



Labour History Project

NEWSLETTER 55 | AUGUST 2012

Many happy song-sessions: *Kiwi Youth Sings*

Socialist Cross of Honor: markings of a working class counter-culture

Runanga Miners Hall: the early years 1908-1920

My comrade, Tilly Hunter

1913 - War on the Wharves

Happy birthday, Woodie Guthrie



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For more information on LHP membership, activities,
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www.lhp.org.nz

DESIGN: Jared Davidson

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FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

Introduction from editor Mark Derby

Although it wasn't planned that way, this issue of the Labour History Project's thrice-yearly journal mainly addresses cultural manifestations of labour history. From his ongoing exploration of politically charged New Zealand folk music, which includes both PhD-level academic research and live performance, Michael Brown has written about a songbook published in the 1950s by Victoria University's renowned Socialist Club, whose membership once included Michael's father. The LHP's recent AGM was enriched by several examples of songs from this collection, selected by Michael who also accompanied and led the singing of the multi-talented members of our organisation.

Peter Clayworth has drawn on his long-term research interest in the history of West Coast mining unionism to record the vast range of cultural and other activities once held at the Runanga Miners Hall. As his article points out, this building is currently red-stickered as an earthquake risk, making his article especially timely.

As with all issues of the journal since 2010, this one has been designed by LHP member Jared Davidson of Christchurch. Jared has also contributed an article on the Socialist Cross of Honor, once presented to those imprisoned for opposing conscription in World War One, and now all but forgotten. Jared records his chance rediscovery of this remarkable emblem, and recalls the labour movement's prominent place in the peace movement of the early 20th century.

While preparing this issue, I was invited to deliver a workshop on labour history to the AGM of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union, the EPMU. This was a welcome opportunity to test the relevance of historical research to the modern union movement, in a period when a series of labour disputes have dominated the front pages and nightly news bulletins for weeks at a time. The workshop was well attended and I was impressed by the ability of those taking part to apply the lessons of the past to the issues they are facing every day as union activists.

In several of the most hard-fought disputes of recent months, the unions' position has been upheld and their members have won substantial gains. In this precarious era, the LHP is determined to make its activities, services and skills as relevant as possible to the needs of the present.

Chair's report

This is written just days after the LHP's latest AGM, an event marked by live singing, home cooking and a typically rousing address from our guest speaker, CTU president Helen Kelly.

As is customary for these meetings, contributions from the floor produced some of the most valuable outcomes. At last year's AGM, one participant queried why the LHP kept its accounts with a foreign-owned bank. The inadequate answer is that we had remained with the same bank since our formation decades earlier, without making the effort to switch to a more appropriate institution. That question, however, prompted our treasurer, Jim McAloon, to take steps to transfer our accounts to a locally owned bank.

At this latest AGM, committee member Marie Russell raised the question of the current whereabouts of a banner created for the TUHP (as the LHP was originally named) in 1990, and not seen in recent years. Another attendee at the meeting, CTU secretary Peter Conway, promised to investigate, and soon revealed that the banner has been held in safe storage for us by the EPMU. Expect to see more of it in the coming year.

The AGM endorsed a program of activities for the year ahead that is based around several important centenaries—of the 1912 Waihi miners' strike (commemorated by a seminar at Waihi in November this year), of the NZPSA (with a major international seminar taking place in Wellington in July 2013, and many other activities) and of the 1913 'great strikes' (which the LHP proposes to recall with a guided tour of historic sites in Wellington, and a specially produced interactive website).

It is also gratifying to report that our old friends the Community Media Trust/Vanguard Films have recently begun working from a new permanent home in the Wellington Trades Hall. Thanks to their support, the LHP now plans to use the Ernie Abbott Room in the hall for our six-weekly committee meetings. As committee member Dave Grant says, this room is, "central, permanent and ideologically empathetic." We look forward to many productive and enjoyable meetings there.

Mark Derby

RECENT AND CURRENT RESEARCH

NOTE: any recent, current or forthcoming research in the field of New Zealand labour history, including specific inquiries, will be covered in this section of the journal. Please send details to: chair@lhp.org.nz



PETE LUSK.

Is this the Capstan Rock?

LHP member and longtime West Coaster Pete Lusk recently sent this photo showing his friend Len Doel standing on a prominent outcrop near Burnetts Face, in the mountains inland from Westport. (Burnetts Face was once a thriving mining settlement and is now a ghost town. It's just a short distance from Denniston, now a much better known community thanks to inspired cultural reworkings of its labour history.)

Pete thought this may be the once-famous Capstan Rock, “where the miners met in 1890 as their big strike fizzled out. Len Richardson, in *Coal, Class and Community*, p.51, says the miners met here secretly and decided to dissolve the union. It was a victory for the bosses—but not for long!”

A former Burnetts Face miner, the late Geoff Kitchen, had earlier told Pete about this rock. “I seem to remember him calling it the stanchion rock, a stanchion being a post on a ship that you attached a rope to. Whether stanchion or capstan, those early miners would have been familiar with these features on board ship—you can imagine passengers being addressed from atop the capstan or kids climbing over it during their long voyage from Britain.”

Pete showed this photo to his friend Peter Mullen, who is in his 90s and worked as a boy in the mines. “He told me the union president sometimes addressed the miners from a large rock in the late 1930s. He doesn't remember the title ‘capstan’. They simply called it The Rock.” However when Peter Mullen saw the photo, he thought this might not be the same rock where union meetings were held during his days in the mines.

Whether or not this is the Capstan Rock, Pete Lusk is convinced that “It's important to get this place protected, as few now know of its history. New opencast mines planned for Denniston could see it destroyed.” The LHP is in discussion with the Historic Places Trust, the West Coast conservancy of the Dept of Conservation, and the mining companies who plan to reopen the old coal workings, regarding the historic significance of remaining features of the early mining settlements.

A 19th-century mining inquiry

Wellington science historian Simon Nathan and a student assistant have spent the last six months transcribing the notoriously illegible letters of pioneering geologist Sir James Hector, a dominant figure in the scientific and intellectual life of late 19th-century New Zealand. By 1890 Hector was in charge of the Colonial Museum (now Te Papa Tongarewa), the Geological Survey (now GNS Science) and the New Zealand Institute (now Royal Society of New Zealand), as well as Chancellor of the University of New Zealand.

Simon says, “eventually we intend to place all the collections on the Geoscience New Zealand website www.gsnz.org.nz as downloadable documents, as they are such a valuable resource.” In the meantime, a batch of letters written by Hector to his wife Georgiana in 1890—the only personal letters that have survived—are available as a downloadable PDF at: http://cdn.onlinehosting.co.nz/~gsnz/siteadmin/uploaded/gs_downloads/MP133A.pdf

The following extracts give his comments on the widespread industrial action then sweeping the country. “I’ll leave you to judge where his sympathies lay!” says Simon.

Wed 3 Sept. ‘90

What a row about nothing all over the colony—but it will lead to great hardship and disorganisation. I fear the new parliament will be very ruthless and not care much for right or wrong. No one is to be paid more than a working man’s wage. That is the creed freely discussed down here.

Dunedin, 4 Sept. ‘90

This place was very quiet yesterday but it is sad to see the harbour empty & everything at a standstill & crowds of sulky looking men blocking all the corners. I can[t] help thinking there will be a row & some broken heads before it is over.

11 Sept. ‘90

The strike is subsiding here I am glad to say. There is a good story about it. One of the rioters was fined £2 10 or a month in jail & the money was subscribed and given to his wife to get him out. But she said “But its John’s own fault & if he was out he would not be earning anything so I’ll just keep the money & let him take it (the time) out in jail. The money’s of more use to me now than he would be.”

In October/November 1890 Hector chaired an inquiry in Greymouth into working conditions in the Grey Valley coal mines.

Greymouth, 16 Oct. 1890

We have got through 5 witnesses now & I have an interview with the strike leaders & they are to come before us at Brunner on Monday. I suspect we will have to get some police to be in attendance. The men look very sulky & determined to have their way. I am afraid they are getting in debt. There are about 450 miners out on strike here & the wages they are refusing range from 10/- to 15/- per diem!



VIEW OF BRUNNERTON, WITH MINE BUILDINGS, CHIMNEY AND MINERS' HOUSES IN THE CENTRE.

JH MENZIES

21 Oct 90

We went up to Brunner yesterday morning but found such a storm raging & got so wet & they have nothing but a kind of shed for us to meet in—with no fire & perched on the brink of a high terrace on to which we had to climb up a watercourse—so that we struck at once and came back by the return train bringing our first miner witness with us & examined him all day in our office here. We got their side of the story which turns out very sad. There are about 320 men out of work & even if the Mines opened again today there would not be room for more than about 100.

Greymouth, 22 Oct 90

We are working as hard as we can but there are still some 20 witnesses whose names have been suggested but there is a lot of them that I don't see any need of hearing as they will only repeat the same stories. We had three yesterday, an engineer & two miners one of whom Ansell is considered a very turbulent character & is going to stand for Parliament. He is a very hideous and rough looking chap but he proved quite quiet in my hands—even docile—and I got a lot of point out of him. The other miner was a splendid witness, a tall strapping fellow, frank & fearless & truthful & not a bit anxious to push extreme issues. If all of them were like him there would be no strikers & yet queer enough he was put in as a witness by the other miners which to me shows that they don't care about extreme unionism.

Greymouth Harbour Board, 23 Oct 90

During the last two days we have had great arguments with men who are Unionists & out on strike as we were anxious to find out really what is in their minds and to discuss something about their organization. The poor men here have been quite deluded & there are about 2000 women & children very near starvation. Brunnerton is a very queer place. The houses are built along the sides of a deep gorge in the Mountains through which the Grey River rushes furiously in a narrow cleft hundreds of feet deep. This is crossed by two suspension bridges

& along the side of the gorge by the big mines you see the great coke ovens & retorts throwing out a great blaze of light. The mines extend into & under the mountains for miles by the turns & twists of the tunnels but the furthestest in point is only 3/4 mile in a straight line from the entrance. The other miners go down to the coal by shafts 660 ft deep & they have worked out acres of coal right under the river.

Greymouth 25 Oct 90

I fancy we are to see the coal mines at work again on Monday—as the strike is giving way. The miners here are getting frightened at last as they hear that 119 men have been engaged in Dn [Dunedin] to take their places. I don't think the mine can at present employ many more than that number as owing to the long time it has been standing it is out of order and the deep parts are full of water which will take 2 months to pump out. I fear that at least 1500 men women & children will be thrown out of employment without much hope. A bad feature is that many of them have bought land & built houses out of their past earnings & if they have they will not find any purchasers as the men who are coming have neither money nor credit.



MAX NETTLAU. LABADIE COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN.

“A comrade from the antipodes”

The previous (#54, April 2012) issue of this journal included an article on the Māori-speaking housepainter and IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) member Percy Short. It noted that he left New Zealand in 1914 to evade conscription and traveled around Europe and Asia, exchanging information with other members of the IWW. Further information on his travels has since been supplied by Christchurch historian Jared Davidson who located an interview with Short conducted by the renowned anarchist and historian Max Nettlau. ‘A conversation with a syndicalist in New Zealand’ was most likely published in the London-based anarchist paper *Freedom* in 1914, although the document is undated. This has been translated by Taranaki LHP member Urs Signer, and some extracts follow:

We had the pleasure to speak with a comrade from the antipodes who has come to Europe to get to know the syndicalist movement of various countries. A few weeks ago, the Auckland branch of the Industrial Workers of the World received a letter from an official syndicalist publication in Europe to gain an insight into the recent big strikes in New Zealand. Our comrade Percy B. Short, together with another comrade, was tasked to draft a response; but because Short was on his way to England, it was decided that he would personally deliver the answers and further information and also get an insight into the European movement.

Having been a member of the Sydney I.W.W. branch for some time in the past, Short has knowledge of the whole revolutionary-syndicalist movement and we were pleased to be able to talk about both movements.

