



Labour History Project

"AN INJURY TO ONE IS A CONCERN TO ALL"

NEWSLETTER 45 — FEBRUARY 2009

Contents

NEWS ROUND-UP

2 — Labour history posters

Jared Davidson, the Christchurch designer responsible for the look of this newsletter, and a moving spirit behind the new Christchurch branch of the LHP, explains his commitment to art and design that serves social justice, not profit. His labour history posters — bold designs in black and red — have received warm praise at home. Now his 'Red Feds' poster will be widely distributed overseas.

4 — Blackball 2008

Commemoration DVD now available

4 — Blackball Museum Trust

Proposed strike memorial

4 — Auckland Labour History Group

Coming Events: Working Women's Charter

5 — LHP committee planning meeting, Greytown

REVIEWS

6 — Paul Corliss: unionist and historian

Reviews of two new works by Paul Corliss of Christchurch, and a profile of the author.

7 — Loco Engineers' Centennial Journal, 1908-2008, compiled by Paul Corliss. 2008

Neill Atkinson

8 — Samuel Parnell: A Legacy

Peter Franks

9 — Black Tuesday

A new theatre production about the 1912 Waihi strike will soon be touring.

11 — Seminar: 1968 — Year of Revolution?

Donald Anderson reviews the LHP's December 2008 seminar in Wellington.

FEATURE ARTICLES

12 — Mark Briggs: flax worker, trade unionist, Red Fed, auctioneer, politician, conscientious objector, humanitarian, all round good bloke

David Grant assesses the place Mark Briggs holds in our country's history of radical resistance to war.

16 — Class War in the Old West

Peter Clayworth, biographer of New Zealand trade unionist Pat Hickey, tracks some of Hickey's background through the history of the Victor Miners' Union Hall Colorado and the Western Federation of Miners, USA.

20 — June 26 1968: a riot outside Parliament?

Toby Boraman reported on his research about student-worker activism in 1960s New Zealand at the recent LHP 1968 seminar. Here he takes a closer look at key events in June 1968.

NEWS ROUND-UP

Labour history posters

Labour History Project
 Newsletter 45, February 2009
 ISSN 0114 4243

PO Box 27-425
 Wellington
 Aotearoa / New Zealand

For more information on
 LHP membership, activities,
 publications and news, see
 the website: www.lhp.org.nz.



EDITOR: Marie Russell — DESIGN: Jared Davidson

Jared Davidson, the Christchurch designer responsible for the look of this newsletter, and a moving spirit behind the new Christchurch branch of the LHP, explains his commitment to art and design that serves social justice, not profit. His labour history posters — bold designs in black and red — have received warm praise at home. Now his 'Red Feds' poster will be widely distributed overseas.

I never wanted to be a graphic designer — at least not in the traditional sense. An important part of my artistic practice has been to explicitly avoid the design industry and all that it encompasses — advertising, profitability, marketing, consumption, and ultimately, the advancement of our current exploitative and illogical system: capitalism. By setting myself up independent of this mainstream conception of design, I've been lucky enough to participate in projects which have been far more worthwhile and productive than encouraging profit margins, consumer culture and an elitist design minority. Work for the Labour History Project — in the form of the Blackball '08 and May '68 posters — as well as my recent poster for the 'Celebrate People's History' project initiated by Justseeds (a collective of USA-based printmakers and illustrators) reflects the sort of artistic endeavours I see particular value in.

As my interest in the role graphic and cultural work can play in political agitation and education has grown, I've come into contact with other like-minded practitioners at home and abroad. Justseeds Visual Resistance Artists' Co-Operative, like myself, realise that cultural production plays an integral role in the continuation of the values and systems that prevail today — including our sense of identity, and equally important, our understanding of history. Hence the 'Celebrate People's History' project — an ongoing collection of educational and agitational posters designed to illustrate aspects of our past which are often marginalised, overlooked and outright ignored.

When I was asked to contribute to the project I immediately knew that I wanted to concentrate on an aspect of Aotearoa's past, or more specifically, our vibrant labour history. A poster on the 'Red Feds' and the influence of the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) in Aotearoa seemed a natural choice.

It's fitting that my growing understanding of labour history events in Aotearoa (especially militant ones such as the forming of IWW locals and the advocating of direct action tactics) was stoked by the Blackball celebrations of 2008, hosted by none other than the Labour History Project. Before that I had tended to look elsewhere for evidence of agitation and class struggle, for traces of politics similar to my own — understandable, considering the relative obscurity of radical labour history in my own (and the majority of people's) upbringing and education. To find concrete evidence of syndicalism, revolutionary unionism and class struggle outside of the parliamentary arena right here in Aotearoa was a truly empowering experience, one I felt I had to share.

So, a growing consciousness of labour history, Erik Olssen's **The Red Feds** (1988) and the opportunity to empower, thanks to Justseeds, has meant a slice of Aotearoa's working class history will be printed and shared with the wider world — in an edition of 4000. And not just as a nostalgic fragment of a past long gone. For me, this type of historical awareness

is a reminder that we still live in a society deeply divided by class.

The actions of the 'Red' Federation of Labour, the various Wobbly locals, and other militant individuals between 1908-13 in Aotearoa stand as an inspiring, but unfinished movement to continue to build upon in our present situation.

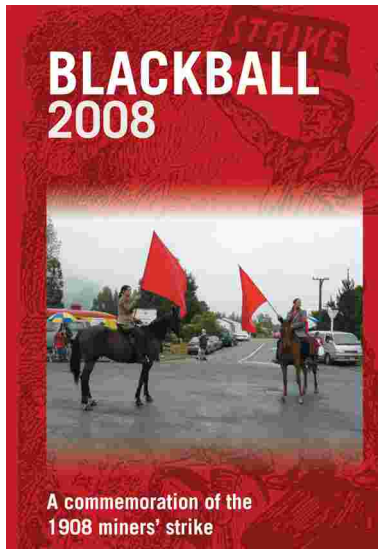
I hope to encourage and take part in similar work in the future, including the screen-printing of my Waihi poster 'Black Tuesday', as well as future projects in collaboration with the Labour History Project and the Christchurch branch I, among others, have helped to form. I understand the printing of this poster offshore may be somewhat of a first for Aotearoa labour history, but I sincerely hope it won't be the last.

By Jared Davidson

For further information about the Justseeds Visual Resistance Artists' Co-Operative, see www.justseeds.org.



The Red Feds by Garage Collective. This poster will be printed and available soon. For more information email: garage.collective@gmail.com.

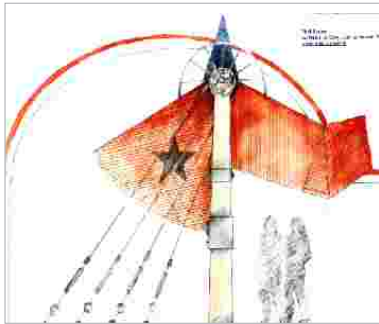


Blackball 2008: a commemoration of the 1908 miners' strike

23min DVD for sale \$15.00

Everyone who attended the Easter 2008 celebrations at Blackball came away inspired. It is not often that a political event is so massively supported and so diversely represented by a local community. Blackball is still a very special place. It continues to be an icon for working-class history, mythology and ongoing organising. By recording the weekend's activities film-maker Rod Prosser has contributed to the amazing effort by the Blackball '08 Commemoration Committee to keep a very important piece of our past alive.

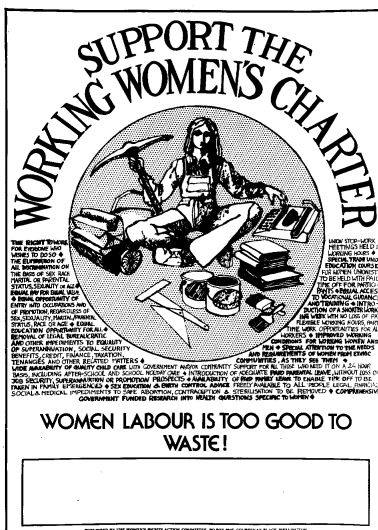
You can order copies of **Blackball 2008** by email: communitymedia@paradise.net.nz or by post to **Vanguard Films, PO Box 3563, Wellington.**



Blackball Museum Trust

After the success of the '08 Commemoration in Blackball (see last issue of this newsletter), the Museum Trust is raising funds to erect a memorial to the strike on land adjoining Blackball's celebrated hotel, 'The Hilton'. The installation will feature a sculpture by artist Phill Rooke, information panels and a small office/ shop and resource centre. Once the memorial is established an education programme will be offered.

