



## *Never A Backward Step*

*TUHP Chair David Grant Extols the Life and Work of Rona Bailey*

*It was a magnificent send-off to a woman who bestrode both left-wing politics and theatre in New Zealand for more than 60 years. On the evening of 31 October, close to 400 people crowded the plaza of Te Whaea — the National Dance and Drama School, in Newtown, Wellington not so much to farewell Rona Bailey but to celebrate her life and work.*

Friends from all areas of her remarkably varied life eulogised Rona at this ceremony, magnificently orchestrated by Cathy Baxter. Theatre director Sunny Amey and dancer and choreographer Jan Bolwell traversed her long and extensive contribution to Wellington's theatre and dance world; labour historian and left-wing activist Peter Franks spoke of Rona's activities in

the Communist Party which she joined in 1943 and of his personal admiration for her when they campaigned together in the Workers' Communist League. Through Simon Wilson, Trevor Richards called on the audience to laud her unbending commitment to the anti-apartheid movement; Maori activist Moana Jackson spoke with admiration for her work

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among Maori, principally her leadership in bringing the importance of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi to the pakeha world; and actor Wi Kuki Kaa talked of her guidance in Taki Rua theatre. Interposed with these memories were songs by the students of Toi Whakaari (the New Zealand Drama School), the Taki Rua Chorus, and the Trade Union Choir which sang *Union Maid*. Kilda Northcott, Lynn Pringle, Anne Rowse, Dawn Sanders and Jennifer Shennan performed *Air For G-String*, a 1928 dance that Rona used to teach at the old New Zealand Drama School, and the playing of a recording of Paul Robeson's 'Freedom Train' speech that Robeson had delivered to a large crowd at the Addington Railway Workshops in 1960.

Befitting the occasion all of these speakers interspersed their comment with humorous personal anecdote, just as many had also done when friends and colleagues organized an earlier, spontaneous wake just days after her death on 7 September, in Wellington's Playmarket in Kent Terrace.

Rona Bailey was in her 91<sup>st</sup> year when she died. Some 10 months earlier, in December 2003, committee members of the Trade Union History Project, within which she had been active since its beginnings in 1987, celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at a Wellington restaurant with good cheer and



fond reminiscence — some days after her multitude of thespian friends had done the same. Some of us who thought she would go on forever did not realize that this would be the last occasion for such a celebration. Just a week or two before her death she was still her feisty, inquisitive and supportive self at the regular three-monthly TUHP Committee meeting held at her Roseneath home.

Rona Stephenson was born on 24 December 1914, the daughter of an immigrant Yorkshire miner who had achieved some measure of financial security as a shoe importer in Gisborne. From her educated and cultured mother she learned a love of learning, but two events early in her life stimulated her to reject the middle-class conservatism of her parents and adopt socialist ideologies. The

first was witnessing as a child, a protest march of unemployed workers starting out from Gisborne and heading for Wellington, which seemed to her to be a phenomenal commitment to a humanitarian cause; the second was when as a 12-year-old in 1926 she spent a year with her spinster school teacher aunt Jessie Picken who introduced her to ideas about the principles of justice and the growing disparities between the 'have's and have-not's' of the world.

Sporting prowess led her to captain the Poverty Bay netball team and with the possibility of being chosen for the national squad she faced a dilemma — whether to continue and advance with her netball career or take up a scholarship to study physical education in the United States (having already trained as a primary teacher in Auckland). She

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chose the latter and never regretted it. An inspirational speech by well-known leader of the American longshoreman's union, Harry Bridges, deepened her socialist and humanitarian ideals and later as she studied dance with the esteemed Martha Graham at Columbia University in New York she was further influenced by the egalitarian 'revolution' then going on in dance as an antidote to the 'highbrow' of ballet. It was there that she first became involved in left-wing theatre. In the United States she also gained her first insight in the politics of race relations viewing, with apprehension, hooded night riders round a burning cross in Virginia, and later, during a side trip to Panama, attending a concert of black American bass Paul Robeson, whose Communism and stand against racial prejudice had caused fear and loathing in his own country. Her American experiences first nurtured her political activism.

