



# Labour History Project

NEWSLETTER 50 | NOVEMBER 2010

**Re-evaluating the 1890 Maritime Strike**

**Ken Douglas - the Biography**

**Central Trade Union Organisations in New Zealand**

**Freed to Care, Proud to Nurse**

**Anarcho-syndicalism in the 20th Century**

**The Wellington Trades Hall ...and more**



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

GUEST EDITOR: David Verran  
DESIGN: Jared Davidson

COVER IMAGE:

Unionists demonstrate in Greymouth on 24 September 1890.

In the centre foreground is the Brunner miners' band.

(P.J. O'Farrell, *The Workers in Grey District Politics, 1856-1913*, 1955).

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FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

## **Introducing your guest editor - David Verran**

*I have long been a follower of labour history, and have been reading this newsletter since the first issue back in 1987. I have attended various labour history conferences, written book reviews and articles for this newsletter, and researched the Northern Local Government Officers' Union, the Liquor Food and Allied Workers' Union, Labour politician Frank Langstone and Fred Young – Auckland and national secretary of the hotelworkers' union. Along with this, I have also researched Alex Drennan and Frank Langstone for the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, wrote the Working Class Heroes series and am co-editor of New Zealand Legacy for the New Zealand Federation of Historical Societies.*

## **Mark Derby's Chair's report**

Warm greetings to all members and supporters of the Labour History Project and to anyone else reading our newsletter.

This column is expected to become a regular feature. It is a chance for me as chair to let all of you know what your executive committee has been doing and planning. In addition, it is significant that the suggestion for the column came from David Verran, the editor of this issue of the newsletter.

### **GETTING THE WORD OUT**

Our thrice-yearly newsletter (which is still in search of a memorable, distinctive and apt title) is a vital part of our ongoing activities. Committee member Marie Russell, in her role as editor from October 2008, created the newsletter's current format and standard. She stood down from the post earlier this year after five groundbreaking issues and guest editors are carrying on her great work on an issue-by-issue basis — initially our own committee member Lisa Sacksen with the previous issue, now Auckland-based David Verran with the current one, and next Paul Maunder in Blackball with the first for 2011. Each has brought their own ideas and skills to the role, and this new column is just one example. Throughout the process, one crucial element has remained constant. Christchurch-based designer Jared Davidson developed the eye-catching, flexible and engaging visual format of this newsletter in 2008 and has continued to design it ever since — promptly, cheerfully and voluntarily.

### THIS YEAR'S AGM

Our AGM this year was held in July for the first time, to bring it in sync with the financial year, and was a very enjoyable and productive event. I was especially delighted to welcome several new committee members, two of whom immediately took on specific roles. Jim McAloon, who teaches history at Victoria University, agreed to take over from Lana Le Quesne as treasurer and soon proved that he could also be of value to the Commerce faculty. Our new secretary is the vastly experienced and utterly dependable Claire-Louise McCurdy. A third new and welcome face is writer and activist Mary-Ellen O'Connor. One of her first contributions was to secure us a semi-permanent new venue for our six-weekly committee meetings. These will now take place in the Victoria St office of her husband Dave Wickham, manager of the union employment advocacy service Works4US. Bear in mind that any LHP members are welcome to attend our committee meetings as observers — email the secretary via the website to find the date of the next one. Finally, 12 stalwart existing committee members consented to be re-elected — they are listed below. My sincere thanks to them and to retiring members Neill Atkinson, Lana Le Quesne and Toby Boraman.

### PSA CENTENARY

The PSA has sensibly made an early start on planning for its centenary in 2013. Earlier this year they invited a member of the LHP to join the centenary planning sub-committee and I've been very happy to fill that role. One element of the plans is an oral history of the PSA's recent history, and our own committee member Mary-Ellen O'Connor has been carrying out archival-quality interviews as part of that project.

### 1890 STRIKE SEMINAR

Perhaps the most significant of our events for this year takes place in early November in Auckland. Our northern colleagues the Auckland Labour History Group have headed the organising of a seminar to mark the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1890 maritime strike. This seminar was initially suggested several years ago by recently retired LHP committee member Neill Atkinson and has been ably implemented by the Aucklanders, in collaboration with the LHP and also our trans-Tasman comrades the Australian Association for the Study of Labour History. Members of all three groups are presenting papers to the conference, which should ensure valuable opportunities to discuss our future working relationships.

### LABOUR HISTORY PROJECT COMMITTEE, 2010-2011.

Michael Brown, Alex Burton, Peter Clayworth, Mark Derby (chair), Peter Franks, David Grant, Richard Hill, Jim McAloon (treasurer), Claire-Louise McCurdy (secretary), Grace Millar, Melanie Nolan, Mary-Ellen O'Connor, Marie Russell, Lisa Saksen, Sue Shone, James Taylor (webmaster), Kerry Taylor.

- *Mark Derby*

## Recent death of Colin Hicks

A full obituary will follow in the next newsletter, but we acknowledge his great contribution to the Labour History Project, the PSA, the CSU and the cause of working people.

## The Labour History Project salutes the Chilean copper miners



Something that press coverage of this event may not have told you — the last miner to reach the surface, Luis Urzua Piñera, is a union leader and leftist, and a second-generation veteran of the long battle between Chile's workers and the regime that has controlled the mines.

Luis' father was a union leader and member of the Chilean Communist Party. He 'disappeared' in September 1973 when the country's elected President, Salvador Allende, was overthrown by the dictator Pinochet. Luis' stepfather, Benito Tapia, was also a miners' union leader and a Central Committee member of the Young Socialists. In October 1973, he was murdered and buried in a mass grave, one of many victims of the Caravan of Death, the extermination squad that selectively killed leftists and officials of Allende's government.

Luis is 54 years old and has been a miner since 1979. He was the most experienced of the 33 miners trapped underground, and therefore the one who took charge following the cave-in and organised the distribution of their limited food supply.

The Allende government nationalized the country's copper industry in 1971 under the state-owned entity Codelco. Pinochet reversed much of Allende's economic agenda but retained the mines as a useful source of funds for the military. As a result, Codelco continued to train technical staff and recently organized the unprecedented rescue operation, a task beyond the means of Chile's private sector.

The October rescue showed the world what life is like for an underground miner and the risks for all workers who face increasing disparity between corporate profitability and worker safety.

- Mark Derby

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

## Globalisation and Labour in the Pacific: Re-evaluating the 1890 Maritime Strike

*The following abstracts are from papers to be presented at the Auckland Conference, taking place on November 4th.*

### **Surfing the global wave from Australasia to Oceania: locating the 1890 maritime strike in the imagined temporal and spatial boundaries of Antipodean labour historiography**

*- Professor Lucy Taksa, Macquarie University*

As Scates pointed out decades ago, 'we know a great deal about the Maritime Strike of 1890'. It is a subject that has been 'debated and celebrated on both sides of the Tasman' (Scates, 1991:70). His view has been echoed by other stalwart labour historians in Australia and New Zealand who have explored a plethora of different aspects of the dispute (Burgmann, 1992: 83; Markey, 1988; Markey 2008; Richardson, 1986: 71; Svensen, 1992: 13). These studies have either focused on the strike itself or used it as a starting point for an analysis of its impact on labour movement organisation, labour and community politics, the state, and gender and the household. In this keynote address, I will consider the strike in a broader context by exploring how its treatment reflects the temporal and spatial boundaries of Antipodean labour historiography. In this way I will highlight how representations of Australia and New Zealand within those boundaries have influenced and constrained the study of labour across the island nations of Oceania during the modern and post-colonial phases of globalisation.