For further information contact Paul Maunder at: wkultur@ihug.co.nz



Auckland Labour History Group

Coming Events: Working Women's Charter

The Auckland Labour History Group is planning a one-day seminar on the Working Women's Charter, to be held on Wednesday 27 May 2009 in Auckland.

The goals of the seminar are to:

- establish an historical record of the Working Women's Charter campaign of the 1980s
- celebrate the Charter and its history
- evaluate the achievements of the Charter
- establish an action plan for unfinished business.

Feminist and trade union activists involved in the original charter will lead the four panel sessions. These will represent a range of different perspectives on the issues involved. The audience is invited to participate in the ensuing discussions.

The sessions will encourage a fuller understanding of the history of the Charter and why it was necessary. How were the clauses developed? What were the intervening obstacles and enabling factors in getting unions to

accept the Charter? What did we achieve, and for whom... women or all workers? What still needs to be done?

The seminar will focus particularly on issues relevant to the union movement, but people interested in labour history and gender issues more broadly will also find this one-day seminar very relevant.

Further details on speakers, venue and bookings for the seminar will be available shortly.

Gay Simpkin
Secretary
Auckland Labour History Group
Email: pgsimpkin@slingshot.co.nz

LHP committee planning meeting, Greytown



LHP committee members at the February 2009 planning meeting in Greytown.

BACK LEFT TO RIGHT: Peter Clayworth, Kerry Taylor, Peter Franks, Lisa Sacksen, Marie Russell.

FRONT LEFT TO RIGHT: Michael Brown, Lana Le Quesne (treasurer), Mark Derby (chair), Toby Boraman (secretary), David Grant.

ABSENT: Donald Anderson, Neill Atkinson, Alex Burton, Maxine Gay, Richard Hill, Dave Morgan, Melanie Nolan, Russell Pierce, John Robson, Sue Shone, James Taylor.

Near the beginning and end of each year, the Labour History Project's executive committee meets to plan the year ahead. These two annual planning meetings take place in congenial outdoor surroundings, and on a warm Sunday in early February we were hosted by longtime LHP stalwart Colin Hicks and his wife Josie at their home in Greytown.

On the patio, under a grapevine, we outlined future projects like this year's Rona Bailey memorial lecture and a possible commemoration of the

1890 strike. And we ate and drank like working-class royalty.

It's a good gig, being on the LHP committee. During the year we meet about every six weeks on a Monday evening, usually in the central Wellington rooms of the WEA (and then repair to a pub around the corner).

Our next meeting is at 6.00pm, Monday 23 March – observers and intending committee members are welcome. For more information, contact our secretary, Toby Boraman, on secretary@lhp.org.nz.

Mark Derby, LHP Chair



REVIEWS

Paul Corliss: unionist and historian

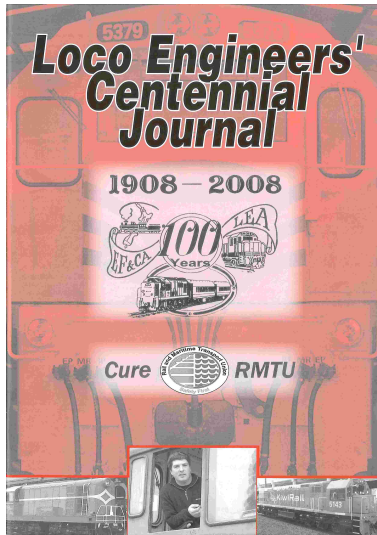
Reviews of two new works by Paul Corliss of Christchurch, and a profile of the author.

Until recently, Paul was the South Island Industrial Officer with the Rail and Maritime Transport Union and is currently organising with the Tertiary Education Union. He has been active in trade unions from the late 1960s when he worked at Westfield Freezing Works, and then as a railway shunter in the mid-1970s. He has held positions in the National Union of Railwaymen, the Canterbury District Federation of Labour and Council of Trade Unions, the NZ Harbour Workers Union and latterly with the Rail and Maritime Transport Union, of which he is a life member.

He is also an enthusiastic flyfisherman and an acquisitive bibliophile who has published a bibliography of New Zealand freshwater fish and fishing books and a bibliography on **Te Ihutai: The Avon Heathcote Estuary**. He has written for fishing magazines in addition to regular contributions to rail union and maritime union journals and also co-authored **May Day: A history and a future**.

Paul writes: 'The more comprehensive the documentary record of the trade union movement, the greater the ability to more fully appreciate its critical organisational role in advancing workplace aspirations and justice. Even a cursory glance at the wealth of material shows a broad range of diverse activity across many occupational groupings, windmills that have been tilted at and often bent, the indefatigable nature of worker organisation and action and the striving for progress in facets of life beyond the industrial. Workers who held comparatively little economic clout were already at the bottom of industrial and social pecking orders. More than 130 years of the literature show victory for endurance and collectivity, for the rights of workplace organisation and against systemic exploitation of gender, race and class. Seemingly nothing has been gained with passivity or without risk and cost. Unsung heroines and heroes abound, most are simply awaiting a sympathetic eye and a studious pen.'

Paul lives in Christchurch with his wife Bette, and son Sam.



Cover of the **Loco Engineers' Centennial Journal 1908-2008**.

Loco Engineers' Centennial Journal 1908-2008

Loco Engineers' Centennial Journal, 1908-2008, compiled by Paul Corliss. 2008. Wellington; Rail and Maritime Transport Union, 2008. Contact: RMTU national office c/- Wayne Butson, National Secretary RMTU, P O Box 1103, Wellington.

This modest but attractively designed booklet of 24 pages was published to mark the centenary of a separate union for railway locomotive workers. It's a welcome addition to the surprisingly sparse literature on the history of railway unionism in this country. The original Engineers', Firemen and Cleaners' Association (EF&CA) was formed in 1908 as a breakaway from New Zealand's first railway union, the quaintly named Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS). Of course, the loco workers' union heritage pre-dated 1908: they formed associations in Auckland and Otago in the early 1880s and played a key role in the establishment of the ASRS in 1886.

As the rail network grew in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, New Zealand Railways' workforce expanded rapidly. During the Liberal era, a period which saw strong employment growth across the state sector, the number of rail workers soared from 4523 (1891) to 13,523 (1912). The rail workforce also became increasingly complex, specialised and hierarchical, deepening divisions between loco crew, guards, signalmen, station staff, track maintenance workers and the growing ranks of tradesmen at the railway workshops. White-collar staff already had their own 'union', the Railway Officers' Institute. By 1908 loco engineers, who formed a distinct, clannish group within the wider rail workforce, were ready to go it alone. Forming their own union aroused considerable bitterness and opposition, not just from railways officials but from their former ASRS comrades. (Later, in 1924, workshop members would also quit the ASRS to form the Railway Tradesmen's Association.)

The new union had a baptism of fire in 1920, when a three-day strike — skilfully timed to disrupt the Prince of Wales' tour — saw the EF&CA win significant gains to their members' pay, hours and leave conditions. This booklet covers the union's formation and the 1920 strike in some detail, using contemporary newspaper reports to good effect. Somewhat confusingly, it then jumps seven decades forward to focus on the 1990s' struggle against the Employment Contracts Act and privatised rail's assault on workers' conditions. But the intervening years are apparently covered in an earlier 75th jubilee booklet, published in 1983.

In the meantime the EF&CA had (in 1977) changed its name to the NZ Locomotive Engineers' Association (LEA) and begun amalgamation talks with the rail officers' and tradesmen's unions, which led to the formation of the Combined Union of Railway Employees (CURE) in 1990. Five years later, in the painful midst of the Wisconsin Central/Fay Richwhite 'revolution', CURE joined forces with the Harbour Workers' Union and National Union of Railway Workers, the successor of the ASRS, to form the Rail and Maritime Transport Union (RMTU). Eighty-seven years after they had formed a separate union, loco engineers had come full circle, finding themselves back within an umbrella rail organisation. Many unions have followed a similar course in recent decades, as declining memberships and the need for industry-wide solidarity have overridden the old skill-



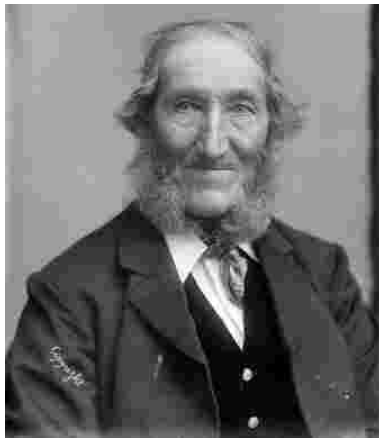
Cover of **The Steel Road**, a Department of Education booklet published in 1950. (Alexander Turnbull Library).

and task-based distinctions that originally prompted union formation.

