*Catherine: Was your whānau always in a union?*

Syd: Yes, when I joined the union I was working in the bush clearfelling natives to put colonist trees up, radiata pine. I was in the Timber Workers' Union. I worked on the floor for about 32 years, and was in the Northern Drivers' Union as a driver, I even worked on the Sydney Opera House for a while as I was in the Builders Labourers Federation over there. Then I came back and got a job in the pulp and paper industry and I was in the Pulp and Paper Union [Pulpies] for about 23 years, and during that time the Pulp and Paper Union and the Timber Workers' Union amalgamated and became the Wood Industries Union. Now from that point in time there was a big Māori workforce in those organisations. I am talking about the forestry sector, timber workers and pulp and paper workers, so there needed to be something apart from what we did at the National Executive and at Conferences other than just the English style of things. We talked about needing to acknowledge that English way but also we said there had to be acknowledgement of some differences of kaupapa. There is a Pākehā kaupapa

fair enough, and there is Māori culture, and so we started looking at different ways of doing things in the organisations. In terms of Māori population there are more Māori in unions per head of population than in the Pākehā population.

*Do you think it's because there are more Māori doing those unionised jobs and it's natural for tangata whenua to stick together? No need for Pākehā terms like "solidarity" to be explained?*

For us it's Kotahitanga, it's like where I was brought up in Whakatāne. Our whole community, I would say about 90% of our community, were Māori. We all got together, used to sleep in different whānau houses. When we grew vegies like kumara or maize we would all go and help our neighbours in the garden, dig each other's garden, we all helped one another, so I guess that was the way we looked at unions. Therefore we had to do the union organising in a way that would suit a lot of our people.

*Was there a group of you that got together one day and decided you needed a Māori place to stand in the unions?*

Yes a group of us, particularly from the Pulpies – we had a runanga in the Pulpies going right back and we spread it into the Wood Industries Union. It wasn't hard to get the Pākehā who were running the union to agree to it because they could see it was needed.

*So you didn't get resistance?*

Well first off it was the days when someone had to open a conference and do it in Māori and you were a Māori so they would get you to open the Conference. They would pull you out of the wardrobe to do it and then after that send you back to your box. We wanted to get past that, further than that. It was about what we saw as the way to run a union and where we should fit in.

*Were there people you remember, from the Māori workforce who were important at leading this change?*

There were those people, the important thing was where you whakapapa from but everyone in the group had the same idea.

Sometimes it was hard, when we were getting it into the CTU [Council of Trade Unions], but wherever you are you get a bit of that, unions or political parties you name it, it's always hard at first. But the thing was we were able to get the Executive and the Conference to agree to it.

I was in the FOL at first and there were no structures like that in the Federation of Labour. Right at the end when they changed to the CTU we started to get some sort of acknowledgement and recognition. It was funny because the Conference we went to to give our first report; one of our fellas was doing the report and the Pākehā workers walked out because it was “just Māori stuff”. But now a lot of them can't wait for the Runanga Report.

The other person I would like to acknowledge from the early days when the Wood Industries amalgamated, before there was a Runanga, the fella who really pushed and pushed on this, was Bill Andersen. Bill was right behind us all the way. He got arrested at Takaparawhau. We walked on the Foreshore and Seabed together as well. Bill and I used to talk about “Communism and Māorism” and I said, “There is a difference, we are all the same but if I am religious and you're not, I won't hate you for it because you are still part of me. That is the difference between us. Whereas Communism is about: you must believe in what I say – and that can be not so different from neoliberalism or fascism.”

Our thing is Kotahitanga, it does not believe in one thing. There are some differences in humans but they all love one another and they all support one another. I told Bill that was the difference between us and Communism. A lot people say, “Māori are just communists” but, no we are not.