### **The Impact of the 1890 Strike on the Formation of the New Zealand Labour Party**

*- Peter Franks*

The three big industrial disputes in New Zealand's history – the 1890 Maritime Strike, the Great Strike of 1913 and the 1951 Waterfront Lockout – are significant as much for their political consequences as their industrial outcomes. A strong case can be made that while 1890 was the worst industrial defeat it had the greatest political significance. Unions played an important part in the November 1890 elections in mobilising working class support for the Liberals who took office in early 1891. The Liberals (who were in power until 1912) were one of New Zealand's great reforming governments. They created the foundations of the Welfare State, including a raft of labour laws. The conciliation and arbitration system they introduced provided the framework for New Zealand industrial relations for nearly 100 years.

In one sense, a paper about the impact of the Maritime Strike on the formation of the New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP) might seem odd. After all, it was more than a quarter of a century between the strike and the foundation of the modern NZLP in 1916. Labour historians have framed the debates on party

formation that preceded the NZLP as a struggle within the labour movement between “militants” and “moderates”. My argument is that this view ignores the elephant in the room, the Liberals who led the first modern government in New Zealand’s history and the longest to stay in power. In this paper I discuss the influence of the Liberals on the NZLP. While they were unquestionably a brake on the development of an independent labour party, they had a profound ideological and political influence. In part I will look at these issues through the views and actions of two Labour politicians who were also important, but much neglected, labour historians: the Dunedin trade union leader and politician J. T. (Tom) Paul and the Auckland Labour MP and rebel John A. Lee.

### **The Impact of 1890 Maritime strike on the Formation of the Labor Party in Queensland**

- Associate Professor Bradley Bowden, Griffith University

Writing in the 1970s the Queensland labour historian argued that the effect of the Maritime Strike has been overstated, and that in Queensland the Labor Party was not ‘born out of the strikes nor had it arisen because of them’. This view runs contrary to the opinion not only of Spence but of popular mythology, which locates the Labor Party’s origins at Barcaldine’s Tree of Knowledge in mid-1891. Nevertheless, this paper will argue that it is hard to contradict Murphy’s view. In Queensland, the policies and structures of both the union movement and the Labor Party owe little to the Maritime Strike. The decision to form a Labor Party was made by the Australian Labor Federation in Brisbane in August 1890. While the Federation met while the strike was underway the decision to form a Labor Party was clearly made before the strike began. The first ‘labour’ politician, Thomas Glassey, was elected 2 years before the strike began.

### **Mahuki of the Red Plume – the Intersection of Labour and Race Politics in 1890**

- Mark Derby, Freelance Historian

In October 1890, as Auckland’s police struggled to maintain order in the city, an armed force was dispatched by special train to the King Country on a confidential overnight mission. The young chief Mahuki Manukura, a disciple of Te Whiti, was occupying European-owned stores at Te Kuiti with 40 unarmed followers. These rebels were taken back to Mount Eden Prison, where Mahuki served 12 months with hard labour.

The extremely rare second issue (25 October 1890) of the then newly-established Auckland labour weekly, the *Tribune*, was largely dedicated to Mahuki’s case. It called him “a Maori Henry George”, and declared that he had been jailed for resisting the “native land swindle” in the King Country. The *Tribune’s* editor wrote to Mahuki in prison, offering him the services of a prominent radical lawyer, William Rees. Both the letter and the *Tribune* issue were intercepted by the gaoler and handed to government officials.

The Mahuki case is a remarkable illustration of some of the wider political issues surrounding the labour struggles then engulfing the country. The Crown desperately wanted to overcome Maori resistance to selling King Country land,

and the first Crown purchases had taken place in April 1890. Mahuki was a leading opponent of such sales and the *Tribune* saw him as an ally in its own opposition to powerful capitalist interests.

The case also illustrates the government's propensity to use state force against its opponents — organised labour or Maori. Plainclothes police were ordered to mingle with strikers on the Auckland wharves. The train sent to arrest Mahuki carried not only armed police but Volunteer Force troops with bayonets. The government and mainstream press treated the intransigent chief as a religious fanatic, and the *Tribune* gives a rare alternative view from the perspective of radical labour.

### **Recurring Patterns in Globalisation and Labour: A Comparison of the Maritime Disputes of 1890 and 1998**

- Jo Kowalczyk, *NSW National Tertiary Education Union of Australia*

Even as the 1998 Maritime Dispute played out there was a sense of history repeating itself in the way that it resembled the Maritime Dispute of 1890. It was evident that there were similarities in terms of who was involved, the issues at stake and the economic context within which the disputes occurred but there was also one key point of difference that is the legal context within which the unions were operating. In 1890 there was no formal recognition of trade unions — this did not come until after the strike — whilst in 1998, the recognition, and associated 'power', that had subsequently been achieved was considerably diminished by the newly elected conservative government's Workplace Relations Act 1996. Since 1998, the ongoing push, particularly during the eleven years of the Howard Conservative government, to decollectivise work has seen unprecedented attacks on trade unions and the longer term outcomes of both disputes are now in starker contrast.

### **'Australasian Assignations? The impact of the '1890' generation and the Maritime strike on later Trans-Tasman unionism'**

- Professor Melanie Nolan, *Australian National University*

The links between the Labour movements in New Zealand and Australia were strong particularly among the miners, the shearers, the wharfies and the seamen; the Maritime Strike of 1890 is one expression of the extent of solidarity. The 1890 Maritime Strike is said to be a fillip for labour in politics; a less successful contemporary proposal to form an Australasian Labour Federation was also supported by 7<sup>th</sup> Intercolonial Trades Union Congress. Given that Trans-Tasman population movements increased after 1890 and communications and fraternal interchange intensified, the failure to form an Australasian trade union federation seems striking. In the paper I argue that Australasian union federation after 1890 was mostly aspirational and restricted to 'Australasian assignations', for instance, the peak union organization, the Australasian Council of Trade Unions formed in 1927 retained 'Australasia' in its title until 1947 but its activities all along were 'Australian'. To establish the mechanism which undermined the impulse towards Australasian union federations requires us to consider the role of generation in labour history for Australian federation in 1901 and separate arbitration systems are only part of the explanation. The shadow of 1890 loomed large in the decades after the Maritime Strike.

William Morris Hughes is a good example of the role of the '1890 generation' in Australasian politics; as President of the Waterside Workers Federation, Hughes did everything he could to ensure that the 1913 General Strike in New Zealand did not extend to Australia. This paper explores his success in containing Australasian trade unionism.

### **A Tale to Squash Incipient Revolvers: Combating the Legacy of 1890 in the Early Red Fed Years**

- Dr Peter Clayworth, Freelance Historian

In his Red Fed Memoirs union activist Pat Hickey commented that, in the early 1900s, any unionists' complaint against the arbitration system 'was effectively squashed by union officials, who, with a pitying look upon their faces, lectured the incipient revolvers about "the '90 strike."'

This paper will examine the legacy of the 1890 strike within early twentieth century New Zealand labour movement. To what extent was the defeat of the strike, along with the subsequent introduction of the arbitration system, used by moderates as an argument against any readoption of the strike weapon by unions? Was worker support for arbitration the result of a belief in the effectiveness and fairness of the system, or the product of a fear that strikes would inevitably be defeated?

The paper will go on to illustrate how the Red Feds, in their opposition to the arbitration system, set about combating the legacy of 1890 and encouraging the idea that strikes could be won. In particular it will consider the Red Fed promotion of a new 'strike mythology' based around the successful Blackball strike of 1908. The paper will look at the question of whether these debates were simply a disagreement over tactics, or whether they were part of a generational shift of power within the union movement as younger activists took over from the veterans of 1890.

### **The New Zealand Coalminer and the Maritime Strike 1890**

- Brian Wood, Independent Researcher

This paper uses new source material and some methodology other than narrative to examine the United Kingdom origins of New Zealand's coalminers and their Union Movement in the 1880s, their affiliations with other unions particularly thorough the Amalgamated Miners' Association and the Maritime Council, the nature of their leadership by John Lomas, their involvement in the Maritime Strike and the aftermath of the strike.

