



Labour History Project

NEWSLETTER 57 | APRIL 2013

PSA and 1913 Strike centenary events

Griffin the one time traitor, and other New Zealand Chartists

Travelling with labour history - a north-eastern journey

New Zealand medical volunteers in the Spanish Civil War

*Sewing Freedom, Your Life For the Job, and The Making
of the English Working Class*



Newsletter 57 - April 2013

ISSN 1175-3064

The Labour History Project Inc.

PO Box 27-425

Wellington

Aotearoa / New Zealand

For more information on LHP membership, activities,
publications and news, check out our website:

www.lhp.org.nz

COVER: Te Aro, Wellington, c.1900. Illustration by
Alec Dunn from *Sewing Freedom: Philip Josephs,
Transnationalism & Early New Zealand Anarchism*

DESIGN: Jared Davidson

NEWSLETTER 57 | APRIL 2013

Contents

FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

Introduction from editor Mark Derby	3
Chair's report	4

RECENT AND CURRENT RESEARCH

First World War Propaganda Films	5
John Mulgan in Greece	5
Wellington Specials, 1913	5

NEWS ROUND-UP

Workers' Memorial Day	5
PSA centenary	5
LHP AGM	6
1913 strike centenary	6

FEATURE ARTICLES

Griffin the one time traitor, and other New Zealand Chartists	7
Travelling with labour history - a north-eastern journey	11
New Zealand medical volunteers in the Spanish Civil War - some new evidence	15
Bill Jordan - a distant champion for Spanish democracy	21
Spooks spy on citizens - a half-century ago	26
From the archives: the 1951 Waterfront Dispute	28

REVIEWS

<i>Sewing Freedom</i>	31
<i>Your Life for a Job</i>	32
<i>Watersiders Working for Themselves</i>	33
Worth a second look: <i>The Making of the English Working Class</i>	34

FROM THE SHOP FLOOR

Introduction

I'm writing this on May Day, just before going to the Museum of Wellington City and Sea which is opening its exhibition of the PSA's centenary banner. Along with the banner itself, the exhibition includes a video describing how this proud symbol was produced. Members of the Labour History Project have been involved in every aspect of the centenary banner project and many more, including a compilation of archival film on the PSA's history, and a forthcoming international conference. We're also working on a series of original songs dealing with the 1913 waterfront strike, an internet-based collection of documents on that strike, an article for the 150th anniversary of the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union for its magazine, an oral history of a veteran union leader, a number of public talks, and a guided walk downloadable by cellphone.

That's a lot of work, and it's deeply satisfying to me to note the very wide range of media and outlets through which this valuable historical information is being delivered. We're still putting out printed matter—in fact, the LHP has recently had a hand in many publications ranging from a centenary booklet to fullscale biographies. But the printed word is no longer the first choice for historians, and for labour historians, whose material is often intended to reach a particularly wide audience, it's even more necessary to find effective and innovative modes of delivery.

This journal is now distributed almost entirely in electronic form, and increasingly, its text includes links to further web-based sources of information. But it's important to note that several contributions to this issue draw on such old-fashioned analog sources as hard-copy documents and photographs, and word of mouth. It can be difficult, but it's very necessary, to find a balance between dwelling on the past and processing the results in forward-looking ways. We'll keep trying, and we hope you'll tell us what you think of the result.

Mark Derby
Editor

Chair's report

By well-established custom, the LHP committee began this year with a long-range planning meeting at Maureen Birchfield's sun-drenched house in Paekakariki, just north of Wellington. What emerged most strongly from the discussion is that this year and the next few are replete with historical resonances for the field of labour history.

It's the centenary of the 1913 strikes and of significant moves towards uniting the Labour movement's political wing this year, and next year marks the centenary of the outbreak of World War One, and the labour movement's response—both pro- and anti-conscription, pacifist and otherwise. We are working with a number of other organisations to ensure that the centenary commemorations record these aspects of the war as well as the military activity, and a sub-group of our members has been set up to co-ordinate this aspect of our work.

The Labour Party will celebrate its hundredth birthday soon, and I and my fellow LHP committee member Peter Franks are preparing a history of the party for publication in 2016.

It's likely that the next (August) issue of this newsletter will be a special centenary issue, devoted to the immensely significant historical events of a hundred years ago.

I'd like to thank Maureen for her longstanding hospitality to our committee, and to encourage all our members, and prospective members, to take part in the impressive range of activities we have underway and planned.

Jim McAloon
For the committee

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

First World War Propaganda Films

Richard Meyer is a professor of art history at Stanford University, California, specializing in 20th-century American art and visual culture. He spent part of February 2013 as a visiting scholar at the New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington, looking at the propaganda newsreels of NZ troops during WWI.

“What I am doing is discovering what happened on the Home Front during that time and if the films made an impact. Apparently they made no difference to the conscientious objectors, anti-militarist and peace advocates. If anyone has more information about how these films were received in NZ or their impact, I would appreciate hearing from them.”

John Mulgan in Greece

Martyn Brown, a PhD student in history at the University of Brisbane, spent April at the National Library and Archives New Zealand, researching writer John Mulgan’s experiences with the Special Operations Executive in Greece during WW2. Martyn earlier studied New Zealand trade union protests against British actions in Greece during December 1944.

Wellington Specials, 1913

Mike Smith of Matamata emailed the LHP regarding his research into special (ie. volunteer and untrained) constables in Wellington during the 1913 strike. “I am trying to make up a roll of the Specials for the whole of NZ.”

If you can provide information, contacts or other suggestions to any of these researchers, contact editor@lhp.org.nz

NEWS ROUND UP

Workers Memorial Day

April 28 is celebrated internationally as Workers’ Memorial Day, and in Wellington it was marked by a windswept but very moving ceremony at the Hutt Railway Workshops. Speakers from the Rail and Maritime Transport Union, local MP Chris Hipkins and others noted the appalling safety record of many New Zealand workplaces. Hazel Armstrong, a lawyer and expert in occupational health and safety, launched her LHP-published *Your Life for the Job* (featured elsewhere in this issue), and Hutt Rail staff unveiled a relocated memorial to a former workmate killed several years ago in an entirely preventable shunting accident.

PSA centenary

As part of its very wide and impressive range of centenary activities, the PSA is progressively digitising the *PSA Journal*. When complete later in 2013, the online *Journal* will be a very valuable new resource for labour history. You can already read and search many issues of this lively and influential publication at: <http://psa.outofprint.co.nz>

The PSA's centenary was officially launched in mid-April in the beautiful 19th-century Hopetoun Alpha Hall, once a Congregational Church. The centenary banner then went on exhibition for a week at the Gus Fisher Gallery, in the former Shortland Street TV and radio studios (a site therefore once occupied by many members of the PSA). The banner and its accompanying display panels and explanatory video were then transported to the Museum of Wellington City and Sea, for exhibition from 1 May. Further exhibitions are scheduled for:

- 20-26 May – Otago Museum, Dunedin
- 13-16 June – Te Manawa Museum and Art Gallery, Palmerston North
- 11-14 July – venue to be confirmed, Hamilton
- 8-11 August, Provincial Museum, Nelson
- 27-30 August, Air Force Museum, Christchurch

The centenary celebrations will end on 22 October with a gala event in Wellington.

LHP AGM

This year our AGM will be held on 2 July in the Todd Foundation Room of the Museum of Wellington City and Sea. Our guest speaker is lawyer, author and occupational health and safety expert Hazel Armstrong. She will talk about health and safety and ACC as a valuable area for labour history research. "I will recall Waihi striker and eventually Labour Minister Mark Fagan's struggle to ensure that miners suffering silicosis were compensated, since we are still struggling for recognition of occupational disease compensation." Surprise entertainment also provided. All are welcome.

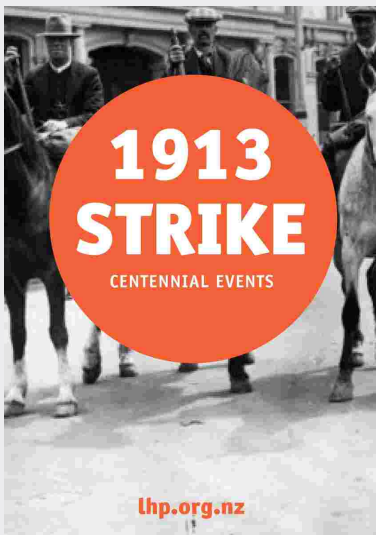
1913 strike centenary

More information continues to emerge as part of the LHP's commemoration of the great strikes of 1913. We recently learned that a silent film version of *Les Miserables* was screening in Wellington at the time of the strike. Tony Robinson, a British actor and active unionist who played Baldrick in the TV series *Blackadder*, has been shooting part of a forthcoming TV show at Buckle St, the site of a battle between strikers and mounted specials in 1913.

A grant of \$4000 has been received from the Wellington City Council towards publishing and other costs for the 1913 strike centenary project. The Ministry for Culture and Heritage has agreed to host the specially designed website "1913 – War on the Wharves". This will enable anyone to click on a map of New Zealand and access documents, including local records, letters and photographs, on that location's response to the strikes.

The first two-hour historical walks around central Wellington sites of significance for the 1913 strike will take place at 10am on Saturday mornings in November. An evening walk is also planned.