Returning to New Zealand in 1939, Rona became physical welfare officer at the Department of Internal Affairs in Hamilton coming to Wellington in 1941 to become the department's senior women's physical welfare and recreation officer, a position she held until 1952 (she left after contracting tuberculosis). In this role she pioneered the teaching of modern dance in New Zealand. The founding of the New Dance Group, and those

that followed, was the result of her enthusiasm and drive to free the art form of its fixations with ballet and ballroom styles. In 1947, Rona travelled to Great Britain, to look at recreational centres, and also visited Czechoslovakia where she attended a World Youth Festival — and Hungary and Yugoslavia where she joined a work gang to help rebuild a railway, and interviewed its Communist leader Jaroslav Tito.

Believing she needed to live her life according to her socialist principles Rona joined the New Zealand Communist Party in 1943, influenced also by her fellow ideologues in the newly-formed Unity Theatre. Marrying and soon divorcing Communist writer Ron Meek, then, through Unity, she met and later married — in June 1945 — Chip Bailey, another Communist, and the true love of her life. In 1949, their only child, a daughter, Meg, was born. In the party, as in all of the other organizations she joined or helped to found, Rona invested long, hard hours labouring at its coal-face. It was difficult for her when Chip was banned from the party post-war after questioning its policy. Party members were told not to talk to him, which did not make it easy for Rona.

Chip and Rona Bailey played vital roles during the 1951 waterfront lockout producing and distributing the

bulk of Wellington's illegal bulletins that told the worker's side of the story. It meant skulking round central Wellington at the dead of night avoiding police to delivering these bulletins — [words by Dick Scott; design and layout by Chip Bailey, illustrations (cartoons) by Max Bollinger] — and finding a hiding place in their small flat for the 'gestetner' machine on which they were produced. In February 2001, she told a large audience gathered in Wellington to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday of the lockout, of her experiences during that tumultuous time. In June 1951, the Bailey's flat was raided.

'For five months we had been living in this scary, unreal atmosphere and I was home one night when the doorbell rang. The adrenalin started pumping. I was on my own except for Meg, who was asleep in her bed. I went to the door to be confronted by two hefty policemen. One was the infamous Dave Paterson who was in charge of the whole area. He liked to be friendly. 'Call me Dave,' he would tell people. So this became his nickname — nobody called him anything else.

Under the Emergency Regulations any policeman above the rank of sergeant could enter anybody's place without permission or permit. These two did exactly that, barging in and pushing me aside. I felt I was quite capable of taking them on and

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when they did try to go into my daughter's room I did make a protest. They just shoved me aside and stormed into the room.

This was the one time I really wished my daughter would wake up and yell her head off but Meg slept soundly right through it. I decided to ignore the policemen completely so I went into the lounge and began compiling some folk dances for teaching the next day. I tried to stay oblivious to them as they ransacked my house. They went in to every room. While they didn't do any physical damage they did leave everything in a hopeless mess. Books and papers were strewn all over the place. It was when they went into the pantry that I thought this was it. To my huge relief they found nothing.

Chip had bought a very big old printing machine that he used occasionally for leaflets. It was parked in the bedroom. Because it was a pretty small flat it was the only place it could go. So when 'Call Me Dave' and Knapp (the other policeman) saw it their eyes lit up. 'We've got it at last!' they exclaimed. I was nearly in hysterics by this time, knowing that this was not going to prove to be any help to them at all.

I went to the landing and saw them lugging this huge machine down the stairs. They took it away and that was that. The court sent a note of prosecution. The police

accused us of having an unregistered machine! We pleaded not guilty. The fact that most government departments had never registered those types of machine did not seem to worry Scully, the magistrate. We were fined £14 for having an unregistered machine.

I can see it now as if it was yesterday; the joy on these policemen's faces when they thought they had found THE typewriter. They never did find it. The police never found the 'gestetner' either, and during those five months they also never fathomed where any of the distribution centres were. People have asked me whether I ever regretted being involved in all this because of the strains and stresses. My reply was always, 'Never!' It was a privilege to be involved in the struggle, and a phenomenal learning experience as well.'