Most attention will be given to the miners at Denniston and Brunnerton on the West Coast of the South Island, an analysis of the extent to which the capital labour markets were Australasian, evaluation of the recollections of John Lomas in respect to the main developments and events, and an examination of prevailing ideologies.

The paper is intended to augment the research and writing of Len Richardson ("British Coalminers and Colonial Capitalists", Chapter 5 in *Common Cause*, (ed) Eric Fry 1986 and his "The Struggle for Acceptance", chapter 2 in *Coal*

*Class and Community*, 1995) and be a discussion rather than a re-evaluation of the major components listed above.

### **‘One of us must either go back or lie down’: The 1890 Maritime Strike as a Turning Point for Australian Radical Cartooning?**

- Dr Nick Dyrenfurth, University of Sydney

The 1890 Australasian maritime strike has long occupied the scholarly attention of Australasian labour and political historians. For their part, Australian historians have detailed the bitter strike’s conduct; debated its cause and effect; and, more recently, examined transnational and gender-specific issues. In particular, the debate as to how much the strike influenced (or acted as a ‘turning point’) the formation of the various colonial Labour parties has cast a long shadow over the historiography of the Australian Labor Party.

This paper, by contrast, explores the ways in which the Maritime Strike acted as a cultural ‘turning point’. It shows how the events of the strike transformed the world of radical cartooning in Australia, a central element of the burgeoning fin de siècle labour movement press. Whereas radical cartoonists hitherto depicted workers as forlorn and rather hapless figures, and conservatives delighted in drawing unions as menacing ogres, the strike provided an opportunity to cast worker-unionists as heroes battling the forces of capital, as per the villainous ‘Mr Fat Man’.

And yet this phenomenon was a complex affair. On the one hand, this was a development driven by overseas cartoonists, men such as the Bulletin duo Phil May and Livingstone Hopkins, themselves drawing upon transnational models. On the other hand, a close reading of the evidence indicates that visual propaganda of these cartoonists was ultimately liberal if not conservative in its outlook. It was in the unashamedly pro-Labor *Worker*, via the likes of Montagu Scott and, in time, Claude Marquet, that this unique iconography truly flowered.

### **The Maritime Strike and Changing Attitudes towards Trade Unionism in New Zealand - A Newspaper Study**

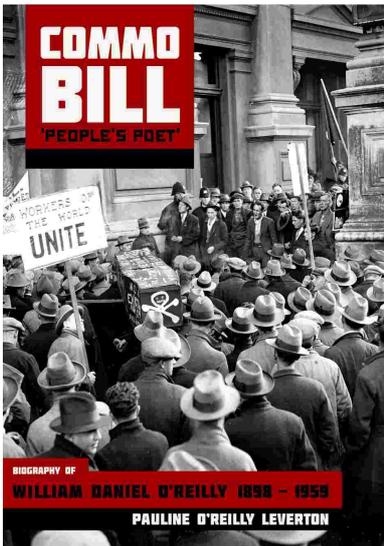
- James Keating, Victoria University, Wellington

This paper examines the changing attitudes of New Zealand newspapers, over the course of 1890, to the tensions created by the emergence of a newly assertive labour movement, culminating in the Maritime Strike of August-October 1890. When New Zealand newspapers initially responded to the development of new unionism, beginning with the event popularly associated with its emergence, the London Dockers’ Strike, a wide range of ideas and opinions were expressed. As newspapers reported on industrial disputes involving ‘new’ labour federations in early 1890, their coverage retained a similar ambivalence. No unified perspective existed for contextualising reports and editorials on the activities of new unions. Without any formal media hierarchy, newspaper frames on labour issues were diverse and chaotic. Was this because, as Benedix Hallenstein suggested, colonial society had finally “recognised [the] utility” of robust trade unionism to an industrial democracy? As industrial disharmony increased between May and July, many New Zealand newspapers

dropped their putative liberalism and adopted a more unified, and critical, position on organised labour. I believe that the Maritime Strike calcified this developing bias against labour federation in most newspapers, and helped reveal the true extent to which labour organisations were tolerated in late nineteenth century colonial society.

## ***Commo Bill* book launch 16 December 2010**

*Commo Bill - Biography of William [Bill] Daniel O'Reilly 1898 - 1959. By Pauline O'Reilly Leverton.*



The front cover features Bill addressing unemployed relief workers on the steps of the Wellington Town Hall during the Depression. He dedicated his working life to improving the lot of workers. His poetry, which features in the book, records many historical events he participated in: particularly the two World Wars, the depression years, peace and conscription activities and the '51 Lockout.

Jim McAloon, Associate Professor of History at VUW, endorses the book, which he indicates taught him much about state repression during the Depression. He states that Bill's life story, the biography of a committed communist and worker, is a very worthwhile read.

Bill died, before his time, aged 59 in 1959 when the author, his youngest child Pauline, was 12 years old.

The Labour History Project and the Wellington Branch of the Maritime Union warmly invite readers to the launch of *Commo Bill* at 5.30pm on 16th December 2010 at Waterside House, Willis Street, Wellington.

RSVP

[10ffpress@gmail.com](mailto:10ffpress@gmail.com) or Phone Pauline on (04) 476 0191.

## **Forthcoming history of the Federation of Labour**

*In Common Cause: the New Zealand Federation of Labour 1937-1988, edited by Peter Franks and Melanie Nolan — to be published by Steele Roberts in 2011.*

David Grant noted in his speech at the launch of his biography of Ken Douglas that there is no history of the Federation of Labour (FOL) and that this is a real gap in New Zealand labour history.

On 9 November 2007, the Trade Union History Project (later renamed the Labour History Project) and the Council of Trade Unions (CTU) held a one-day seminar

to mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the FOL. The seminar was hosted by Margaret Wilson, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, and was held in the Legislative Council Chamber at Parliament. A conspicuous proportion of the nearly 100 people who attended on the day were trade unionists; the majority attending were active unionists including a good number of 'young ones' who were keen to find out about the history of the labour movement. At the seminar, a number of people urged the organizers to publish the papers.

This is evident in the range of presenters: labour historians, Erik Olssen, Peter Franks, Melanie Nolan, Ray Markey; five former union activists and veterans of the 1980s, Ken Douglas, Mike Sweeney, Syd Keepa, Martha Coleman and Dave Morgan; and the President, Helen Kelly, and the then Secretary, Carol Beaumont, of the CTU. Thanks to Alex Burton, the proceedings were videotaped and the masters are held at the New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington.

In early 2011 Steele Roberts, which has produced several labour history titles including the biography of Sir Arnold Nordmeyer, will publish *In Common Cause, the New Zealand Federation of Labour 1937-1988*. Edited by Peter Franks and Melanie Nolan, *In Common Cause* includes the papers given at the seminar (which have been rewritten and expanded by their authors) and much more.

Erik Olssen's chapter surveys the predecessors of the FOL from the end of the 1913 Great Strike to 1937; a much neglected period in New Zealand labour history. He shows how the vision of a unified labour movement that transcended distinctions based on skill, craft, religion and race was kept alive during a period of disunity and division. Peter Franks' chapter draws on the FOL's rich archive to look at the foundation of the FOL in 1937. There was a strong impetus for unity but the debates at the first conference revealed quite diverse views of what the FOL should be.

Melanie Nolan's chapter discusses the FOL and wage bargaining. She points out how the emphasis in other histories on politics and personalities has obscured the grounds for disagreement between the two wings of labour in the long term. She shows that the period of centralized wage fixing was shorter than is often supposed. Ray Markey's chapter looks at the FOL in its final decades, a subject that has been scantily covered in published labour history. He analyses the different roles the FOL played as an agent of mobilisation of workers, an agent of exchange with employers and the state and an agent of regulation, internally with unions, and in the society as a whole.