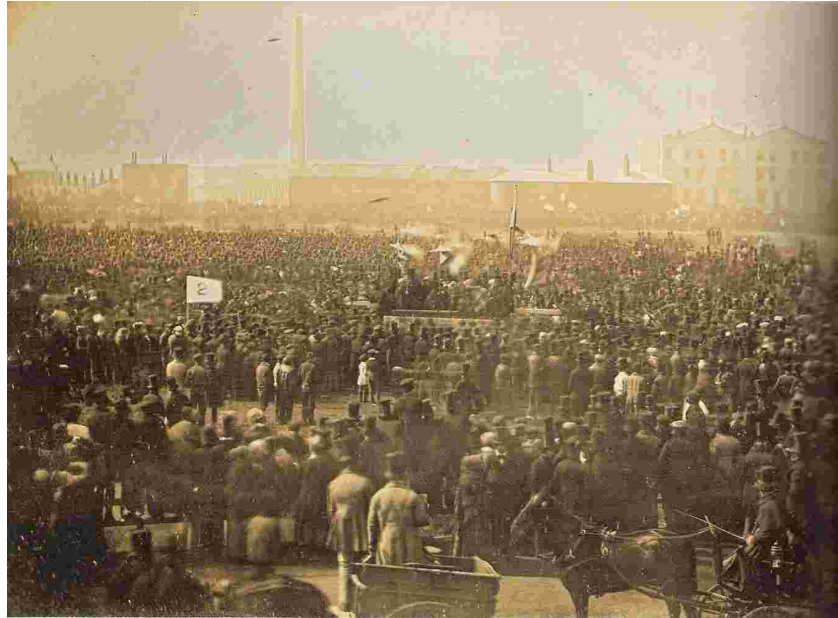
The Museum of Wellington City and Sea is collaborating with the LHP and the Turnbull Library to run a two-month series of People's History talks at the museum and the Turnbull in October-November. These will be illustrated talks about workers' and people's history, presented in an accessible and engaging style, to appeal to Wellingtonians with a general interest in history. This may become an annual series. The programme will become available on the LHP website over the coming months. Inquiries to Marie Russell. Email: marie.russell@otago.ac.nz



FEATURE ARTICLES

Griffin the one time traitor, and other New Zealand Chartists

By Mark Derby



A CHARTIST DEMONSTRATION AT KENNINGTON COMMON, 1848. HISTORYATWOODLANDS.WIKISPACES.COM

Ever since the six Tolpuddle Martyrs were transported from their fields in Dorset, England to Tasmania in 1834 for daring to form an embryonic agricultural workers' union, others have been inspired by their example. Every summer a festival is held in the village of Tolpuddle to remember the martyrs through union banners, songs, storytelling and theatre.

Last year the festival featured the Tasmania Grassroots Choir, performing their original folk opera about one of the transported men, George Loveless. (This choir also visited New Zealand in 2009, singing at Mayday concerts in Palmerston North and Wellington).

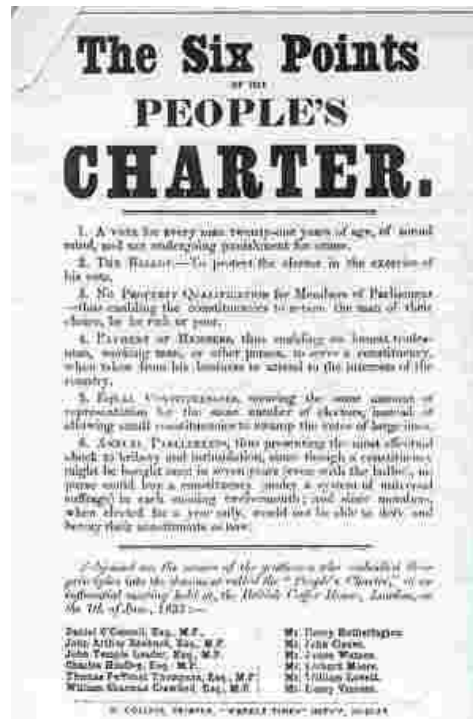
Among those who admired the Australians' performance at Tolpuddle was Les Kennedy, a teacher, unionist and labour historian. Les has been a lifelong trade unionist, and a member of the UK's largest teachers' union for 37 years. In that time he has been a school representative, local negotiating secretary, national executive member and regional organizer of the union. He has also worked for the Trades Union Congress where he was responsible for setting up an adult learning centre in Cornwall. He taught history in a state secondary school for 30 years and has also taught adult evening classes. For the past four years this exceptionally active educator has also run the Trades Union Congress's Radical History School at the Tolpuddle Festival, where he met his Tasmanian counterparts.

This year Les retraced the route of the martyrs and attended the Labour History and Music Festival in Hobart, Tasmania. There he gave a series of talks on the Tolpuddle Martyrs and their close political associates the Chartists, especially William Cuffay who was also transported to Tasmania for his political activity.

During the festival Les met John Maynard, president of the New Zealand Postal Workers Union and labour history enthusiast. John extended an invitation to Les to pass on his knowledge in this country, and during a brief visit to Wellington in March this year, Les and his wife Rosemarie spoke to a public meeting in the city library.

Les's subject was the Chartists, the 19th-century political movement which derived its name from the People's Charter, the document that set out their basic demands. The Chartists were "probably the most radical movement in Britain in the 19th century," said Les. "They wanted to change the way politics operated."

Their movement emerged in response to the harsh conditions endured by working people in the Industrial Revolution, and the lack of Parliamentary representation for all except the wealthy. Anti-union policies such as the arrest and transportation of the Tolpuddle Martyrs heightened workers' sense of injustice. Their first People's Charter was launched in 1839, in the hope of persuading politicians of the need for electoral reform by force of argument.



The Charter set out six points of political reform:

- 1 - universal male suffrage (Originally the Chartists called for votes for women as well, but this was rejected by their own members as going too far)
- 2 - a secret ballot
- 3 - annual Parliaments
- 4 - equal-sized electoral districts
- 5 - wages for MPs
- 6 - abolition of the property qualification for MPs (which meant that only those owning property of a certain minimum value could be elected to Parliament)



Between 1838 and 1858 the Chartists delivered these demands to Parliament in three giant petitions, totaling millions of signatures. Each one was rejected. The movement failed in its day, said Les, because it was confused in its aims. “The Chartists took on too much too soon.” They were also bitterly divided internally—for example, over the use of physical force to resist repression.

And yet, although they have been widely regarded as a failed movement, the Chartists “were really important in developing the voice of working class people. They put ideas out there—and eventually they succeeded.” By 1918 every one of the points in their original Charter had been adopted by Britain’s parliamentary system, apart from no. 3.

In this country, Les noted, those same political principles were adopted from a much earlier date, and the Chartists who migrated here may have had some influence on this more progressive political tradition. The leading British socialist HM Hyndman has said that during the 1850s Chartists and other radicals gave up the “apparently hopeless struggle against class inequality and class greed at home to seek a wider field in new countries”, including this one.

George Binns, an executive member of the national Chartist Association who served six months in prison for propagating his beliefs, features elsewhere in this issue. He may have been the highest-profile Chartist to migrate to New Zealand, but he was far from the only one.

William Vincent of Hull, Yorkshire, was the brother of a well-known Chartist journalist and lecturer. He arrived in Wellington in 1840 and worked as a printer. In 1845 he and four colleagues founded the *Wellington Independent*, which became the town’s main newspaper. From 1848 Vincent was active in the movement for representative government, and two years later the *Sydney Herald* was reporting that, “The settlers of Port Nicholson appear to be thoroughly inoculated with the principles of Ultra-Chartism.”

A few years later Charles Rae, a painter who had been active in Chartist agitation in London, arrived in Christchurch, “to assist in the founding of a young nation”. He did so mainly by helping to form local Literary Institutes (the forerunner of public libraries). Rae also became president of the Christchurch Knights of Labour and branch secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, the largest railway workers’ union.

The importance of making books and other educational material available to working people was clearly a primary concern for Chartist immigrants. Robert Carpenter, a bookbinder, began selling books in Wellington’s Molesworth Street in the 1850s and, with his long beard and outspoken opinions, eventually became a famous local identity.

One of the most mysterious and intriguing Chartists to make their mark in New Zealand was William Griffin, who arrived in Auckland about 1843. He had previously worked as Manchester correspondent for one of Britain’s leading Chartist newspapers, the *Northern Star*. He suddenly acquired national prominence by giving evidence in court against his Chartist comrades, who received heavy prison sentences. Griffin then disappeared from view, and was apparently relocated to New Zealand by the British government.



TOP: CHARLES RAE.
1940 CENTENARY OF PROCLAMATION OF BRITISH
SOVEREIGNTY STAMP ISSUE, ALEXANDER TUNRBULL
LIBRARY

ABOVE: ROBERT CARPENTER.
1/2-091021; F, ALEXANDER TUNRBULL LIBRARY

By 1851 he seems to have gained the confidence to launch a local newspaper, the fortnightly *Auckland Independent and Operatives' Journal*. This defended trade unions and reported attempts to establish a co-operative bakery to counteract a steep rise in the price of bread. An editorial in June 1851 proclaimed, "Working men, we look upon you as the real prop, the real strength, the enrichers and defenders of the country in whatever capacity you may be placed... Labour is the source of all wealth."

Unlike other Chartists such as Binns, Griffin was a forthright supporter of reconciliation in both race and class. His newspaper included Maori poetry in translation, and testified that Maori "have ever been, with some exceptions, our best friends".

A lack of advertising revenue forced Griffin to close the paper in November 1851. He then wrote for other publications including the *Auckland Examiner* whose editor, Charles Southwell, was a veteran socialist, freethinker and Chartist lecturer.

Griffin helped to form the Auckland Building Operatives Society, one of the earliest New Zealand unions, and agitated for shorter working hours, and workingmen's representation in the Auckland Provincial Council. In 1857 he argued that New Zealand's other major settlements had legislated for an eight-hour working day, and that Auckland should do the same. He overcame strong opposition to this move and in September 1857 new working hours of 8am to 5pm, with an hour off for lunch, came into force in Auckland.

This one-time traitor to Chartism, sent abroad to protect him from retaliation from his own comrades, ultimately reinvented himself to end his days as a venerated pioneer of New Zealand's embryonic labour movement.

Footnote: John Maynard advises that the Tasmania Grass Roots Trade Union Choir are thinking of making a visit to NZ in 2014 or 2015—perhaps bringing the Tolpuddle folk opera.

REFERENCES

Each of the Chartist migrants named above has an entry in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, from which their quotes is taken. Further information on William Griffin is taken from: 'Mercenary Scribblers and Polluted Quills': the Chartist press in Australia and New Zealand' by PA Pickering in *Papers for the People—a study of the Chartist press*, ed. J. Allen and OR. Ashton, Merlin Press, 2005

Travelling with labour history - A north-eastern journey

By Peter Clayworth



BIRTHPLACE OF WILLIAM FOX IN WESTOE
SOUTH SHIELDS. NOW THE WILLIAM
FOX HOTEL.



The North East of England is an area with an extremely rich labour history. It was one of the birthplaces of both industrial capitalism and the trade union movement. My partner Janis is a native of South Shields, a town on the southern mouth of the river Tyne. We have made a number of journeys there to visit her family. Our last visit, over New Year 2011-2012, reinforced for me the way that investigating labour history can enhance the experience of a place and its people. In the process I discovered some interesting connections between Tyneside and New Zealand, including with my own hometown of Nelson.