The Loco Engineers' Centennial Journal presents other content often found in anniversary histories, with potted biographies or reminiscences by key figures, a selection of historic images, a page of verse and forewords or messages of support from officials and politicians. Former Minister of Transport Annette King's contribution naturally highlighted the Labour government's 2008 buy-back of New Zealand's rail system, which (at that time, at least) complemented the positive, forward-looking tone of this booklet. At a time of uncertainty over the new government's transport priorities, we can be sure that loco engineers and other RMTU members will strive to ensure that New Zealand's recent rail revival is not derailed.

By Neill Atkinson

(Neill is the author of **Trainland: how railways made New Zealand**. Random House, 2007.)



Samuel Parnell: A Legacy

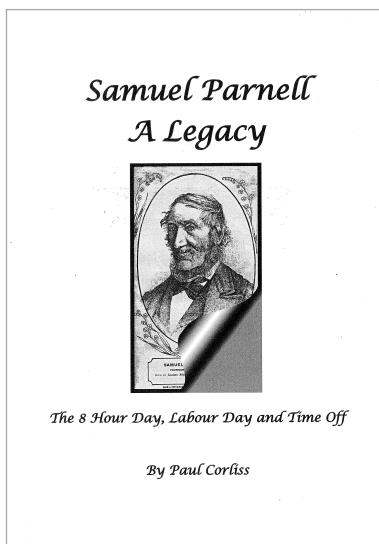
Samuel Parnell: A Legacy: The 8 Hour Day, Labour Day and Time Off by Paul Corliss. Available from Purple Grouse Press, 38 Bellevue Terrace, Mt Pleasant, Christchurch or email pccorliss@paradise.net.nz. Price \$10 plus actual postage.

In 2006 Canterbury University Press published **Words at Work**, a superb annotated bibliography of New Zealand trade union literature compiled by Christchurch unionist and labour historian Paul Corliss. He has now followed this with an excellent new account of the founding of the eight hour day in New Zealand and its significance for working people.

Samuel Duncan Parnell, a London carpenter, immigrated to New Zealand on board the Duke of Roxburgh, arriving in Petone on 8 February 1840. A fellow passenger, George Hunter, asked Parnell to build a store for him. He agreed, on the condition that the hours of work would be eight a day. In reply to Hunter's objections Parnell said: 'There are twenty-four hours per day given us; eight of these should be for work, eight for sleep, and the remaining eight for recreation and in which for men to do what little things they want for themselves.' Hunter protested that in London, 'the bell rang at six o'clock, and if a man was not there ready to turn to he lost a quarter of a day.' 'We're not in London,' Parnell replied.

There were few carpenters in the new settlement and Hunter had to accept Parnell's terms. Parnell met incoming ships, talked to the workers and enlisted their support for the eight hour day. A meeting in October 1840 resolved to work eight hours a day from 8am to 5pm, 'anyone offending to be ducked into the harbour.' As a result of Parnell's efforts, the eight hour day became established in Wellington.

The demand for shorter working hours was a major issue for workers and unions throughout the capitalist world in the latter part of the 19th century. In 1890, Wellington unions organised the first annual Labour Day demonstration. Parnell, then 80 years old, was the guest of honour. Seated on a carriage drawn by four horses, he headed the march to Newtown Park where he was presented with an illuminated address which honoured him as 'the father of the eight hours movement'.



TOP: Samuel Parnell.

ABOVE: Cover of **Samuel Parnell: A Legacy** by Paul Corliss.

Parnell's story is an important part of our labour history. It has been told a number of times before. For example, in 1997 the TUHP published **Workers' Holidays in New Zealand: A brief history** which incorporated an earlier booklet by Bert Roth. In telling the story again, Paul Corliss has come up with a fresh approach that will interest those well read in our labour history, as well as those who are new to it.

For newcomers, this 80 page book covers the Parnell story in detail, the early struggles for the eight hour day in New Zealand and subsequent advances in working time entitlements. It includes essays on Parnell and other early campaigners from the **Dictionary of New Zealand Biography** and articles on recent campaigns and advances.

For those who know the basic story well, Paul does three important things. First, he examines the claims that others were actually the founders of the eight hour day in New Zealand and concludes, after a careful analysis, that Parnell still deserves recognition. Second, he draws on the detailed press coverage of the time to paint a vivid picture of the first Labour Day demonstrations and celebrations in 1890. A useful selection of contemporary news coverage is included as an appendix. Third, he brings the story up to date with a discussion of working time entitlements in the 21st century.

Paul's perspective on the Parnell story is summed up in his conclusion:

"An old lesson, often repeated, teaches us that industrial progress is vulnerable to political predation as well as worker and union complacency. It is most reliant for its survival on worker vigilance and popular pressure. No achievement is permanently 'in-the-bag', because, like the mythical cat, it is constantly seeking or being assisted with ways to escape."

By Peter Franks

(Peter is the author of **Print and politics: a history of trade unions in the New Zealand printing industry 1865-1995**. Victoria University Press, 2001.)

Black Tuesday

A new theatre production about the 1912 Waihi strike will soon be touring.

The police baton thought to have killed Fred Evans during the 1912 Waihi strike has been rediscovered recently, thanks to a new theatre production on the strike.

Black Tuesday, written and performed by Theatre Militia, has so far only been seen at Wellington's BATS Theatre, in winter 2008. With a bare minimum of props, costumes and sets, but with powerful singing, punchy multimedia effects and vivid characters, it brought to life the dark days of 1912 when the unionists at Waihi's goldmine stayed out for eight months, until finally defeated by a massive force of police and strikebreakers. Ricky Dey plays Evans in the show, and co-wrote the play with fellow company member Felix Preval. They formed Theatre Militia five years ago together with Rachel Lennart (who directed **Black Tuesday**), with the aim of 'making theatre for people whose voices aren't usually heard'. **Black Tuesday** is their seventh show and like most of the others, was devised and written by the cast themselves.

Audiences at BATS were enthusiastic, with a full house and a standing ovation on the night I went. Best of all for the cast were the close personal connections between some of their audience and the play's subject. The grandson of Constable Wade, the policeman injured in the melee which killed Evans, introduced himself to the cast afterwards and said he still owned Wade's baton, which may have delivered Fred Evans his fatal blow. The cast have also met descendants of Waihi strikers, including one who was present when Evans died.

While researching Evans' story, Ricky found that during the strike, 'The eyes of the world were on Waihi, yet most New Zealanders know nothing about it. We should be proud of the strength and solidarity of these people'. So Theatre Militia is now taking **Black Tuesday** out of the theatre and into community halls around the country. The next performances are at Paekakariki on Friday April 24 and in Palmerston North on Saturday 2 May, as part of the May Day concert at the Regent Theatre.

THEATRE MILITIA PRESENTS

Black Tuesday

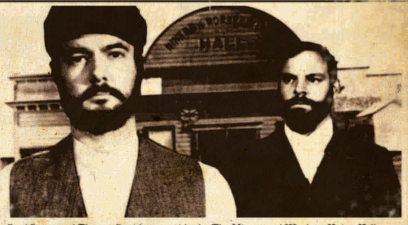
Waihi Beach New Zealand 12th November, 1912

THE STORY OF FRED EVANS AND THE 1912 WAIHI GOLD MINERS STRIKE.

Written by Richard Dey and Felix Preval

DIRECTED BY RACHEL LENART

At the time of the strike, the labour movement in New Zealand was expanding rapidly. The New Zealand Federation of Labour (known as the "Red Red"), which was linked to the Socialist Party, was gaining considerable support from the working class, and the Waihi Trade Union of Workers, to which many miners belonged, was part of the Federation. Disputes between the union and the large Waihi Goldmining Company were frequent. Miners had many grievances with conditions of work, and often downed tools and walked off the site in response to accidents in the mine - falls, broken limbs, crushing, bruising and even the occasional fatality. Though a more insidious killer than the accidents was miners' phthisis - dust on the lungs, because of miners' complaint as it was known, men who started mining at 16 would be lucky to reach 40. The company offered no compensation for miners.