A lot of stuff happened to me when I was working on the floor but then my comrade Bill talked me into a job in the union. The pulp and paper industry was quite good money. I said to Bill “I will take that job but I will probably lose about \$15,000 a year, but you are right, it's about people, not about what's going into your pocket”. That was in 1999, 20 years ago, but some fellas have been doing this forever. I find that the best organisers come off the floor, not from university with a couple of degrees.

#### *Who were the allies in the CTU leadership?*

Douglas was President but did not really understand Kaupapa Māori, but Ross Wilson was the Secretary

before he was President and he's Ngāi Tahu, he got it. The Runanga made Māori workers from all over the country feel more equal and have a place to stand.

Pasifika are the same, they are also big numbers in the union. So after the Runanga came the fono and then the women's group and the youth wings. It all came after the creation of the Runanga.

There were always wahine Māori in the Runanga and they were always really the boss. That was how we were brought up. They say only men can speak on the paepae but they cannot speak till the woman speaks. It's the women that run it. On the marae everyone has a place and comes through, so from working at the back of the kai house you end up doing the karanga.

#### *Was there much excitement when the Runanga first started?*

When it first started it was like “away you go”, and a lot of people thinking “what are they going to do for the union?” But it all got a big push when Helen Kelly became President of the CTU and I became Māori Vice President and we had a bit of a meeting, all the office holders. Her first question to me was, “Syd, was what would you like to do as Māori Vice President, what would you like to see happen?”

And I said, “What I will try and do Helen is have a relationship with Iwi Māori. Because they think the same as we do.” This came to fruition as you would know from the AFFCO [Auckland Farmers Freezing Company] dispute.

Re AFFCO, I met with a few iwi leaders because they were from all those areas where AFFCO were operating. I talked to people like Sonny Tau from the north, Ngahiwi Tomoana from Ngāti Kahungunu, Paora Stanley in Te Puke. We used to have phone conferences with them and Helen. The iwi leaders were on board because they had to be, it was their people. So that was one of the better things when they got involved in that dispute and we still have this relationship between the union movement and iwi Māori. I have been to a couple of their conferences, talked with them, and they all agree with us because they used to be union delegates. Helen and Ross were bloody helpful. We got people involved in different parts of the motu and we still try and keep the relationship going for our people and workers in general; it's one of the benefits of the Runanga for the union.

*Is there a two way understanding, recognising what unions also owe tangata whenua in this country?*

We want a relationship that includes the union movement; the unions are at different levels of understanding, some have written kaupapa and Te Tiriti words, Te Reo labels, but you have to put that into practice, that is ongoing work. Sometimes it is still “open the door for Māori protocol and then back in your box” but people are working to make it real.

In the CTU Runanga they do consult us and ask for our views, especially on things like “The Future of Work”, we are really involved in it because a lot of those job changes are going to affect our people. We have a lot of involvement in CTU work such as with finance issues and “Just Transition” in the climate crisis.

The Runanga over time has built a stronger place for Māori workers, and this is about workers. Our people come from many different job sites. It’s good when each union reports on what is happening. The unions are getting there. It has been slow for some but it’s getting faster. At least they can build on the progress they have made. Educating people is part of the Runanga – first tikanga and the workplace. Everyone in the Runanga gets that it’s about the issues with the rich.

*Do you think the unions have done enough for Māori workers like the SWAP [Sawmill Workers Against Poisons] workers?*

At first the union organisers did not understand what was happening with the stuff they were putting in the timber which was getting into the health of Māori and Pākehā workers. They just knew about workplace hours and wages etc. It was good when Joe Harawira brought it to the attention of all the unions, they did get involved. Where I was brought up is where they dumped all the crap. It wasn’t only the workers it was also the people living in those areas; it was all our marae down home. The mills said “we will make your whenua bigger” and they dumped all that stuff on us. They knew what was in that timber waste and they just dumped their rubbish on us and all our rivers were contaminated. So the unions did have a big role because Joe Harawira was a delegate in the Timber Workers Industries Union. It took a while but they came to see me. I was around at the beginning; we all grew up together and played rugby. Me and Rua Williams were quite high up in the union that covered those workers and we were advocating right through to the CTU. When they did that documentary at the marae in Tokoroa that was when the CTU was having our

Runanga Conference and they interviewed Joe and me, so the union got involved but there was also a real push from Joe and others of us that came from the industry.