The Victorian era's Winston Peters

Westoe, a suburb of Janis' hometown of South Shields, was the birthplace of William Fox (1812-1893). Fox was a New Zealand Company agent, journalist, artist, explorer, politician and New Zealand's premier on four different occasions. He was born into a comfortably off middle class family, at a time when Westoe was still a leafy rural village. In 1842, six weeks after their marriage, Fox and his wife Sarah came out to New Zealand. Fox, a trained lawyer, did a little legal work but was more keen on working as a journalist and editor, and developed a lifelong skill for making and keeping enemies. A big fan of the Wakefields and their colonisation schemes, he became the New Zealand Company agent in Nelson after the untimely demise of Arthur Wakefield at Wairau in June 1843.

Fox arrived in Nelson into the middle of one of our earliest labour disputes. Nelson's labourers, 'mechanics' and journeymen carpenters had organised themselves to protect their wages and conditions. With much of Nelson's land owned by absentee investors and little capital invested in the new colony, the landless labourers were soon short of work. The Company was reluctantly forced to provide them with relief work. There were a series of angry protests

over this situation, including one in which a works supervisor was ducked in a pond. Fox successfully resolved the dispute by offering the labourers piecework on the roads and small plots of land to cultivate. At the same time he unsuccessfully lobbied the cash-strapped Governor FitzRoy for a contingent of soldiers, not just to protect Nelson from potential Maori attack, but also to put down any possible labour uprising.

Fox was agent in Nelson until 1848. During this time he made a number of exploratory expeditions, including three weeks in the Buller Gorge with Charles Heaphy, Thomas Brunner and the Maori guide Kehu. He went on to a career in politics, continuing to court controversy and make enemies. He seems to have been the Victorian era's Winston Peters, always happiest in opposition. Fox opposed the 1860 war in the Waitara, but perhaps more out of reaction against a government he despised than due to any support for Maori. He was premier in the mid-1860s when large areas of Maori land were confiscated. In his later years Fox campaigned for prohibition, for which he was a lifelong advocate, as well as for state education and votes for women.

The political prisoner

I discovered a further connection between Nelson and the North East when I travelled down to Sunderland, the city less than ten kilometres south of South Shields. Sunderland was, until the Thatcher era, a major coalmining and shipbuilding town. It still retains a number of major industries, including the Nissan car factory. The Sunderland museum has some fine exhibitions on the life and work of the miners and shipbuilders, including their union organisations and the miners' strike of the early 1980s. Much of the emphasis is on the way of life created around particular industries and unions, echoes of which remain even after the industries have gone. Sunderland also has a fascinating museum of glass work, which looks not only at the beautiful work created through the centuries, but at the workers who created it.

Sunderland was a major centre of the Chartist agitation around the Great Charter of 1838, which called for such utopian demands as universal male suffrage, the secret ballot and the abolition of the rule that only land owners could stand for Parliament. George Binns (1815-1847) was an activist in Sunderland's largely working class Chartist movement. He was from a Quaker family and, in 1837, after his parents' deaths, took over his father's draper's shop. Binns and his friend James Williams became leaders in the local Chartist movement. They set up a mechanics' institute (an early form of public library), along with a bookshop and newsagent that doubled as a meeting place for local radicals. Binns gained a reputation as an outstanding orator on Chartist ideals and wrote poetry based on his beliefs. At a time when Chartist demonstrations were often broken up violently by the authorities, Binns and Williams advocated 'moral force Chartism', emphasising change through non-violent means.

The British authorities regarded all Chartists as a threat and in 1840 Binns and Williams were tried and convicted for participating in illegal meetings and publishing a seditious handbill. Both were sentenced to six months' imprisonment in Durham Gaol. Once released in 1841, Binns continued with agitation, but also tried to maintain his drapery business. He was not a successful businessman, ending up in debtors' prison. Freed in 1842, he decided to start a new life and set sail for the New Zealand Company settlement of Nelson in August of that year.

In Nelson Binns did not become involved in incidents such as the labourers' dispute. He appears to have seen New Zealand as a land of opportunity where the type of actions he had taken in England were unnecessary. Binns stated his position in a letter to the *Nelson Examiner*, in answer to accusations that he was a 'Chartist ringleader.' He wrote that he had nothing to do with Chartism in New Zealand where settlers were 'united ... by a community of interest' and 'where there is no grievance to redress and no enemy to our weal.' While trying to live a life of 'peace and good-will' in Nelson, Binns declared he had not abandoned his principles: 'When I came to New Zealand it was after I had suffered imprisonment, sacrificed my business, and lost the goodwill of relations in an effort to free my country.'¹

The only record of Binns lobbying the New Zealand government was as one of the local signatories to letters and petitions condemning the 1843 'massacre' at Wairau and the governor's failure to take action against Maori. Like many British radicals he appears to have seen Maori control of lands as a similar block to progress as that presented by the aristocracy in England. Both Maori and aristocracy were seen as backward groups, preventing the development of land by working people who would make better use of it. It appears that Binns continued to hold his Chartist ideals, but did not see fit to extend these ideals to New Zealand's indigenous people.

Binns was involved in an unsuccessful shore whaling venture in the Nelson area and then worked at a bakery. He suffered for years from tuberculosis, dying an early death in April 1837, at age 31. His brief time in New Zealand provides us with a link with the heady days of Chartist actions in Britain. It is ironic, given George Binns' own lack of business success, that the family business went on to become Binns' Department Store, which was a landmark in Sunderland until its closure in 1993.



LEFT: THE STATUE OF JOHN SIMPSON KIRKPATRICK IN OCEAN ROAD SOUTH SHIELDS.

RIGHT: 2420 KIRKPATRICK'S PUB/NIGHTCLUB, WITH THE STATUE OF SIMPSON IN FRONT. FORMERLY THE SOUTH SHIELDS SCHOOL.



The socialist with a donkey

A further antipodean connection can be seen in Ocean Road, the main street of South Shields. Like most New Zealanders and Australians, I was brought up with the story of Simpson and his donkey, repeated every Anzac Day. Simpson, real name John Simpson Kirkpatrick, was famous for his role in

rescuing wounded soldiers at Gallipoli. The story had a particular resonance with the Biblical element of the saviour with the humble donkey, with the added note of sacrifice, as Simpson was killed in action on 19 May 1915. Walking along Ocean Road, I was surprised to come across a large statue of 'Simpson' and his donkey in the main thoroughfare. I learned that John Simpson Kirkpatrick (1892-1915), the sum of all Anzac virtues, was in fact a Geordie. He was born in Tyne Dock, a tough working-class neighbourhood of South Shields. Young Jack, as he was known, is said to have always had a love of animals. He was particularly fond of the horse he drove in his childhood job on the milk rounds. He also loved the donkeys that people rode at the South Shields seaside.

In 1909 the 17-year-old Jack went to sea. He jumped ship at Newcastle, New South Wales, in 1910, and worked as an itinerant miner, farm labourer and sailor. Although he liked a drink and the occasional scrap, Jack always sent about a quarter of his pay home to his widowed mother in South Shields. By the time war came in 1914, he was thinking of a return trip to England—apparently a motivating factor in his enlistment. For reasons that remain mysterious, he enlisted under the name John Simpson. Instead of a direct trip home, Jack ended up at Anzac Cove, where his exploits and early death brought him lasting fame.



There are a number of interesting twists to the Man with the Donkey story. A New Zealand connection is provided through one of the most famous images of 'Simpson', the painting 'The Man with the Donkey' by New Zealand artist Horace Millichamp Moore-Jones. The image is, in fact, of Richard 'Dick' Henderson, a New Zealand medic who took on the job of rescuing wounded soldiers after Simpson's death. Moore-Jones based his painting on a photo of Henderson, which he assumed was a photo of Simpson.

'The Man with the Donkey' was adopted by militarists as a great image of empire patriotism, with Simpson's posthumous fame being used to promote the pro-conscription campaign in Australia. The use of John Simpson Kirkpatrick as an image of Australian loyalty to empire was deeply ironic. Not only was Jack a recent Geordie immigrant to Australia, he was also a staunch socialist. Having grown up working-class in a depressed industrial area, Jack referred to England as 'that louse bound country'. He wrote home to his mother, 'what they want in England is a good revolution that will clear some of these Millionaires and lords and Dukes out of it'.² Had he lived, Jack would no doubt have been happy to know that the majority of Australian voters rejected conscription twice over in the referendums of 1916 and 1917. Yet, for reasons of his own, this staunch socialist joined the Australian Imperial Force and ended up another casualty for Empire and capitalism on the shores of Gallipoli.

The North East of England and the neighbouring areas of Scotland contain many more treasures for the labour historian. I hope to bring readers a few more of these in a later article or two.

Peter Clayworth is a Wellington historian and writer.

REFERENCES

1. *Nelson Examiner*, 25 March 1843 p. 217
2. Letters from John Simpson Kirkpatrick to his mother, quoted in Peter Cochrane, *Simpson and the donkey: the making of a legend*. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1992, pp. 18-19.

New Zealand medical volunteers in the Spanish Civil War - some new evidence

By Mark Derby

In 2009 the book *Kiwi Compañeros: New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War* was published, based on a 2006 LHP seminar. Since then the book has been published in a Spanish translation, the screen rights have been optioned, and a mass of new research material has offered further information on the role of New Zealand and New Zealanders in the calamitous 1936-39 conflict.

Much new material was received from people hoping to establish that a person not mentioned in *Kiwi Compañeros* had nevertheless taken part in the civil war. Many of these claims did not stand up to analysis. The best-known case concerned the father of the present prime minister who, his family alleged, had fought in Spain for the British Battalion of the International Brigades. Nothing could be found to support this claim, and some documentary evidence appears to disprove it.

However, some of the research that has come to light since the publication of *Kiwi Compañeros* does add materially to our understanding of New Zealand's part in the civil war, and is summarized here.



DR GLADYS MONTGOMERY, c.1919. AUCKLAND MUSEUM

Dr Gladys Montgomery

Kiwi Compañeros gives just three paragraphs of information on Dr Montgomery and states "Very little is known about this remarkably public-spirited woman". Information subsequently received from her descendants, and from the records of organisations she belonged to, has added significantly to this picture.

