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TRADE UNION HISTORY PROJECT

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NEWSLETTER

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1997 TUHP SEMINAR: 50 YEARS OF STRUGGLE - THE STORY OF EQUAL PAY

This was the theme for our 1997 seminar held over Labour Weekend, on Saturday, 25 October. Like other TUHP seminars it provided a unique opportunity for seminar participants to hear from the very people who were key players in the making of labour history over the previous fifty years.



Contributors to Equal Pay Seminar. Back l-r: Elizabeth Orr, Martha Coleman, Margaret Long, Therese O'Connell, Peg Hutchison, Prue Hyman. Front: Mary Boyd, Margot Rodden, Rona Bailey. Absent: Cath Kelly, Margaret Shields, Miriam Dell, Charlotte Macdonald, Anne Else, Noel Woods.



The taped record will eventually be used to produce a full report of the Seminar. In the meantime **Margot Roth** provided the following summary of the day's proceedings:

"Why should we pay ten shillings for an article we can get for five shillings?" asked the Chairman of the Public Service Commission in the 1950s, explaining why he opposed equal pay for women public servants. The same man was unwilling to employ women as filing clerks because they might have to climb ladders.

Such legendary examples were part of the history recounted at the Seminar which consisted of three sessions for the telling of history, and a final fourth entitled "Where To From Here?" Women who had been involved in working for equal pay at different times gave their accounts of the activities that had engaged them.

Melanie Nolan introduced the proceedings and said that setting aside a day to examine the history of efforts to achieve equal pay would show the ebb and flow of different campaigns during the first half century.

However, from the 19th century onwards the issue was canvassed from time to time - in 1895 and 1905 the annual general meetings of the Trades and Labour Council called for equal pay. In 1927 the first meeting of Labour Party women supported it and brought the matter to the attention of the whole Labour Party, while large groups of women such as teachers and public servants were also in favour.

The first session of the seminar was on the postwar campaign leading up to the 1960 Government Service Equal Pay Act which had two phases: 1943-1947 and 1952-1960. The panel for this discussion consisted of Mary Boyd, Margaret Long, Cath Kelly, Rona Bailey and Margaret Rodden.

Next was the campaign leading up to the 1972 Equal Pay Act, the participants being Anne Else, Margaret Shields, Peg Hutchison and Dame Miriam Dell.

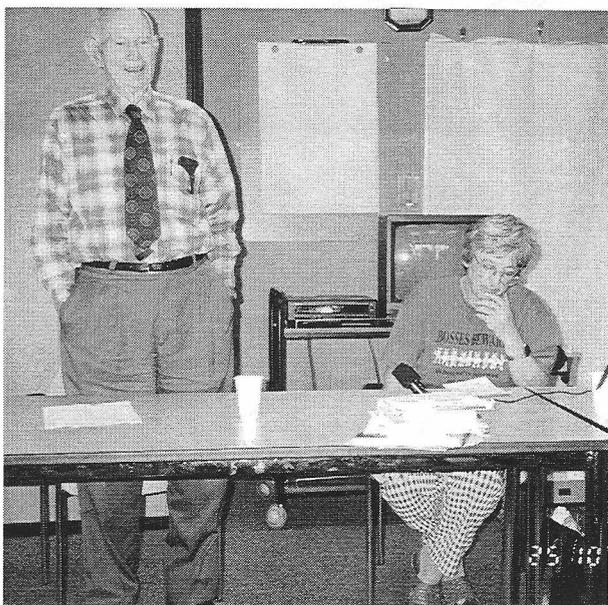


Session 2, Equal Pay Seminar. L-R: Margaret Shields, Anne Else, Peg Hutchison, Dame Miriam Dell.

The third segment was an examination of how well the 1960 and 1972 Acts had been interpreted and implemented and how to improve their usefulness. Speakers were Elizabeth Orr, Martha Coleman and Charlotte Macdonald (who took the place of Sonja Davies who was unable to attend).

After these three sessions Noel Woods, a retired public servant, gave a brief address based on his interest and experience in dealing with pay equity as a member of the Labour Department. In 1957 he chaired an inter-departmental working party on equal pay set up by the National Government shortly before a general election and in 1960 he was a member of the Equal Pay Implementation Committee.

He said that he believed in numerically strong organisations like some trade unions overseas. New Zealand's 1894 Arbitration and Conciliation Act had left a legacy of small, local unions, but he looked forward to the day when amalgamations would produce half a dozen unions at most, enough for a small county like ours. Organisations of that strength could have more say in setting policy, and there would be fewer problems like that of introducing equal pay.