*Where do you see the Runanga now?*

The creation of the Runanga opened up the gates for other groups like LGBTQA rights as well. Can you imagine that 40 years ago? It’s great that it opened the door up for all groups that needed a voice.

The biennial Hui/fono bring us together. Members who have had to push for more power sharing, become more militant.

The Runanga is doing good work and acknowledging the differences in kaupapa. Number one it’s about workers and it’s about educating those ones who need to be educated. If we need to go further and work with iwi we will. We have some good up and coming young people coming through. Bill, Ross and Helen removed barriers and so did our tangata whenua members. The National Executive and Runanga have joint hui.

I am still in FIRST Union and it is also a union that comes from the same kaupapa. Just having the Runanga structure brings out more people; it is so much better than if it’s all done by white men and everyone else in the cupboard. People feel better and more productive and that gets back to families and getting them involved.

*Especially if you are on strike, you need family to be committed?*

We had a 14 week strike in the pulp and paper industry so family involvement is essential. It is about people, it’s about their future, their kids’ future; you don’t want to be an individual, its Kotahitanga.

My union was involved in the foreshore and seabed, other unions didn’t participate and the CTU did not say much due to the affiliation [of large member unions] to the Labour Party, but a lot of workers marched as individuals. We pushed the CTU but I was a just member then, not a leader of the Runanga. There were some great leaders from all over from the beginning of the Runanga, we did it together!

*Ngā mihi nui ki te rangatira Syd Keepa.*

*Interview conducted on 30 January 2020.*

# Reviews

## 'Helen Kelly – Together', directed by Tony Sutorius

Reviewed by Therese O'Connell and Claire-Louise McCurdy

The title seems a bit odd. Yes, it is about Helen Kelly, but "Together"? When it's about the last ten months of her life after the diagnosis of terminal lung cancer, a time when most people retreat into their personal lives?

Helen agreed to Tony Sutorius of Unseen Films following her about filming, not long after she resigned from the presidency of the NZCTU. The resulting film opens with her going for radiotherapy along with chemotherapy, treatments she knows cannot rid her of the cancer, but which might ease the pain and disability.

Photographs and Helen's voice-over illustrate her childhood with her brother Max, in an activist household in Wellington, immersed in the political issues of the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Her father, Pat Kelly, a trade unionist from Liverpool, and her mother Cath, best known for the nation-wide Campaign Against Rising Prices (CARP), included their children in their work and action; Helen and Max's early play involved protests and meetings. So the public and private, the personal and political, had never been separate and distinct.

When her job with the NZCTU ended, Helen continued to address the tragic inadequacies in the health and safety legislation and its implementation. The film shows her working together with others, bringing her mana and voice and energy to their attempts to bring to account some of New Zealand's major industries – forestry, meat processing, farming and mining. And it shows her bringing together the women whose husbands and sons were killed in forestry accidents and at Pike River, to support each other as they recognise the similarities in their situations and challenge WorkSafe's failure to prosecute.

*Helen Kelly – Together* is a film about a warm, compassionate, intelligent, feisty woman and, by documenting the issues and injustices she was passionate about, the union groups she worked with and the people she brought together, it is also about a New Zealand that defers to business and is casual about workers' accidents and deaths. So much for a fair go for all.

The film is moving and angering and inciting. Go see it.

## 'Helen Kelly – Together', directed by Tony Sutorius

Reviewed by Paul Maunder (reprinted from the *Greymouth Star*)

*Helen Kelly – Together* is a fine film and one that will remain in my memory. Filmed over the last, dying year, it becomes a tribute to the collectivism of working people. As she becomes weaker, the spirit of collectivism which informs the film becomes stronger.