After recovering from tuberculosis Rona threw herself into full-time political activity. She increased her proselytizing for the Communist Party — eventually, in 1963, becoming a national committee member — as well as working as national secretary of the Society for Closer Relations with the Soviet Union which was her full-time job. She was also active in the Peace Council, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and, from 1959, the 'No Maoris: No Tour' movement formed to protest the impending 'white' All Black rugby tour to South Af-

rica. In conservative New Zealand at the height of the Cold War, it was difficult being a Communist and outspoken activist. The police Special Branch and its successor, the Security Intelligence Service kept a close watch on Rona and her colleagues and she became a particular antagonist among *Truth* reporters who regularly vilified and demonised her. The bigger tragedy at the time was Chip's premature death from a brain tumour in 1963, aged just 42. Chip had been largely responsible for unifying the split Wellington Drivers' Union after the 1951 lockout and was becoming influential in the Federation of Labour at the time of his death. As Peter Franks told the 31<sup>st</sup> October audience, Rona lost a comrade, friend and lover at his passing. She never remarried.

The war in Vietnam and New Zealand's support for American aggression sparked a new round of dissent. She was a key member of the Wellington Committee on Vietnam from its beginning in 1965, being treasurer for much of its life until it wound up in 1976 and was to the fore in anti-Vietnam war protest marches through the streets of Wellington — becoming a key organizer of the increasingly populous mobilizations against the war from 1971. From 1965 to 1970 she was the New Zealand correspondent for the New China News Agency, *Xinhua*, yet, ironically, her

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activism during this period caused her problems inside the Communist Party. Its executive tried to expel her in 1966. She became increasingly uncomfortable with the growing 'otherworldliness' of the political stance of the Communist Party movement's leadership in the wake of the Cultural Revolution. It denounced trade unions, sneered at the anti-war movement and in 1970 deregistered the Party's entire Wellington district and expelled six leading members including Rona who was particularly singled out as a 'threat.'

She was unfazed. She helped to found both the Wellington Marxist-Leninist Organisation and later the Workers' Communist League. She worked as tirelessly for them, usually the back-breaking and unheralded administrative stuff behind the scenes, as she had for the Communist Party. She left the League in 1985. Like her former colleagues there was no animosity. In her typically selfless way, Rona told me that that she had nothing but the greatest respect for the rank and file of both organizations — their dedication, courage and genuine achievement in the fight for justice and a new social order.

In 1981, she was batoned and left bloodied in the 'battle of Molesworth Street' during protests against the Springbok rugby tour. When she was named by Prime Minister Robert Muldoon in his infamous list of 12 Communists

whom the SIS alleged were responsible for organizing the 'radical' opposition to the tour Rona took umbrage — not because she was a member of the Workers' Communist League at the time but because Muldoon had insulted the 100,000 people who had already protested against it when it was only six weeks old. Muldoon referred to Rona at the 'High Priestess of New Zealand Communism'. He was angry and disparaging of course, but as Peter Franks has commented, it was really a compliment to Rona; an acknowledgment of her spirit, influence, tenacity and courage.

After the tour, she became involved with a group of anti-racist pakeha activists determined to educate white New Zealand about the meaning and consequences of the Treaty of Waitangi. *Project Waitangi: Pakeha Debate the Treaty* was a campaign that began in 1985 projected to last for five years to coincide with the 1990 celebrations of the treaty signing. This was effectively her last political campaign although she gave great support to the foreshore and seabed hikoi marchers in Wellington last year, providing them with hot soup and assisting two 'old' kuia in their walk from their Te Papa base to parliament.

Rona has also become a treasured stalwart of the Trade Union History Project since its inception, taking part in the organising of a number of its

seminars and exhibitions and being the focus of one held in 1993 called 'Dissenting New Zealand'. Between 1987 and 2005 only one other committee member has lasted as long and nobody else has attending as many committee meetings as Rona. In the very last months when we gathered to meet in Rona's house she would provide goodies and glasses of wine.

Among all her other achievements, Rona was also a published author producing in 1967, with labour researcher Bert Roth, *Shanties By the Way*, a collection of popular and radical folk songs. Bert, Rona and friends scoured the country for material for this publication which is still a leader in its field. Active, energetic and feisty she was no shrinking social butterfly. She liked a drink and a bet. In 1967, after she had been a widow for four years, a substantial inheritance following her mother's death enabled Rona to purchase a classy MGB sports car which she hurtled around country roads and caused comment among observers to and from her Roseneath home.