Noel Woods at seminar



Cath Kelly at seminar

Other points made by speakers were:

- The history of the different campaigns had to be assessed in terms of the social and economic conditions of the particular time for example during world war 2 women in the labour force rose from only 5% in 1939 to 25% at war's end. The introduction of new salary scales provided an opportunity for the growing army of women public servants to improve their status and salaries.
- The 1943 PSA Women's Committee organised lunch-time meetings and widely publicised the aims of the rate for the job and equal opportunity in employment and promotion. The Committee also did research showing that the majority of PSA women members supported these aims, while Bert O'Keefe and Jack Lewin were two key people who promoted them.
- While the activities of the PSA's Women's Sub-Committee (first set up in 1955) were endorsed by women, they would not have been successful without the strong, practical support of men in influential positions in the PSA.
- The reason that the PSA was able to introduce equal pay 12 years ahead of the private sector was because of good organisers, carefully thought out strategies and an excellent campaign overall which kept the public as well as PSA members informed.
- The consistency of the call for equal pay and opportunity over so many years has been a marked feature, as new campaigners, believing they were pioneers, found they were standing on the shoulders of a previous generation who had been standing on the previous generation's shoulders... .

- Prue Hyman, the facilitator of the last session, said that women had made progress but only a small percentage was earning high salaries and occupying positions of influence. She thought that less stress should be put on the gender differential by itself and that differences among women should also be studied in terms of race and class.



Lunch break for Seminar participants

Therese O'Connell added an entertaining dimension to the seminar when she led everybody in singing songs on the subject of equal pay. The following is an example:

THE BOSSES LAMENT

Whatever will we do
 Whatever on this earth
 When all the secretaries demand what they are worth.

Well I don't know what to make of it
 Just where will it all end
 I haven't been so mortified since early 1910.

Well I've heard of war and famine
 But the things got really hard
 When the ladies at my office got hold of Union cards.

Whatever will we do
 Whatever on this earth
 When all the secretaries demand what they are worth.

My girl she runs the office - you know that's what girls do.
 She does her job yes very well and most of my job too.
 But it's certainly outrageous and completely out of line
 When she demands a salary commensurate to mine.

Whatever will we do
 Whatever on this earth
 When all the secretaries demand what they are worth.

My Secretary tallies up the things that I must do.
 She keeps a list of all my friends so I'll know who is who.
 My Lord! if she should leave me Oh how would I survive
 I haven't made a phone call since 1945.

CHORUS

Well there's rumour of a walkout
There's rumour of a strike
Rumours of a picket, a slowdown and the like
But I've got my survival plan in case of storm and strike
Here's how I'll get the job done - I'll give it to my wife.

CHORUS

Well I've had enough of this - I just can't comprehend
Whoever do they think they are - to organise like men.
Well I believe in order - the tried and trusted norm
I'll damn well see them fired if I can find the form.

Whatever will they do
Whatever on this earth
When all the secretaries demand what they are worth.

RALLY AT PARLIAMENT TO STOP MAX IN HIS TRAX

On December 10 last year an estimated three thousand people rallied at Parliament in Wellington to protest against Max Bradford and the Coalition Government's plans to trade public holidays for cash. Rallies were also held in other centres.

The Wellington rally featured rousing addresses by TUF's Maxine Gay, Laila Harre Alliance MP, Labour MP, Pete Hodgson and Ross Wilson from the CTU.

It was not all serious though: *Choir Choir Pants on Fire* - a group of singers from The Working Women's Resource Centre led the crowd in songs appropriate to the occasion, and Father Christmas turned up at the end to let everybody know what he thought about the Government trying to steal Xmas.

This was the beginning of continuing protest action so watch out for notices of future rallies. The first opportunity will probably coincide with the opening of Parliament in mid February.

So that you're well informed to participate in protest action, we urge you to buy the TUHP's latest publication, *Workers' Holidays in New Zealand*. A description follows.

NEW BOOKS

Workers' Holidays in New Zealand - a brief history, TUHP, 1997.

As a reaction to the Coalition Government's attack on the right to public holidays, the TUHP has published a short illustrated history of the struggle for workers' holidays in New Zealand.

The booklet updates the TUHP's 1990 publication on the history of Labour Day and the campaign of the eight hour day, which has been out of print for some time. It includes new material on the history of workers' holidays, compiled by John Hamil on the basis of research material collected by Peter Franks.