Fred Evans and Thomas Davidson outside the The Miners and Workers Union Hall!


THERE IS A LOADED GUN POINTED AT WAIHI!!

Design by Dylan Mercer

The police buildup in Waihi continued until an estimated ten percent of New Zealand's police force was present. Around sixty strikers were arrested and jailed. Anger among the strikers grew, and the Federation of Labour gradually began to lose control to even more radical groups, such as the Industrial

Workers of the World organisation. In October, the Company was able to re-open the mine with non-union workers ("scabs"). The union workers reacted angrily, and the new workers were attacked with stones. Tensions between the union and non-union workers were very high -

See Black Tuesday for more



Starring
Hannah K Clarke, Richard Dey,
Richard Falkner, Luke Hawker,
Bex Joyce, Simon Smith
and Julia Truscott

**24 April 2009, St. Peters Hall, Paekakariki
and the MayDay Concerts Palmerston North**

for more information contact
theatremilitia@gmail.com

Poster for Theatre Militia's play **Black Tuesday**.

From early June the company hopes to tour to other communities, initially in the North Island only, owing to cast availability and budget restrictions, but they hope to reach the South Island next year. They would like to hear from anyone who would appreciate a performance in their town. The set is minimal (10 beer crates), and the venue needs only a reasonably tuned upright piano. If you want to see a powerful and moving production based on one of the central events in our labour history, contact Ricky

Dey on rickydey@gmail.com.

By Mark Derby

(Mark is writing a book on John Cullen, Police Commissioner during the Waihi strike.)



Seminar: 1968 — Year of Revolution?

Donald Anderson reviews the LHP's December 2008 seminar in Wellington

There was something in the air in 1968. A wave of revolt spread around the world. In France, workers and students famously almost brought down the government. Occupations, strikes, riots and mass protests occurred in the USA, Czechoslovakia (the Prague Spring), Italy, Spain, Mexico, Brazil, Pakistan and elsewhere. In Vietnam, the Tet offensive was launched.

This mood of rebellion spread to New Zealand. A major workplace revolt occurred against the nil wage order issued by the Arbitration Court. A worker-student protest, legend has it, almost 'stormed' Parliament. Major – and successful – protests were held against a proposed US military installation called Omega. The 'Peace, Power, and Politics' counter-conference was held against the Vietnam War and SEATO. And there was much other activity too.

1968 symbolised the hope of a new generation that they could radically change the old establishment. In New Zealand, it led to a blossoming of struggle by workers, students, Maori, women, Pacific people, environmentalists and others.



TOP: Montage of events in 1968.

ABOVE: Poster for the LHP seminar, screenprinted by Garage Collective. This poster is for sale in a limited edition print, on high quality art paper, size 900mm x 640mm, for just \$15, mailed to you in a mailing tube. Contact: chair@lhp.org.nz.

On Saturday 6 December 2008, over 40 people gathered to listen and discuss whether or not 1968 was a year of revolution. We were entertained and informed by Lisa Sacksen's paper on events in France in 1968 and by Toby Boraman's presentation on the worker-student alliance in NZ and the 'storming' of Parliament (see Toby's paper in this issue). Peter Franks spoke in his usual thorough and perceptive style on the movement against the nil wage order.

Memories of many of those present were rekindled by the reminiscences and analyses of prominent trade unionist Ken Douglas, former Resistance Bookshop operator Pat Bolster, and Auckland Progressive Youth Movement member Barry Lee.

Alex Burton's cleverly-cut selection of New Zealand television and film selections brought alternating rounds of laughter and thoughtful murmurs from the audience. Our thanks to the NZ Film Archive for their assistance.

It was good to see new faces at the seminar, and to learn that some of the spirit of 1968 was still alive in New Zealand!

The afternoon ended with a comradely round of drinks, or two, at The Thistle Inn to celebrate the Christmas season.

By Donald Anderson



Mark Briggs and his wife Bertha (about 1930)

FEATURE ARTICLE

Mark Briggs: flax worker, trade unionist, Red Fed, auctioneer, politician, conscientious objector, humanitarian, all round good bloke

David Grant assesses the place Mark Briggs holds in our country's history of radical resistance to war.

In 2005 painter Bob Kerr asked me to write biographies of Archibald Baxter and Mark Briggs for his exhibition on the two men's experiences in France in 1917-18. It gave me the chance to reassess whether through their resistance they experienced the apex of the State's intolerance towards anti-war and anti-conscription non-conformity within the country's anti-militarist history – and whether we can in fact claim such a tradition.

In **Field Punishment No 1: Archibald Baxter, Mark Briggs and New Zealand's Anti-Militarist Tradition**, I argue a bold 'yes' to these questions. Baxter was well-known through his remarkable wartime memoir, **We Will Not Cease**, and also as the father of James Keir Baxter, poet and counter-culture figure of the 1960s and early 1970s. But Briggs left nothing and had an 'ordinary' family. So one of my motivations was to give voice to New Zealand's most obdurate conscientious objector.

Briggs was working class. Born in Londesborough, Yorkshire on 6 April 1884, the son of a shepherd, he migrated, barely literate, to New Zealand with his widowed father and brother in 1904. All three found work in the flaxmills that dotted the Manawatu district. He joined the Manawatu Flaxmills Employees' Industrial Union of Workers, initially a moderate arbitrationist union but becoming increasingly militant as it covered growing numbers of itinerant flax workers living and labouring in dire conditions. Briggs led his union's agitation for better pay and conditions, and it joined the 'Red' Federation of Labour in July 1911. Briggs led resistance to some moderates wishing to disaffiliate as Red Feds. He attended the Federation's second conference in May 1912 where he met Peter Fraser, Bob Semple, Tim Armstrong, Paddy Webb and Joe Savage; all became life-long friends.

A month earlier he'd pleaded in Wellington with Minister of Labour John Millar for better conditions and pay for Rangiotu flax workers. The press got wind of the visit, decried that Red Feds were protesting about flax workers' conditions, and the Rangiotu flaxmill manager then sacked Briggs. From then on he found it impossible to get work in the Manawatu district. In 1915 when the government was compiling its register of military service, Briggs was processing flax near Te Aroha in the Waikato.

In 1916, Briggs joined the Empire Auctioneering company in Palmerston North as co-owner and manager with his union friend Bob Brown. In December 1916 he was called up for army service. Retaining his strident socialist views despite his foray into capitalism, he rejected this compulsion because the government had not conscripted wealth before men. Rejecting the conscription system itself, Briggs refused to attend his appeal board hearing. In March 1917, after refusing to attend an army medical

examination, he was arrested and confined to barracks at Trentham Military Camp.

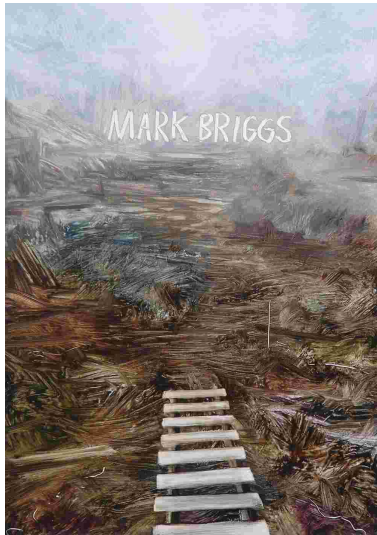
From then on, Briggs' story is one of unbending refusal to co-operate with the military authorities on any issue no matter how minor. For refusal to wear army uniform, to salute, and to drill, he was imprisoned with hard labour, and on continued stubbornness, had long periods of solitary confinement. In July 1917, he was one of 14 objectors marched through Wellington to the troopship Waitemata for transport to Sling Camp in England. They were sent to the front line in France. This was meant to be secret but one of the confined men, Garth Ballantyne, had a note smuggled off the ship by a crew member, letting the cat out of the bag.

The brutal treatment included confinement in the ship under armed guard, random physical violence, solitary confinement in handcuffs and/or leg-irons at all times except when eating, bread-and-water diets, verbal threats of court-martial and execution, being tied to poles by ropes twisted tightly in all weathers, and forced transportation to the front-line. Briggs and Baxter, alone among the 14, held out to the end. Briggs never budged in his refusal to kowtow to the authorities. Sling's commanders found they could do nothing with him, save execution, which despite the threats was not allowed. He was the first to be sent to France. At the time he was on hunger strike.