The final chapter is an edited transcript of the panel discussion at the seminar, during which five union activists and veterans from the 1980s gave their perspectives on the transition from the FOL to the CTU. The participants were Ken Douglas (FOL secretary 1979-1988 and founding CTU president 1987-1999), Syd Keepa (convenor of Te Runanga o Nga Kaimahi Maori o Aotearoa, Te Kauae Kaimahi), Martha Coleman (organiser for the Central Clerical Workers Union and assistant national secretary of the NZ Clerical Workers Association), Mike Sweeney (Auckland District Secretary of the Engineers Union and the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union from 1991 to 2006) and Dave Morgan (national president of the Seamen's Union and the Seafarers Union from 1973 to 1998 and founding president of the Trade Union Federation).

*In Common Cause* includes a lot that is new. In the introductory chapter, Peter Franks and Melanie Nolan analyse the view of some historians that the FOL, for substantial parts of its history, was not progressive and did not represent workers well. They map out new questions that can now be asked of the FOL's role in New Zealand history when wider social developments are considered. The book includes a comprehensive list of the FOL's officers and national executive members, a large number of photos and cartoons (some of which have not been published before) and statistics and graphs on union membership, FOL affiliations and industrial disputes.

- Peter Franks

## FEATURE ARTICLES

# Ken Douglas - the biography

*David Grant reports on the launch of his biography of Ken Douglas, published by Random House.*

On the evening of Monday 6 September 2010, some 220 guests attended the launch of LHP member David Grant's biography of Ken Douglas *Man for All Seasons: the Life and Times of Ken Douglas*, in the Brierley Theatre at Wellington College. Attendees thoroughly enjoyed the occasion and felt that the Governor-General the Hon Anand Satyanand did both the book and the subject proud in his address launching the book. Random Houses' publishing director Nicky Legat also spoke, as did the author. The following is an edited version of David's address without the 'thank-yous' at the end.

Your excellencies, the Governor-General, the Honourable Sir Anand Satyanand and Lady Satyanand, distinguished guests and Dave Keat. Can I too extend a very warm welcome to everybody here this evening-family, friends, colleagues, former colleagues of both Ken and myself, some of whom have come from far and wide?

The launch of the book represents the culmination of three years of hard work spread over nearly twice that long as two other smaller book projects and teaching at this school to supplement an insubstantial writing income, have intervened.

Late in 2004, David Filer who was researching a television documentary on Ken Douglas for Top Shelf Productions approached me to see whether I would like to write an accompanying biography to tie in with the screening of the documentary. Initially I said no as I was in the middle of another commissioned history. Then I reconsidered. Douglas was an intriguing subject from what I knew about him then — controversial, enigmatic, larger-than-life, a man who seemed to this observer, and others, to have taken a quantum ideological leap from his role as the often outspoken communist leader of our trade union movement, steering it through its most radical period of change in our history to one where he was now sitting, and apparently thriving, on several capitalist boards.

A challenge indeed. So I took time out from that project and agreed to pursue the task on the proviso however that it would be a thoroughly researched biography of the man and his work and therefore not be ready in time for the documentary's screening in 2006.

It behoves me to say that I went through my own gamut of emotions while researching this story—excitement, intrigue, fascination, surprise, stimulation, caution, inattention, senses of déjà vu at times, bafflement occasionally. It has always been interesting, frequently challenging but never, ever has it been dull. It is also, I must stress, a life and times study and therefore a de facto history, at least in part of the Wellington Drivers Union, the Drivers' Federation, the Federation of Labour and the Council of Trade Unions during the time of Douglas' tenure in each of these organisations. These groups should have their own histories. That there is not a book detailing the story of the Federation of Labour in particular, is, in my view, a huge gap in our industrial and political historiography.

One or two people have asked me what it is like to write a biography of someone who is still alive, in implicit or explicit comparison with someone who is dead. My immediate answer was I don't know really. This is my first biography. The big advantage for the former is that you talk to that person at length — which I have done — and because the history is relatively recent — talk to his family, friends, colleagues, supporters and antagonists. A perceived downside is that a person would want to check what you had written, suggest or persuade you to alter material to make him or her look in a better light. In other words a constrained, sanitised and essentially untrue account.

Now I could never do that. Ken made no demands for expurgation of any kind. He made a promise to himself that he would answer all of my questions with honesty and that nothing would be left off the table. While he read every word of the draft, he made no censorious demands, just the intermittent drawing of my attention to further areas of research or the provision of an occasional anecdote. A hagiography, this book is not. A sympathetic judgement, yes, probably, but I shall leave the final assessment to informed critics - if we have any.

Now is not the time to discuss in any detail the content of the book. But, I will recall just a few incidences. When, not if, you buy your books for family and friends then you read about when, for example, Ken, aged 14, tried to sell condoms to his fellow pupils just 200 metres from here behind the school's fives court. He was singularly unsuccessful, unlike his sometime classmate Ron Brierley who sold stamps in their hundreds. Brierley went on to become a multi-millionaire, Douglas, a truck driver.

There's the time he demolished a house with his truck in Haining St. There's the time Robert Muldoon, remarkably, invited him to join his think tank, to combat, in Muldoon's word, a right-wing ideology then pervasive in Treasury. Was Muldoon, the avowed anti-communist, trying to buy him off? Jimmy Knox certainly thought so. I think so too. Then there was Ken's enjoyment in going head-to-head, ideologically, with Roger Douglas, the man he calls his illegitimate half-brother. These are just teasers folks. There's plenty more where that came from.

It behoves me finally to acknowledge a whole bunch of people. Firstly, there is somebody who has nothing to do with this book save for one small footnote. Through the 1960s and 1970s, Ivan Reddish headed the Post Office Association, later to become the Post Office union, he headed the international telecommunications union for a period and he headed the Combined State Services Organisation, which became the Combined State Unions at the end of his watch, largely because of him. The late Ivan Reddish was also my father-in-law and it was from a series of discussions I had with him I learned what it was really like to be working class in New Zealand and what it was really like to be a working class trade union leader in this country - this to a person who came from a very different social milieu. A stimulating and wonderful man and I'd like to acknowledge members of his family who are here tonight.

Ivan Reddish's connection with Ken Douglas is through another fine trade union leader in Ron Burgess who succeeded Ivan soon after his retirement as a leader of both the Post Office and Combined State Unions and who from 1987 worked very closely with Ken as the first secretary of the Council of Trade Unions until he retired in 1991. Ron and Jenny Burgess are with us tonight and I happen to know that on this very day they are celebrating their 52<sup>nd</sup> wedding anniversary - and ladies and gentlemen I think that is worth a round of applause..."

Unity Books sold 127 copies at the launch almost a record number for them and they participate in many book launches. Manager Tilly Lloyd was delighted. Following the launch, Doug Catley an old school friend of Ken Douglas, who now heads the Healthcare organisation shouted the Douglas and Grant whanaus, and friends, to dinner at the prestigious White House restaurant in Oriental Bay where 'the food was excellent and the conversation invigorating.

## **The Wellington Drivers' Unions, a brief history to 1940**

In his biography of Ken Douglas, David Grant outlines the early history of the Wellington Drivers' Union. There were in fact three separate unions covering Wellington drivers between 1895 and 1916. The Wellington Carriers' union was formed on 7 March 1895 and registered under the Arbitration Act in April 1895. It cancelled around June 1902 and then was re-registered in 1904. Allan Orr was at various times the union president and then secretary and Alfred Smith was secretary from at least 1907 to 1911, W. T. Queree was secretary in 1912 and at least 1913. It was finally cancelled in 1916 in favour of the Wellington drivers' union.