Gladys Montgomery's Scottish-born father managed hotels in mining districts around Coromandel and Waikato, and she was born in Huntly in 1891. She had no fewer than eight sisters and seven brothers, and was among the youngest of this enormous family.

After early education in Auckland she travelled to Britain in 1909 to study medicine and graduated from Glasgow University in 1914. With the outbreak of war she was appointed to the Royal Army Medical Corps as a surgeon attached to the New Zealand contingent. She worked briefly as medical officer at the 3rd Scottish General Hospital, Glasgow, before returning to New Zealand as medical officer on a troopship in 1918.

She then practised as a GP in Dunedin and Auckland, and gained a reputation for her willingness to give her time and professional expertise to many voluntary organizations. In 1920 she became a foundation member of the Auckland branch of the Federation of University Women, and was elected its president in 1931.

That year she returned to Britain to obtain a Diploma of Public Health, a qualification not then available in New Zealand. The *Auckland Star* reported in August 1931 that Dr Montgomery "is now in Glasgow doing post-graduate work at the Sick Children's Hospital". The following March the *Evening Post* announced her return to Auckland, and related her impressions of social conditions in the UK. "In Glasgow malnutrition and nutritional diseases were particularly prevalent... the Clyde shipbuilding yards had closed down, and the poverty was terrible. This no doubt accentuated the disease among children, but she was disappointed that more advance had not been made there to relieve the trouble among the babies, and a greater advance shown in dietetics. In London hospitals were feeling the 'pinch of the time' very much, as they were dependent on voluntary contributions. Such appeals as 'Do without some of your cigarettes and give to the hospital' were frequently to be seen—yet strange to say, in Scotland, with all its unemployment and distress, the hospitals did not seem to suffer to anything like the extent they did in England. People gave liberally, and the result was splendid equipment in many of them. New Zealand nurses usually did very well in the Old Country, as their training was accounted as being particularly good."

By September 1936, when Spain was engulfed in the turmoil following a military revolt against its elected Republican government, Dr Montgomery returned to the UK, apparently to make a tour of European countries with her sister Vivienne, a nurse. She changed her plans and in March 1937 offered her services to a British ambulance unit affiliated to the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief.

She arrived at Almeria in southern Spain soon after 15,000 refugees had poured into the city from the Malaga district. They were fleeing from Franco's advancing forces, which bombed them from the air and shelled them from the sea during the 200-mile journey along the coast. "On hearing of the need, the [ambulance] unit established a hospital at once, and later a second one where many serious cases were nursed by excellent voluntary nurses from England. The children were suffering greatly from inanition, having been fed chiefly on half-boiled rice, and, of course, in their weakened condition, they became susceptible to pneumonia, broncho-pneumonia, diarrhoea, multiple abscesses, and so on.

The unit dispenses milk to the refugees, who crowd round every morning in their thin black dresses, looking for all the world like starved crows.”



A TRAINEE NURSE WITH STARVING SPANISH WAR ORPHANS, MURCIA, 1937. MORRIS FAMILY COLLECTION.

She also visited a hospital in the southern city of Murcia, set up to treat wounded troops, including International Brigaders. “‘How do you come to be here?’ I would ask one. ‘Oh,’ he would reply in broad Scots, ‘I had political principles; I made a study of economics.’ Occasionally I would encounter a disillusioned adventurer, but the majority, though wounded, were still tremendously enthusiastic in the crusade against Fascism...”

“Some of the International Brigade soldiers complained that the French and Belgians were not ‘good comrades,’ so I asked why they did not have separate wards for English-speaking soldiers. They told me that would not do, as it would destroy the international aspect of the brigade.”

In June 1939 Dr Montgomery left Spain for London, so her civil war service spanned just three months. She then worked at Hammersmith Hospital and later as superintendent of the national Epileptic Colony at Lingfield, Surrey, where she is said to have “introduced new and progressive ideas.”

She also worked at Stobhill General Hospital in her old university town of Glasgow. A former archivist to the Greater Glasgow Hospital Board advises that, “Stobhill was one of three poor law hospitals established in the city in the early 1900s... Appointments there carried much less kudos than in the voluntary hospitals such as the Royal, Western or Victoria Infirmaries.”

Dr Montgomery spent the duration of World War Two as public health officer in the industrial city of Rochdale, Lancashire, and finally as officer of health (a post within the London County Council) in the west London suburb of Ealing, where she remained for 15 years.

Her medical career ended when she was deprived of speech by a sudden illness. She was then nursed by her sister Vivienne, who brought her back to Auckland in 1965, where she died four years later.

Nurse Dorothy Morris

Kiwi Compañeros described nurse Dorothy Morris as “slim, brown-haired and speaking good Spanish”, and recorded her several years of dedicated service in Spain from February 1937. Subsequently, the Morris family and institutional archives have revealed a body of further information on this remarkable woman.

Originally from Cromwell in Central Otago, Dorothy Morris later lived in Christchurch, where her father was Lyttelton’s harbourmaster and where she trained as a nurse at Christchurch Hospital. In 1934 she left to nurse in London and in late 1936, as with Dr Montgomery, she was recruited by an ambulance brigade based at Oxford University.

She administered the same children’s hospital at Almeria described above by Dr Montgomery and later served as principal nurse to the 13th International Brigade. After a break in the United Kingdom, she was asked by the Quakers to return to Spain in April 1938 to run the Hospital Inglese di Niños (English Children’s Hospital) at Murcia.



ABOVE: MURCIA, 1939.
 ABOVE RIGHT: THE ENGLISH
 CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL IN MURCIA.
 RIGHT: SOME CHEERFUL YOUNG PATIENTS
 OF THE HOSPITAL MORRIS FAMILY COLLECTION.



Francesca Wilson, a British relief worker, described meeting her New Zealand counterpart in her 1944 memoir, *In the Margins of Chaos*. “Dorothy was tall and good-looking. She had the open, unselfconscious manner, the spontaneity and disregard of class distinction that that made one realise at once that she had not been born in England... the hospital, full as it was, looked like a model—the marble floors scrubbed, the children neat and clean, with white bows in their hair, the convalescents in the garden, or having lessons with a Spanish teacher”.

Dorothy told Wilson of her difficulties at persuading senior medical staff at the hospital to adopt her methods of treatment. “Murcia is full of Fifth Columnists, who are longing for Franco’s entry. [Senior doctor] Don Alfonso’s assistant is probably the head of their Phalange—he has said some odd things to me sometimes. Food has been very difficult. The International Brigade, who used to help, disappeared at twenty-four hours’ notice in April—they got up

to Barcelona just before the road was cut, except for a few sick and wounded. I'll never forget that departure. It was tragic."



DOROTHY MORRIS WITH A PATIENT OF HER MURCIA HOSPITAL, C. JULY 1938. AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE ARCHIVES.

Dorothy Morris worked at Murcia for 18 months, until the fall of the Republic made it impossible for her to remain in Spain. She was then employed by the International Commission for the Assistance of Spanish Child Refugees and placed in charge of relief services in Spanish concentration camps in the Pyrenees area of southern France, where she remained after the German occupation. Once again, Francesca Wilson encountered her in the squalid and vastly overcrowded refugee camps. "She was turning her dynamic energies on to helping the individuals who came to her for advice, and to improving the camps. She had discovered bookshops in Paris which specialised in works in Spanish and, with the help of a colleague, arranged for circulating libraries of thousands of volumes for Argeles and the other camps. Adult classes in complicated technical, as well as more elementary, subjects were kept going full blast; workshops for men and women and schools for children were equipped and organised, milk and foods supplied to about four thousand infants, and drugs and equipment to emergency hospitals."

The Christchurch nurse returned to London shortly before the outbreak of war. In a letter to her family in winter 1941, she said how she missed the vividness and clarity of her life in Spain in the final days of the Republic.

"Nothing is now being done at all in Spain, where things are frightful, owing to the hostile attitude of the Fascist regime, which has behaved with even more beastliness than even we feared.

"I was given the opportunity of carrying on with them last September. However I thought it best not to become a 'professional' refugee, and took up other work. By various ways & means I have now one of the most sought after jobs for women that are to be had in wartime England.

"I am the Personnel and Welfare Supervisor in a large factory on War production. My first idea was that women would be wanted in Industry in a big way; so in August I took a 2 months Engineering course... lots of Ladys & Honourables took it & had their photos in the Tatler etc leering at the lathes, and smirking at their handiwork, (often largely the handiwork of the charming and patient instructors)...

"The first few weeks of the Blitz were real Front Line stuff. It was not possible to sleep upstairs, with major battles going on just above the chimney pots, and the house rocking about occasionally when something landed near by. I had a bed in the basement too, and the right to a bunk in a sort of bear's den in the garden. Early to bed in the basement with ear plugs and a book, was my lot for about 2 months...

"My factory is a large one of a group, I have to watch over about 1600 people's comfort & wellbeing during their working hours. I find my experience in Spain of enormous help. Identical problems arise every day. I have also a clinic with 2 nurses always busy, so my nursing has come in handy again, tho' it is a long time since I have done any, and I am distinctly rusty.

"I get impatient with English slowness often—so stupid they seem in comparison

with Spaniards; and then of course this war is not the burning personal affair that the Spanish War was—that was the most glorious Crusade with no doubt about it for most of us, where I encountered some of the finest people I feel sure, in the world. (Some of the craziest as well.) This affair is a loathsome bore that has to be endured to the finish, which I fear will probably be a horrid sticky one. It is good to be doing something definite & worthwhile, tho', and I'm quite content...

“Life is much more normal than you would think possible, under the circumstances. I think it's too darn normal. There should, for instance, be far stricter rationing than there is—the waste and muddling that goes on is truly [sic] appalling. In Spain I saw much more really intelligent planning, with vision and imagination. Here they are trying to bring themselves to State planning in a big way—but oh HOW it hurts, & what messes they make. The struggle behind the lines at this moment is this, put simply—Who, when the war is ended, shall own the ‘assets’ of the Empire?—the State, meaning I suppose everybody in one way or another or a select small body of ‘Big’ industrialists controlling a few huge combines to whom & which the rest of us shall be ant-slaves. Here in England one can watch that fight going on every day, & sometimes it is very, very interesting.”



DOROTHY MORRIS (SECOND FROM LEFT) WITH HER FAMILY IN CHRISTCHURCH, c.1970.