In France, he remained characteristically defiant at every turn, refusing to walk, stand, salute or wear uniform. He was carried, dragged, or flung onto and transported around in a handcart. He spent much time confined and guarded in a hut. He was the first objector to undergo Field Punishment No. 1, in which he was bound hand and foot to a pole, and left hanging for hours at a time in the open air in all weathers. It was extremely painful as hands and feet turned blue. But humiliation was the main aim, with field punishment poles being erected in full view of troops moving to and from the front line.

In March 1918, on the orders of Major-General Sir Alexander Godley, the supreme commander of the New Zealand forces, Briggs was dragged feet-first with cable wire fastened under his arms, over a mile to the front line along the duckwalk to which netting had been roughly nailed. His back, arms and neck were a mass of lacerations and blood oozed through the remains of his garments. A huge wound was gouged into his right thigh, 'big enough to put your fist into'.

Half a mile down the walk the provost-sergeant (military policeman) in charge ordered the other three soldiers to drag Briggs through freezing water in a shell-hole. The pain from his lacerations was immense, but he put up with it in silence. When he again refused to walk he was dragged into a second hole where the soldiers tipped him backwards into the water. Just as Briggs managed to raise his head above the water, the sergeant threw a handful of muck in his mouth yelling, 'Drown yourself, you bastard. You've not got your Paddy Webbs and your Bob Semples to look after you now!' Asked again to walk, Briggs muttered: 'Never, as long as I draw breath.' Later after he was dragged back to camp he could only crawl. One of the soldiers told him that he himself had been threatened with court-martial and execution had he not participated in the dragging. Others expressed indignation at the actions of the sergeant and even threatened to shoot him if he tried it again.



Bob Kerr's painting gives visual expression to the tribulation Briggs went through when he was dragged up the duckwalk at the Front in France, 1918.

In two months the army gave up. In May 1918, still stoic and defiant and in pain from his injuries, Briggs was classified medically unfit for active service because of 'muscular rheumatism.' Colonel George Mitchell, the commander of the New Zealand army base at Etaples had written, half-admiringly, that Briggs would likely remain an objector to the end. He was repatriated to New Zealand in January 1919, still nominally in the army; but refused the soldier's pay and discharge papers offered to him on disembarkation.

Briggs suffered opprobrium from patriotic New Zealanders and was shunned in the street in his home town, Palmerston North. Wisely he kept his head down, returning to the auctioneering business with Brown and later with Bert Cooksley, a Gallipoli veteran and political conservative. Briggs was a benevolent employer, providing gifts to his workers on birthdays and at Christmas and generous leave and support at times of bereavement. He found it hard to sack anybody. On 14 April 1920 he married hotel worker Bertha Burrill. On their wedding night she discovered, with horror, the grave scars etched into his back and the deep depression above his right hip. It seems extraordinary but Briggs seemed to suffer remarkably little from ongoing anxieties pertaining to his war experiences.

Baxter, with his new wife Millicent, remained a committed pacifist. Briggs turned his energies to community involvement. He played cricket and soccer; coached rugby and boxing and later became a committee member and patron of local clubs. He attended and spoke at many hui, having developed close links with Maori during his days as a flax worker. Through the Labour Party he became particularly friendly with Rangī Mawhete, president of Labour's Maori Advisory Council, who from 1928 was developing a relationship between Labour and the Ratana Movement. He remained close to the Labour leadership between the wars. Savage, Semple, Fraser and Webb among others stayed at the Briggs' family home when visiting Palmerston North. Twice he stood for Labour in city council elections, losing narrowly both times. Probably his war record was a factor in these defeats.

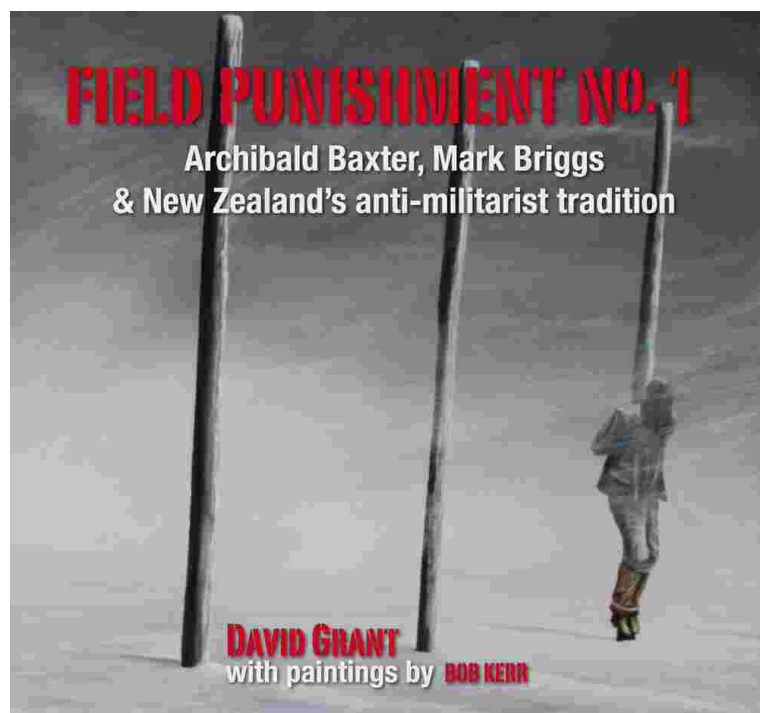
After Labour became the government in 1935, Prime Minister Savage tried to persuade Briggs to become a Labour member of the Legislative Council or Upper House. After refusing twice, he finally acceded in March 1936. Savage indicated that Briggs would serve as the 'conscience' of the House and that his appointment was a symbol to all those who opposed war. Briggs was quiet in the House, not taking naturally to the cut and thrust of political debate. But in June 1940, he did urge that the government exercise tolerance towards conscientious objectors in the new war (they didn't). Controversially, he did not oppose the introduction of military conscription. With a growing political conservatism, and in line with the Labour leadership, he bought into the argument that while this war was tragic, they had to combat an aggressive and brutal foe who was breaking all bounds of human civility in attempting to destroy world democracy. Briggs did this with a heavy heart although with all other Legislative Councillors he had minimal impact on government policy anyway. In 1944, in one of his few later public speeches, he criticised the slowness and inequity of reviewing authorities reassessing objectors' cases for release from prison camp, but was ignored. He died aged 80, on 15 March 1965, saddened by the growth in militarism and New Zealand's preparedness to tackle communist expansionism through war.

Mark Briggs will be best remembered for his experiences during the First

World War, and rightly so. I contend that Briggs was not a hero but an 'ordinary' man caught up in extraordinary circumstances, events that he faced with enormous moral courage. He and the other transported objectors were tortured in varying degrees in the most astonishing incidence of State-sanctioned cruelty in this country's history. Forcibly taking the 14 men, without warning, to the front line to cure them of their insensibility represented the nadir in the State's bigotry towards legitimate dissent. Twelve of the 14 succumbed to the army's wishes, some in the most trying of circumstances. In a poignant irony, one, William Little, was killed within 18 days of becoming a stretcher bearer.

Baxter and Briggs prevailed, making them New Zealand's first successful dissenters, succeeding against all odds in a young, immature, subservient, insecure and martial society that feared nonconformity, even more so under the stresses of war. They stood at the apex of the State's intolerance towards such dissent. They are key in our tradition of anti-militarism that includes Moriori leader Nunuku-whenua; Taranaki's Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi; the brave young working class men mostly from the West Coast and Canterbury who protested against compulsory military training when it was first introduced in 1911; the anti-conscriptionists of World War One; other pacifists before and in the early days World War Two, and the myriad of antiwar activists who emerged in the nuclear age. Briggs and particularly Baxter (through his book) became heroes to many of these later activists. They are exemplars of the cause of war resistance in this country, men of courage, spirit and principle, to be lauded in the same breath as Te Whiti, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela.

By David Grant



Field Punishment No. 1 by David Grant, with paintings by Bob Kerr, was published by Steele Roberts in 2008.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Class War in the Old West

Peter Clayworth, who is writing a biography of New Zealand trade unionist Pat Hickey, tracks some of Hickey's background through the history of the Victor Miners' Union Hall Colorado and the Western Federation of Miners, USA



TOP: 'Victors Miners' Union Hall No.32', taken around 1903. There are no bullet holes as yet.

MIDDLE: Detail of the ironwork above the entrance.

BOTTOM: Bullet holes are visible in this 1915 picture of the hall.