She maintained her interest in dance and theatre all her life, teaching dance at *Toi Whakaari* until well into her 70s. She remained a close connection with Unity which evolved into the Depot Theatre or Taki Rua. As with the TUHP, she had become a treasured kuia to these organizations and it was fitting that

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on the evening of her wake in October that *Toi Whakaari* director Annie Ruth should announce that the movement studio at the school would be named and dedicated to her memory.

Selflessness has been the hallmark of Rona's political life. She shunned the lime-light preferring to graft behind the scenes. She despised trends. Her socialist activism was born of a lifelong commitment to humanitarianism first stimulated when she observed the doleful, down-at-heel unemployed in the streets of Gisborne when she was a child. Rona Bailey always held true to socialism's central tenets. Dogma to her was its least attractive trait. She was more concerned with the ideology's practical expression — 'liberty, equality, fraternity'. Her compassion touched a lot of people; her socialist ideals influenced many in the generations which followed. She was one of a kind. This country is the poorer for her passing.

David acknowledges the assistance of Peter Franks and Peter

Kitchin in the preparation of this obituary, and is grateful to Rona's grand-daughter, Ned Sheehan for the photographs.



... from **Maureen Birchfield**

Rona was a friend and Communist Party comrade of both my parents, Connie and Birchie, until an ideological rift drove them apart following the Russian invasion of Hungary. Next, Rona became a friend of mine, when I joined her on the TUHP Committee during the '90s. She was old enough to be my mother, but it never felt like that: she just

didn't fit the elderly stereotypes in the way she dressed, the friends she had, the food she ate, the things she said, the questions she asked — usually the hard ones — at committee meetings. I miss her frequent phone calls when she shared her ideas about the TUHP, and issues that concerned her. Her mind was always ticking over. She was an inspiration.

... from **Richard Hill**

I first met Rona soon after I arrived in Wellington in 1971. I suppose the main thing that struck me personally about Rona was that although we were 'mortal enemies' in the 'intra-left' infighting (she knew that my detestation of Stalinism in all its forms was accompanied by a puzzlement that decent, humane lefties could ever have been induced to support the appalling crimes against humanity) — when we formed the TUHP she was happy to put those fundamental differences behind us, and a very short while, after we'd sussed each other out, we became pretty good friends.

## Trade Union History Project

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# Chairperson's Report to AGM

5 December 2005 at Wellington

**This year the Trade Union History project celebrates the 18<sup>th</sup> year of its existence. There have been a number of highlights, and one significant sadness. The year began with all 2004 committee members being re-elected on to this year's committee and it was pleasing that a significant proportion of these members attended most meetings and became involved in our activities through the year.**

On 9 April 2005 we held our seminar *Working People, Trade Unions and the Vietnam War: Responses to Armed Conflict* at PSA House before an audience of about 40. As the seminar received extensive coverage in the May Newsletter little needs to be added here except to record that it was a successful event. Participants, including this writer, learned much that was new about this sad conflict and the role of New Zealand trade unions and working people in opposition to it. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the seminar's sub-committee led by Donald Anderson, which spent many hours organising the event.

Colin Hicks wrote a detailed description of his vision for establishment of a *Labour History Trust* in the May newsletter. Progress towards

the establishment of the *Trust* was inhibited to some extent by the 2005 general election and it was thought appropriate to defer overtures to government until a new administration was formed. Work on its development will be reactivated in 2006. The progress of the idea of a dedicated vehicle to *'encourage and promote New Zealand labour history research and scholarship'* will be a key objective of the new committee. The sub-committee believes it will be timely to approach key ministers in the new year to press for support for this trust. At the same time further contact with interested parties will be made.

This year some progress has been made towards setting up a TUHP website. A sub-committee comprising Donald Anderson, James Taylor, Neill Atkinson, and Alex Burton met in July to discuss issues around establishing and maintaining the site, how it might be structured and what sort of information it might present — such as, for example, a notice-board of upcoming events, previous conference papers, TUHP newsletters, a brief chronology of New Zealand labour history, and possibly a trade union bibliography. At the same time John Robson suggested that NZEI could be

willing to build, host and maintain a TUHP website as a sub-domain of their main site. John has since had discussions with NZEI's IT manager about facilitating this process. The sub-committee is currently awaiting further developments and are looking forwards to making further progress in early 2006.