Allan Orr was born in Geelong, Victoria, in 1853 and came to New Zealand around 1863. He moved to Wellington in 1890, where he worked as a storeman and a carrier and became president of the Wellington carriers' union in 1895 or 1896. He also campaigned against Chinese immigration and was a strong supporter of the Liberal government. Around 1900, some tramway employees were included in his drivers' union, before Orr formed a separate Wellington

Grooms and Conductors' union. In 1902 Orr stood for the Wellington City seat and in that year was described as being secretary for "half a dozen unions", including the Wellington brick, tile and drain workers' union, the carriers' union, drivers' union, plumbers' union, grocer's employees' union, timber yard employees' union and the grooms and conductors' union. He was a regular union advocate to the Wellington Conciliation Board and the Arbitration Court and in 1905 he unsuccessfully stood for the Wellington City Council.

The separate Wellington drivers' union was formed on 20 July 1899 and registered under the Arbitration Act 8 September 1899. Allan Orr was also secretary of this union from 1899 to 1902, David Blackie from 1903 to 1912 and Andrew Parlane from 1913 to 1940. The latter is confirmed from the *Evening Post* of 8 February 1913, which confirms Parlane's election and that he had been on the executive of the Wellington drivers' union since 1901 and its president on five occasions. From around April 1912 the union became known as the Wellington Motor-Car, Horse-Drivers and Livery-Stable Employees' and from 1925 the Wellington Drivers and Related Trades.

Grant describes how the drivers were reluctantly drawn into the November 1913 strike and as with other unions at the time had to contend with an Arbitrationist breakaway union called the Wellington Carters and Motor-Vehicle Drivers' union. This was registered under the Arbitration Act around November 1913 and cancelled around June 1915.

Long time Wellington drivers' union secretary Andrew Parlane (1869 – 1952), was born in Rangiora, moved to Wellington in 1897 and worked as a carrier. He was secretary of the Wellington drivers' union 1913 - 1940, and at various times president of the Wellington Trades and Labour Council. His brother, Edward Parlane, was secretary of the Canterbury drivers' union, and a Christchurch local body politician. Andrew Parlane was also president of the Wellington Labour Representation Committee, a Labour Wellington City Councillor 1935 - 1938, and active in the Wadestown area where he lived from 1910. He died 12 July 1952.

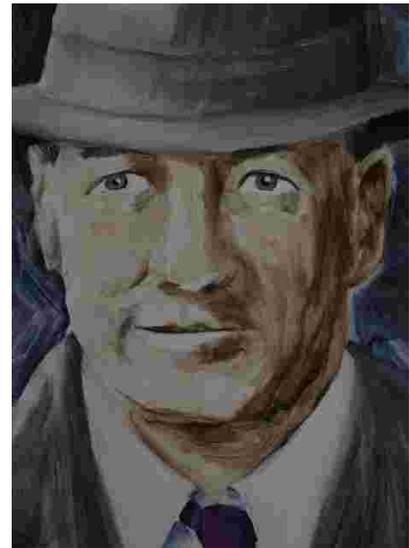
- *David Verran*

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## How to lose a customer

Wellington artist Bob Kerr has been working on an exhibition he calls 'the Three Wise Men of Kurow.' He was not pleased to see one of those men attacked in a recent ad campaign by Dominion Breweries. Here he puts the record straight.



ABOVE, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: Rev. Arnold Nordmeyer was a Presbyterian minister whose sermons dealt more with the here and now than the hereafter.

Dr Girvan McMillan became known for his fast and furious driving around his large country practice, and his expectation that trains in the Kurow shunting yards should make way for him.

Kurow school principal Andrew Davidson saw his school roll suddenly grow from 63 to 339. He was a tireless and innovative educator who believed that each child 'possessed a spark of genius somewhere'. It was the teacher's job to find it.

The same weekend the Labour Party held its annual conference in Auckland, Dominion Breweries ran full page ads in the *Sunday Star-Times* under the headline 'How to Lose an Election.' The main image is of Arnold Nordmeyer, Finance Minister in the 1957 Labour government. The ads describe him as "an enemy of fun" and "old gorse-pockets Nordmeyer."

The hero that this muddled campaign, with its associated film and TV ads, attempts to promote is Morton Coutts, then the owner of Dominion Breweries. The ads present Coutts as the advocate for the working man. In fact, Coutts built a house next to his Waitemata brewery known as Morton's Mansion. The bathroom alone cost more than a state house.

Dave Shoemack, DB Export's marketing manager, says Nordmeyer taxed the world's best imported beers so heavily that no ordinary man could afford to drink them. As a result, "the inventive Morton came up with a cunning plan to help average Kiwi beer drinkers who were outraged by the new tax. Morton quietly set about creating a beer that would not only avoid the import duty, but would also hold its own against the world's best beers."

Regardless of what you think of the quality of DB's product, these facts are not correct. Collaborative research by the company and its largest competitor, NZ Breweries, did develop a new process that significantly reduced brewing times. But this Continuous Fermentation Process was patented in 1956. DB was producing beer this way for a year before Nordmeyer's tax was even introduced.

The newspaper ads describe Coutts as 'visionary.' The real visionary was Arnold Nordmeyer. Working in Kurow in North Otago during the depression he witnessed real hardship at an unemployed workers' camp known as the Willows, where unemployed families lived through freezing winters in tents, and shacks made

of beaten-out fuel cans. Nordmeyer, the local schoolteacher Andrew Davidson and the town doctor Girvan McMillan, met to discuss solutions to the Third World poverty they had seen at the Willows. At the doctor's kitchen table they wrote down the simple points they believed should form New Zealand's future health system. It should:

- be free, complete and able to meet the needs of all people
- aim to prevent disease
- make provision for income loss
- provide all the facilities for the diagnosis and treatment of disease
- be based on the provision of a family doctor for every person, and the patient's free choice of doctor
- include adequate provision for health research.

By 1935 Nordmeyer and McMillan were in Parliament where they were the architects of the 1938 Social Security Act, which combined the introduction of a free-at-the-point-of-use health system with a comprehensive array of welfare benefits.

Shoemack and his expensive spindoctors simply ignore the fact that by taxing imported beer Nordmeyer was actually assisting the New Zealand-owned brewery. What's more, today DB is no longer a New Zealand company. It is now owned by Singapore-based Asia Pacific Breweries.

These ads are, of course, not really directed at the public. They are dog-whistle ads attempting to head off proposed changes in the drinking age or the price of alcohol, hence that strange headline 'How to lose an election.'

## **The history of central trade union organisations in New Zealand**

The first trade unions in New Zealand were formed in the early 1860s but it was nearly 25 years before the first attempt was made to bring unions together on a nationwide basis. This occurred in 1885 when a New Zealand Trades and Labour Congress met in Dunedin. Thirty-eight delegates representing 2,500 workers took part.

Trade unions got on a firmer footing after 1894 when the Liberal government established the arbitration system. However, this system encouraged the proliferation of small, local unions. The decade before the First World War saw the growth of socialist ideas and militancy among some groups of workers and the formation of the 'Red' Federation of Labour, which went down in defeat in the Great Strike of 1913. After the war, unions remained divided nationally between the 'militant' Alliance of Labour and the 'moderate' Trades and Labour Councils Federation.

The Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s left trade unions in a very weak state. Working people rallied behind the Labour Party, which swept to office in 1935. However, the divisions among unions got worse after Labour's election victory. The Alliance of Labour (which was the strongest national

organisation) split into two warring factions in 1936. There were bitter exchanges in the press and in early 1937, both factions called conferences to form a new national union organisation.

However, there was a strong desire to form a strong central organisation of unions. The rival conferences were cancelled and Peter Fraser, Labour's Deputy Prime Minister, agreed to open a national industrial conference. This conference opened at the Trades Hall in Wellington on 14 April 1937. Over 300 delegates, representing 178,000 of New Zealand's 191,000 union members, attended and established the New Zealand Federation of Labour. Its role was summed up in the FOL's constitution which said that while each union would have full self-government over its own industrial affairs, the FOL 'will be the means of securing unity of action on all general matters for the national welfare of unionism.'