It was a brave thing for Helen to do, to perform her death and I had wondered about the wisdom, but it proved an act of genius by filmmaker, Tony Sutorius to suggest it, for there is something of the Greek Tragedy here, that such a capable, humble woman should be stricken at a young age when, quite simply, the leadership of the country was a logical future role.

And the chorus is magnificent, led by three working women (and their families): Maryanne from Tokoroa and Anna and Sonja from the Coast. They are strong, angry, tender and beautiful. There is a watching from these women which the director catches perfectly, that working class watching of people in power or authority, wary until convinced of authenticity and integrity. And then the aroha.

The bosses are distant figures. Instead we see their intermediaries, the bureaucrats who are serving the ruling class, and what sleazy figures they are.

It is a film with death as its theme, not only Helen's approaching demise, but the preventable deaths of workers – and how many there continue to be each year. But despite the darkness of the subject matter, there is plenty of humour here: the sardonic court jester, CTU lawyer, Peter Cranney, the judges and coroners quizzical questioning of Worksafe 'inspectors' and Helen's irony when faced with the idiocy of an MBI committee going nowhere.

And finally there is tenderness as Helen approaches the end, with a scene of the women who have become her friends massaging her stricken head and face – a beautiful image with which to end this fitting tribute to Helen Kelly, to the union movement and to working people.

**'Harriet Morrison: Fighting for Fairness',  
directed by Caitlin Lynch**

Reviewed by Claire-Louise McCurdy

In 1890 in Dunedin, Harriet Morrison became Secretary of the new Tailoresses Union, the first union to represent female workers in New Zealand. But her name is not well-known and she figures only fleetingly, if at all, in general New Zealand histories. The Council of Trade Unions (CTU) has been working for some time on developing a film to change that, recognizing her significance in working women's history and the connections between her campaign for women's suffrage and current campaigns for pay equity. A grant from the Ministry for Women's 125 Suffrage fund, Whakatū Wāhine, and additional support from New Zealand unions enabled *Harriet Morrison: Fighting for Fairness* to be made.

The more I watched this little film, the more impressed I became with what its makers have managed to pack into 8 minutes, 47seconds. It's an easy and engaging watch, but as I took notes for this review and realized I was trying to capture the entire script, it became apparent how tightly and cleverly structured this film is. Every image and every sentence counts – as do the words of the songs sung by the Wellington union women's choir, *Choir Choir Pants on Fire*, that are the background music.

Caitlin Lynch, researcher, interviewer and then director of the film, addresses the silences of general histories by taking us into archives. We see her selecting from copies of newspaper articles and cartoons, reports of Harriet's speeches, parliamentary legislation and reports from the 'Sweating' Commission, to tell us about the deterioration in working conditions over the 1880s – 12 hour 'day's', 16 hour 'days' for barely survival pay – that lead to the establishment of the Tailoresses Union. And we hear relevant excerpts from Morrison's public speeches in an Irish accent, reminding us of her family's country of origin. Harriet was adamant that if women were in the workforce to earn a living, they had a right to determine the laws that affected them, but could not "have a voice or be properly represented without the ballot in their hands". Her mobilization of working-class women to sign the successful suffrage petitions was a major factor in more signatures being collected in Dunedin than anywhere else.