Our conversation was even more interesting because our comrade is Maori by birth, the son of a native of New Zealand, the people who are more and more pushed to the side but keep standing tall with unbelievable

energy and endurance.

...First of all we discussed the general forecast of revolutionary syndicalist propaganda with comrade Short. We were thoroughly surprised when told that this propaganda is particularly successful amongst Maori because of the past of this people with their indigenous communism.

Amongst Maori, a worker who acts as a scab and steals the bread out of comrades' mouths is basically unheard of because their old sense of solidarity stemming from their tribal customs prohibits such actions.

We talked at length about anti-militarist propaganda which has started over the last few years since the introduction of military service in New Zealand. Several young men, sentenced to jail, started a hunger strike, just like the Suffragettes in England now. The anti-militarist movement is still alive.

Finally, it was the trade union movement and the behavior towards the conservative organisations that interested us the most:

Q: Are the conservative unions, we asked, who are organised under the Arbitration Act gaining or losing influence?

A: At present, replied Short, 80,000 workers live in New Zealand. 65,000 of those are organised under the Arbitration Act and 15,000 under the labour federation act. The latter settle their disputes with the employers directly.

Q: And how are the strikes in your 'workers' paradise', the 'country without strikes and lock-outs', as our social reformers in Europe like to call it?

A: The strikes are growing, both in terms of numbers and in intensity.

Q: And the law on strikes, which makes them illegal?

A: The compulsory Arbitration Act has had its head smashed in New Zealand (Arbitration is killed in New Zealand).

Note: whether due to misinterpretation or deliberate misrepresentation, much of the above information is misleading or downright false. For example, Māori had been prominent among the strikebreakers during the 1912 Waihi strike, and in the pre-WW1 period they showed little enthusiasm for joining revolutionary syndicalist organisations such as the IWW. According to Percy Short's descendants, although he learned and later taught the Maori language, he was not himself of Māori ancestry.

An alleged Spanish Civil War combatant

The LHP regularly receives research queries from the public, and one arrived recently from the descendant of a Canterbury man with the improbable name of Montmorency Silas Valentine de Villiers. Despite sounding like a character from PG Wodehouse, De Villiers was indeed born in New Zealand in 1919 and signed up with the New Zealand Military Force (1st Canterbury Battalion) on 5 July 1940 at Christchurch, where he was described as being 5 foot 11 1/2 inches tall and weighing 10 stone 7 pounds, with a fair complexion, grey/green eyes and dark hair.

His Attestation Form asked De Villiers to state any previous military service. He answered—Toledo 1938-39. Granada, ie in Spain during its 1936-39 civil war. His relative asked for any information the LHP might be able to provide on this war service, through our work on a 2006 seminar and subsequent book, *Kiwi Compañeros—New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War* (Canterbury University Press, 2009).

ZEALAND MILITARY FORCES. WAR.
(N.Z. 302)

ATTESTATION FOR SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR. 3/1/555

Questions to be put to the Recruit.

1. What is your name? <i>(Christian names and surname to be written in block letters.)</i>	1. Surname: de VILLIERS Christian names: Montenegro Valentines
2. Where were you born?	2. N.Z.
3. What is the date of your birth?	3. 24th Feb. 1919.
4. Are you a British subject? If naturalized, state where and when	4. Yes.
5. Where were your parents born?	5. Father: South Africa (Pretoria) Mother: N.Z.
6. If your parents were of alien birth, state when and where they were naturalized	6. Father: _____ Mother: _____
7. What is your trade or calling?	7. Clark.
8. What is your address in New Zealand?	8. 103 Mayland St. Sturton 19 Coleridge St., Sumner.
9. Who is your next-of-kin? (state relationship)	9. Name: Mr. W. de Villiers Address: 19 Coleridge St.
10. What is the name and address of your present or last employer?	10. Army Department of Cant. Regt.
11. What are your educational qualifications?	11. St. Columba's Sch. P.O. 2 St.
12. Are you single, married, a widower, divorced, or legally separated from your wife? If married, of what nationality was your wife before marriage?	12. Single
13. If married, a widower, divorced, or legally separated from your wife, how many children under sixteen years of age have you?	13. _____
14. If single with dependants, state who they are	14. Widow.
15. Have you ever served in any naval, military, or air force? If so, state which, length of service, and cause of discharge	15. Toledo 1938-39. Granada if Ant. Regt. Hq. Sergeant
16. Are you willing to be inoculated or vaccinated if required?	16. Yes
17. Are you willing to serve in the New Zealand Military Forces for the duration of the war, for so long after the war as will enable you to be demobilized, or until lawfully discharged?	17. Yes
18. What is your religious denomination?	18. Church of England.

I do solemnly declare that the answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagement made.

Signature of Recruit: **W. de Villiers**

Oath to be taken by Recruit on Attestation.

I, **Montenegro de Villiers**, do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to our Sovereign Lord the King, and that I will faithfully serve in the New Zealand Military Forces against His Majesty's enemies, and that I will loyally observe and obey all orders of the Generals and Officers set over me, until I shall be lawfully discharged. So help me, God.

Certificate of Attesting Officer.

The above questions were read to the above-named recruit in my presence. I have taken care that he understands these questions, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered. The said recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath of allegiance before me at **Sturton**, New Zealand, on this **5th** day of **Feb.** 19**55**.

Signature of Attesting Officer: **W. J. [unclear]**

NOTE 1.—If any alteration is required in the attestation, the Attesting Officer will make it and initial the alteration.
NOTE 2.—Before a soldier signs his attestation form he will be asked by the Attesting Officer to verify the entry showing his full and Christian names and to state if the spelling is correct.
NOTE 3.—To be completed in duplicate and dealt with as laid down in Appendix XVII.

Union Report

LHP members are likely to enjoy watching "The Union Report", a weekly summary of union news presented by Auckland provocateur Martyn Bradbury and broadcast on Triangle TV at 8pm each Monday night. Those outside the Auckland coverage area can watch it on YouTube from the following morning.

The reply, after consulting with professional researchers internationally, is that De Villiers had almost certainly invented his Spanish combat experience. Both Toledo and Granada were held by the rebel (ie Francoist, anti-Republican) forces from the outbreak of the war, and by 1938 there was little or no fighting taking place there. A foreign combatant serving on the rebel side in this period would have been so unusual as to have certainly attracted media and official attention, yet no records exist of anyone corresponding to De Villiers' description. Disappointingly for our inquirer, this intriguing forebear appears to be one of many whose alleged Spanish Civil War experience does not withstand historical investigation.

NEWS ROUND UP

Raise the banner high

At the time of writing, Wellington artist Genevieve Packer was working hard on one of the few union banners produced in recent decades. Large, ornate and powerfully symbolic banners, often constructed to be carried by two people at outdoor processions, were once prized possessions by many New Zealand unions. Like most of this country's union traditions, the custom of making and displaying these banners was imported from the UK, where it remains a proud and vibrant artform.

Stop Press

As we go to press, the LHP is happy to report the reappearance of its very own banner, commissioned in 1990 by the Trade Union History Project (as we were then known). Longtime member Richard Hill recalls "some vigorous debate within the committee as to the relative merits of different designs, but a (relatively rare, for those days!) consensus over the eventual winner." The magnificent TUHP banner has been carefully stored by the EPMU and currently adorns the tearoom of its head office in Lyall Bay, Wellington.

Bert Roth, the late and much-missed Auckland labour historian, says that, "The display of trade union banners... was closely linked to the annual processions commemorating and celebrating the introduction of the eight-hour working day." These banners, says Bert, were "an affirmation of pride, a statement of purpose (often expressed in a short motto) and a call for support." He adds that, "nearly all of the hundred or more banners carried by New Zealand unionists over the past century have long disappeared".

Their number, however, will soon be increased by one. Genevieve's banner has been specially commissioned by the NZ PSA to mark its centenary next year. A nationwide contest was held to pick the winning design, with LHP chair Mark Derby among the judges. Although progress on producing the winning design is well advanced, you won't see even a glimpse of it in this issue of our newsletter. PSA general secretary Brenda Pilott says, "It seems right that our members see it first" and so this stirring and symbolic centennial project will be first unveiled at a special PSA national congress in Wellington in September.

After that, the banner is likely to tour to a number of centres along with a specially produced set of information panels, so that as many people as possible are able to see it.

"The role of the public sector"

The 2013 centenary of the PSA will be marked with a number of projects in addition to the commissioned banner. LHP committee member Mary-Ellen O'Connor has produced an oral history of the Association's last 25 years based on in-depth interviews with a range of former and current PSA activists. An ambitious centenary website is planned. And a major international conference will take place in Wellington in July 2013. Its theme is the "public realm" and, according to the organisers' introductory statement, "It will consider particularly the role of the public sector in the shared relationship between the government and civil society that underpins a successful modern democracy."

Among the questions which conference presenters are asked to address are:

- Is the trend to privatising public services blurring the distinction between the private and public sectors and weakening the public realm? As policy advice is becoming increasingly contestable, is the role and place of the public service clear, and who maintains the integrity of research and analysis behind policy?
- How has work in the public sector changed, and how is it likely to change further?

The LHP is actively engaged in helping to plan this conference, and members will be kept informed of developments.

“Remember Waihi”

As indicated in our last issue, planning is now well advanced for the seminar and related activities to mark the centenary, this November, of the Waihi goldminers’ strike. This event has the title, “Remember Waihi”, a phrase widely used by the union movement in the years following the strike, to simultaneously urge solidarity in the face of the kind of oppression that killed striker Fred Evans, and caution at challenging powerful and ruthless vested interests.

The seminar begins at 8.30am on Saturday 10 November in the Community Hall (the site of the former Miner’s Hall) in Waihi’s main street. In the afternoon it continues in the smaller Friendship Hall nearby. A full program of speakers from both New Zealand and Australia will offer papers on many facets of the still highly contentious issue. This will be followed at 5.30 pm by the opening of Wellington artist Bob Kerr’s exhibition of paintings titled “Gold Strike”, and at 8pm by a variety concert. The following morning there will be a memorial ceremony for Fred Evans on the site of his death, led by Auckland writer Chris Trotter.

To register for the seminar, or for more information, contact: Joce Jesson, email jg.jesson@xtra.co.nz, ph. 09 622 2142.



Sharing transport to Waihi seminar

If you wish to share transport to the November seminar with others;

*from Auckland and points north, contact:
FIRST Union ph. 0800 863 477*

from Wellington and points south, contact:

*Paul Tolich, EPMU, email
Paul.Tolich@epmu.org.nz*

1913 - War on the Wharves

Next year will also mark the centenary of a bitter industrial dispute involving some 16,000 workers, monster demonstrations and a wave of violence on a scale that, arguably, has yet to be matched. The series of spontaneous strikes, known as the Great Strike of 1913, stretched across New Zealand and reached almost all corners of society – rural farmers who volunteered their services to help bring about order, workers and their wives and children, those in positions of power (police, politicians, and the legal system), and employers.

To mark this profoundly transformative episode in our history, the LHP proposes to create an interactive online website called 1913 - War on the Wharves. This will make available collections of primary documents such as personal letters, photos and diaries, and other historical material, via an interactive digital map of New Zealand. It will be a participatory project with a high level of community input. Local researchers such as high school students and others could locate and propose documents from their own geographical areas.

Several major public institutions have so far indicated support in principle for the website. The LHP is now seeking project partners, funding and other forms of support to make this innovative project possible. To find out more, or to become involved, contact: Jared Davidson, email garage.collective@gmail.com

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Labour history in Italy

On 1 May this year, the proposed Italian Society for Labour History (Società Italiana per la Storia del Lavoro, or SISLav) held its first meeting in Reggio Emilia. An English-language version its manifesto can be found at: <http://storialavoro.wordpress.com/english/for-an-italian-scholarly-society-of-labour-history/>

This first meeting was followed by a working seminar in Rome with the title 'La Storia come Storia del Lavoro' ('History as Labour History'). The formal foundation of the Society is scheduled to be held in Milan by early October.