The establishment of the Federation of Labour was a watershed in NZ labour history. For the first time trade unions had a forum to make common policies and an effective voice in national economic, industrial and political issues.

Until the late 1930s, the arbitration system applied to only a minority of workers. The first Labour Government introduced compulsory union membership and national awards. After the Second World War, wage bargaining was overshadowed by national wage cases (General Wage Orders) argued by the FOL before the Court. Another militant revolt against the arbitration system was defeated in the 1951 Waterfront Lockout.

By the mid-1960s, the arbitration system had been undermined by union frustration at the conservatism of the court, the National Government's threats to introduce voluntary unionism and by the growth of enterprise bargaining outside the system. An economic downturn in 1967 marked the end of the post-war prosperity. In 1968, the Arbitration Court shocked unionists and alarmed employers and the government by refusing to grant a general wage increase with its 'Nil Wage Order'.

There was a sharp increase in strikes and widespread direct bargaining between unions and employers. Governments, both National and Labour, and leaders of the FOL and the Employers Federation, scrambled to try to prop up the arbitration system. The 1970s and 1980s were a seesaw of wage controls, confrontations and compromises between unions, employers and governments against a backdrop of growing economic instability with rising inflation and unemployment.

By the 1970s, it had become clear that the FOL was no longer able to speak on behalf of unions as a whole. State sector unions (most of which were not affiliated to the FOL) had emerged as a powerful force in their own right along with white collar unions such as the Bank Employees. In the 1980s, there was growing collaboration between the FOL and the Combined State Unions. In the early 1980s, the Public Service Association took the initiative and proposed a new central organisation combining both private and public sector unions. After a long delay, and much agonising, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions was formed in October 1987.

- Peter Franks

## NEWS

## Sudden death of the biographer of Fintan Patrick Walsh

Many were surprised when someone not from the political Left, nor with a background in the labour movement, attempted to write a biography of Walsh. This was also the first biography Graeme Hunt had tackled. Nevertheless, as someone who peer reviewed the book I regard it as the best biography of Walsh that could be written. Graeme was an assiduous author and let the facts drive this biography. He and I had many disagreements about his more recent *Spies and revolutionaries; a history of New Zealand subversion*, but on his Walsh book we agreed.

- David Verran

## REVIEWS

## A history of the Nurses' Union

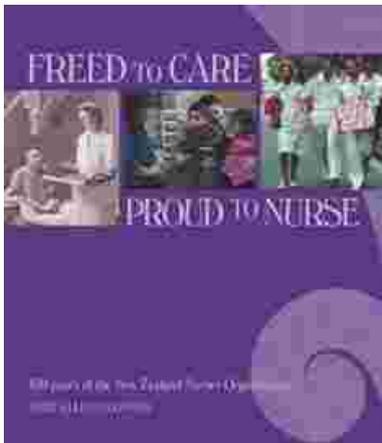
*Freed to care, proud to nurse – 100 years of NZNO*, by Mary-Ellen O'Connor. Steele Roberts, 2010.

*Background from Mary-Ellen O'Connor:*

It has been said the journalism is the first rough draft of history. In the case of this book, that was literally true. I was lucky enough to have every volume of *Kai Tiaki Nursing New Zealand*, the second oldest continuously published periodical in New Zealand after the *School Journal*, the organisation's publication available to me in the New Zealand Nurses' Organisation library. This contained annual reports, conference proceedings, discussion documents, photographs and information of all kinds. It was invaluable and enabled me to do the job in the tight timeframe demanded.

I was also lucky in another resource — an oral history archive assembled 25 years ago at the time of the New Zealand Nurses Association's (as it was then) 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary — sponsored by the Nursing Education and Research Foundation. Archived at National Library's Oral History section, this consists of interviews with nurse elders who lived and worked through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these are intriguing for their sheer drama — district and epidemic nursing in remote area, usually on horseback, with little more than a Gladstone bag of medicines, often treating Maori with no idea of cultural mores, the World Wars and the Napier Earthquake. Some of these also deal specifically with Association matters, commenting on particular events and individuals. The National Library also has a collection of miscellaneous NZNO papers covering many decades.

Other resources were patchy. Membership lists and other organisational documents have not been comprehensively archived. As with many other unions, this activity would have depended on the enthusiasm of individuals, at any one time. While there is a very useful library attached to the NZNO National Office, since the 1980s, other offices have not had the resources to devote to archiving. It also seems that the winding up of local branches in



1989, to be replaced by regional committees, also spelt the end to a lot of amateur archiving of organisational history. All in all, I think I was very lucky to have access to enough interesting material to be able to construct a readable account.

#### EDITORIAL NOTE

*The Auckland Branch of the New Zealand Registered Nurses Association was formed on 23 July 1908 as the Auckland Trained Nurses Association. In 1927, it became the Auckland branch of the national organisation and Auckland City Libraries has minute books and other records from 1908 to 1967 (NZMS 777). See also V. Ruth Anderson's "N.Z. Registered Nurses Association Inc, Auckland Branch 1908 - 1968", (Auckland, 1968)*

## ***Freed to Care: a review***

On taking up her position in New Zealand in 1906 as Assistant Inspector of Hospitals, Australian nurse Hester Maclean decided that New Zealand nurses would benefit from two professional enterprises that she had seen working effectively at home. One was a professional journal, the other a national professional association. She founded the journal *Kai Tiaki* at her own expense in 1908 and the following year persuaded the local nursing groups in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin to unite to form the New Zealand Trained Nurses Association. Mary Ellen O'Connor's book, *Freed to Care, Proud to Nurse*, traces the history of this association over the century.

Covering a century of any organisation's people, policies and politics is a demanding task. Managing the sheer mass of material and topics forces some tough decisions, particularly on what to include and how to organise it. O'Connor deals with this deftly. Throughout the book she maintains a focus on the association's interests, efforts and achievements and sets these against necessarily brief descriptions of changing health concerns and services. The overarching structure is chronological and most chapters cover a decade — a device that generally works well in addressing major shifts in the profession. Predictably, two chapters deal with war and ensuing changes, and the chapter on the 1930s describes the association's advocacy for nurses during the Depression.

Other chapters are named for the decade's identified theme. Chapter 7, for example, is intriguingly titled 'Secularisation of Nursing' to reflect the sharp break in traditions that followed the transfer of nursing education from hospital schools of nursing to the tertiary education system from the early 1970s. This relocation of programmes to polytechnics meant nursing students were no longer under the restrictive control of hospital schools, nurses' homes and hospital board's expectations of service that had all been part of the apprentice-style hospital training. The notion of 'secularisation' is less convincingly extended to changes in control over nursing more generally. Until the 1970s professional power rested with what O'Connor describes as an "axis" (p.155), a controlling alignment of a small number of nurses who occupied influential positions in the Department of Health's Division of Nursing, the Nurses and Midwives Board and the Nurses Association. The new Nursing Council, set up in 1971, separated out more clearly the roles of the regulatory body and the

central nursing division, and Shirley Bohm (the Director, Division of Nursing) began to distance her team in the Department of Health from its close connection with the Nurses Association. This idea of a small controlling group and its demise is not new but it would perhaps be unfair to expect new arguments from a book that is rightly more concerned with providing a descriptive, narrative history covering a century.