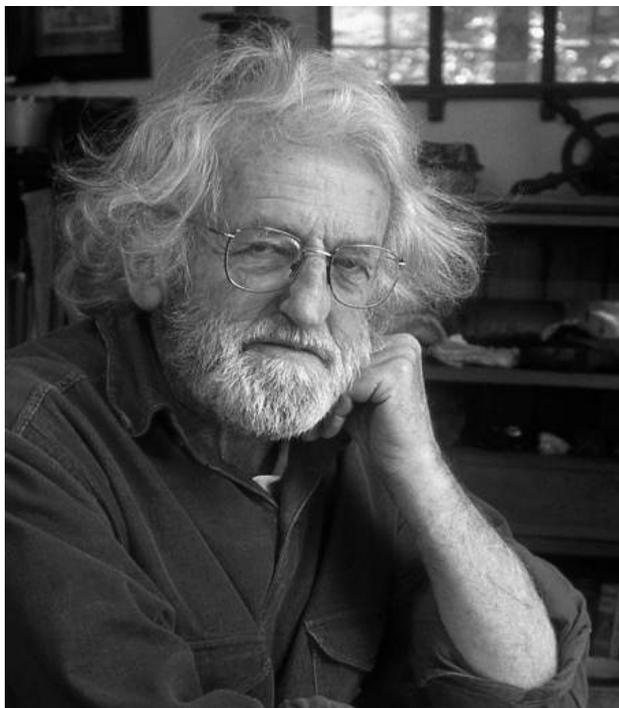
"While much has changed since Harriet's time, the campaign for equal pay for women is still on-going". One sentence closes the 125-year gap and Tamara Baddeley, a care and support worker tells us her busiest day starts at 7am and finishes at 9:45pm, a day as long as those of the 1880s sewing women. And her work makes other people's lives possible. Without help with getting up and dressed, help with the "hidden necessities", Bronwyn Hayward could not exercise her right to work, to public space. Without support workers, "life is hell".

Cut to TV News announcers reporting the government's agreement that care and support workers have been underpaid because most of them are women, and cut again to the announcement of the increase in pay from just over the minimum wage to just over a living wage – and more: \$23.50 to \$27 an hour. There's surprise and disbelief in the joy on the care and support workers' faces. Kristine Bartlett calls it "a life changer". As Tamara Baddeley said, in relation to the meaning of women's suffrage, "When women band together, believe in something enough, they can make it happen."

Caitlin's final interview is with the Prime Minister, surely a living symbol of the success of the suffrage campaign. But she "would love a country where girls and young women don't even think about gender when it comes to work". When Caitlin points out that Harriet Morrison shared that aspiration, we hear that Irish voice again: "...mind is the standard by which humanity must be gauged, not the garments worn". Jacinda Adern has the last words: "She'd kick me in the pants and tell me to hurry up for sure."

I must have watched this film a dozen times at least over writing this review, enjoying its easy pace, its accessibility – and appreciating its message – every time. It's a wonderful labour history resource, restoring Harriet Morrison and working women to our understanding of the past, affirming uniting and organising as crucial for change – and generating questions with every bit of information it imparts. It doesn't finish with the celebration, it closes with the message Jacinda thinks she would receive from over a century before: "Hurry up". There's so much still to do.

# Obituaries



## Dick Scott

Historian/Journalist, 17 November 1923 - 1 January 2020

By Mark Derby

The proudly partisan, highly distinctive and self-taught labour historian Dick Scott had a profound influence on several generations of New Zealanders.

As editor of the *Transport Worker*, the defiant newspaper of the Waterside Workers' Union, Dick played a central role in the bitter and drawn-out dispute between the union and the McCarthyite National government. At the end of the dispute he rescued a complete run of back copies of the *Transport Worker*, dating back to 1916, from the union office and presented them to an anti-Nazi refugee newly arrived from Austria. Bert Roth credits this gift with sparking his own lifelong and hugely productive commitment to recording this country's labour movements.

Two decades later, as a very young and naive student, I was so inspired by Dick's writing and reputation that, together with my friend John Christie, I proposed to reprint his history of the waterfront dispute, *151 Days*. This vigorous, indispensable narrative was written in white heat immediately after the events it describes, and published with great difficulty in 1952. By the pre-digital early 70s, copies of *151 Days* were rare and hard to come

by, and John and I wanted to make the book available to young hot-heads like ourselves. Dick immediately and generously agreed to a reprint, and I met him for the first time in his spacious, magnificently adorned villa in Mt Eden. (I remember a life-size, framed photo of the Taranaki prophet Tohu on one wall, although at the time I had never heard of him or his companion Te Whiti.)