After the war, Nurse Morris ran her own hospital in London, employing a number of New Zealand-trained nurses. After her retirement she returned to Christchurch in 1983, and died in 1998.

Dorothy's god-daughter, Jane Taylor, knew her in her last years in Christchurch. “She came back here to be closer to her family. She always lived on her own—she was fiercely independent. I'd describe her politics as pretty leftist—she was very much a humanitarian.”

Her nephew, Taranaki artist Roger Morris, adds “We understand she skirmished on the fringes of the Bloomsbury set but never married, although we do have stories of a lover in Spain. A doctor, who was killed in the civil war... She was a fantastic woman. Tall. Fierce. She went to Spain on her own volition, which says much for her intuition and recognition of the forces at work in that country. I am very proud of her.”

Mark Derby edited and co-wrote Kiwi Compañeros: New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War. He is now editing Dorothy Morris's letters for publication, with the co-operation of her family.

Bill Jordan - a distant champion for Spanish democracy

By David Jorge



ABOVE: 102ND COUNCIL SESSION OF LEAGUE OF NATIONS, 1936, DURING BILL JORDAN'S PRESIDENCY.
ABOVE RIGHT: BILL JORDAN.
LEAGUE OF NATIONS PHOTO ARCHIVE

Geographical antipodes do not mean political, ideological or ethical antipodes. New Zealand had many important things to say in the main international forum of the 30s, the League of Nations. Less than a year after the election of its first Labour government, New Zealand stood almost alone on the world stage in its defence of the Spanish Republic. It did so not on grounds of political ideology, but rather of international law and ethics, since the government of the Republic represented the legitimate authority in Spanish democracy, and those opposing it were antidemocratic rebels backed by the despotic powers of Germany and Italy.

New Zealand's defence of Spanish democracy was far from token, particularly considering the close ties that bound Wellington to London under New Zealand's status as a British Dominion. The active support for the Republic proclaimed at the League of Nations by its first New Zealand delegate, and High Commissioner in London, William (Bill) Jordan, caused intense irritation in some spheres of the Foreign Office. Jordan's foreign policy directives marked a sharp difference not only from the stance of his predecessors in office, but also from the rest of the British Commonwealth.¹ Neither Australia nor Canada maintained an independent position on Spain, while South Africa was firmly independent only in relation to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia.

The Michael Savage-led Labour government's support for the Republic also faced internal opposition, since majority opinion in New Zealand argued for following in the footsteps of Britain and France (that is, to support non-intervention in Spain), and even prompted a divergence of views between Jordan and various senior colleagues, including future Secretary for Foreign Affairs Alister McIntosh.² The clear stance taken by the government headed by the charismatic Michael Joseph Savage was not an easy position to implement. Adopting it had, therefore, much greater merit than has generally been acknowledged to date.

Savage intrinsically linked both social security and national security. The country's safety was essential in order to protect the welfare state being created by his government's political course. In addition, Savage truly feared the prospect of war, and the only global vehicle for resisting international aggression was the League of Nations. An opportunity for the League to demonstrate its peace-keeping powers was presented in early 1935 on the occasion of Italy's attack on Abyssinia. New Zealand demanded immediate and strict sanctions against Rome. When the then-High Commissioner in London, Sir James Parr, showed reluctance to challenge the British government by adopting a different stance on sanctions, Savage abruptly ordered him to implement Labour's policy.

Soon afterwards, Parr was replaced in his position by Jordan, the British-born former MP for Onehunga who had known Savage when both had been founding members of the Labour Party. Savage maintained that Great Britain had "taken the lead in undermining the League of Nations at all times when it has been weakened." For a small and remote country like New Zealand, collective security was essential.³

On July 16 1935, as a military coup was unfolding in Spain, the government of New Zealand presented a Reform Memorandum, also known as the Twenty-One Points, to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Joseph Avenol, in Geneva. In essence, the memorandum argued that the League's problems lay not with its Covenant, but rather with the lack of will on the part of member states to make it work. The only way to strengthen international security in situations such as the current crisis in Abyssinia was through the automatic imposition of economic sanctions accompanied by a total boycott of the aggressor, with the use of force as the last resort.⁴

Britain also prepared its own memorandum, alleging that economic sanctions would not be effective.⁵ This meant, in practice, the abandonment of collective security by Britain, and its example was followed by other member states, with the sole exception of the Soviet Union, which found itself isolated in upholding the collective security for which it had joined the League in 1934.

Consistent with his government's clearly stated principles, Savage opposed the recognition that London granted to the Italian conquest of Abyssinia in the (northern) summer of 1937, and he telegraphed the British government dissociating his country from the message sent to the Italian authorities.⁶ Jordan advised his chief that he regretted the lack of sympathy shown by the League to the embattled Spanish government, adding "you and I are not so much interested in the policy of the [Spanish] Government as in the fact that it was elected, and, further, that it is a Member State of the League of Nations."⁷

The first open difference between London and Wellington over Spain had occurred some months earlier, in October 1936, when the fall of Madrid at the hands of rebel troops seemed imminent and inevitable. The British government's main objective was to retain its economic and geostrategic interests in Spanish territory regardless of the regime in the power, so it raised the possibility of giving *de facto* recognition to the rebel forces led by General Franco. New Zealand opposed granting recognition of any kind, since that would undermine the legitimate government of Spain.⁸

At a subsequent meeting of the League of Nations Council, Jordan requested

a full investigation into the causes of the coup, the way the country had developed since the last general election, the political principles of both rebels and loyalists; everything necessary to determine whether the uprising was justified. He added that, in the event that there were any justifications for the revolt and the intervention by Italy and Germany, the rebel leaders should go to Geneva to plead their grievances and offer explanations. “The Council, the public, the world will listen. The Council would endeavour immediately to solve the issue in the interest of humanity and the system of government.”

Until the exact origins of the war became clear, Jordan believed, the Council could not take any position on the issue. It seems clear that he himself did not believe the proclamations of the insurgents, who argued that the coup and revolt were justified on the grounds that they represented the true will of the Spanish people. Jordan probably felt that General Franco would not send any representative to Geneva, given his contempt both for the League of Nations in particular and for the rule of law in general.⁹ Regardless, this request by New Zealand’s representative for an investigation into the origins of the conflict was ignored.

In March 1937 London announced its intention to send a representative to the Francoist side, with a brief focused purely on commercial interests. The New Zealand government responded that it was “strongly and unalterably opposed” to any kind of action that could be interpreted as recognising any administration other than the government constituted according to law. It did not, however, specifically condemn the non-intervention policy and avoided taking any direct action in relation to Spain. Paradoxically some British citizens asked the Savage-led government to further its commitment to the Spanish Republic, since they began to see New Zealand as the best candidate to lead the international campaign in support of the Republican cause.¹⁰

London, however, did not accord any importance to the maverick attitude displayed by its distant Dominion, which was therefore not reflected in the voting at Geneva.¹¹ New Zealand’s case emerged at the meeting of the Council of the League of Nations in May 1937, when Jordan gave a speech proclaiming that the situation in Spain demanded more from Geneva than mere acceptance of a policy of (imperfectly implemented) non-intervention. He proposed the establishment of a special committee within the Council devoted to initiating appropriate actions to bring the Spanish conflict to an end.¹²

Jordan’s proposal sought to integrate the work of the Non-Intervention Committee within a broader effort led by the League of Nations. It proposed, in short, a provisional mandate in Spain under the auspices of the League, or an international supervision under its sponsorship, which would allow the Spanish people to freely choose the form of government they deemed appropriate, without any external limiting conditions.¹³ This form of mandate was stipulated in Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, and originally conceived as a form of supervision by a colonial power of a new state initially unable to govern unaided.

Jordan’s proposal would not be easy to implement in the prevailing circumstances, as neither of the opposing forces would accept such an option at that stage of the war, but it at least provided a legitimating (and also humanitarian) action by the League of Nations. Jordan reiterated the mandate proposal at the

following Council meeting in September 1937, insisting that Spain should be able to decide its own future, to the extent of holding new elections under League supervision after the mandate period.¹⁴

However, New Zealand's representative was not supported in his personal and well-intentioned plans, from which his own government discreetly distanced itself after appreciating the general lack of acceptance of the mandate proposal.¹⁵ Nobody else in Geneva had the will to involve the already extremely weakened League in what was considered a naïve and dangerous adventure, and hoped that the Spanish question would be resolved exclusively within the scope of the Non-Intervention Committee. That was the pernicious idea that prevailed near Lake Léman throughout the course of the whole war in Spain.

Despite the foregoing, Jordan's position before the Council had some international impact. Articles in the British press reported that New Zealand's delegate was unable to progress his proposal due to pressure from Britain's foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, who directed Jordan to amend his speech. Jordan himself publicly denied that the Foreign Office had been responsible for revising his words, although he acknowledged that Eden had spoken to him about the speech he was about to deliver. In saying this, Jordan may have been protecting Eden and also maintaining his own dignity and independent image. Yet according to some stunned witnesses, Eden took advantage of the delay while his own speech was translated into French to take the floor beside the next scheduled speaker, Jordan, bent over his shoulder and spent about ten minutes making marks in blue pencil on his speech notes.¹⁶ A member of New Zealand's delegation who was then seated behind Jordan, W. B. Sutch, corroborated this account.¹⁷ Historian Susan Skudder has since found a preliminary draft of Jordan's speech, noting incompatibility between the League Covenant and the non-intervention pact, and describing the Spanish conflict as a fascist war of aggression.¹⁸ This so-called 'blue-pencil incident' appears to be a humiliating violation of the foreign policy that New Zealand was developing, for the first time in its history, in an independent political and ideological direction.