This point about the intention of the book, however, needs to be considered further. O'Connor explains that it was to be a "readable account, rather than an academic tome" (p.2). Setting aside the implication that these are mutually exclusive categories, the comment raises an important question. Should an overview history designed for a general, mostly professional, readership meet conventions of historical research? O'Connor frequently writes a passage as though the information has come from her own research. Sometimes this is perhaps understandable when it relates to a general summary of a topic or time period, with references only given for quotations from primary sources. At other times it is misleading. Examples appear in the separate vignettes on nursing notables. No reference is given on the page and it is only separate information in the endnotes that indicates the material has been adapted from another source, such as an entry in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. Occasionally the wording in a passage signals its close alignment with another source. An example is in the description of "the international idea" (p.38). The reference to a chapter by a leading nurse educator, Beatrice Salmon, in an earlier history of the association, seems to refer to a single statement near the end of the passage yet an earlier section closely follows her writing.

The most significant lapse, however, is inattention to primary sources that historians would have considered fundamental to the research. While O'Connor undertook numerous interviews and a wide search of relevant secondary sources, the records of the association itself were largely ignored. Material held in the organisation's library (annual reports, submissions, positions statements and guidelines) is listed in the references but only the minutes of the Wellington and Nelson Branches were included in the research, and then only from the 1950s. The full records of the association held at the Alexander Turnbull Library are not mentioned. These records are a rich source. Reference to them would have allowed a sharper picture of the tensions and turmoil within the association and between it and other agencies. This can be illustrated by another example from the 1970s. O'Connor either ignored the association's highly emotional and divisive 1972 annual conference or accepted the bland account provided in the journal. A search of the association records would have clearly revealed the bitterness it generated.

The mainstay of O'Connor's research was *Kai Tiaki*. All volumes are held in the organisation's library and those from 1908 to 1929 have been digitised (another centennial project) and are available through Papers Past at the Alexander Turnbull Library. O'Connor has skilfully used the journal as an excellent source to portray the organisation's "achievements, concerns, conflicts and triumphs" (p.15). At times its achievements are perhaps overemphasised. An example relates to the improvement in maternal mortality rates after the Midwives Act 1904, which introduced midwifery training and the registration and regulation of midwives' practice. The book claims that through the work of Amelia Bagley, Hester Maclean and Jessie Bicknell in the next 20 years, the association "could take much credit for the implementation" of the changes brought by the Act

(p.57). It is difficult to see the part the association played in this. The three women were nurse-midwives working in the Department of Health and it is in their official role supervising midwives and inspecting hospitals that they achieved the improvements.

The tension between the association's industrial and professional roles is rightly identified as the dominant theme in its history. This played out in different ways across the decades and remains today. This aspect should interest union historians. As the book deals with a professional body that represented the largest section of the health workforce over a century, and one dominated by women, it will also contribute to our understanding of both labour and women's history. Its title reflects the organisation's current vision statement and as a centennial project the book meets the organisation's wish for a celebratory history. It is richly illustrated, engagingly written and will be enjoyed by a wide readership.

- Pamela Wood

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See for example File 79-032-02/03, 'Conference - Remits, Resolutions and Related Correspondence', New Zealand Nurses Association Records, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

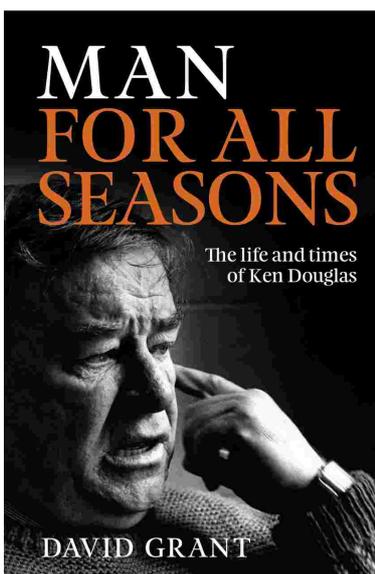
## ***A brief review of *Man for all Seasons; the life and times of Ken Douglas****

This is a major New Zealand biography on a major New Zealand citizen.

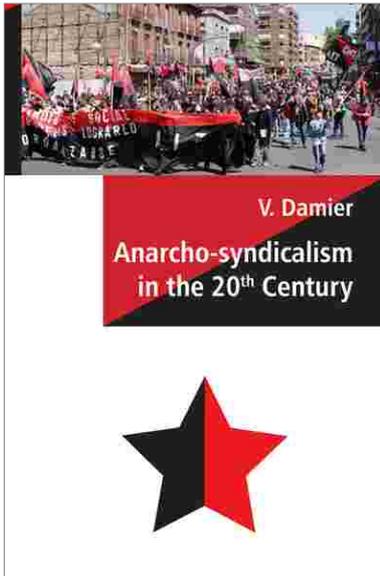
Grant takes us through Douglas' family background, the Wellington driver's union, the Communist and Socialist Unity Parties, the Federation of Labour and the Council of Trade Unions, and the last ten or so years when Douglas was supposedly in retirement but actually as busy as before on boards, sporting groups and public bodies. This story of Douglas' political, personal and union development is analysed in depth, but always with both clarity and context.

Grant also describes the last 40 to 50 years of the New Zealand industrial landscape. From the worldviews of Fintan Patrick Walsh, Tom Skinner and Jim Knox to New Zealand unionism in the twenty first century, the span of this book is wide and deep. All Labour History Project members and supporters should read this book, and I am sure will receive a much clearer understanding of from where the New Zealand labour movement has come where it is now, and Douglas' role in that.

- David Verran



## *Anarcho-Syndicalism in the 20th Century*



For those who can read Russian, Vadim Damier's two-volume study of the International Workers' Association (IWA) is a comprehensive history of the worldwide anarchist labour movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For the rest of us, Malcom Archibald has translated what is essentially a streamlined version of Damier's larger work into English. *Anarcho-Syndicalism in the 20th Century* is a broad survey of a movement often marginalised by academics, and is a welcome addition to the existing literature on anarcho-syndicalism. As Damier illustrates, anarcho-syndicalism was far from a outmoded, ineffective or petty-bourgeois movement.

Damier: "Its appearance in so many settings has created a daunting task for historians who would do justice to its scope and diversity." Exploring this diversity and its development from revolutionary syndicalism, its theoretical and tactical differences as it was practiced worldwide, and historical examples of anarcho-syndicalism in action, the reader gets a sense of how hundreds of thousands — indeed millions — of workers around the globe embraced the ideology of anarcho-syndicalism and libertarian communism, and put those ideas into practice.

The actions of anarchist-influenced workers and their struggle for freedom truly was an international movement. Although Europe is often the focus for historians, Damier does a great job in showing that equally strong and sometimes numerically larger movements existed in Latin America — not to mention Japan, Korea and China, Africa, Eastern European nations and even Australasia. Although Damier does examine in detail the Spanish Revolution (and the fatal rejection of core anarchist principles by the leadership of the CNT), the international framework used throughout the book is a refreshing change from Eurocentric anarchist historiography and Spanish exceptionalism.

The origins of the international syndicalist (and in turn anarcho-syndicalist) movement is explored in the first chapters. Damier argues that an explicit shift from revolutionary syndicalism to anarcho-syndicalism was signaled in 1919. In a speech made by German anarchist Rudolf Rocker at the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of the FVdG (Free Association of German Trade Unions), a synthesis of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism was put forward in opposition to co-operation with parliamentary activity, political affiliation, and co-operation with the German Communist Party. According to Damier, Rocker's 'Declaration about the Principles of Syndicalism' helped clarify the ideology on which the anarcho-syndicalist movement was to be based.

Damier dedicates valuable space to the years up to and including the 1922 congress of the IWA, as it included debate on how anarcho-syndicalists should organise themselves, what tactics and structures enabled the most effective struggle, and what role they saw for their organisation after the revolution. The FVdG congress certainly influenced the IWA's own declaration, the 'Principles of Revolutionary Syndicalism'. As W. Thorpe points out, the declaration "signified an important advance in syndicalist thought, since it confirmed and made clear what had often only been implied in pre-war European syndicalism". It put forward more strongly the opposition to political parties, the Bolsheviks and their associated trade unions, and moved past the political neutrality of the 1906 Charter of Amiens.