Dick came to his role as a leading voice of the New Zealand left from an unusual direction. He was raised on a Palmerston North dairy farm in a conservative family, and veered left under the influence of a high school history teacher with a British PhD and an admiration for the Chartists, and the school handyman, who was 'widely read in radical literature and willing to offer alternative education whenever I skipped a class.' At Massey University he dutifully studied agriculture while energetically editing the student newspaper.

A stint in the Home Guard during WW2 meant a posting to Wellington where he could visit the Communist Party's Unity Centre in Willis St, and meet comrades such as Rona Bailey, who became lifelong friends. The newly formed Labour daily the *Southern Cross* gave him a start in incendiary journalism, and led to editorship of the *Public Service Journal* during the torrid era of arch-foes Jack Lewin and Fintan Patrick Walsh. 'If there was toil and trouble I was often there.'

The large and diverse crowd who attended Dick's funeral in Auckland reflected the direction of his life and work after the publication of *151 Days*. A dignified and elderly Niuean woman turned to the coffin and thanked 'Mr Scott' for the international attention he had brought to her tiny country with his revelatory account of New Zealand colonial rule, *Would a Good Man Die?* A high-level deputation from Parihaka paid tribute to the immeasurable political and cultural impact of *Ask That Mountain*, Dick's account of the government invasion of their pacifist Taranaki settlement. In an exceptionally rare tribute, they farewelled its Pākehā author with karakia once sung by Te Whiti and Tohu themselves at the tangi of distinguished elders.

I once visited Dick at his small wooden cabin at Pahi on the shore of the Kaipara Harbour, a region whose history he elegantly recorded in the multiple biography *Seven Lives on Salt River*. I noticed the rusty remains of a small handgun on the mantelpiece, and Dick told me he had found it many years earlier under a wood pile in Central

Otago. Few other historians, I believe, would have troubled to look for their material in such unlikely places. Dick did so repeatedly, and discovered episodes from this country's past which had been well buried and long forgotten, and then brought them to light in unflinching and unforgettable terms.

So long, Dick, and thanks for all the inspiration and support you've given me and many others. E te kaituhi rongonui o te kōrero nō nehe, kua wheturangihia, moe mai rā, takoto mai rā, okioki e.



## Gerry Hill

*Unionist, Political and Social Activist, Labour History Stalwart, 1954 - 2020*

*An appreciation by Richard Hill*

Gerard (Gerry) Hill died on 4 January 2020 in Auckland aged 65, after a long struggle against motor neuron disease. During those three debilitating years both his flamboyant enjoyment of life and his lifelong commitment to helping others did not flag. Rather than focusing on himself and his situation, he continued to work for a better, fairer more decent society in both macro and micro ways, and to enjoy himself and entertain others in the process.

Gerry had been a keen member of the Trade Union (later Labour) History Project for decades, one of a small Auckland core group that in effect operated as the Project's Auckland branch, hosting events and publishing material.

His working life was essentially one of two halves. First, he was a seafarer from the age of 20. His experience of exploitation and inequalities in the maritime world reinforced his instinctive propensity to follow his father into the union world, beginning as a crew delegate.

Secondly, some twenty years ago he moved to establishing and running, with his partner Sally James, a no-ordinary bed and breakfast in Ponsonby.

This became his base for a great deal more political activism at both national and local levels. The most well-known example of the former was his masterminding of Operation Hope, which raised \$3.4 million to take a relief ship to aid drought-stricken people in the Horn of Africa. And to the end he retained a fierce commitment to improving life in his local Ponsonby community.

His great friend Mike Lee summed up the various facets of his career at a celebration of his life (which Gerry, being Gerry, had himself curated): 'seafarer, union official, political activist, community leader, Ponsonby historian, author'. This list might suggest, and rightly so, a tireless leadership of or involvement in campaigns for peace and social justice, and movements fighting for progress towards greater equality in the present and socialism in the future.