London was evidently exasperated by New Zealand's rebellious attitude at Geneva, to the extent that in May 1938, when Jordan held the League's rotating presidency, the head of Britain's Foreign Office, Lord Halifax, said that if that month's Council followed the standard pattern, Jordan's attitude "could be an embarrassment." Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, was sent to Geneva specifically to restrain New Zealand's delegate.¹⁹ MacDonald noted, however, that Jordan's personal attitude was always very friendly, and attributed the diplomatic difficulties to one of his advisors.²⁰ MacDonald even told Jordan that he would like to congratulate him on his stance before the League, but that the international situation was too delicate to permit this, especially as Britain's rearmament programme was not yet complete. The British government agreed that Halifax and MacDonald would prepare a message for Savage, calling his attention to the problems that could arise out of the Presidency of New Zealand's representative in Geneva unless he changed his attitude.²¹

A particularly uncomfortable situation was presented to Jordan in May 1938. The head of the Spanish delegation, Julio Álvarez del Vayo, proposed a resolution proclaiming an end to the policy of non-intervention, given its evident ineffectiveness. Jordan, with no time to consult with his government before

casting a vote, was placed in a dilemma. Meanwhile the Soviet representative, Maxim Litvinov, launched into a speech confirming full commitment to the cause of the Republican government.²² Jordan chose to abstain from voting, as did eight other countries, and only the Soviet Union and Spain itself voted to accept the Álvarez del Vayo resolution. “These abstentions are hardly proof of the success of the policy of non-intervention”, reported New Zealand’s delegate.²³

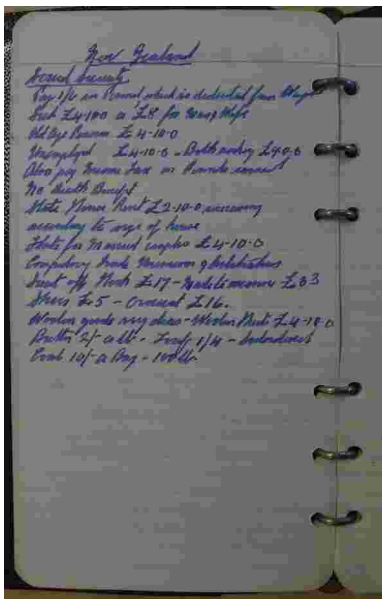
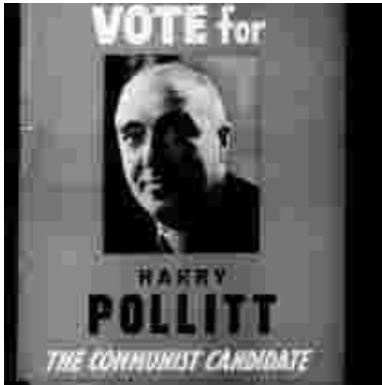
New Zealand’s government delegated to Jordan the position to take in Geneva in regard to the Spanish conflict,²⁴ and his defence of the Republic was only matched by the Soviet Union and Mexico, the latter’s commitment being unparalleled. Mexico and New Zealand were the only countries prepared to openly criticize the restrictive action of the Non-Intervention Committee in regard to the role of the League of Nations. In 1939, following the conclusion of the struggle in Spain, New Zealand declined to recognize General Franco’s regime.²⁵ In doing so, its only supporters were the same countries that showed their firmness at the League of Nations during the course of the war itself—Mexico and the Soviet Union. The position of these latter countries towards the defence of the Spanish Republic is well recognised internationally—that of New Zealand, very much less so.

David Jorge is a Spanish historian and the convenor of H-Spain, an online forum promoting critical discussion of the history and culture of contemporary Spain.

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Spooks spy on citizens - a half-century ago



TOP: HARRY POLLITT.
ABOVE: A PAGE FROM HARRY POLLITT'S NZ NOTENOOK, RECORDING PRICES OF EVERYDAY ITEMS. RUSSELL CAMPBELL.

The hapless sleuths of the Government Communications Security Bureau are, it's safe to assume, squirming with discomfort as their interdicted and dazzlingly incompetent activities are exposed daily in the press.

In a reminder of how little our local intelligence community has done to deserve that term, LHP committee member and former Victoria University academic Russell Campbell has dug out some files copied during a research trip to the United Kingdom.

These deal with the April 1960 visit to this country of Harry Pollitt, the chairman of the British Communist Party, which he joined as a foundation member in 1921. Pollitt, a voluble Lancastrian, was raised in poverty and started working at age 13, eventually qualifying as a boilermaker. He had been invited to New Zealand to speak at the national conference of the local communist party, which was then agonising over its relationship with Walter Nash's Labour government and over the alarming rise of Maoism worldwide.

The conference opened in Auckland on Easter weekend during a tropical rainstorm, but the hall was full to welcome to welcome not only Pollitt but also 'fraternal delegates' as they were called, from Australia and China. A fourth fraternal, from East Germany, had hoped to attend but was denied a visa.

Fourteen years after this historic visit John Mahon, a British writer researching a biography of Pollitt, wrote to the Socialist Unity Party of NZ (the Soviet-aligned party which had parted ideological company with the CPNZ) for recollections of this antipodean trip. George Jackson, then the national secretary of the SUP, replied that it started with a revelation.

"On the opening morning we had delegated a group of comrades to search the building. It was during their search that they discovered a transmitter in the ceiling with a microphone, behind a roll of honour of past Masters of the Friendly Society, whose building we were renting.

"On the second day a further set was discovered, but not of the same standard as the first... We publicly offered to return the equipment to the owners, provided they were prepared to identify it and claim it as their property. The only response this brought was a letter from the acting-Minister [of Broadcasting], stating that as we apparently had some property that was not ours, it should be handed over to the police... To the best of my knowledge the equipment was never claimed and I do not know what may have happened to it. I hope that some day it may appear in a historical museum. We all believe they were planted by the Security Forces."

Despite this unpromising start, Pollitt made a grand impression on the local party members, and Jackson recalled his "eloquence, content, wit and wisdom". Pollitt himself noted that "the presence of the other Fraternal had a terrific effect... Naturally the important fraternal from China [Chen Yu] stole the show." Nevertheless, the response to his own speech was "like a Lancashire audience

for me. The crowd responded alright and stood up and cheered for minutes on end.”

In Auckland Pollitt was accommodated in the non-proletarian surroundings of the Grand Hotel. At one formal dinner the hotel’s manager, “to be amiable”, passed around a box of cigars. Jackson says that “Knowing Harry liked a cigar, the word was passed around to everyone to take a couple, so a nice stock was built up for Harry.”

After this comfortable start, Pollitt’s itinerary included meetings in Dunedin, Greymouth, Christchurch and Wellington. During the trip he kept detailed notes in a ringbound notebook of the social conditions he observed, such as the amount of social security benefits, and the cost of household items such as shoes, butter and coal. Dunedin’s *Evening Star* of 20 April 1960 called Pollitt a “70-year-old dynamo, ardent in his belief that Communism is the cure-all for world unrest”.

In every town he found that locals came up to him to say, ‘Remember me?’ In the South Island many Scots and miners revealed that they had also known Willie Gallacher, the then-president of the CPGB who held the parliamentary seat of West Fife for 15 years.

Pollitt ended his brief New Zealand trip by returning to Auckland en route to Sydney. There he arranged an improbable and poignant meeting with the mother of Griff McLaurin, a mathematician who had left to study at Cambridge, where he volunteered for the Spanish Civil War soon after its outbreak, and was killed in action in Madrid in December 1936. “I remember him going out” (to Spain) wrote Pollitt, who was the CP’s general secretary at that time. He carried a bunch of flowers as he and George Jackson came to pay their respects to the aging Mrs McLaurin.

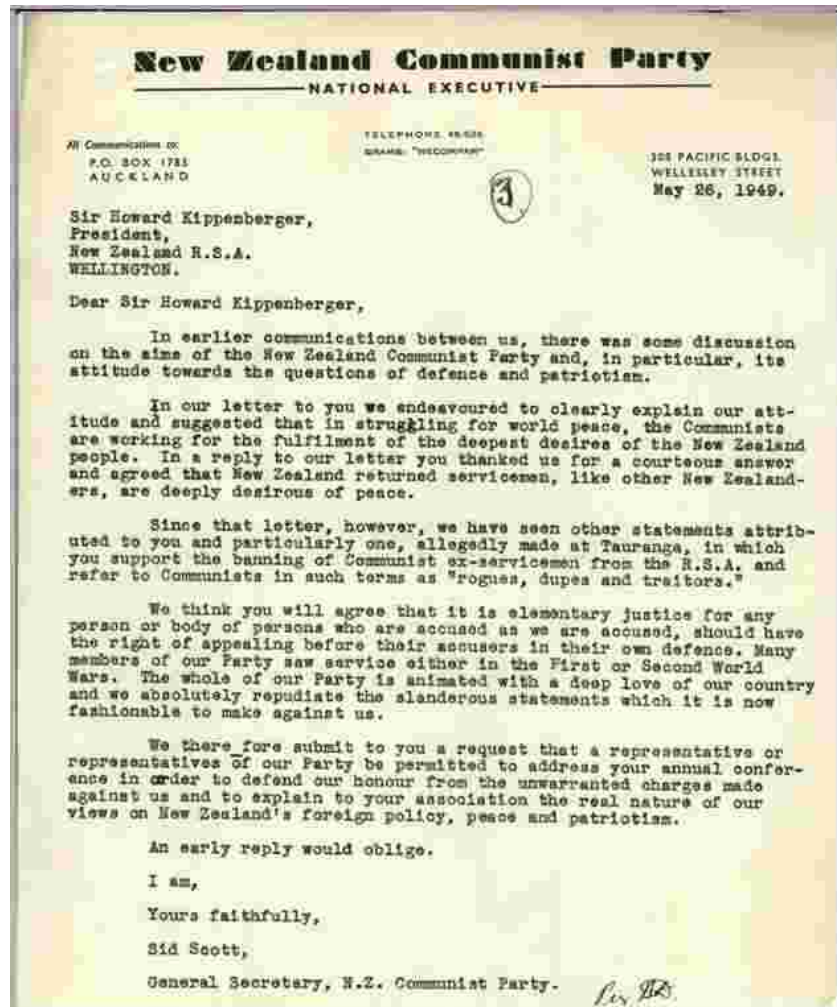
Jackson remembered that, “Mrs McLaurin was delighted with him visiting her. One incident I recall was when she asked Harry to sit in a chair where the light from a window would shine on him as her eyesight was failing, and she wanted to see him clearly.”

The McLaurin family was academically distinguished, socially prominent (Auckland University’s chapel is named for Griff’s cousin) and politically conservative. Yet Mrs McLaurin’s affection for her son, and her regard for those who had known him shortly before his death, meant that she treated her British visitor with more respect, and better result, than the country’s bumbling secret agents.