Although it is still close to a year away, planning is well advanced for the 2006 Seminar which will explore New Zealand's involvement in the *Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. Commemorating this event's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, in its scope and size this seminar will rival our 2001 seminar on the 1951 waterfront lockout. The project, sparked by the research work of Auckland historian Michael O'Shaughnessy who has traced the contribution of the few, but remarkable New Zealanders through archives in Spain, Russia, the United Kingdom and Australia, will be held in Wellington on the weekend of the 5-6 November 2006.

A formidable range of speakers have already agreed to speak on a variety of topics such as the role of New Zealand's trade unions to the war, the Catholic Church's involvement, the Quaker fundraising campaign among others. The seminar will have input from

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Victoria University, and the New Zealand Film Archive will run a concurrent festival of films on the war, made both here and overseas. It is also likely that New Zealand journalist Geoffrey Cox's classic eye-witness account *Defence of Madrid*, first published by the Left Book Club in 1937, will be reprinted by Wellington's *Te Awa Press* to coincide with the seminar. More work needs to be done and the organizing sub-committee welcomes the support of anybody who wishes to assist. Please contact seminar co-ordinator Mark Derby, 04 914 3055 (w), 04 973 8900 (h) or [mark-derby@paradise.net.nz](mailto:mark-derby@paradise.net.nz).

Committee member Melanie Nolan has finished editing all of the papers presented at our '1913 Strike' seminar held late in 2003 — as well as a handful of further essays on the topic from other contributors. The anthology is now in the hands of its publishers, Canterbury University Press, who expect to publish it in March or April next year.

Melanie has spent the last six months on sabbatical at Australia National University in Canberra, but will be with us again next year.

It is with a deep sense of sadness that I record the death, on 7 September, of Rona Bailey, one of our two longest serving committee members, our kuia, and TUHP stalwart from the beginning. As the forthcoming *Newsletter* is largely dedicated to Rona's life and work, little needs to be added here except to comment that her absence on our committee has already been deeply felt. There has been some preliminary discussion among committee members about how the TUHP should honour Rona and we invite the wider membership to join in these suggestions.

TUHP paid-up membership is currently 84 which is a slight decrease on 2004. At the end of November 2005 we have net current assets of \$10,558.17 — an excess of expenditure over income of \$1,696.66 for the current fi-

nancial year. This is a reasonably healthy position for us in the circumstances as we may anticipate subscription income in excess of \$1,500.00 before the end of the 2005/6 year, and a good deal of our expenditure has already been accrued.

It behoves me to comment that attendances at some meetings has been small with a handful of committee members either attending no meetings at all or being otherwise uninvolved in TUHP activities throughout the year. I would be grateful if these people would let me know either at the AGM or privately at some other time whether they wish to continue with committee membership. Conversely, others on the committee have lent much time and energy to our projects in 2005 and I would like to thank them very much for their input — and I look forward to working closely with them in the coming year.

David Grant  
Chairperson

## TUHP Committee 2006

Those elected at the AGM held on 5 December 2005 were: *Alex Burton; Colin Hicks; Darrell Bennetts; Dave Morgan; David Grant; Donald Anderson; Donald McRaid; James Taylor; John Robson; Kerry Taylor; Lana Le Quesne; Mark Derby; Maureen Birchfield; Maxine Gay; Melanie Nolan; Neill Atkinson; Peter Franks; Richard Hill; and Sue Shone.*

At the first meeting of the Committee to be held in February 2006 the positions of Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer will be determined.

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# Frederick George Young

## *Myth and Reality*

**Fred Young was the Auckland and national secretary of the powerful hotel-workers' union from 1931 until his death in 1962. As a fellow "union boss" with F.P. Walsh and others in the 1930's and 1940's he inevitably made enemies, and those enemies have largely dictated how history has judged him. One particular enemy was John A. Lee, and there had been a legacy of bad blood between them since the mid 1930's.**

Young was born in 1888 to a lower middle class family in London's docklands, and emigrated to New Zealand around 1909. He worked as a bell-boy and porter and became president of the Rotorua Branch of the Auckland hotel-workers' union in 1913. While Rotorua president, Young would later claim, he brought on his own prosecution for breaching the boardinghouse workers' award for accepting a payment for working on his holidays. The magistrate held that both the employer and employees had attempted to defeat the provisions of the Award and fined them all.