Happy birthday, Woody Guthrie

Woody Guthrie, the radical musician who wrote more than 3,000 songs, was born 100 years ago this July. In April the University of Southern California hosted a day-long conference on Woody's life and political influence, followed by a concert with Jackson Browne, David Crosby and Graham Nash, Tom Morello, Kris Kristofferson, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Sarah Lee Guthrie (Woody's granddaughter) and others. In addition, British singer Billy Bragg recently performed an entire series of tribute concerts in the US. The official centenary website is at <http://www.woody100.com/>



Your editor, like many other New Zealanders of a similar age, was taught Guthrie's best-known song, "This Land is Your Land", at primary school, but never with the full lyrics, such as the following verse:

In the squares of the city, in the shadow of a steeple;
By the relief office, I'd seen my people.
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking,
Is this land made for you and me?

The Battle of Blair Mountain

The LHP was among more than 100 signatories to a petition sent to West Virginia's legislators in June, urging them to create a permanent park to commemorate the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain. This battle, the largest armed confrontation in US labour history, took place when members of the United Mine Workers tried to unionise the coalfields of southern West Virginia, and were opposed by 3,000 law enforcement officers, many of whom worked directly for the coal companies.

A mining company has now stated its intention to develop mountaintop removal mines on the site of the battle. The petition calls instead for a 1,600-acre Historic Blair Mountain Park. For more information, see:

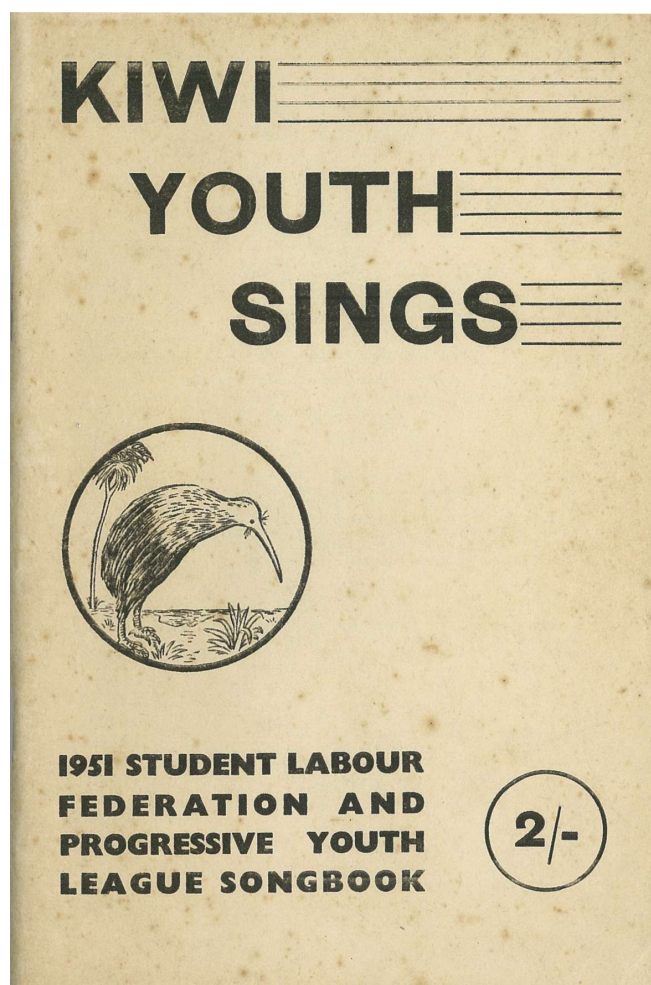
lawcha.nfshost.com/wordpress/2012/06/.../friends-of-blair-mountain/



FEATURE ARTICLES

Many Happy Song-sessions: *Kiwi Youth Sings*

Michael Brown



COVER OF *KIWI YOUTH SINGS*. MICHAEL BROWN

Music has long been part of trade unionism and leftwing political action in New Zealand. Song, especially, has proved a potent means of expression, with the act of group singing in itself serving as a powerful demonstration of collective engagement. Songbooks provide valuable evidence of this musical tradition and one of the most interesting local examples is *Kiwi Youth Sings*, a soft-cover anthology of leftwing, student and folk material published during the tumultuous year of 1951. Compiled within the Socialist Club at Victoria University College (VUC), it gives many insights into student socialist activity during this key period. The songbook is also significant as an early work by one of the editors, Conrad Bollinger, author of *Grog's Own Country* (1959) and the Seamen's Union history *Against the Wind* (1968).¹ This article, based upon my research into the VUC Tramping Club (whose membership overlapped with the Socialist Club's), discusses the background, content, and legacy of *Kiwi Youth Sings* (Bollinger and Grange 1951). It remains exploratory, however, and any corrections or additional information readers can offer would be much appreciated.

1. Con Bollinger was recalled by his granddaughter Etta in the Labour History Project Journal issue 51, April 2011 – ed.

SOCIALIST CLUB FLOAT IN ANNUAL CAPPING WEEK "PROCESH", WELLINGTON, MAY 1953. FROM LEFT, DAVID SOMERSET, CHRIS BEEBY, SUE RIX-TROTT AND OTHERS UNKNOWN. REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF MARY MOWBRAY AND TREVOR MOWBRAY



In the decade after World War II, there was a thriving leftwing scene at Victoria University College. While Victoria already had something of a reputation for political radicalism, the mass enrolment of returned servicemen—including many with committed Marxist viewpoints strengthened by wartime experience—sparked new interest. They were instrumental in founding the Socialist Club in 1946 to organise campus talks, debates, and film screenings. Club activities stepped up a notch with the onset of the Cold War, as New Zealand governments took an increasingly conservative tack. As ex-serviceman Pip Piper told me:

the war finished and we thought, well, we've beaten Hitler and the Japanese and Fascism in general... you know, the sun is starting to shine on democracy. Then, of course, things didn't quite work out that way... so that made one think, "well, what the hell were we doing a few years ago?" (interview, 7 March 2008)

Pip Piper, Ron Smith, Harry Evison and Harold Dowrick were among those who subsequently led street protests against Dutch attacks on Indonesia (1947) and compulsory military training (1949). Members also lent clandestine support to the Waterfront Workers' Union during the 1951 lockout (Bollinger 1957; Hamilton 2002:96-98, 105-106).

Singing was popular in VUC Socialist Club circles and the creation of a customised song book like *Kiwi Youth Sings* a fairly natural extension. Its editors were Neil Grange and Conrad Bollinger, former secretary of the club and assistant editor on student magazine *Salient*. Interestingly, the publication of the songbook came as a surprise to many in the Socialist Club, according to the late Hugh Price (pers. comm. 13 June 2008). Significantly, it was printed not in Wellington but by an Auckland firm with leftwing sympathies (Wilson Printery), suggesting that the editors may have kept it "under wraps" to forestall potential censorship under the Emergency Regulations instituted in 1951. *Kiwi Youth Sings* was officially published by the Student Labour Federation—to which leftwing groups at universities around the country were affiliated—and a non-student equivalent, the Progressive Youth League, thus giving it national distribution. On the first page, the editors set out their aims and suggested how the book could be used:

We aim to present for the first time in a single book the words of songs sung by young socialist workers and students throughout New Zealand.... We hope the collection as it stands will serve as a basis for many happy song-sessions in crowded flats, at week-end schools, on the beach at summer camps and around the fires in tramping huts. Above all, we hope that through the singing of these songs many more young people will be drawn into the struggle for peace, for higher living standards and greater freedom—in short, the struggle for socialism.

The 134 songs in *Kiwi Youth Sings* are organised into three parts—Songs of struggle, Youth and student songs and Folk songs. Many items are accompanied by brief explanatory notes. The selection is eclectic, encompassing leftwing classics ('The Internationale', 'Joe Hill'), British socialist anthems ('March of the workers'), Irish "rebel" songs ('Kevin Barry'), American Wobbly parodies ('Pie in the sky'), Spanish Civil War items ('The four insurgent generals'), the Soviet Union's national anthem ('Flag of the Soviets') and some Australian and New Zealand songs, along with general material like 'All through the night', 'Funiculi, funiculà', and 'Go down, Moses'. The overall mixture shows the numerous influences that fed into the singsong culture of the VUC Socialist Club.



COVER OF *YOUTH SINGS*. MICHAEL BROWN

The inclusion of certain songs provides interesting evidence of the club's international connections. The World War II Italian partisan song, 'E le stellette', for example, was probably learned firsthand by an ex-serviceman student and thence passed to the editors. Many items were directly taken from *Youth Sings/ Молодёж Поёт /La Juventud Canta/La Jeunesse Chante* (Anon. 1949), whose structure and English title also influenced the New Zealand songbook. *Youth Sings* was published in Prague by the International Union of Students for the 1949 World Festival of Youth and Students, convened in Budapest with a similar organisation, the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY). The VUC Students' Association was in fact affiliated with the WFDY (informally known as "Woofdee") between 1946 and 1950, and, according to Bollinger, "delegates—usually graduates who chanced to be in Europe—were sent regularly to its gatherings" (1957:41). *Kiwi Youth Sings* is itself dedicated to a Sydney festival planned for 1952 and certain songs may have been picked up at earlier Australasian conclaves. One song note also mentions the inaugural 1949 student congress held at Curious Cove in the Marlborough Sounds where, apparently, 'Bump me into parliament'—by Australian Wobbly organiser William Casey—was used to heckle a guest speaker:

This song was sung by students at the New Zealand University Students' Association Congress at Curious Cove in January, 1949, just as Ormond Wilson, then Fabian L.P. member for Palmerston North, was commencing his address....

*Bump me into Parliament,
Bounce me any wa-ay
Bump me into Parliament,
On next Election Day.*

A highlight of *Kiwi Youth Sings* are 21 New Zealand songs. Included as "Folk songs" are several Māori items and tramping parodies, along with 'Weeping and wailing' (a.k.a. 'Aidle-o boy'), a traditional ballad about reluctant parenthood

which was highly popular with students before the advent of the contraceptive pill. The “Youth and student songs” section contains mainly politically orientated material. Some songs were highly topical. ‘The basic wage song’, for example, parodied the hit Dinah Shore song ‘Buttons and bows’ for the 1949 Trade Union Basic Wage Campaign:

The bosses say we’ve too much pay
I guess they ought to know
But what with food and coal and wood,
And bargain pays that are no good.
We’ve got no dough for buttons and bows.

Several protest numbers come from World War II. ‘The C.S.R. and the Suva snobs’ records the discontent felt by some New Zealand soldiers stationed in Fiji who were helping, in effect, to guard Colonial Sugar Refining Company operations from a potential worker uprising:

For they’ve never tasted freedom
And their wages hardly feed ‘em,
As relentlessly they bleed ‘em,
Do the bloody C.S.R.

Eight songs are taken from recent VUC “extravs”—annual capping shows combining musical parody, ribald humour, and satire on current affairs (Smith 2007). In the late 1930s and 1940s, extravs were particularly critical of the New Zealand political establishment. *Kiwi Youth Sings* includes three numbers from Ron Meek’s notorious 1941 extrav, *Jonnalio* (the title is a play on John A. Lee and *Pinocchio*), which targeted the first Labour government’s infighting and authoritarian approach. The editorial notes to these songs in *Kiwi Youth Sings* may have helped reinforce the story that *Jonnalio* was banned for its “seditious” content by the New Zealand government under wartime regulations. In fact, it was more likely self-censored by a nervous student executive (see Hamilton 2002:94). A parody of ‘The gendarmes’ duet’ has the characters of the “Fox” (Peter Fraser) and “Cat” (Bob Semple) crooning:

We’re renowned in song and story,
For our rather ruddy tint,
But the records of our glory
We’re glad to say are out of print.

Mockery of the Labour Party’s perceived abandonment of its original socialist principles continued in late 1940s extravs. By this stage, however, compelling new targets were emerging, including American Cold War imperialism and press hysteria over “red” infiltrators. The latter is satirised in the 1949 *Jubileevit?* number ‘The communist under the bed’, which includes a topical verse referring to the Cecil Holmes “satchel affair” at the National Film Unit:

Come rally, you citizens, hark to my song,
For I’ve found an excuse for whatever goes wrong;
When there’s trouble with unions, elections ahead,
Just look for the Communist under the bed.