The result is an attractive and useful little book of 24 pages which clearly and concisely traces the history of the struggle of workers to the right to holidays on pay.

Every worker should have one!

Workers' Holidays in New Zealand is available to TUHP members at the special price of \$5.00 a copy.

Just post your \$5.00, with your name and address, to Denise O'Reilly at the CTU, P O Box 6645, Wellington or Fax 04 385-6051.

STICK OUT, KEEP LEFT: An autobiography of Margaret Thorn edited by Elsie Locke and Jacquie Matthews Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books, 1997, \$29.95.

This review, by Hilary Stace, was published in the *Evening Post* on 16 January 1998:

'Stick out, keep left, time will vindicate you', Margaret Thorn advised her politician husband James during the reforming era of the first Labour government. He preferred compromise. Margaret Thorn's vivid memoirs are not of compromise. With encouragement from her friend Elsie Locke, Margaret reviewed her life when in her 70s, in the late 1960s. A life-long campaigner for social and political justice, against the excesses of capitalism and the futility of war, she was also a fighter for the right of women to control their fertility. For three decades this fascinating manuscript awaited a publisher, and now in the centenary of Margaret's birth, it is at last available.

The story starts with the lives of her grandmothers, worn out with childbearing and poverty, in the Manchester slums. Margaret Anderson came to New Zealand as a teenager in 1912 and she documents the struggles her family had with unemployment and unfair employment conditions, poor housing, ill health and other injustices. Political action offered hope and on one level this is the story of the growth of the political labour movement and the election of the first Labour government in 1935, its success epitomised by the 1938 Social Security Act.

Margaret married James soon after he was released from jail for anti-war 'seditious utterances' in 1917. Her memoirs reveal a story of the women who worked so hard for the Labour Party, a history which has been largely invisible. The suffering in the depression of the early 1930s, particularly of women, is painful to read.

After his Thames seat disappeared in 1946 James was posted to Ottawa as New Zealand High Commissioner. In those early days of the cold war Margaret found it easy to escape from cocktail parties by dropping choice phrases such as "exploitation of labour".

This is also the story of families making a home in New Zealand. For the Thorns it meant surviving on little money, hard work and constantly shifting house - balanced by the satisfaction of making a new garden in each home.

This book can be enjoyed on many levels - as an autobiography it might encourage others to document their own lives. Older readers will relate to the incidents and places mentioned. Anyone interested in our political, social or women's history should like it.

Judicious editing, helpful but unobtrusive footnotes, and some interesting photos make this a very readable book.

Hilary Stace is an editorial officer with the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography.

TUHP GRANTS

Late last year, the TUHP Committee approved the following grants:

Oral History Project Interviews - Peter Franks was granted \$4,000 to conduct interviews with four Printers Union Activists: Wally Clements, Tilly Hunter, Allan Ryan and Joe Kelly.

Publication subsidy - The University Of Otago Press was granted \$3,000 towards the publication of a biography of political activist, trade unionist and communist, Connie Birchfield, written by her daughter, Maureen Birchfield.

Funding support of \$1,000 was granted to Elayne and Ian Robertson to assist with their oral history project on former **Wellington City Transport Employees**.

A research grant of \$1,200 was given to Brian Wood for the revision and extension of *Disaster at Brunner* into an extended history that will include other of mining disasters.

NZ Working People 1890 - 1990 gifted to secondary schools

Stevan Eldred-Grigg was commissioned by the TUHP to write this book which was published in 1990 by Dunmore Press, with a TUHP subsidy. Recently the TUHP took the opportunity of purchasing remaindered copies of the book from Dunmore Press at a significantly reduced price.

With the cooperation and assistance of the PPTA, the TUHP distributed 378 copies of this important history of working people to secondary schools. Letters of appreciation and thanks have been received by both the TUHP and the PPTA.

TUHP'S BERT ROTH SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT COMPLETES THESIS

Congratulations to Shaun Ryan who has completed his thesis on the Otago Engineers Union.

OPINIONS ON THE FUTURE OF THE TUHP

From Ann Calhoun:

...I wanted to attend the review on 29 July to thank members for initiating and supporting the Wellington City Art Gallery exhibition *Art and Organised Labour* in 1990. As one of the curators, the exhibition personally gave me many returns and has continued to do so. I mean this both in terms of the people I met and the research and learning I gained.