All photos: www.rebelgraphics.org.

The Miners' Union Hall in the small town of Victor, Colorado, is a site of great historic significance to the international labour movement. In the early 1900s the hall was the centre of dramatic events as the local headquarters of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), the USA's most militant union. The building is still scarred by bullet holes, witness to the violent class struggle known as the Colorado Labor Wars. Employers and state authorities joined forces to crush the WFM, afraid of the Federation's growing power and its radical ideas. The WFM rejected craft-based trade unionism in favour of industrial unions, dedicating itself to a class war aimed at the overthrow of capitalism through mass industrial action; a doctrine described as revolutionary syndicalism.

The ideas of the WFM had a profound influence beyond the USA, in particular in early 20th century New Zealand. Pat Hickey, a member of the WFM, brought the message of class war to New Zealand's West Coast mines in 1907; leading to the 1908 Blackball strike and the beginnings of broader union federations. The Federation of Miners, the forerunner of the New Zealand Federation of Labour or 'Red Feds', was based on the WFM model and adopted the militant preamble of the WFM's constitution. The WFM was instrumental in starting the Industrial Workers of the World movement, the IWW or Wobblies. The most militant labour agitators in pre-war New Zealand were based on the American IWW model. It can be seen that through these connections the violent labour struggles of the early 20th century American West helped spark New Zealand's own industrial upheavals in the 'Red Fed' era.

The history of the WFM in Victor, Colorado, reflects the broader story of the miners' struggles in the American West. The WFM was founded in response to the violent repression of the 1893 miners' strike at Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The Federation's core supporters were the hard rock miners of the western states: South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah and Colorado. The WFM later spread into western Canada. By the early 1900s, the Federation had grown in power following a series of successful strikes. They were organising carpenters, construction workers and smelter workers, as well as coal and hard rock miners.

Teller County, Colorado, was a centre of union power. The area included the hard rock mining towns of Cripple Creek and Victor. The local government was dominated by the union, a number of WFM co-operative shops were located in the area, while the Victor Daily Record was a strongly pro-union newspaper. The WFM was able to insist on an eight hour day and union wage scales throughout Teller County. The WFM had been set up with an emphasis on improving the working conditions of its members. This was often achieved through negotiation, and in union towns such as Victor there was for a time a considerable degree of cooperation between the union, the law enforcement authorities, and the more moderate employers. During this period of relative industrial peace, in 1901-1902, the Victor Miners' Hall was built on 4th Street. The

hall provided a site for union meetings and social activities, as well as symbolising the unionists' pride in the power of their Federation.

As employer strength continued to crush strikes in many western mines, the WFM became more strident in its ideology and rhetoric. With the election of Charles Moyer as president and William 'Big Bill' Haywood as secretary/treasurer, the Federation gained two leaders who were dedicated militants. The WFM rejected the conservative American Federation of Labor as a bastion of craft unions, more interested in feathering the nests of skilled tradesmen than advancing the cause of workers as a class. By 1903 the WFM was calling for 'a complete revolution of social and economic conditions' and the abolition of the wage system. During this period the WFM gained a reputation for readiness to use violence to achieve its aims. The Federation always argued that this was largely a smear by the capitalist press and that most violence was initiated by the employers. Colorado's employers were frightened by the radical language and the growing power of the Federation. The employers established their own 'Citizens' Alliances' to combat the unions. They also gained a strong ally with the election of anti-union Republican, James Peabody, as Governor of Colorado. Friction between the WFM and employers increased as the Federation focused on the campaign for an eight hour day, a measure supported by a referendum of Colorado citizens, but blocked by the state judiciary and government.

The 'Colorado Labor Wars' were sparked by employer reaction to the WFM organising Colorado City smelter workers in the mills where Cripple Creek and Victor ore was smelted. Union men were identified by spies from the Pinkerton Detective Agency and dismissed from the mills. Mill workers struck in protest and, true to the principles of industrial unionism, the WFM miners of Cripple Creek and Victor went out in support. Governor Peabody and the employers' associations saw this as an opportunity to break the power of the WFM. Under the pretext that the Cripple Creek area was out of control, Peabody sent the National Guard into Victor and the surrounding Teller County. Union officials, WFM members, sympathetic public officials and the staff of the Victor Daily Record were systematically arrested. While the rest of its staff were imprisoned, an emergency edition of the Daily Record was printed and distributed single-handedly by Emma Langdon, an apprentice linotype operator who had escaped arrest. The National Guard ignored court orders to release the prisoners. The authorities claimed the union was responsible for a series of violent incidents, including sabotage of railway lines and explosions in mines. The Federation consistently claimed that sabotage in Colorado was the work of employers' agents, in attempts to discredit the unionists. On December 4, 1903, Teller County was officially placed under martial law, the Bill of Rights was suspended, and union leaders were imprisoned or deported from Colorado. The right to bear arms was removed, merchants were arrested for displaying pro-union posters, the Daily Record was placed under military censorship, and the Victor Miners' Hall was briefly occupied by National Guardsmen.

The situation worsened in June 1904, following an explosion in the Depot at the Independence Mine and Mill. Thirteen strike breakers were killed and a further six wounded. The Citizens' Alliances immediately blamed the WFM, while the Federation claimed the blast was another attempt by the employers to discredit them. As no independent investigation of the crime was ever carried out, it remains unclear who was responsible.

The Cripple Creek Mine Owners' Association and the Citizens' Alliance

immediately took advantage of the situation, meeting at the Victor Military Club to plan the removal of all pro-union elements in Teller County. Sheriff Henry Robertson, who was regarded as soft on the WFM, was forced to resign under threat of being lynched. The employers then called a citizens' meeting across the street from the Victor Miners' Union Hall. As an angry crowd was fired up by anti-union rhetoric, unidentified gunmen drew revolvers and fired shots at random, wounding at least five people. It is not clear why the shooting started or who was responsible for it. Fifty members of the WFM left the scene for the safety of the Victor Miners' Hall. Company L of the National Guard, the local Victor unit commanded by one of the mine managers, then surrounded the Union Hall and opened fire. After four miners were wounded the unionists surrendered. The Hall was wrecked by Guardsmen and the Citizens' Alliance, and the union's records were destroyed. Following these events other WFM halls in Teller County were wrecked, WFM cooperative stores were looted and the Victor Daily Record was taken over by state authorities and transformed into an anti-union paper. Those workers who refused to renounce the WFM were driven out of Colorado.

The events of the Colorado Labor War convinced the WFM that they were in a war to the death with the employers and their government allies. The Federation was a major party at meetings in Chicago in 1905, from which the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) was formed. The IWW had the aim of carrying on the class war through the organisation of all workers into one big union, with the power to tackle the employers' alliances. The final goal was the destruction of capitalism, leading to 'the cooperative commonwealth'. Large union organisations would form the basis of the new society to come.

While the WFM was helping organise the IWW, New Zealander Pat Hickey was involved in Local 67 of the WFM at the Bingham Canyon Mine in Utah. Hickey no doubt heard a great deal about the Colorado Labor Wars and may have even visited Victor during his American travels. Fully converted to the WFM's vision of class war and revolutionary syndicalism, Hickey returned to New Zealand in 1906, determined to bring militant labour activism to the 'workers' paradise'.

The Victor Miners' Union Hall is now the focus of a campaign to restore it as an international centre for labour and particularly miners' history and education. The Hall is derelict but activists are working under the banner of the Victor Heritage Society to raise funds and buy the Hall from its current owner, who is willing to sell, and restore the building to its former glory.

Anyone keen to learn more about the project, or to donate to the Hall's restoration, should contact **Katherine.Sturdevant@ppcc.edu**.