...

We must call in the aid of an army of marks
 Against Bolshevik plots by some Film Unit clerks,
 For a typist with dangerous thoughts in her head
 May well be the Communist under the bed.

The subject of “red baiting” was rather close to home for the Socialist Club, given that some members also belonged to the University Branch of the Communist Party. Needless to say, the club always encompassed a much wider range of leftwing viewpoints, including scepticism about strict “party line” dogma. Freedom of thought, several ex-members have told me, was regarded as a higher ideal. This political breadth is reflected both in *Kiwi Youth Sings*’ repertoire mixture, as outlined above, and the inclusion of items like ‘Red fly the banners-o!’ and ‘Harry Pollitt’ which poke affectionate fun at leftwing icons. Unfortunately, this did not prevent the VUC Socialist Club from being infiltrated by the police Special Branch soon afterwards over a periodical, *Newsquote*, being edited by three members (one of whom was the writer’s father). Despite consisting solely of already-published material from reputable Western newspapers and journals—albeit usually questioning aspects of the Cold War consensus—Special Branch deemed *Newsquote* highly subversive and the students suffered a variety of “unofficial” McCarthyesque reprisals (Price 1989; Hamilton 2002:105).

In retrospect, *Kiwi Youth Sings* can be seen as a kind of musical “self-portrait” of the VUC Socialist Club at its peak, when the club was inspired by both the ex-servicemen’s example and international student socialism, and goaded into action by a conservative sea change in New Zealand politics. By 1957, however, the club had become inactive and it was not revived again until students returned en masse to leftwing causes in the late 1960s (Hamilton 2002:135-136). *Kiwi Youth Sings* would have some ongoing influence, nonetheless, as a stimulus for singsongs and source of material for later student songbooks. Leftwing columnist Chris Trotter, a student activist in the 1970s and 1980s, recently cited the anthology on his blog (see: <http://bowalleyroad.blogspot.co.nz/2010/07/songs-of-our-fathers.html>). Another legacy of *Kiwi Youth Sings*, as possibly the first anthology to feature a New Zealand folk songs section, was in anticipating and encouraging the collecting of local folksong by Rona Bailey, Bert Roth, and others in the 1950s and 1960s. It also remains relevant today—many songs remain socialist evergreens, others, included some quoted above, are becoming curiously topical once again. Copies of *Kiwi Youth Sings* are held by the Alexander Turnbull Library, and the libraries of Victoria University of Wellington and University of Auckland.

Michael Brown is a Wellington musician and music historian. He and other Labour History Project members gave a short programme of songs from Kiwi Youth Sings, with audience participation encouraged, at the LHP’s recent AGM.

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Socialist Cross of Honor: markings of a working class counter-culture

Jared Davidson



THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIALIST PARTY'S 'SOCIALIST CROSS OF HONOR'. JARED DAVIDSON

In July 1911 William Cornish Jnr, a young conscientious objector from Brooklyn, Wellington, stood before Magistrate Riddell on charges of refusing to register under the Defence Act of 1909. Amended in 1910 and finally enforced in April 1911, the Act required compulsory registration of all men between the ages of 14 and 30 as an “attempt to re-organize [New Zealand’s] defence forces along the lines agreed to at the Imperial Naval and Military Conference” held in London in 1909.¹ Cornish Jnr, having “no intention of obeying the law” and “prepared to take the consequences,” refused to pay the £4 fine. Instead, he was sentenced to 21 days in jail—becoming, according to Ryan Bodman, the first Pakeha political prisoner in the nation’s history.²

William Cornish Snr shared his son's sentiment and echoed the rumblings of an antimilitarist movement gathering momentum—a movement angered by creeping militarism and state curtailment of liberty. “What is this terrible offence for which my son is punished?” wrote Cornish Snr to the *Evening Post*. “He refuses to register himself like a dog. A dog registered and collared!” He concluded defiantly:

My son is told to defend his country. He has got to defend his father's property. And how much property has his father got? None. Nine-tenths of the working class—the class I belong to—have no property; therefore it means that the ruling class—the capitalists—have got the cheek and impudence to ask the sons of the workers to defend their property... I am happy and proud to be the father of such a noble son who has the courage to say: No! No! No!”³

Harry Cooke, son of the New Zealand Socialist Party's (NZSP) Christchurch secretary Fred Cooke, was another young objector who said “No! No! No!” to the fine and was sent to jail. He was not the last. Backed by antimilitarist groups like Louise Christie's Anti-Militarist League and Charles Mackie's National Peace Council, along with working class bodies such as the NZSP, the Federation of Labor and the Passive Resisters' Union (PRU), youths across New Zealand were refusing registration and compulsory military training in large numbers. By 1913 the *Maoriland Worker*, which started a ‘Roll of Honour’ on the jailing of Cornish Jnr, had 94 names listed (many with double sentences), while prosecutions under the Act had reached a figure of 7030.

Yet despite the statistics, antimilitarist ‘shirkers’ and ‘anti-defenders’ were in the minority - a movement on the margins of a highly conformist culture. They were often ridiculed by the mainstream press—“we have precious little sympathy with the silly, notoriety-craving youths,” wrote one scathing editor.⁴ Therefore, the support of collective associations like the NZSP and the PRU formed an important part of resisting militarism in its various forms, and dealing with the reprisals. With the creation of these associations came a working class counterculture with its own institutions, values and symbols, a “means of defining and winning space within the social structure.”⁵ Newspapers, banners, badges, slogans, songs, social events, physical spaces and social relationships were just some of the ways working people expressed their solidarity. PRU members wore distinctive red, white and gold badges on their jackets, published the spritely *Repeal* and had their own hockey team “with bright red uniforms and big crowds to watch them on Saturday which highlights the popularity of their cause.”⁶ The NZSP had its halls, Sunday schools, stationery (“the red flag and Socialist motto being very prominent”) and in 1912 even considered purchasing their own van.⁷

So when Cornish Jnr and Harry Cooke were imprisoned, the communities of which they were a part rallied together in true countercultural fashion. Although a demonstration planned at the prison gates was foiled when Cornish Jnr was released an hour early, the Wellington socialists threw two receptions for him at the Socialist Hall. The first, attended by a crowd of over 300, saw Cornish Jnr receive a medal from the Runanga Anti-Conscription League—possibly the first celebratory medal of its kind in the history of the New Zealand labour movement. Speaking on behalf of the League, Robert Semple “congratulated Cornish on defying an immoral law” before presenting him “with a handsome

gold medal, which bears the following inscription:—‘Presented to W. Cornish, junr., by the Runanga Anti-Conscription League. 26/7/11.’”⁸ The following night saw Cornish Jnr receive a second medal – the Socialist Cross of Honor:

The design of this cross is based on the Victoria Cross. On the centre shield are engraved the name of the NZ Socialist Party, the number and the name of the boy. In the centre are a red flag and the words ‘Anti-Militarism’ and at the bottom is written ‘For Courage’”⁹

Cooke received his Socialist Cross in a similar ceremony a month later, presented by the Christchurch NZSP in front of a crowd of 200.



Cartoonist William Blomfield, well known for his anti-socialist satire, was quick to jump on the paradox of anti-militarists receiving medals. His drawing of a menacing Cornish Jnr—medals abreast and Union Jack torn in his hands—is like a patriotic poster gone awry. All the elements are there: flags, conscription posters and medals portrayed in a way to stir even the mildest patriot, but for all the wrong reasons. The paradox was not lost on the NZSP. “Many may ask why the Socialist Party is initiating the military authorities and their barbaric symbols of slaughter,” wrote Fred Cooke. “We answer that our cross is symbolical

of peace and brotherhood, and in after life the boys who have gained them can justly boast of striking a blow for liberty and fraternity.”¹⁰ Indeed, as the British cultural theorist Raymond Williams has pointed out, the crucial difference between the elite and the working class in cultural terms was not “language, not dress, not leisure... but between alternative ideas of the nature of social relationships.”¹¹ The Socialist Cross may have been a medal originally based on militarist conquest, but in the hands of the working class its social value was immensely different.

It is not known how many of these unique medals were produced. By mid-1912 the NZSP was appealing for funds to keep the practice going: “there are a number of crosses in the course of being finished, and by appearances we shall require a larger number than was anticipated.”¹² References to the Socialist Cross disappear from the *Maoriland Worker* after June 1912 and they are missing from collectors-catalogues such as Leon Morel’s *Catalogue of Medals, Medalets, Medallions of New Zealand, 1865-1940*. It appears none are held in any cultural heritage institutions, making them even rarer.



So imagine my surprise when, after giving a talk on New Zealand’s labour movement at Occupy Christchurch (in walking distance of the PRU’s former headquarters, the Addington Railway Workshops), I was approached by a man named Walter Dobbs claiming to have PRU badges in his possession. At that stage I had no idea any such medals existed, and assumed Walter simply meant the gold PRU badges worn by its members. Instead, in his Addington storage unit, he presented me with not one but two Socialist Crosses. A cross with the faded inscription #24 was in poor condition, but the Socialist Cross of Honor #5, given to PRU founder James Kirkwood Worrall after imprisonment on 5 March 1912, was as good as new.

Walter also had transcribed copies of Worrall’s letters from Ripapa Island in Lyttelton Harbour, an internment camp for conscientious objectors. Marched through Lyttelton at the point of bayonets, Worrall and other resisters were shipped to the island in June 1913 where they soon refused to clean weaponry and carry out military drill. “They were placed on half-rations, to which ten of the PRU members responded with a hunger strike.”¹³ As well as letters to his mother describing the hunger strike and island conditions, Worrall and Reg Williams managed to get an impassioned plea to the Labour Unity Conference being held in Wellington, causing the entire group of over 400 delegates to march on Parliament and demand a hearing with Prime Minister William Massey:



Top: JAMES WORRALL (LEFT) AND HIS BROTHER WEARING THEIR PRU BADGES. JARED DAVIDSON

Above: RNZAF AERIAL PHOTO OF RIPAPA ISLAND (AND FORT JERVOIS), 1957.

It is now the morning of July 2, and ten of us have refused the fifth meal offered us. Three of our number are ill, one seriously. It makes no difference, however, as we have decided that unless we are allowed to return to the barrack room and given our full rations, we will be carried off the island dead, or as near dead as our tormentors will allow us to get... Our message to you, our comrades, is to fight hard. No quarter! No compromise! No surrender! We are prepared to play the game to the last: all we ask is for you to do the same. Let the world know that this little country is game enough to challenge the power of the military autocracy which is threatening to overwhelm the world, and is ruining the workers of the world.¹⁴

Massey called an immediate Cabinet meeting and the following day promised the conference that conditions on the island would be improved, military drill would not be enforced and inquiries into all complaints would be made. Although not the unconditional release originally demanded, the hunger strikers and resulting publicity had won their point.¹⁵

These letters give a rare insight into the fraught activity of antimilitarists like Worrall and highlight the importance of both collective and family support, the latter being a key but under-examined institution.¹⁶ “With your letters time passes fairly quickly,” wrote Worrall to his mother, just after the hunger strike,

I received Father’s note, and was very disappointed that he could not come across... I hope that Father left the fruit across there, because I feel fit to eat some. Perhaps you may be able to come another day this week—try, anyway, because I want Father to see the place. Don’t forget to make things hot outside. I will write more soon. Don’t worry, we will win yet. Don’t forget the fruit. W Hooper and I are waiting for it.¹⁷

Likewise, the Socialist Cross and corresponding letters shown to me by Walter highlight how much important archival material relating to the labour movement exists in private collections, its value often unknown to their owners. Sadly, in a time of cuts and mergers, archival outreach is often the last thing on a heritage minister’s mind. That is why labour history and accounts of our working past are important—the continuation of a working class counter-culture held dear to those that struggled to create it. As Fred Cooke wrote in 1911, “in the future, when working-class history comes to be written, our Cross will be held in high esteem.”¹⁸