Gerry had grown up in the shadow of the blacklisting of his father, waterside union leader Toby Hill, after the great 1951 lockout. The economic and personal pressure this placed on the family was intensified by Toby's demonisation during the nastiest years of the Cold War. His victimisation by employers, politicians and right-wing union bosses lost him job after job before he was able to revive his union career in the 1960s. For Gerry, the profound impact of this dominant factor in his early upbringing was compounded in later years when some sections of the left began to downplay or denigrate his father's role as National Secretary of the Waterside Workers' Union during and immediately after the lockout struggle.

Gerry Hill's union life saw momentous changes in the maritime world, in part a consequence of Rogernomics policies aimed at damaging if not destroying the union movement (a period which saw the establishment of the Trade Union History Project to preserve the memories of past struggles and achievements – a task intended to establish a knowledge base to inform future action). He moved from the Federated Cooks' and Stewards' Union to the Seamen's (later Seafarers') Union after the two amalgamated, and ended his union career in the Maritime Union of New Zealand when the seafarers' and waterfront workers' unions also amalgamated in 2002.

His commentaries on union history aimed 'to set the record right', as he would often put it, and I looked forward to our robust discussions on a number of his visits to Wellington over the several decades I knew him. We might well sometimes disagree about matters past, present or future – occasionally all three – but we shared a commitment to the importance of the past in both understanding the present and providing valuable lessons on how to work towards a better future. When his illness began to take serious hold in 2018, Gerry and Sally moved for a time to Wanaka, and this resulted in his book *The Cooks and Stewards Union: A Memoir*, with a Wellington launch that a number of Labour History Project members and supporters were privileged to attend.

In union, political, private and indeed all manner of circles, Gerry was passionate and engaged, a person of action as much as theory (and there was plenty of that too). As Mike Lee put it, 'he ruffled feathers – because he cared.' Sometimes the Trade Union/Labour History Project received the benefit of his forthright critiques and suggestions, which were always listened to with respect – if not always acted upon – because they came from a position of hands-on experience, a remarkable capacity for recall and intense desire to get the analysis right. Wearing one of my previous hats as chair of the archives sub-committee of the Project, I always appreciated Gerry's determination to get union records safely into archival repositories, to provide a crucial (if as yet neglected) source for future work on labour movement history.

I was fortunate to be able to visit Gerry on 27 December 2019, in the sunny front yard of the house where he lived with his soulmate Sally, herself a social and political activist and good friend of the Labour History Project.

The house was next door to the premises of their Great Ponsonby Arthotel, a lively social and political environment where they kindly put up the occasional Project speaker passing through Auckland, as well as hosting many trade unionists at a reduced union rate. The hotel was also a magnet for international visitors, such as Jose Ramos Horta, who stayed several times and met with many East Timorese activists at the time of the independence struggle.

On my last meeting with Gerry, a week before his death, he told me excitedly about a cultural fundraiser which he and Sally had organised in the house for that evening. The next day he moved to a hospice, where he died in tranquil surroundings a week later, having just reached pensionable age.

On my visit, our conversation ranged far and wide, as usual. Gerry talked of his regret at having to miss out on, for wheelchair accessibility reasons, the recent premiere of Dean Parker's powerful and moving play on the life and death of Blair Peach, the New Zealand social-justice campaigner killed by a member of the Special Patrol Group of the London Metropolitan Police at an anti-fascist demonstration in 1979. We had discussed this over the decades, and Gerry had always supported the joint Wellington- and London-based campaigns for retrospective justice for Blair, whose killer has never been charged despite overwhelming evidence. I was able to update him on recent promising developments in the United Kingdom, and that made him happy.

Towards the end of our chat Gerry was telling me how much more he had wanted to do before died. He then indicated it was time for me to go. It was, and I did, but not before stressing that he had achieved far more in his life than most, and assuring him that his example would live on and inspire many. He seemed to accept that this was a pretty good legacy.





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