For file references or further information on this incident, contact Dr Russell Campbell, russellcampbell@clear.net.nz

From the archives: the 1951 Waterfront Dispute

By Trish McCormack



ARCHIVES NEW ZEALAND

Even today opinion is sharply divided when talk turns to the New Zealand Waterfront dispute of 1951. The language you use to describe the event can define you. If you call it a strike you are on the side of the government; if you call it a lockout you are on the side of the workers. Down the years waterfront 1951 has become the stuff of legend—ballads have been written about the workers, crushed, some would say, by a heartless government machine. Homage was paid when it was all over to those workers who stood fast to their principles, choosing to face starvation for their families rather than back down. Those who helped them with food faced risk of prosecution. The waterfront became a crucible in which the principle of civil liberty was tested and broken.

One observer of Waterfront 1951 was writer Bill Pearson. His response was to leave New Zealand appalled by the suppression of civil liberties he saw here. He wrote of a nation cowed and frightened in his famous essay *Fretful Sleepers*. Pearson described New Zealanders who were ridden with small-town prejudice and puritanism, concerned only with "a hypocritical concern for respectability."

Of course it would be oversimplifying things to suggest the Waterfront Dispute was the sole cause of the emotionally-deadened New Zealand society that Pearson describes. However it was significant; ports were the centre of industry in the developing New Zealand of 1951, so when in February that year the Waterside Workers Union withdrew its labour in a wage dispute the effect was profound.

Watersiders worked in harsh and often dangerous conditions but their employers were not renowned for their concern and were slow to introduce labour-saving equipment or indeed any other form of benefits to their workers. Historians believe it was no coincidence that the major industrial disputes in New Zealand history, in 1890, 1913 and 1951, were fought most fiercely on the waterfront.

The National Government, led by Sidney Holland, took a hard line against militant communist-influenced unions like the Waterside Workers' Union. As Holland's biographer Barry Gustafson wrote, this was the cause of the 1951 Waterfront dispute which led to:

“industrial disruption, social hardship, economic loss, political division and hatred almost unparalleled in New Zealand history. The National government enacted harsh emergency regulations, including strict censorship, and used the courts, police and armed forces to break the unions.”

So where did this all end? This is contested history at its most compelling: there are as many stories as there were people who took part. Bill Pearson and others believe it scarred the New Zealand psyche for decades thereafter. The strike-breakers believed they were saving New Zealand from the threat of communism and much else besides.

The public records that survived, as embodied in the holdings of Archives New Zealand, are interesting as much for what they contain as for what is missing. Many of the archives of Waterfront 1951 are still restricted nearly 60 years after the event due to sensitivity and privacy issues. Those that are open are almost exclusively from the point of view of government but there are obvious divisions within this. Government Ministers and members of the Labour opposition have differing views. It is interesting to consider the language used in the following documents. They tell a lot about the viewpoint of the writer. It is also worth considering which government departments were collecting correspondence on the event in order to gain a picture of the different sectors of society involved.

There are many records detailing the daily movements of a squadron from the Royal New Zealand Air Force as it was mobilised to take over the work of the watersiders. This was a major logistical exercise involving the transfer to Wellington of hundreds of troops and support staff.

Civil Emergency – Waterfront – 1951 [Archives Reference: AIR 1 60 1/7/6 Pt 1]

Another interesting record is a summary compiled by the Walter Nash, Leader of the Labour Party in 1951. Nash was trying to avoid offending the different factions of his party in his stance on the dispute and famously told a May rally in Auckland that 'We are not for the waterside workers, and we are not against them'. As his biographer Barry Gustafson wrote, this opened him to ridicule

from political opponents and the press for years afterwards.

Waterfront Strike Summary 1951 [Archives Reference: AANK W3285/7]

There are letters written by Sid Holland thanking the Air Force on behalf of all New Zealanders for their role in crushing the union action on the waterfront.

Civil Emergency – Waterfront – 1951 [Archives Reference: AIR 1 60 1/7/6 Pt 1]

Then there are the points of view not necessarily considered much by historians grappling with the core political causes and consequences of waterfront 1951—for example the small Tongan village waiting desperately for a supply ship to bring staple food and important medical supplies, something held up for months by the dispute.

Waterfront Strike 1951 [Archives Reference: IT 1 433 ex 69/184 Pt 1]

There is also the story of the Samoa banana industry being crippled by a 12,000 pound loss as a result of shipping restrictions caused by the dispute—as an emotive news editorial in the file below demonstrates.

Waterfront Strike 1951 [Archives Reference: IT 1 433 ex 69/184 Pt 1]

Then there were the fruit growers of Marlborough facing ruin because of being unable to export 605,000 crates of fruit. It is easy to see how community spirit would have fractured by such competing needs.

Apples – Waterfront Strike [Archives Reference: IMD 1 27 11/8/45]

The end came after 151 days when the watersiders were defeated. National called a snap election and emerged with a huge majority. It took this to be a resounding endorsement of its harsh actions in breaking the dispute. However, there are many sides to this watershed event in New Zealand history—and you will not find them all within government archives. The voice of the people is largely missing. Fortunately there is a rich store of records in other libraries and museums as the sample from Index New Zealand listed below will show.

Look at these archives and make your own decisions about Waterfront 1951.

Trish McCormack is an archivist at Archives New Zealand by day, and a crime-writer by night. Her novels Assigned to Murder and Glacier Murder are set on the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island.

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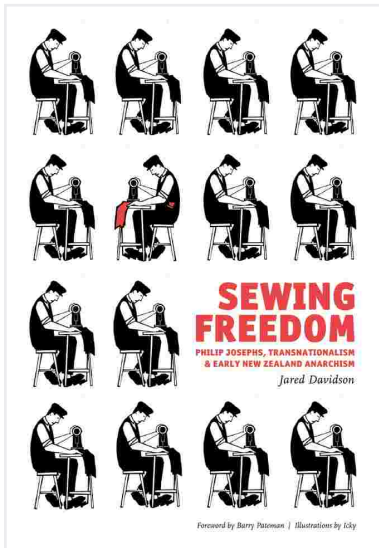
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REVIEWS

Sewing Freedom

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

Sewing Freedom: Philip Josephs, Transnationalism & Early New Zealand Anarchism by Jared Davidson. AK Press, 2013 (USA/UK), ISBN-13: 9781849351324. Reviewed by Chris Brickell.

Jared Davidson's new book is a history of both an influential figure—Philip Josephs—and a movement: anarchism in New Zealand. It is a beautifully-written and impeccably-researched volume that brings to our attention an often overlooked aspect of our political history.

Sewing Freedom traces the journey of Josephs and his family from Latvia to Scotland and then to Wellington in 1903, where he ran a tailor's shop and distributed anarchist literature. 'Between sewing machines, pulleys, pressing irons and a button-hole machine, workers could converse, browse anarchist pamphlets ... and measure up for a custom-made suit'. Over time, Josephs helped to spread anarchist ideas from one end of New Zealand to the other, including the work of key international figures: Pyotr Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin and Emma Goldman, among others. The indefatigable Josephs also took part in protests on behalf of workers and against the tyrannies of governments and bosses.

Davidson clearly situates anarchism in relation to wider transnational labour movements over the first two decades of the twentieth century, and demonstrates the relationships between anarchist thinkers and activists both here and overseas. Along with Josephs, we meet Christchurch chemistry professor Alexander Bickerton as well as several immigrants: English doctor and eugenicist Thomas Macdonald—an acquaintance of Kropotkin—and German billiard table maker Johann Trunk. The reader gains a clear sense of international connections as well as Josephs' 'key role in the establishment of a distinct anarchist identity and culture' in New Zealand.

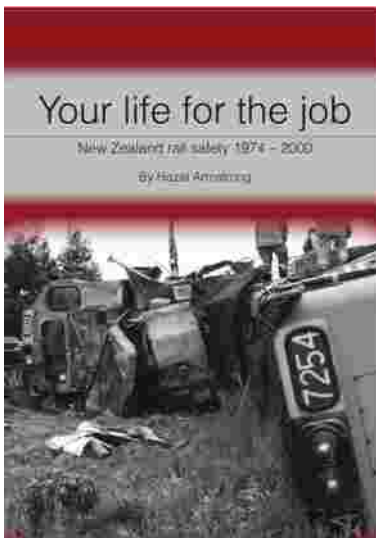
Sewing Freedom offers an excellent discussion of class politics, adding Davidson's voice to the critique of the myth of New Zealand as a classless society. There are useful discussions of the strikes at Blackball in 1908 and Waihi in 1912, and the (sometimes complex) relationships between anarchism, socialism and the state. The latter ramped up the pressure in the Wellington waterfront strike of 1913, when 'Massey's Cossacks' violently clashed with workers. Philip Josephs was there, standing on a platform near Queen's Wharf, loudly expressing his horror at the government's actions. Soon the forces of repression came for him. Although Josephs escaped imprisonment—on a technicality—his shop was raided, his anarchist materials confiscated and his pamphlet operation shut down. 'Despite its liberal façade', Davidson argues, 'New Zealand was one of the most stringent suppressors of dissent in the Western world'. Josephs left New Zealand for Australia in 1921, having 'placed New Zealand anarchism firmly on the global anarchist map'.

Sewing Freedom works on several levels. It is a meticulous biography, a portrait of an era, a sophisticated discussion of anarchist philosophy and activism, and an evocation of radical lives and ideas in their context. Davidson has designed a fresh, crisp book with visual impact, nicely enhanced by Alec Icky Dunn's

wonderful sketches of key places in this history: working class backyards, a miner's hall and striking workers under attack by the forces of the state. This beautifully-executed book tells an important story in New Zealand's political history.

Chris Brickell is Associate Professor of Gender Studies at Otago University. Sewing Freedom will be launched at the Museum of Wellington City & Sea on Wednesday 15 May, 5.30pm. Author Jared Davidson, prominent British anarchist historian Barry Pateman (who contributed a foreword to the book) and Mark Derby will be present. You can also buy copies direct from the author, at \$15 plus postage and packing, at www.sewingfreedom.org

Your Life For the Job



Your Life for the Job - New Zealand rail safety 1974-2000 by Hazel Armstrong. Labour History Project, 2013, ISBN 978-0-473-24211-4

From the book's blurb:

Shunter Robert Burt fell under a moving wagon in May 2000. He was the fifth rail worker to be killed in six months. His employer, Tranz Rail, had a workplace accident rate eight times the national average.

This book, written by New Zealand's foremost legal expert on workplace health and safety, concludes that the appalling rate of death and injury on New Zealand's railways in the 1990s is 'the story of de-regulation and privatisation'.