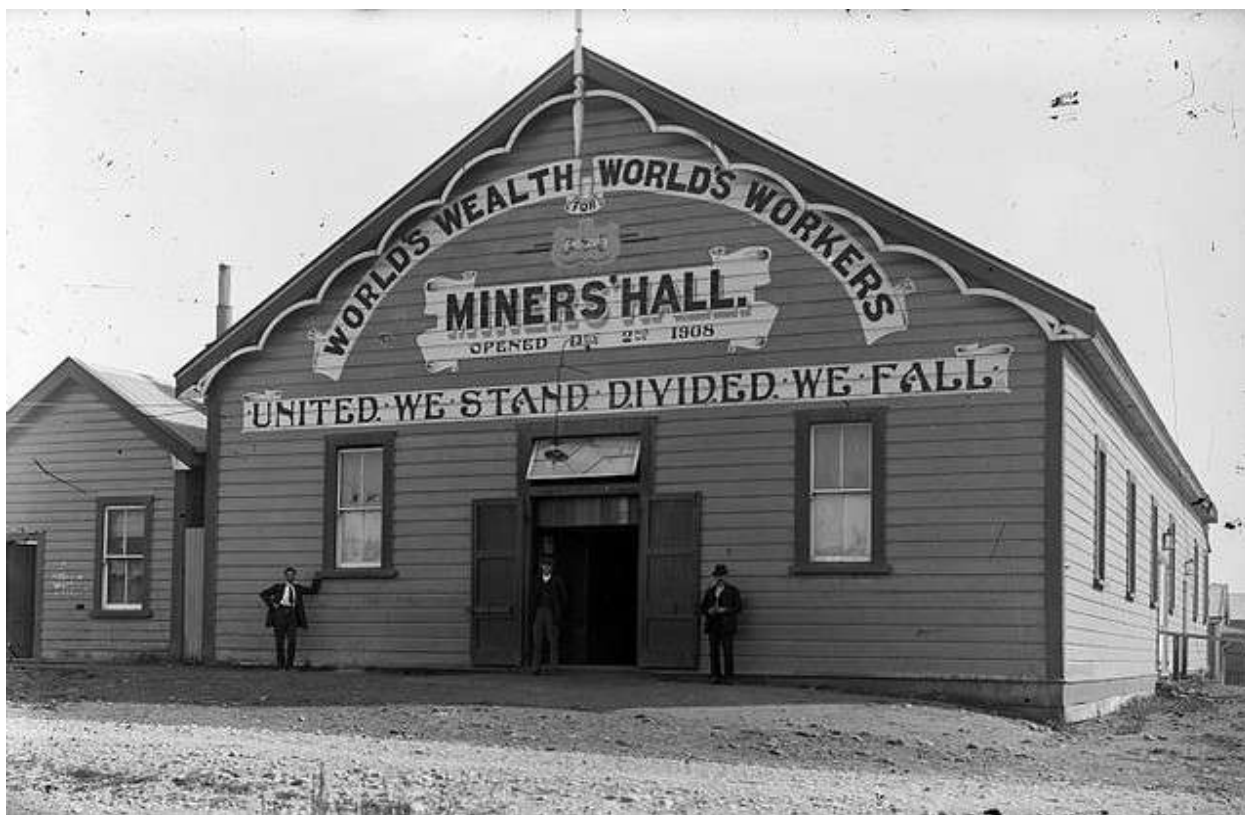
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Runanga Miners Hall: the early years 1908-1920

Peter Clayworth



MINERS HALL, RUNANGA (C.1910). QUINN, JOSEPH: NEGATIVES AND PRINTS FROM PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO OPERATED BY JAMES RING AND LA INKSTER. REF 1/2-179351-G. ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND.

The small West Coast town of Runanga, in the north of the Grey Valley, boasts one of New Zealand labour history's most significant buildings. The Runanga Miners Hall reflects local community history along with the broader histories of unions, the political labour movement, and of working people in general. In recent years the local group Friends of the Runanga Miners Hall have been trying to restore the hall. Unfortunately it now faces a new threat as the Grey District Council has red-stickered the building as an earthquake threat.

The opening, in 1901, of the state mine at Coal Creek near Runanga launched the Seddon regime's major experiment in government operated coal mining. The towns of Runanga, a government initiative, and Dunollie, a privately sponsored venture, were established to house the miners and their families. The first coal from Runanga was shipped out in 1904. In September of that year the miners formed the Runanga District Coal Mine Workers' Industrial Union of Workers. Robert 'Fighting Bob' Semple was their first president. Semple had been forced to leave the coal mines of South Gippsland in Victoria after being blacklisted in the bitter strike of 1903.

In the early 20th century New Zealand's industrial relations were to a large extent governed by the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1894. William Pember Reeves, the architect of the Act, intended that it would protect workers, encourage moderate unionism, and regulate decent work conditions while at the same time preventing strikes. In 1904 the Arbitration Act was still regarded

by unionists as largely beneficial to workers. It did not cover rural labourers, domestic servants or state employees. Thus, as state employees, the state coal mining union's first successful campaign was to get registered under the Act, which technically did not apply to them. It is ironic that Bob Semple led the union into gaining registration. Semple later achieved fame, or notoriety, for leading militant union opposition to the Arbitration Act in the 'Red Fed' years, from 1908 to 1913.

The Miners' Union was based in both Runanga and Dunollie, holding its early meetings in sites such as the Dunollie Hotel and the Dunollie Druids Hall. The two towns had a number of venues for community events. The Runanga Tennis Club Ball was held at the Dunollie Druids' Hall in April 1907, while the Library Committee held a 'financially successful' dance at the same venue in September of the same year. A lantern lecture on 'The Progress of the Church in New Zealand' was held in the Runanga School Hall in June 1907. By 1908 Runanga also had a Masonic lodge, with its own hall for meetings. Runanga, with a town council dominated by members of the Miners' Union, was known in the conservative press as a hotbed of radicalism. In June of 1908 the leader of the 1889 London Dockers Strike, the legendary Tom Mann, spoke at the Dunollie Druids Hall. The Miners' Union itself was actively involved in community activities, one example being the use of union funds to establish a Co-operative Society, which had a store up and running by 1906.

In early 1907 the Miners' Union decided they needed their own hall. The planning for the hall's construction was conducted by the union's executive committee, while the plans for the hall itself were carried out by architect George Millar. Construction was carried out by 'Mr Murray and his staff'. The hall was opened with celebrations in December 1908, with a special train from Greymouth bringing people up for the festivities. The new hall was adorned with slogans made popular throughout the industrialised world by the militant working class: 'World's Wealth for the World's Workers: United We Stand Divided We Fall.' James Begg Kent, MP for Westland from 1947 to 1960, stated in later years that as a young activist he painted the slogans at the instigation of Red Fed activist Pat Hickey. (Letter J B Kent to J Weir, 21 Aug 1966).

From the beginning the hall was used for union meetings, as well as for the public meetings of labour movement speakers and for meetings of the Runanga Co-operative Society. The hall was the venue where the Miners' Union decided on action to deal with workplace and community issues. Thus in February 1919 the Miners' Union called a stopwork meeting to discuss the need for a medical officer for Runanga. The meeting, presided over by H. Coppersmith, mayor of Runanga and president of the Runanga Medical Association, decided to strike until the government appointed a replacement for the retiring Dr. Meade. Another meeting in 1920 protested over the quality of rail transport to the mine. Union meetings at the Miners Hall were not confined to the miners. In 1920 Arthur Cook, president of the NZ Workers Union (NZWU) and an advocate of 'One Big Union', held a meeting at the hall. Cook addressed the Runanga section of railway construction workers, who resolved to join the NZWU.

Women were also labour orators. In 1909 Mrs Glover was recorded as speaking 'at length' on 'Women and Socialism', during her West Coast tour. A women's branch of the Socialist Party was established at Runanga in August 1911. Women were also often prominent among the prohibition speakers who frequently

spoke at the hall and among the entertainers who performed there. Yet despite the rhetoric of Runanga's unionists in support of Britain's suffragettes and of women's rights in general, women carried out largely traditional roles in the operation of the hall. Most of the organising committees seem to have been male dominated, while 'energetic ladies' committees provided the food for functions. Women appear to have carried out many of the less glamorous but essential roles in keeping the hall going.



BOB SEMPLE (LEFT), PADDY WEBB (CENTRE) AND PAT HICKEY (RIGHT).

Prominent Red Feds such as Bob Semple, Pat Hickey and Paddy Webb all spoke regularly at the Miners Hall in the early years. Webb and Hickey were both Runanga residents during 1909 and 1910. Other socialist activists such as Robert Hogg, a Socialist Party activist and later editor of *NZ Truth*, were hall orators. Paddy Webb, following his election in 1913 as the first Labour MP for Grey, regularly used the hall as a venue to address constituents. So did his successor, Labour Party leader Harry Holland. In February 1919, Holland used the Miners Hall as the platform to launch Labour's national election campaign. The hall was not only used by Labour candidates. During the 1913 election campaign both Mr H L Michel, the Reform candidate, and Mr Hannan, the Liberal candidate, addressed voters in the hall. Their meetings were well attended but with audiences not generally as supportive as those for the Labour candidates.

The Miners' Hall was important for local government and for such worthy local organisations as the Runanga Beautifying Society. The town clerk's office for the borough of Runanga was, in the 1910s, located in the hall. The mayor and the six borough councillors were usually members of the Miners Union. In 1919 the Runanga returning officer was one G R Hunter. George Hunter, also the chair of the Co-operative Society, was Paddy Webb's closest old comrade. Like Webb he was a miner from Victoria and one of the seven men whose sacking sparked the 1908 Blackball strike.

Prominent social issues were promulgated from the hall. Throughout the 1910s speakers on the hot issue of prohibition spoke there. They included the visiting British MP and socialist reformer Phillip Snowden and his wife Ethel. Ethel Snowden, suffragette and temperance campaigner, was described in the advertising as 'the most brilliant woman speaker in the Empire.' The Snowdens spoke in favour of national prohibition in October 1914. In 1918 Canadian visitors James Simpson of the Trades and Labour Council, and Mr W D Bayley,

professor of economics at Winnipeg, were prohibitionist speakers at Runanga.

The labour movement held meetings discussing local and international issues. In May 1920 Paddy Webb chaired a meeting at which Bob Semple called for financial support for an ongoing strike among the miners of Broken Hill. The Runanga brass band led the crowd in singing labour songs, including 'The Red Flag.' Semple reminded the large and enthusiastic crowd that the Broken Hill miners had consistently supported their comrades in New Zealand during strikes. The meeting closed with cheers for Semple and for the Broken Hill miners.

In September 1920 Paddy Webb chaired another meeting held under the auspices of the Labour Representative Council. This time music was provided by the Runanga silver band, with the familiar crowd singing of 'The Red Flag.' The band was followed by an address by a Mr Zekull, a representative of the Russian Bolsheviks. The assembly unanimously endorsed a motion protesting against foreign intervention in the Russian civil war. A second motion supporting self-determination for Ireland was passed with one dissenter, James Simpson, a member of the Protestant Peoples Association. Simpson claimed that Sinn Fein was a nationalist movement, whereas the labour movement should be internationalist. The meeting unanimously passed a third resolution calling for the removal of laws that continued to discriminate against conscientious objectors, and closed with three cheers for Russia.

The issues of war, pacifism and conscription received considerable attention at Runanga. In September 1914 the *Grey River Argus* reported with glee that 250 people had attended a meeting to set up a patriotic fund in Runanga. The *Argus* was later well known as a labour paper, but did not become so until 1919. In the early 1910s the *Argus* often referred to town and union leaders as 'the Runanga clique.' Mr G Millar (perhaps the same George Millar who designed the hall) chaired the 1914 patriotic fund meeting, which resolved to hold a fund raising concert. The Miners' Union at this time seems to have also suffered from a fit of patriotism, offering the hall for the concert free of charge. This meeting was closed with the singing of 'God Save the King', rather than the usual 'Red Flag.' A series of further concerts and picture shows were arranged to raise funds for the war effort.