In Rocker's 1919 speech, he had made it clear that the role of the anarcho-syndicalist union was not to manage the successful revolution. Instead, the management of production and consumption were to be transferred into the hands of Councils: "the organisation of enterprises and workshops by economic councils, the organisation of the whole of production by industrial and agricultural associations, and the organisation of consumption by workers exchanges". The explicitly anarchist communist Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA) in its 'Memorandum' "categorically rejected the notion that labour unions — organs which arose under capitalism in response to capitalist conditions and fulfilled a service as the best means of worker resistance against the State and Capital — would be transformed in the course of revolution into the basis and ruling organs of the new society":

*"With the liquidation of the capitalist production system and rule of the state, the syndicalist economic organs will end their historic role as the fundamental weapon in the struggle with the system of exploitation and tyranny. Consequently, these organs must give way to free associations and free federations of free producers and consumers".*

Debates around structure and industrialisation continued into the 1920's and 30's. These were essentially debates between communist modes of distribution and a collectivist revisionism, which for sections of the French CGT and the German FAUD seemed more suitable to the industrial development at that time. Once the bearer of anarchist communism, many of the FAUD's leading activists began to see distribution according to need as a 'crazy idea', calling instead for the study of capitalist economic categories, distribution according to 'productivity', and that 'rationing by means of monetary regulation' was 'fairer' than anarchist communism.

For some in the IWA this signaled a dangerous influence of capitalist thinking, the departure from anarchist communism, and a slide towards centralisation and Marxist 'gigantomania'. The FORA were particularly critical: "the new, free society should not develop according to the laws of the old society... but represent a decisive, radical break with it". Socialism was not just an economic problem, but also a cultural and psychological one which extended outside of the factory gates. The self-activity and struggle of the workers themselves was more important in the destruction of capital than some linear stage of revolution outside of their control.

The Japanese federation Zenkoku Jiren were even more vocal in their opposition:

*"The current system... deprived workers of any responsibility and required coordinating and administrative authorities incompatible with libertarian communism. The new society must surmount industrialism with its soul destroying division of labour and base itself on a different conception of the interrelation of production and consumption, but with the emphasis on consumption".*

They argued for syndicalism that challenged the division of society into groups according to occupation, the preservation of the factory system and centralisation, and the organisation of society on the basis of industrial unions. These would simply perpetuate the division of labour and the hierarchy of management. Instead, the free association of communes and councils would unite consumption and production after the revolution: organising according to a capitalist framework in the here and now would hinder, not help, these future structures.

These arguments illustrate the diversity within the anarchist labour movement during its development. Damier also shows that these developments were important

for a visible minority, if not the majority of workers in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In many cases struggle was more influenced by the ideas of Bakinin and Kropotkin than Marx or Engels — a point especially relevant now as workers look for a real alternative to both state socialism and capitalism. In illustrating the international movement and its debates, Damier makes available important themes for a new generation, and helps point to current understandings of anarcho-syndicalism.

Unfortunately, the book gets a little sparse on contemporary anarcho-syndicalism — only briefly touching on the splits within the IWA after World War Two, and more recent struggles. However, to have a broad survey of a movement and its ideas in one place is a valuable resource in itself and worth checking out. Anyone interested in a basic history of anarcho-syndicalism, the IWA, and a libertarian alternative to both capitalism and state socialism will be well pleased.

- Jared Davidson

## WORK IN PROGRESS

# Do you recall the Wellington Trades Hall?



Those who attended the Labour History Project's AGM in July this year were treated to an impromptu talk on a subject not always considered part of our field of interest — a building of special importance to the labour movement. Wellington heritage architect Deborah Cranko explained that she has been contracted by the Wellington Trades Hall Council, with funding from Wellington City Council, to prepare a Conservation Plan for the Wellington Trades Hall in Vivian St. This will set the scene for the restoration of the grand old building, and Deborah and the Council hope to learn more about its past from former users.

Already Deborah has uncovered some remarkable information about the imposing but now somewhat tired old structure. The Trades Hall was originally designed to be framed with steel, and then re-designed in reinforced concrete. It was built of that material in the mid-20s and opened with suitable aplomb in 1927. Today, more than 80 years later, it is not considered an earthquake risk-prone building, a somewhat surprising tribute to the quality of its construction. According to an unconfirmed trade union legend, the concrete structural beams and columns contain rather more reinforcing steel than the design called for, and the extra steel was supplied from an un-named source on the wharves. This, suggests Deborah, may be what has given the sturdy old hall its impressive longevity. "It was perhaps an inadvertent predictor of current seismic codes." From before World War One, Wellington unions began planning for a district headquarters that would contain an assembly hall for public meetings, a 'school for instruction' and a library, as well as offices for individual unions. Funds raised for the project included profits from Labour Day parades, which were once large and lucrative events for the labour movement. They had special significance for Wellington since it was a Petone carpenter, Sam Parnell, whose determination helped to introduce the first eight-hour working day, an achievement commemorated by the introduction of Labour Day as a public holiday in 1899. A bust of Parnell once stood in the council room of the Trades Hall.



In 1914, nationwide (voluntary) union membership stood at about 70,000, almost a quarter of the total workforce. That degree of support proved sufficient to buy the Vivian St site in 1923 from the Martin family, large Wairarapa landowners who gave their name to the town of Martinborough. In the 1920s, the national economy was booming, and construction in the capital was at record levels as the foundations were laid for the stocky three-storey office building with its impressive atrium (multi-storey internal lightwell). Ornamentation was generally modest, in keeping with the practical values of the trade movement of the time.

Over time, the building was altered significantly to take account of changing needs. In 1958 the impressive atrium void was floored over to create more office space Deborah hopes that the renovation can restore it to its original

dimensions. The assembly hall at its rear was demolished in 1987-8. In 1929, a 'temporary' caretaker's residence (still standing) was built on part of the flat roof. This was, of course, the home of the man now most closely associated with the Trades Hall — its caretaker Ernie Abbott, who was murdered by a suitcase bomb placed in the foyer in 1984, a crime that remains unsolved.

The exterior of the current building has remained largely unchanged since it was opened in 1927, adding to its historical significance. It is also highly significant as a key centre for the trade union movement and the development of the Labour Party in Wellington. It has seen such decisive events as the meeting by the Waterfront Workers Union in February 1951 that called for a ban on overtime after an unresolved dispute with employers about a wage increase. The employers responded by locking out the wharfies and sparking the savage 151-day nationwide waterfront dispute.

Today Trades Hall is a run-down memory of its finest days. In 1945, it was home to the Federation of Labour and a host of national and regional unions. Current tenants include the Manufacturers and Construction Workers Union, Tramway Workers, Postal Workers, Bakers and Unite unions but most unions now prefer to occupy more modern offices elsewhere in the city. Refurbished and cleverly modernised, Wellington Trades Hall would be able to serve new generations of the labour movement and serve as a monument to the ideals it embodied when it opened.

Deborah Cranko has prepared a comprehensive, fascinating and heavily illustrated Conservation Plan setting out the case for the hall's restoration. It describes the run-down state of much of the building's fabric, and the importance of preserving it. She now hopes that an oral history project can record more of the building's history by collecting stories from those who have used it over the decades. If you, or anyone you know, has information, photos or anecdotes about Wellington Trades Hall that they are willing to share for this vital project, contact:

Trades Hall Council - [Sam.Murray@ReddFish.co.nz](mailto:Sam.Murray@ReddFish.co.nz)  
Graeme Clarke - [m.c.union@tradeshall.org.nz](mailto:m.c.union@tradeshall.org.nz)  
or Cranko Architects - [Cranko@cranko.co.nz](mailto:Cranko@cranko.co.nz)  
- *Mark Derby*



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