In the early 1990s new workplace health and safety legislation 'obliged employers to take all practicable steps to prevent harm to their employees'. *Your Life for the Job* makes clear that New Zealand Rail (NZR) was secretly exempted.

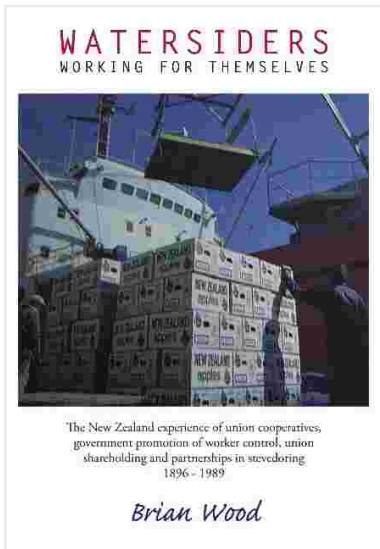
Soon afterwards, NZR was sold to a consortium of private owners which renamed it Tranz Rail, cut staff numbers and reduced spending on equipment and maintenance. Eleven of its employees were killed on the job between 1995 and 2000. This shameful record was brought to an end after the RMTU, the rail workers' union, successfully called for an independent enquiry.

Author Hazel Armstrong points out that other state-owned industries now face de-regulation and privatization. Both the 2000 Tranz Rail enquiry and the 2012 Pike River enquiry illustrate what happens when;

- regulators are ineffective and are captured by the employer;
- Parliament and the government of the day are prepared to compromise worker health and safety for some other end-game; and
- directors and managers turn a blind eye to hazards.

Your Life for the Job was launched on April 28—Workers Memorial Day—at the Avalon Rail Workshops, Lower Hutt, and is available to purchase from Hazel Armstrong Law for \$20 per copy. Email hazelarmstronglaw.co.nz to order a copy.

Watersiders working for themselves



Watersiders Working for Themselves - the New Zealand experience of Union Cooperatives, Government promotion of Worker Control, Union Shareholding and Partnerships in Stevedoring 1896 - 1989 by *Brian Wood*. *Self-published, with the support of the Labour History Project, 2013.* ISBN 978-0-473-23802-5.

Brian Wood was a deck officer on tramp, refrigerated and liner vessels. As well as a master mariner's certificate, he gained qualifications in the economics of ports and sea transport. With the Waterfront Industry Commission he developed statistics and research and new administrative systems to meet the changing needs of the industry. As the commission's general manager he had extensive dealings with employers, unions and shippers and with the development of waterfront legislation.

For much of the 20th century New Zealand watersiders were involved in attempts to gain formal control of their working lives. Before World War II the aim was to establish union cooperatives and a few such ventures succeeded in niche operations in spite of opposition from the British owned shipping lines that dominated waterfront work. Jim Roberts, the waterside union secretary and later president of the Labour Party, was a driving force. As a foundation member of the Waterfront Control Commission, he assisted in introducing a cooperative contract bonus scheme intended to progress the government's aim for watersiders to be more or less working for themselves.

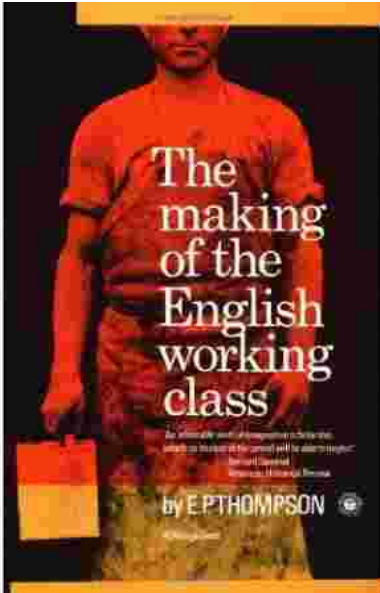
After the war, in a climate of frequent industrial stoppages and a refusal by union leaders, especially Jock Barnes, to comply with commission decisions, the government's plans for watersiders to gain more control were frustrated.

In the 1970s, against a background of government restrictions on wage increases, local initiatives saw the emergence of union shareholding in stevedoring companies, and all-in contracts with large shippers for a production bonus.

As well as recording the efforts to enable watersiders to formally control their working lives this study reflects the changes in methods of waterfront work and organisation in New Zealand and overseas. Sources include the official records of the commissions, port employers, unions and government. Ports featured are Auckland, Tauranga, Wellington, Lyttelton, Dunedin, Port Chalmers, Whangarei, Gisborne, Napier, New Plymouth, Patea, Nelson, Timaru and Bluff. References are made to dock work in Australia, United Kingdom, Marseilles, New York and Salonica.

110 pages, A5 with six pages of illustrations, a comprehensive bibliography and index. Price \$24.95 post free in New Zealand, add \$5.00 for international airmail. Copies available June 2013 from B H Wood, 27 Thurleigh Grove, Karori, Wellington 6012. Email: bwood_nz@yahoo.com

WORTH A SECOND LOOK

The Making of the English Working Class: 50 years on*By Jim McAloon*

This is the first in an occasional series of articles on significant books in the field of labour history that deserve re-reading. The LHP welcomes suggestions for future titles in this series, and reviewers thereof.

In 1963 the leftwing English publisher Gollancz brought out what would become one of the most influential works of social history in the English language: E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*. Some lines in the preface are widely quoted: "I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity" (Page 9. Page numbers taken from 1963 Gollancz hardback edition). For Thompson, those who lost the historical battle were not therefore to be forgotten or marginalised. Marx had said that people make their own history, but not just as they choose. But Thompson's emphasis was on the first half of that formula; "The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making" (12).

Thompson was writing against two contrasting views of the industrial revolution. If he was seeking to put human choice back into Marxist history, he was, if anything, even more opposed to mainstream celebratory views of the industrial revolution and of British liberties. His book must be located in a historical moment itself, of the ideological bankruptcy of Soviet communism and the vacuity of "you've never had it so good" (Tory prime minister Harold MacMillan's smug economic summary to the electorate in the early 1960s).

In 16 rich chapters and 850 pages the book takes the reader through the 40 years 1792-1832, decades of massive economic change in England. They were also decades of intense political repression in the newly enlarged United Kingdom. Thompson argues convincingly that there were fundamental connections between industrialisation, the wars with revolutionary and Napoleonic France, and the intensified oppression of working people and radicals. It was, as he says, a long counter-revolution. Thus the process of class formation was political and cultural, not just economic. It was a process in which there emerged "the consciousness of an identity of interests as between all these diverse groups of working people and as against the interests of other classes" (194).

Thompson discusses Tom Paine, his strengths and limitations, at some length, for Paine's 1792 masterpiece of radical democracy, "the Rights of Man is a foundation-text of the English working-class movement" (90). Thompson brilliantly indigenised the radical tradition, showing how entrenched liberty was in popular culture.

He poured scorn on his scholarly contemporaries who celebrated the Industrial Revolution; as he says, the "classical catastrophic orthodoxy has been replaced by a new anti-catastrophic orthodoxy" (195) and his view of academic controversies over whether the standard of living improved is summarised in the pithy comment that the labourer's "own share in the 'benefits of economic progress' consisted of more potatoes, a few articles of cotton clothing for his family, soap and candles, some tea and sugar, and a great many articles in the

Economic History Review” (318).

There are detailed discussions of weavers, farm labourers and artisans, with much emphasis on the way that workers’ autonomy diminished. For artisans there was longstanding recognition of “custom” in wages, in prices, and in work-speed, “at the pace which their craftsmanship demanded” (235).

Increasingly, for employers these came to be seen as restrictive practices. Religion and community get detailed treatment too. While Thompson perhaps grudgingly admires Methodist staunchness and independence, he also discusses the way in which its precepts could make workers more obliging to their exploiters. He explores leisure, socialising, recreation, and friendly societies, in communities “which the working people, in antagonism to their labour and to their masters, built for themselves” (447).

The book’s climax is a discussion of class consciousness. Thompson’s argument is that England came close to a revolution in 1831-32, a revolution which was only averted because, in the atmosphere of war and counter-revolution, the middleclass was picked off, losing its reformist or radical edge (807). In fact bourgeois reformists used radical agitation to secure what they wanted in the 1832 Reform Act and then ditched the workers, making instead an accommodation with landed wealth while radical trade unionists found themselves with an involuntary passage to Van Diemen’s Land. The book closes with a tribute to the countless thousands of working people, “the most distinguished popular culture England has ever known”, who “had... nourished, for fifty years, and with incomparable fortitude, the Liberty Tree” (831-32).

Like any work of historical scholarship, *The Making* is of its time. It prompted and inspired two generations of labour historians who developed and extended its insights, and who were working along similar lines of enquiry. It certainly encouraged social historians to examine popular culture and was a major force in the development of ‘history from below,’ histories of the common people. In time it was criticised for a certain blindness on gender, and feminist historians of the 1970s and 1980s challenged and modified some of Thompson’s approach. One compelling example of this critique was Anna Clark’s lengthy study of gender and working class politics, *The Struggle for the Breeches*. In time, too, scholars took the definition of ‘work’ beyond Thompson’s more or less traditional emphasis on the money economy, as in a recent study by Carolyn Steedman of domestic service, *Labours Lost*.

The Making remains in print, most commonly seen in a Penguin edition. Thompson was one of several highly influential historians who came out of the Historians Group of the Communist Party of Great Britain; most of them left the party after the Soviet Union crushed the Hungarian rebellion of 1956. Others in that group included Dorothy Thompson (the wife of EP), John Saville, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton and Eric Hobsbawm. After 1956 Thompson became and remained an independent, libertarian socialist, mostly writing freelance apart from six years at the University of Warwick. Characteristically, he resigned from Warwick over the links between business and the university administration. Equally characteristically, he spent the later 1970s and most of the 1980s campaigning for nuclear disarmament; having been a tank officer at Monte Cassino he knew something about war. Thompson died in 1993, aged 69. His life and work have been discussed by a number of scholars, most

recently by Scott Hamilton, an independent scholar in Auckland. Thompson's work remains monumental: rich and detailed, infused with moral passion, it amply repays reading.

Jim McAloon is treasurer of the Labour History Project, teaches history at Victoria University, and has recently enjoyed discussing The Making of the English Working Class with honours students.

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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