I have been unable to attend more than the occasional function organised by the TUHP but have always supported the organisation financially to encourage the work being done. I agree that the name of the organisation has a brand name feel to it and could be used as an umbrella for broad research or projects on labour history. There needs to be on-going public reminders of the need to deposit valuable historically relevant archive material. As one person put it, why not have one seminar a year? These could act as a focus for the continuing collection of collective labour and union history. If the organisation dies it will be so much harder to kindle similar sentiments at some future date.

Thank you for the good work.

From David Verran:

Regarding the TUHP folding, I have found it rather Wellington centered. Paradoxically, however, my suggestion is that we form a closer relationship with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History. Either as an Australasian Society with NZ branches, or at least on an agency basis for individual membership and subscriptions to *Labour History*...

...Further to the Australian Society, I note that they have a web site ([http://sue.econ.su.oz.au/ir/labour history/](http://sue.econ.su.oz.au/ir/labour%20history/)., if I read it correctly), with a subscription facility. If we had a NZ agency then we could pay in NZ \$. However, they do focus more on labour issues generally, and less on union matters, and are a bit more academically inclined.

Another suggestion is that as many TUHP people have net access then perhaps the TUHP could set up a web site and a mail group? This could also assist with trans-Tasman contacts. After all there are a great number of similarities between the labour movements in NZ and Australia, more so than between NZ and Britain in fact.

Your opinion is welcome too. You can post, fax or e-mail it to Maureen Birchfield: TUHP, BOX 27 425, Wellington, Fax 04 237 6413, e-mail: CUESWN@massey.ac.nz

PAUL ROBESON'S CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Black American singer and socialist, Paul Robeson was born on 9 April 1898. He visited New Zealand in 1960. Several events are planned to commemorate his life - a Radio New Zealand **Spectrum Documentary** and a **TUHP celebration**.

If you want to know more, **contact Rona Bailey**, 30 Robieson Street, Roseneath, Wellington, Phone (04) 384 8870.

TUHP 10TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER - 14 MARCH 1998

DON'T MISS OUT! With this Newsletter, you should receive an invitation/order form to the **TUHP's 10th Anniversary Dinner** which will be a delicious and joyous occasion - economical too as the TUHP is subsidising the cost of your meal.

Order your tickets as soon as possible and encourage your friends to do the same. Why not organise a group?

1997 TUHP Committee

Rona Bailey
Pat Bolster
Colin Hicks (Chairperson)
Warwick Johnson (Treasurer)
Jock Phillips
Margot Roth
Pat Walsh

Maureen Birchfield (Newsletter Editor)
Peter Franks (Secretary)
Richard Hill
Melanie Nolan
John Robson
Ken Thomas

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NAME: _____

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PHONE: Home: _____ **Business:** _____

Individual Member - \$10.00

Corporate Member - \$50.00

Donation

AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____
(Subscriptions include GST)

Post form to:

**The Secretary
Trade Union History Project
P O Box 27-425
WELLINGTON**

TRADE UNION HISTORY PROJECT

P O Box 27 425, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

YOU ARE INVITED

To attend the

10th Anniversary Dinner of the

T U H P

Date: Saturday, 14 March, 1998

Time: 6:30 pm (drinks)

7:30 pm (dinner)

Place: University Staff Club
Rankine Brown Building
Victoria University
Kelburn Parade
Wellington

Price: \$25-00 per head

RSVP: Pat Walsh
Industrial Relations Centre
Victoria University
P O Box 600
Wellington

by Friday 27th February 1998

Ph: (04) 471 5358

Fax (04) 495 5084

I will attend the 10th Anniversary Dinner on Saturday 14th March 1998,

Name: _____

No. Attending: _____

Cheque for \$25-00 enclosed.

Cheques to be made out to TUHP



TRADE UNION HISTORY PROJECT

P O Box 27 425, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

Centennial Celebration for Paul Robeson born 9 April 1898 - died 23 January 1976



Featuring Robeson's music - reminiscences

Speaker: Rona Bailey

7:30 pm, Tuesday, 7 April

PSA House
Aurora Terrace,
Wellington

gold coin entry - refreshments

For further information:

Phone Rona Bailey, (04) 384 8870
or Marie Russell, (04) 384 9119

Paul Robeson - singer, actor, political activist, renaissance man - achieved world-wide acclaim for his work. His achievements and charisma make him a significant 20th Century figure. A leader not only in the arts, but also in the movements for workers' rights and for peace. Robeson was ahead of his time as a black rights' activist. Persecution by the USA Government, particularly during the McCarthy era, greatly damaged Robeson's life and career. His visit to Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1960 was a highlight for many workers here.