As the war progressed Runanga returned to its old radical form. In August 1916 meetings in towns around the country voted in support of a motion put forward by the Massey-Ward coalition government affirming New Zealand's determination to carry the war to an end. The *Argus*, in an article entitled 'Discordant Note in Red Stronghold', noted that a Runanga meeting voted by 24 to 12 to reject the government motion.

The Miners Hall was not just a site for political or social improvement activities. From the earliest it was a place of entertainment, with regular showings from travelling movie companies. In March 1909 Perry's Electric Biorama presented a string of short movies including *For the Sake of His Uniform*, *Infernal Music* and *Cabby's Sweetheart*, interspersed with 'beautiful songs and duets' from the Sisters Brady accompanied by 'colourful lantern slides.' Travelling companies such as Pollards Pictures and Peerless Pictures regularly brought 'the pictures' to Runanga. The Miners Hall was the regular venue. In later years movies starring such silent screen legends as Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks,

Mary Pickford, and Mabel Normand were shown. Titles included *Tarzan of the Apes*, 'an astonishing jungle drama,' and 'that stupendous picture production', W D Griffiths' epic *Intolerance*. The features were usually accompanied by serials such as *The House of Hate* and *The Lightning Raiders*. Some of the shows were considered racy or scandalous; Mabel Normand's *Mickey* was restricted to those over 15 years old, 'by order of the Health Department.' The film *Damaged Goods*, on the subject of venereal disease, was considered so controversial that separate sessions were held for men and women.



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE MINERS HALL, RUNANGA (C.1908-1912). PRICE, WILLIAM ARCHER, 1866-1948: COLLECTION OF POST CARD NEGATIVES. REF 1/2-000194-G. ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND.

The hall was also the venue for visiting performers and lecturers. The 'Dandies of 1920' performed 'their celebrated costume entertainment.' In 1910 Mrs Perkins performed with a chorus of 50 voices and a full orchestra. A special train was put on from Greymouth to allow the townfolks' attendance. The Valdares and Garrison Vaudeville Company performed in 1911 with their Roman Maids and Reggiardo with his trained poodles. In another show Mr Victor lectured on 'Science and the Soul,' followed by a clairvoyant performance. Zoe the clairvoyant boy also performed with a travelling picture show. The celebrated Huddersfield Bell Ringers, 'the finest in the World', put on a concert at the hall in 1912. On another evening the Marist Brothers performed 'solos, duets, and choruses.' Touring drama companies such as the 'Within the Law Company' performed modern and classic plays. The 'world famous Corrick Entertainers' gave musical performances, interspersed with comedy and short films. Professor Clement Wragge, in 1909, gave an astronomy lecture at the hall to an enthralled audience. The Very Rev D J O'Sullivan SMA was there the next year, showing 'several hundred limelight views,' of his travels in Egypt and Palestine.

The people of Runanga also put on their own entertainment at the hall. In 1919 a picture show and Art Union lottery was held, with the £100 raised going to the fund to support dependents of imprisoned conscientious objectors. Annual balls were held, including those for the Runanga footballers, and the Grand Leap Year Ball of 1920. Miss Watson's orchestra performed at both events. Grand concerts and dances, involving performances from local talent, were regularly held to raise funds for local institutions such as the Runanga Convent

School, the Catholic Bazaar Fund and the Runanga School Committee, as well as for wider causes such as fundraising for the striking Broken Hill miners. More modest events such as euchre nights were also regular fund raising events. Then there was the annual Chrysanthemum Show by the State Colliery Horticultural Society. This event, always held at the Miners Hall, was famous throughout the Coast, with trains always put on from Greymouth for the event.

This brief summary of political and social activities at the Runanga Miners Hall in its early years gives us a snapshot of the life of a politically engaged mining community in the early 20th century. It also gives the lie to the idea that life was isolated and dull in the West Coast mining communities of that time. Clearly a vibrant and well attended social life was available to the working people of that time, much of it organised by the people themselves.

Dr Peter Clayworth is a Wellington historian. He is writing a biography of former West Coast miners' leader Pat Hickey.

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UNION FAMILY

My comrade, Tilly Hunter

Peter Franks

'Union Family' is an occasional series about a contributor's family member and their involvement with the labour movement. We welcome suggestions for contributors and subjects for this series.

Tilly Hunter was a socialist and feminist who was active in trade unions, community organisations, the Labour Party and the Communist Party. I am proud to have been her son-in-law and her comrade in various causes.

Our first encounter was at the annual meeting of the Clerical Workers Union in August 1975. Eighty percent of the union's members were women but the organisers were men. There was a vacancy for an organiser and I moved that the union appoint a woman. I had my arguments prepared but I hadn't thought about arranging a seconder. To my relief, Tilly was straight out of her seat to second the motion and argue strongly for it.

The top table, sensing a plot, looked aghast. An amendment—that a 'suitably qualified' organiser be appointed—was proposed and carried 30 votes to eight. Tilly bounced up to me after the meeting was finished. 'That was good fun', she said with a grin. We lost the motion but won the battle. The next day Therese O'Connell was appointed; the first of a notable group of women who were organisers for the Clerical Workers.

Tilly and I became friends and then family when I fell in love with Sue Piper, her daughter. I knew a bit about Tilly's life but found out a lot more when I started writing the history of the Printers Union in the late 1990s. She had the

distinction of being the first woman to be elected to the Printers' national council and to be secretary of the union's Wellington branch. She was certainly different from the other printers' leaders. She was a young woman, she came from a middle class family and she was a communist.



TILLY HUNTER AT HER 80TH BIRTHDAY PARTY IN 2009.

Tilly was born Margaret Neilson Dewar in India in 1929. John Dewar, her father, was a railway engineer from Scotland. Margaret Mary Crosse, her mother, was a daughter of a Hawkes Bay farming family with strong Scots ancestry. She had gone to India to visit her brother who was in the Indian Army. John Dewar contracted tuberculosis and the family returned to New Zealand. He was only 45 years old when he died in 1940.

Tilly's mother settled in Paraparaumu. When Tilly finished primary school she was 13 years old, the then school leaving age. True to their Scots heritage, her family believed strongly in education for daughters as well as sons. Thomas Ezekiel Crosse, Tilly's grandfather, was one of those who established Woodford House in Havelock North as a private girls' school. Because money was tight, Tilly went to Napier Girls High School as a boarder rather than to Woodford. Tilly once told me that her life was characterised by change. She was born in

the year of the Wall Street Crash which led to the Great Depression. She was five when the Quetta earthquake killed 40,000 people and turned her father's railroad into a twisted mess. The first Labour government raised the school leaving age and reformed the examination system. These changes were implemented while Tilly was at Napier Girls where she acquired the nickname Tilly, after a chubby and cheerful cartoon character.

Tilly's schooling took place during the Second World War. The war had a profound effect on her. She was deeply disturbed by the waste of human life, both combatant and civilian. She was also appalled at the destruction of countries and resources.

She started at Wellington Teachers College and at Victoria University in 1947. Her feelings about the war were fertile ground for the socialist views of many of the ex-servicemen who were returning to tertiary education. She got involved with *Salient*, the student newspaper, and the Socialist Club. One day she was standing at the bottom of the stairs in the Hunter Building and her friend Ron Smith asked her to join the Communist Party. She didn't hesitate.

Tilly took politics seriously but she also had a lot of fun. She made many friends and learnt lots both inside and outside lectures. The Socialist Club held weekend seminars where trade unionists led sessions on what socialism really meant from the point of view of a wharfie or a carpenter or whatever. She said, 'it was very good learning stuff and I enjoyed it all enormously.'

Tilly went teaching, she fell in love and married Pip Piper. She was 20 years old. Sue was born in 1951 and Mike in 1953. The marriage ended and Tilly had to earn a living for herself and two small children.

Tilly decided she wanted to work with her hands. She got a job in the print shop run by the Disabled Servicemen's League. There was a rigid segregation of jobs in the printing industry. Only men could do apprenticeships which led to the best paid work. Women worked mainly in low-paid, unskilled jobs. However the Printers' Award, unlike others, did not have different pay rates for men and women.

The print shop needed a guillotine operator. Tilly volunteered. There was a big row about whether she could do the job. She won the argument and a much better wage than she was getting as a printers' assistant.

The Printers Union was run by tradesmen and was a conservative organisation, but it had a very democratic structure. The union was organised at the workplace and each workplace was entitled to be represented on the board of management which ran the local branch.

Tilly became her shop's delegate to the board of management and a Printers' delegate to the Wellington Trades Council. At the age of 29 she became the first woman to be elected to the National Council of the Printers Union.

Shortly after this, the union's Wellington branch secretary resigned when it was discovered that he had misused union money. Tilly was appointed acting secretary and was one of the very few women union officials at the time. She threw herself into the job with great support from other unionists, particularly

Chip Bailey and Jock Hunter.

Tilly was a great storyteller. One of her favourite stories comes from her time as secretary of the Wellington branch of the Printers Union.

John Dickinson, an overseas-owned stationery manufacturer in Haining Street, Wellington, was a regular source of complaints to the union office. Tilly asked to have a meeting with the workers at lunchtime in the cafeteria. This is what happened next:

Permission was granted by management for me to do so, but I had a think about this and I thought, those swine are going to be there and it will be just as intimidating as me standing by a machine and trying to find out what's bugging them. So I trundled off to whoever was running the Trades Hall at the time and booked a room, just in case.

Then I went back and sure enough, just as I was standing on a chair about to harangue the multitude, in filed most of management and all the foremen. So I said, "I see that we have visitors who are not members of our union." Because I had thought this one through, and it was only a matter of 50 yards across the road, I said, "I have booked a room in the Trades Hall, and all of you who wish to listen to me and tell me and the union generally what is bugging you, I suggest you gather up your sandwiches and come with me." With which I climbed down off the chair thinking, "I wonder if it will work!" There was this clatter of feet behind me down the stairs.

I was 150 feet tall that day. There were only two people in the union who stayed behind. When we got over to the Trades Hall the members presented me with a list of demands (all of which I think, except two, were implemented) and also voted to stay out for the afternoon.

The point of this story, and of a lot of other campaigns in which Tilly was involved, is about leadership. She said: 'If somebody stands up and says, "Look, I'll take most of the punches, I will support you in anything you decide to do and I will provide you with the space in which you can do it", then together we are invincible. People need leaders—perhaps leaders is a bad word, a facilitator is a good word. Facilitating is what I was doing, actually.'

Tilly decided not to stand as the Printers' secretary when the next elections were held. The job was not compatible with looking after her children and she had no regrets. It was difficult being a sole parent. This was years before the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit. She fell in love again and married Bill Marsh. Jim was born in 1960 and John in 1962. She left the print shop and went back to teaching as a reliever. Then her second marriage broke up. In the 1970s she married again to Jock Hunter. That relationship didn't last either. As she once said to me, in a considerable understatement, 'marriage and I did not meld very well.'

Tilly left teaching and became a postie. She was a keen walker and insisted on doing postie runs on the hills of the eastern suburbs.

She loved the freedom of being a postie and the opportunity to meet lots of

people. She got involved in the union and was the secretary of the Wellington branch of the Post Office Association, a voluntary role, for several years.

After ten years with the Post Office, Tilly went to work as an accounts clerk in the private sector and was an active member of the Clerical Workers Union. She also did a lot of voluntary work in the community, for example with the Strathmore Food Bank, the Women's Boarding House in Mount Victoria, the YWCA and the Strathmore Park community centre.

Tilly left the Communist Party in the late 1950s. She was appalled by the Soviet Union's revelations about Stalin's murderous rule. She was shocked by the Soviet invasion of Hungary. These things upset her but she was still a committed socialist and protestor; 'old rent-a-demo herself', as she liked to put it. She was active in local community issues, like curbing airport noise, and international issues like apartheid and the Vietnam war.

In 1975 National was re-elected. Tilly, like many others, became very worried about where New Zealand was heading under Muldoon. She came to the conclusion that it was not good enough just to have a pure political philosophy. She decided she had stood on the sidelines long enough. She joined the Labour Party.