Or write to

Victor Miners' Union Hall
c/o Kathy Sturdevant
3970 Cyclone Drive
Colorado Springs CO 80920
USA

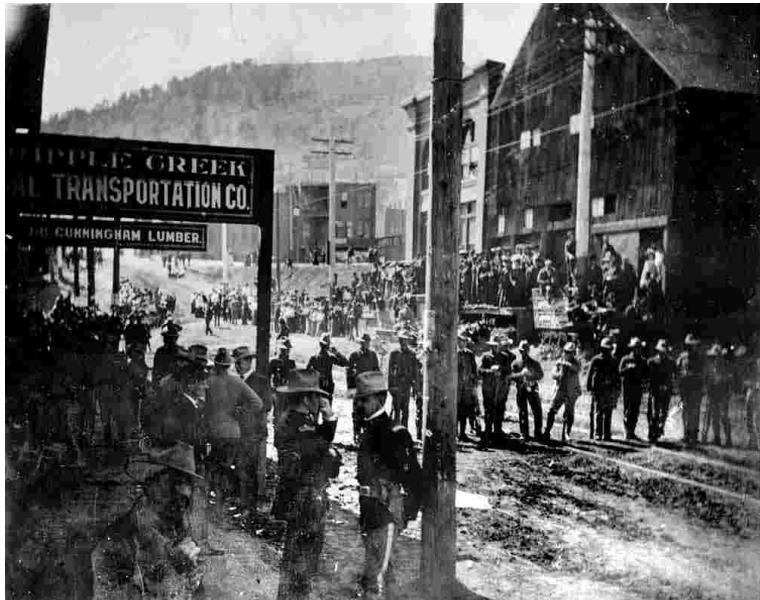
More information can be found on www.rebelgraphics.org/wfm_hall/

By Peter Clayworth

TOP: The filename identifies this image as "Miners Union Hall Mob."

MIDDLE: The Colorado National Guard. Victor had its own National Guard regiment stationed at the armory, one block from the WFM hall. Although the sign says Cripple Creek (Coal Transportation Co), this is 4th street in Victor, near the WFM union hall.

BOTTOM: The exterior of the WFM hall today.
All photos: www.rebelgraphics.org.



FEATURE ARTICLE

June 26 1968: a riot outside Parliament?

At the recent LHP 1968 seminar, Toby Boraman reported on his research about student-worker activism in 1960s New Zealand. Here he takes a closer look at key events in June 1968.

Hot on the heels of events in France in May-June 1968, a worker-student protest of several thousand people converged on Parliament on June 26 1968.¹ Students held 'Students and Workers Unite', 'Student-worker Solidarity' and 'Bursaries and wages must be increased' banners.² Some also carried 'billowing red and black flags',³ a symbol of the French revolt.

It has been claimed that the protest nearly ended in the storming of Parliament.⁴ The Dominion exclaimed that the allegedly violent protest ended in a near riot.⁵ An editorial in the Evening Post sternly remarked that it 'will be long remembered with shame as one of the most discreditable affairs in the history of this land.'⁶

Given these assertions, it is puzzling that this protest has received little attention.⁷ I'll attempt to shed some light on this event, and discuss whether or not it was violent. I'll also look at whether the one-day stoppage on the day of this 'riot' can be called a Wellington general strike.

What was the June 26 1968 protest all about?

It was a very broad protest at the opening of Parliament. According to various press reports, from 3,000 to 7,000 attended.⁸ A multitude of causes were represented:

- The major protest of the day was against the Arbitration Court's nil wage order which had been announced on 17 June 1968. Given inflation, this order was effectively an across-the-board wage-cut. The Wellington Trades Council organised a one-day strike on June 26 and a march from Trades Hall to Parliament grounds. There was also a watersiders' march to Parliament to protest the order.
- Seamen protested against the lack of safety at sea.
- The Maori Organisation on Human Rights demonstrated its opposition to the Maori Affairs Amendment Act of 1967. According to Ranginui Walker, this Act allowed Maori land to be commodified and sold, and thus 'for Maori people, the Act was seen as the "last land grab" by the Pakeha.'⁹ At least 400 Maori from as far as the South Island, Gisborne, East Cape, Taranaki and Hawkes Bay attended the protest.¹⁰
- Members of the Wellington Committee on Vietnam decided to show their opposition to the Vietnam War and SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organisation). This was just after the popular Peace, Power and Politics counter-conference to SEATO in April 1968. The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was also protesting against French nuclear testing.
- The Wellington branch of the Campaign Against Rising Prices was there, claiming that rising prices affected working class people the hardest. There was a mini recession in 1967-68, and some resulting unemployment.
- The Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association organised a student march to demand higher bursaries for students and higher salaries for university staff; to oppose the proposed Omega US military spy base¹¹ and the Vietnam War; and to show support for the workers.¹²

What happened?

It's hard to say definitively. I haven't interviewed people who were involved, and would be keen to hear from people who were. Instead, I have pieced together events from the press reports. The union demonstration began with workers listening to speeches from union leaders. At some stage, workers by-passed a police barrier, and arrived near the steps of Parliament. Tom Skinner (President of the Federation of Labour), Norm Kirk (Labour Party leader) and Toby Hill (chairman of the Wellington Trades Council) spoke out against the Arbitration Court's decision. Some in the crowd booed them for being too tepid. Skinner was heckled for 'sitting on the fence', and Hill was booed when he asked unionists to resume work and to stay behind the police barriers.¹³

Trouble erupted after Skinner and other union officials asked the crowd to disperse before the student protest arrived. John Gough, then Chairman of the Wellington Committee on Vietnam, grabbed a megaphone and urged the protesters to stay put and 'stand firm'.¹⁴ His call was greeted warmly. It appears most refused to leave. The People's Voice commented:

there is nothing that frightens right-wing trade union leaders more than the direct action of the masses. This was clearly demonstrated in Wellington when some trade union leaders got cold feet and attempted to call off the demonstration at Parliament Grounds. But they were overwhelmingly defeated by the rank and file.¹⁵

Then the 800-1,000 strong student demonstration arrived. Students became vocal and the speeches more militant.¹⁶ Chants of 'Long live Danny the Red' (that is, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the French anarchist leader of May '68), 'Holyoake out' and 'No Omega bases' went up. Pushing began against police lines.¹⁷ It is not clear whether this came from the protesters, or whether it was a response to the police attempting — and failing — to clear the way for the outdoor opening ceremony.¹⁸ When the police attempted this, the protesters sang 'We shall not be moved' and sat down.¹⁹ Further trouble erupted when Prime Minister Holyoake appeared on the steps, smiling and waving to the crowd. Demonstrators became particularly incensed when he did this.²⁰ They surged forward, and almost broke the police cordon. This impromptu occupation of Parliament grounds forced the cancellation, for the first time ever, of the outdoors ceremony marking the opening of Parliament. Demonstrations also forced 'distinguished' guests including the Governor-General to use a side door to enter Parliament.²¹



Students and workers struggle against Police outside Parliament on June 26 1968

Owen Hughes wrote in *Salient*:

There were those at the time however, who saw the wrath of the crowd and the strength of their 4000 number as an immediate force for storming the steps of Parliament and taking over the building. Of course this could quite easily have been done and apparently the minions inside the building were hurriedly preparing for this eventuality.²²

Was the protest a riot?

The left-wing and student press hotly and unanimously denied that the protest was a riot, or even violent. Several, such as the *New Zealand Monthly Review*, argued that the only 'violence' that occurred was in small scuffles between police and demonstrators.²³ Terry Adams, then the Assistant Secretary of the Wellington Seamen's Union, wryly wrote, 'if this was violence, then I must admit I've seen worse on a wharfies' picnic day.'²⁴ Only two arrests were made, a far cry from the more turbulent demonstrations of the era, such as the Agnew protest in Auckland in 1970, the 'battle of Willis Street' in Wellington in 1970 and the Mt. John protest in 1972. The protest did involve surges against police lines, pushing and shoving, attempts to place the Viet Cong flag on the steps, and tussles with police, and thus may be called direct confrontation, but not real violence.

Was this a Wellington general strike?

I ask this because Chris Trotter has optimistically asserted that a similar union stoppage in 1970 in Wellington was 'effectively a half-day general strike by the capital's wage workers.'²⁵ General strikes can be city-based rather than nationwide, such as the Seattle General Strike of 1919. So can the 1968 strike be called a Wellington-wide general strike? I doubt this for several reasons. Firstly, Toby Hill did not call for a strike at all firms in Wellington. He only called for a strike at firms which had not already granted an increase in wages in defiance of the nil wage order. Secondly, some unions, such as the Wellington Builders' and General Labourers' Union, disassociated themselves from the Trades Council's call for a stoppage.²⁶ Thirdly, although I have not found enough evidence about the support for the strike on June 26, if one relies upon the *Dominion*, the strike did not appear to be universal or general at all. The *Dominion* claimed staff attendance in retail stores was high, and trains and buses ran as usual, apart from routes of the Newlands Coach Service, which were cancelled.²⁷ However, print workers had gone out on strike and prevented the *Dominion* and *Evening Post* from being published on June 26. This was the first time ever that both newspapers had not been published.²⁸ It seems that action not only by print workers but also by waterside workers (seamen and wharfies), and barmen closed their respective industries for the day.²⁹

From this patchy evidence, the strike can be viewed as more of a small mass strike (I use the terminology of Rosa Luxemburg in her 1906 article) than a general one, especially as it seems that only about 3000 or more workers attended the demonstration on the day. I think it's easy to over-romanticise large strikes, and see them as more general and radical than they were.