Tilly believed that working people must be organised to protect and advance their interests. It was her firm view that the unions and the party are the two wings of the one labour movement.

She threw herself into the Labour Party with the same enthusiasm and clear thinking that she applied to other causes. She held many offices in different party organisations across Wellington but she never saw that as important. Tilly was a true democrat. She thought that people matter most, regardless of their station or their title.

She had a favourite story about door-knocking for the Labour Party in the state housing area of Strathmore. At one house she was met by a fierce, barking dog. The door opened and a young boy came out. He shouted at the dog to shut up and said, 'don't bark at her, she's the Labour lady.' To Tilly that comment was as important as the gold badge she received when the Labour Party made her a life member in 1996.

Through the Labour Party, Tilly met Annette King and became her electorate secretary in 1993. Tilly worked for Annette for a long time and was on the Labour campaign committee in Rongotai until the 2008 election. I believe that Tilly did her best work for the community and the Labour Party while she was working with Annette. They became close friends and they were an awesome team.

She was never an uncritical member of the Labour Party but she was always loyal. She had no time for individuals who thought they were bigger than the party. She also had no patience with people who lived in the past. Tilly said to me: 'Being a socialist, you know that the world's changing and I try to live my life like that. If you don't live in the present, how the hell can you deal with the future?'



TILLY AND ANNETTE KING ABOUT TO START ONE OF THEIR REGULAR SATURDAY CLINICS IN RONGOTAI.

Tilly's family had taught her the importance of education, in the broadest sense. She loved reading and was a good thinker. In 2010, after she found out she had cancer, she read a review of Louise Raw's new interpretation of the 1888 London Bryant and May strike. (Louise Raw, *Striking a Light, The Bryant and May Matchwomen and their place in history*, Continuum, London, 2009). I bought it for her and she was excited about Raw's argument that, far from being pawns of the Fabians, the matchwomen had organised and led their successful strike.

Tilly spent the last weeks of her life at the Vincentian Home in Berhampore and died there on 10 April 2011. On my first visit to her, I commented that she was in a nice room with a good outlook. 'That's right,' she replied, 'but the best thing about being here is that I'll still be able to vote for Annette.'

Peter Franks is an industrial mediator and the author of several books and articles on New Zealand labour history. Most recently, he, together with Melanie Nolan, co-edited Unions in Common Cause - the New Zealand Federation of Labour 1937-1988 (Steele Roberts Publishing 2011).

Perspectives of a Strike

Waihi 1912



Mary Carmine

If you have material you think we should review, or are interested in reviewing for us, then contact the reviews editor at reviews@lhp.org.nz

REVIEWS

*Perspectives of a Strike*¹

Joce Jesson

Carmine, Mary, *Perspectives of a Strike: Waihi 1912*, (Waihi: Mary Carmine, 2012), ISBN 978-0-473-20108-

On a trip to Waihi during 2011, members of the Auckland Labour History Group undertaking some reconnaissance for the forthcoming 100-year commemoration of Frederick Evans' death and the 1911-1912 Waihi dispute, experienced some unease. From conversations with locals, we gained a clear understanding that there was still a sense in which talking about the strike in Waihi was like Basil Fawly imploring Germans not to "mention the war". Later, in February this year, we received an invitation to a book launch at the Waihi Museum. The book, the notice said, was about perspectives of the strike taken from interviews with descendants of the miners and townspeople of the time.

Waihi over the years has become somewhat of a bellwether of the overall New Zealand economy. Apart from the role that the 1912 dispute has been given in teaching industrial relations, creating union cultures and labour history, various sociopolitical and technological shifts also show their influence in the town and region. There is the initial discovery of gold, and the creation of a gold extraction factory, once the cyanide technology was supported by government, in order to extract the lower grade ore as the initial material was used. Then there is the takeover of small mining companies by British capital, followed in time by the development by Keith Wrigley of Akrad Radio Corporation (Auckland Radio) and its creation into a radio and later television manufacturing business (with multinationals Pye and Phillips), again with government support, when the Martha Mine indicated closure in 1952. Television manufacturing came to an end in 1986 when Phillips rationalised its international manufacturing. For Waihi as town and region there were the parallel developments of dairy co-operatives and then the creation of Fonterra, followed by tourism.

Our hope was that *Perspectives of a Strike* could show some new light on the Waihi strike and might also help us to understand that initial uneasy feeling which was still being expressed. And so a small group of us from Auckland Labour History Group went down to the March book launch.

This was held in the fascinating Waihi Museum and Arts Centre. This building was originally the old Technical School, first established in 1908 with local fundraising in the heyday of George Hogben, the first of New Zealand's innovative educationalists under Seddon. The building was closed down in the postwar boom of the 1960s, when all local technical education was moved to Waihi College. It was at the Technical School and the later Waihi School of Mines that Keith Wrigley of Akrad first learnt his trade. This was also where pioneering New Zealand film-maker Rudall Hayward studied physics for two years.² Following the Technical School's relocation to Waihi College in 1962, the building was purchased by the Borough Council and set up as a gold mining museum and local arts centre. There are two main rooms—the museum section, housing some remarkable mining artifacts including a beautiful glass display of the extensive Martha mines' levels before it became opencast, and the adjacent art gallery where the book launch was held.

Around the walls of the art gallery for the book launch occasion were a series of photos, many taken from Alexander Turnbull Library collections and some from the museum's own collection and private donations. These were all described (unconsciously I believe) to create the perspective of a dominant discourse, noting the 'so-called scabs' and 'the authors of the troubles—the Federation Exec'. This reading portrayed the strikers as 'othered' against the authorities' version of history.

Mary Carmine is well known locally as a long-serving Hauraki Plains councillor, an ex-deputy mayor and a member of many council committees, including chair of the Heritage, Arts and Culture portfolio. She is the Council nominee on Go Waihi,³ and writes regular columns for the local paper. She had originally planned this book to be serialized in fortnightly episodes from March to December 2012. However that plan was changed and the episodes were produced as a book, launched by the local National Party MP for Coromandel, Scott Simpson.

Mary Carmine is very brave in writing this book, given how much Waihi and the 1912 strike forms part of the New Zealand social and industrial-relations folklore, which has become an accepted history.⁴ At the launch she emphasised that her book was not referenced, suggesting that it was not a textbook, even though she had consulted various academic theses such as those of Phil. Rainer,⁵ Clive Sleeman,⁶ and Jeremy Mouat.⁷ She suggested "that it is time we took an objective view and told the stories from all sorts of angles", implying that her account was a more objective history than some she described as the earlier 'more emotional ones'.⁸ She has also relied on various reports from local memories, newspapers and Council records, as well as the collection of William Parry's papers bought at auction and donated to the Museum (the Capper collection).

The foreword to the book reads:

This book is written essentially for the people of Waihi so that they can know their own history, not be ashamed of it and can understand the actions of their ancestors... I hope it can also be of interest to more than those who live in Waihi or who have ancestors who were there at the time of strike.

Sadly, the foreword reveals a very limited recognition of just what history or social geography is. What was there to be ashamed of? What were the actual questions behind the creation of the book? Academics insist on recognizing and referencing sources, including in the writing of oral history, because history is an interpretive discipline. The ideas and explanations of events are continually being revised, and the interpretation of every new explanation should be considered in relation to the existing received ones advanced. That is what I term, 'recognizing the *academic whakapapa* of an idea'.

Although much of the book's story is derived from important earlier sources, this is not a great history—it is the revision of a received truth. There is no sense of the way that laws and regulations cause structural shifts, and no recognition at all that the union movement itself is formed out of the 1894 IC & A Act,⁹ along with other Liberal 'state creation' activities of the time. Some of the major omissions in Carmine's research include the failure to recognise

the role of Pat Hickey. Even though Hickey's presence is recorded in the museum itself and he stood as a Socialist for Ohinemuri in the election of 1911, he is invisible here. Stanley Roche's *The Red and the Gold*,¹⁰ (itself apparently derived in large part from Harry Holland's account of the strike)¹¹ is not mentioned. Also missing is Erik Olssen's *The Red Feds*, with its strong sense of a structural explanation for the rise of the Federation of Labour.¹²

When asked about the omission of Roche, Carmine suggested that she had been told it was a work of fiction. Her source for that information, Doreen McLeod, works for Newmont Mining, the current mine owners.

What this says is that she who writes history claims the story. Without some sense of significant structures, this work boils down to a trite story about individuals threatening and fighting over what union they should be covered by. There is no sense as to why people were prepared to go to such lengths in defence of the idea of the right to strike, why working with non-union labour was seen as a safety matter, nor what the ultimate goal might be for the strikers. Carmine even refutes the received truth that the Waihi strike was important in the formation of the Labour Party (although this, like most of her other assertions, is not fully referenced).

Mary Carmine's book does present an opportunity for history students at school, in tertiary study or those in union education to critique her particular revision of received history, in association with existing views. However I suspect we may have to wait a while to find out if Waihi, still a company town with a giant hole in its main street in which Tonka-toy trucks move under the amazing shadow of the Cornish pumphouse, is ready to remember or understand its given history.

Dr Joce Jesson recently retired as a senior research fellow in education, University of Auckland.

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Strongman - The Tragedy

Mary-Ellen O'Conner

Strongman - The Tragedy, dir. Gaylene Preston, TV3 Sunday 13 May 2012.

I was camping at Carters Beach, Westport in January 1967, awaiting School Certificate results, when my horizons were suddenly expanded and darkened all at the same time. My uncle arrived, quite distraught, to tell us of the Strongman Mine disaster at nearby Runanga, with the loss of numerous lives. That announcement was etched into my memory forever. So it was with quite some interest that I watched the documentary *Strongman - The Tragedy* which was broadcast Sunday 13 May on TV3.

At 10.04am on January 19 1967, a methane explosion ripped through the Greens 2 section of the Strongman coal mine on the West Coast. This was the biggest underground mine in New Zealand but also one of the most dangerous because of the level of methane in the gas. Nineteen men were killed, 15 bodies were recovered on the same day, two more two weeks later and two were never found. The tight-knit community was devastated. Forty-five years later, the largely untold story of the Strongman Mine tragedy was the subject of a telefeature produced and directed for TV3 by Paula McTaggart and Gaylene Preston, with funding from the New Zealand On Air Platinum Fund.

Born and raised in Runanga, McTaggart has been developing the project since 2007, when a visit to her uncle, the late Ron Gibb, sparked her interest in the tragedy. Gibb was one of five men from Mines Rescue who received the British Empire Medal for their actions during the tragedy. Preston directed the dramatic scenes which were blended with McTaggart's interviews with survivors and families.

Harry Bell, one of the Mines Rescue team, states at the beginning that, "the inquiry was a whitewash, the truth never came out, it's about time it did". A sense of bitterness pervades many of these interviews—bitterness about the loss, intensified by regret about not speaking up at the time of the inquiry. The fact was that the abandoned mine workings very close to the Greens section posed a very significant methane hazard. This was the cause of the explosion. It seems officials had known about it for a long time. In addition, there simply wasn't enough time to check the gas levels in every section of the mine before every shift. The checker was fudging the log. On the morning of 19 January, the dynamite being used to shift coal exploded, collapsing the wall through to

the abandoned workings, setting off a massive coal dust explosion, killing all in that section.