The significance of the protest and strike

This protest and strike was significant for many reasons. It highlighted the remarkable convergence of issues at the time, and how protest on one issue fuelled protest on another. It was part of a wider strike movement

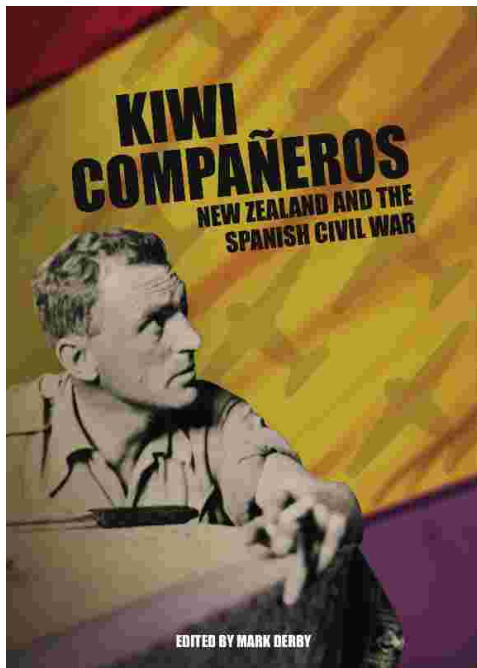
that was an essential factor in stopping the nil wage order, and gaining workers a 5% pay increase. As the most important example of worker-student solidarity during the 1960s and 1970s, it gave hope to some that an alliance between workers and radical youth could be formed. It was possibly the first significant protest over the alienation of Maori land during the 1960s. It highlighted how workers and protesters gained confidence that through their collective action, they could more effectively oppose the establishment – and there was a significant rise in strike action, direct action and protest activity in general after 1968. Finally, it highlighted how the mainstream news media created a sensational spectacle of violent unruly protesters, and how they feared the spread of the overseas uprising to these shores.

By Toby Boraman

- 1 — This article is a shortened version of a paper presented at the LHP seminar 1968: A Year of Revolution?
- 2 — 'The Week Workers and Students Shook up the Ruling Class', **People's Voice**, 3 July 1968, p. 8.
- 3 — Ventosus, 'Capital Comment', **New Zealand Monthly Review**, 92 (Aug. 1968), p. 6.
- 4 — 'In 1968, Parker was involved in the 1968 march protesting the nil wage award which almost ended in the storming of Parliament', http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dean_Parker, accessed 27 Nov 2008.
- 5 — 'Violence Erupts in Protest at Parlt.', **Dominion**, 27 June, 1968, p. 1.
- 6 — 'The Rabble in Our Midst', **Evening Post**, 27 June, 1968, p. 12. Dan Riddiford, National MP for Wellington Central, also said a 'gang' of students 'defied the police and attempted to let loose a tirade of disorder and perhaps death on the people of New Zealand.' He later said his speech was misreported, claiming he said 'train of disorder' rather than 'tirade'. 'Riddiford says speech misreported', **Salient**, July 23 1968, p. 1.
- 7 — The only substantial reference to the protest I'm aware of is Elsie Locke, **Peace People**, Christchurch, 1992, p. 219.
- 8 — According to the **Evening Post**, 3,000 people attended, the **Christchurch Star** and the **New Zealand Herald** both estimated more than 4,000, the **People's Voice** claimed 6,000, and the **Christchurch Press** claimed well over 7,000. **Evening Post**, 27 June 1968, p. 21, Pat Walsh, 'An 'Unholy Alliance': The 1968 Nil Wage Order', **New Zealand Journal of History**, vol. 28, no. 2, 1994, p. 184 n.26, 'Defiant Mob Blocks Steps of Parliament', **New Zealand Herald**, June 27 1968 p. 1, **People's Voice**, 3 July 1968, p. 8 and **The Press**, June 27 1968 p.1. The **People's Voice** further claimed the demonstration was composed of 3,000 union members and 1,000 students, while the **Press** claimed 7,000 unionists marched. **People's Voice**, 3 July 1968, p. 8.
- 9 — Ranginui Walker, **Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou**, rev. ed., Auckland, 2004, p. 207.
- 10 — 'Violent Demonstrators Force Side-Door State Opening of Parliament', **Evening Post**, 27 June 1968, p. 21 and 'Burning Resentment for Maori People', **People's Voice**, 3 July 1968, p. 8.
- 11 — Large demonstrations against the Omega spy-base were held in Christchurch and Auckland in June and July 1968. See Owen Wilkes, **Protest**, Wellington, 1973.
- 12 — Owen Hughes, 'June 26 – the beginning of...the end.' **Salient**, June 25, 1969, p. 14.
- 13 — **NZ Herald**, June 27 1968 p. 1.
- 14 — **Dominion**, 27 June, 1968, p. 1.
- 15 — 'Road to Victory Open', **People's Voice**, 3 July 1968, p. 1.
- 16 — Hughes, 'June 26', **Salient**, June 25 1969, p. 14.
- 17 — **NZ Herald**, June 27 1968 p. 1.
- 18 — **Evening Post**, 27 June 1968, p. 21.
- 19 — **Evening Post**, 27 June 1968, p. 21.
- 20 — **Dominion**, 27 June 1968, p. 1.
- 21 — The Australian High Commissioner's limousine was 'scratched, the diplomatic pennant ripped off and the tyres let down' 'University Finds Blame Wrongly Put on Students', **Evening Post**, 27 June 1968, p. 14.
- 22 — Hughes, 'June 26', **Salient**, June 25, 1969, p. 14.
- 23 — See Ventosus, 'Capital Comment', **NMZR**, August 1968, p. 6.
- 24 — Terry Adams, **Seamen's Journal**, vol. 3 no. 3 (June/July/August 1968), p. 6.
- 25 — Chris Trotter, **No Left Turn**, Auckland, 2007, p. 255.
- 26 — 'Firms urged not to act hastily over wages', **NZ Herald**, June 25 1968, p. 1.
- 27 — 'Thousands March on Parliament', **Dominion**, 27 June 1968, p. 2.
- 28 — Peter Franks, **Print and Politics**, Wellington, 2001, p. 173.
- 29 — Also Wellington drivers were expected to join the strike – **NZ Herald**, June 25 1968, p. 1.



Kiwi Compañeros...



Special offer to members of the Labour History Project

Kiwi Compañeros – New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War, published by Canterbury University Press in association with the LHP and edited by LHP chair Mark Derby, will be released in May 2009.

Based on a TUHP seminar in November 2006, this is the first-ever account of New Zealand's role in the civil war that tore Spain during 1936-39, and became a ruthless rehearsal for World War Two. **Kiwi Compañeros** records the actions of the New Zealanders who took part, including those who worked for the Spanish cause at home. It draws on recently released military documents and previously unpublished photographs to tell the all-but-forgotten story of those who chose to enter a crucial conflict on the far side of the world.

Contributors: Peter Clayworth, Farrell Cleary, Mark Derby, Rosamunda Droescher, Lawrence Jones, Judith Keene, Malcolm McKinnon, James McNeish, Michael O'Shaughnessy, Dean Parker, Nicholas Reid, Anna Rogers, John Shennan, Susan Skudder and Kerry Taylor.

Special pre-publication offer!

Kiwi Compañeros, a 300-page book extensively illustrated with photographs, cartoons, military records and many other images, will retail for \$45. As a member of the Labour History Project, you can buy it in advance of publication for just \$35 plus post and packing. Fill in the coupon below and send it with your payment. We'll mail your copy out to you as soon as it arrives from the printer.

Membership has its privileges.

Kiwi Compañeros – New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War. Edited by Mark Derby. Published by Canterbury University Press in association with the LHP, 2009.

- Please send me copies of the book at \$35 each (RRP - \$45).
- I enclose my cheque for \$....., incl. \$5 post and packing (within NZ only).
- I'd like the editor, Mark Derby, to sign my copy.

Name:.....

Address:.....

Phone:..... **Email:**.....

Labour History Project — PO Box 27-425, Wellington — www.lhp.org.nz — Email: companeros@lhp.org.nz