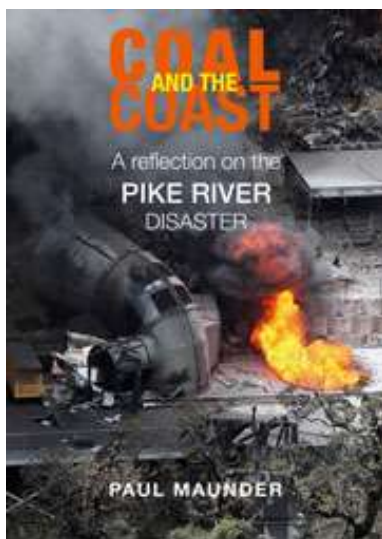
The thrust of the inquiry focused on whether those who set the dynamite knew the risk from the abandoned workings. The mines manager said he had informed deputy manager Kinsey, now dead, of the risk. This was where a lot of blame was laid. “Shot fired in contravention of the regulations”, “Negligence caused blast” were the newspaper headlines, as Kinsey silently copped most of the blame. In reality, everyone was flaunting the rules for the sake of productivity, all the time. As one witness highlighted, greed was the real culprit. And the government was complicit in the cover-up. Miners and mines rescue were told to keep quiet or the mine would be closed. Very few were called to speak at the inquiry. They didn’t want to anyway—their livelihoods depended on the mine working. The Greens 2 section of the mine was closed, but the rest of the mine went on operating until 1992, when it was replaced by Strongman 2.

This documentary was given extra layers of resonance by the Pike River tragedy and the subsequent revelations around that. Having seen it, one can only imagine the sense of déjà vu experienced by the Strongman families and survivors when Pike River occurred. The same discounting of danger in the interests of productivity and jobs nearly 43 years later must have been a searingly awful replay. But wisely, the producers drew no comparisons, made no parallels and no voiceover was used. All interviews were conducted prior to the Pike River disaster. The film spoke for itself. For myself, it was something of a revelation to realise that the emphasis on productivity, not safety, had caused a very similar tragedy under state-controlled mining – it is not only the private sector that is guilty of cutting terrible corners.

The notable difference from the Pike River tragedy was in the determination—foolhardy perhaps—to re-enter the mine and claim the bodies. In 1967 the culture was anything but risk averse. “I spose we done things that day you wouldn’t normally do, wasn’t it?” said one interviewee. Those who entered spoke of the poisonous, overwhelming atmosphere and wanting to retch into their masks but knowing they couldn’t or they’d be dead too. It was impossible to tell one mangled body from another except by their battery number. “I put my arm into his chest cavity” was the graphic description of one rescuer’s efforts. They were at constant risk of another explosion. They certainly deserved those British Empire medals.

The interviews with the women flesh out the domestic side of the tragedy. Alice Noble, widow of ‘Ginty’ Newcombe, gives a full and moving account of what happened for her. Anne Hart, a young nurse, off-duty at the time, tells of going down to wait at the mine mouth to help the injured. There weren’t any. I would like to have known how those 14 widows and families survived in the days before ACC, but this was not addressed directly. Presumably they received some compensation and collected the widows’ pension. Some must have remarried. McTaggart, Preston and New Zealand on Air all deserve congratulations for the making of this documentary, as does TV3 for screening it in a prime time slot. Let’s hope there’s more labour history to come.

Mary Ellen O’Connor is a Nelson writer, currently completing an oral history of the last 25 years of the NZ PSA.



Coal and the Coast

Toby Boraman

Paul Maunder, *Coal and the Coast: A Reflection on the Pike River disaster*, Canterbury University Press, 2012 ISBN 978-1-927145-26-5

This is a commendable book. Indeed, it is one of the better leftwing books to come out in recent years. It's brief and easy to read. It does not just examine the horrors of the Pike River coal mine disaster and the associated story of the deregulation of safety in mines under neoliberal capitalism. It also covers the socialist and trade union tradition of West Coast miners; explores the ecological limits to coal mining; examines the past, present and future of the West Coast; investigates the changing class composition on the coast (and how it is becoming more multicultural) through interviewing some present-day miners; and it briefly looks at some of the problems created by the Treaty settlement process on the coast.

Maunder's book begins with a personal account of the disaster, including his experience as a volunteer medic, waiting outside the mine as the catastrophe unfolds. The tragedy then becomes a media-driven farce, while the Blackball community that Maunder is part of grieves. Maunder ably tells the story of how the disaster is no accident, but the result of a profit-hungry mining company cutting corners in a largely deregulated safety environment so as to get coal out of a dangerously gassy mine as quickly as possible.

For this review, it's appropriate to focus on the historical aspects of the book. The historical overview of coal mining unionism is bright and breezy, if a little sketchy. Still, it gets many of the more important events and traditions across, especially for those unfamiliar with the period. However, there are some mistakes. For example, the Alliance of Labour (AOL) is mistakenly named the 'Labour Alliance', and it is claimed that the AOL was tied to the Labour Party (which is true in its later years, but up to about the mid-1920s, the AOL was strongly influenced by syndicalism and its anti-parliamentarism). And the notorious Fintan Patrick Walsh was the vice-president and then the president of the Federation of Labour, not the secretary of the Trade Union Federation, an organisation that didn't come into existence until the 1990s (perhaps the confusion here is between the Trade Union Congress, an organisation Walsh bitterly opposed, and the FOL). Plus I would have liked to see a few more sentences on the post-WWII period, and the tensions inherent in the social democratic class compromise (even in mines that were state-owned), tensions that erupted during the widespread class conflict of the 1970s, and whether this conflict affected miners and the Coast.

Overall, though, Maunder does a good job of bringing this history up to date, when working-class people on the coast face unemployment, low incomes, and poor services; and miners, albeit well paid, still face pretty hazardous working conditions. He overcomes the temptation to see the West Coast socialist tradition through romantic eyes as an episode from the past, and to lament this passing. Maunder uses the theory of French post-Marxists like Badiou to explain how the Pike disaster produced a temporary rupture to the normal neoliberal capitalist flow of things. People come together to overcome a crisis, and then this co-operation evaporates, as the all-powerful spectacle re-packages the

disaster in an alienated form, a form which co-opts any glimmers of hope for the rupture to widen and deepen.

While an undoubtedly useful framework, I think it tends to stress the power capital has over us (and through us), rather than the power we have to create new forms of struggle and organisations, as well as re-invent old ones, in accord with the neoliberal conditions of today (conditions that are similar in some respects to the ones 100 or so years ago, when militant union traditions were often established in highly casualised workplaces, with a mobile, international and fragmented workforce). Or perhaps I'm just being wildly optimistic? Maunder does find that the tradition of workers' solidarity and socialism is almost dead on the Coast, as life becomes privatised and fragmented under neoliberalism. In any case, it is great that Maunder sets up the book to talk about how 'another world is possible' even without the simplistic 'grand narratives' of 'social redemption' from socialism's past (though the 'dreaming' solutions Maunder offers remind me more of an updated yet mild social democracy rather than a basis for 'another world').

Overall, Maunder's book is stimulating and broad-ranging. It doesn't flinch from a warts-and-all look at a region and the scarring, tragic impacts neoliberal capital has inflicted on it, and us all. It's useful for non-Coasters too, as it's a decent introduction to today's class structures and offers a well-rounded critique of neoliberal capital's relentless commodification of life. It's not afraid to ask questions and make statements about sensitive subjects. Unusually, it even throws in a little bit of theory into the mix, which I think is most welcome. It also doesn't neglect the libertarian socialist tradition, unlike most union and left histories. And it notes the urgent need for socialism today to take account of multiplicity, diversity, and climate change (while, I would hope, opposing exploitative green capitalism). But most importantly it achieves exactly what it set out to do: an introduction to the past, present and future of the Coast, and setting out the need for a more diverse and complex socialism for today's conditions. It is the type of book you can recommend to people who are new to socialism and the broad labour tradition, and are interested in it.

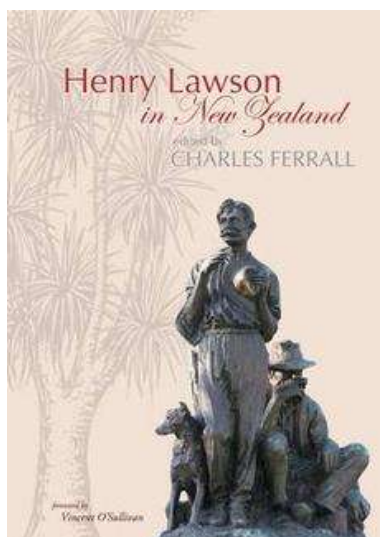
Toby Boraman is a Wellington historian, and author of the only published history of New Zealand's 20th-century anarchist tradition.

Henry Lawson in New Zealand

Mark Derby

Henry Lawson, edited by Charles Ferrall, *Henry Lawson in New Zealand*, Steele Roberts Publishers 2012, ISBN 978-1-877577-39-0

In a time when ever-hopeful New Zealand jobseekers are heading across the Tasman in record numbers, it is piquant to be reminded that the flow was once in the opposite direction. In the early 1890s a prolonged and obstinate economic depression forced many desperate Australians to try their luck in New Zealand, and this book compiles the writings of one of them, the hard-drinking socialist and bard of the working man, Henry Lawson.



Lawson is celebrated sufficiently in his homeland to feature on both a postage stamp and a ten-dollar bill, and yet the three trips he made to New Zealand between 1893 and 1898 produced a large part of his published output. It includes short stories set in Wellington, the Hutt Valley, Pahiatua and the South Island; odes to Rewi Maniapoto, Tom Bracken and the anarchist writer Arthur Desmond; and much pungent journalism.

Most of this body of evocative, observant, vigorous writing appeared in Australian rather than New Zealand publications, and much of it long after the events described. The great strength and insight of this unique compilation of Lawson's New Zealand writings is that they have been assembled by subject matter—so that all of his observations on first arriving in Wellington, for example, appear together even if originally published years apart.

The result is an impression of New Zealand in the 1890s from the perspective of an eloquent outsider who tramped between towns in search of work, and learned to bludge drinks even from wily publicans. Lawson could also celebrate the dawn of women's suffrage, admire the traces of Māori nationalism and laugh at his own ineptitude as a vaudeville actor.

The most substantial section of the book deals with the year Lawson spent at the tiny settlement of Mangamaunu, north of Kaikoura—now a favoured surf beach but then the site of a one-teacher 'Native school'. As that one teacher, Lawson recorded impressions of impoverished Māori in language that has since been described as 'stridently racist'. However, as Vincent O'Sullivan points out in his exemplary foreword, "it is the entire arc of [Lawson's] writing that we have to consider, not this or that point along the way to mine quotations for easy reprimand."

Lawson's poetry, with its thumping rhyme-schemes and heavy sentiment, may seem no more than doggerel to today's readers. Charles Farrell, O'Sullivan's colleague in Victoria University's English Department, offers the important insight that it was written for immediate consumption in newspapers and general-interest magazines. "Anyone who read a newspaper a century ago also read poetry, something unimaginable today."

Farrell has edited this splendid collection, supplied an indispensable introduction and augmented Lawson's material with thoughtful and widely researched notes. He has done an outstanding service to Lawson's literary reputation in this country, and to anyone interested in a vivid and unvarnished take on New Zealand as it entered the 20th century.

Mark Derby is the chair of the Labour History Project.



What is the Labour History Project?

The struggle for workers' rights has a long history in Aotearoa New Zealand. Trade unions and the fight for a fair society are important strands of our national story. Many major historical events have their roots in labour-related issues. These have also been key influences on national politics and the evolution of New Zealand society. Labour history connects New Zealand to the world. Work has been a prime factor in our migration history and local unions (and related groups) have important links overseas.

Much of New Zealand's labour history, however, remains undocumented and unpublished. The social history of work in New Zealand has been relatively neglected by historians. Without a more accessible labour heritage, we overlook important ways of understanding New Zealand's past and present, and vital perspectives on where we are heading.

In 1987 the Trade Union History Project (TUHP) was formed by historians, trade unionists and political activists to help document New Zealand labour history. Initially established with state funding, since 1991 the organisation has relied upon volunteer resources, donations, and occasional publishing grants. In 2008 the TUHP changed its name to the Labour History Project (LHP) to better reflect the range of member interests. The LHP is an energetic and independent incorporated society. It has over 150 individual and institutional members and maintains links with affiliated organisations such as the Auckland Labour History Group, trade unions, libraries, museums, academics, and counterpart groups overseas. It is the only national organisation dedicated to fostering New Zealand labour history and cultivating an important part of our collective memory. The Labour History Project has no affiliation with the New Zealand Labour Party or any other political party.

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