Young moved to Auckland and became president of the Auckland union from June 1914 to April 1915, when he

volunteered for service in World War One. John A. Lee later claimed Young was involved in both harsh mistreatment of shell shocked soldiers at the Front, and with 'black market' alcohol. Certainly Young's official war record provides no evidence of either, and Lee's claims only surfaced a year after Young's death in 1963.

On his return Young managed various hotels in the Auckland and North Auckland area, and was again prosecuted for an Award breach. This time for failing to keep a wages and time book. Young later admitted only to having been lazy. He was not renowned for working hard. Lee also alleged that Young was a Communist Party supporter at the time. Again, there is no conclusive proof and one might think that a hotel manager was not an obvious Communist Party recruit in the 1920's.

Young appears to have reactivated his union activities around the time of the Alliance of Labour supported "No wage reductions" campaign in the hotel industry in 1931. In fact his timing was most propitious as 6 months later the Auckland secretary was dismissed for negligence and Young became acting secre-

tary. He wasn't, however, directly involved with brewer Ernest Davis' promotion of the Labour Party candidacy of John A. Lee, despite what has been suggested. Lee was elected in 1931 only a month after Young became acting secretary and Young was to later criticise Lee's involvement in high interest loan dealings.

During the early 1930's the hotel workers' unions fought cuts to pay and conditions with the advice and solid support of the watersiders' and seafarers' unions, as fellow members of the Alliance of Labour. This linked Young closely to Jim Roberts and F.P. Walsh. Roberts even encouraged Young to stand for Parliament, but this was thwarted by revelations of Young's former Award breaches. Young also got into much trouble over the 1935 Auckland local body election campaigns. He was identified as a supposed dominating force in the Auckland Labour Party and as having tried to force through the withdrawal of the nomination for a sitting M.P. and the nomination of a weak Labour candidate to oppose Young's former employer, Ernest Davis, for the Auckland mayoralty.

The reality is more that

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Young had difficulty in even winning election to the Auckland Labour Party Committee, let alone dominating it. He also favoured another candidate for the Mayoralty and there was no evidence produced of any bribe. Nevertheless Young's very intemperate language nearly led to his expulsion from the Party. He also tried to act as an "honest broker" at the time of the resignation of Jim Roberts from the secretaryship of the Alliance of Labour in 1936, rather than as a "henchman" of F.P. Walsh. At the time those in attendance regarded the matter as more one of a personal disagreement rather than a power struggle.

Just as Young was said to dominate the Auckland Labour Party, so the reality of his supposed domination of the Auckland Trades Council while President from 1937 to 1942 is different. Young's attendance, and hence direction of the Council, was variable at the least. Also, the degree of influence he was able to bring to bear on the expulsion of John A. Lee from

the Labour Party in 1940 is also open to question.

Another accusation is that Young's mistress received a hotel license in return for his opposition to the recommendations of the 1946 Report of the Royal Commission on Licensing, which favoured nationalisation of the liquor industry. Young was a Commission member. Young had always publicly opposed nationalisation and his nomination to the Commission may have been Prime Minister Peter Fraser's ensuring the elimination of what may have become a contentious political issue. Certainly few Commission recommendations were ever actioned.

Young's level of involvement with the break-away TUC in 1950 has nevertheless been understated, not least by Young himself. He was certainly trying to play a double game with his own hotelworkers' unions who opposed the TUC, although whether he was acting with the secret support of F.P. Walsh is unlikely. Nevertheless, Walsh took over from Roberts after 1936 as

Young's favourite Wellington correspondent.

During the 1957-1960 Nash Labour government Young acted more as a lobbyist for the licensed victuallers' association than as a loyal pro-Labour union secretary. While he managed to become a member of the Tourist Hotel Corporation, the 1935-1949 closeness between the Labour Party and the hotelworkers' unions was gone. In fact his unions had virtually disaffiliated by the time of the 1960 election. He also misled his own union when it came to assisting F.P. Walsh with the payment of libel costs brought by Tony Neary. When he died in 1962 Young had been secretary for 31 years. He had been asked to resign in the early 1940's because of time pressures from his wartime duties, but this was turned down by his unions.

For more details please visit my on going work at [http://www.geocities.com/nzhistory/Fred\\_Young.htm](http://www.geocities.com/nzhistory/Fred_Young.htm)

David Verran.



## Dick Scott's "151 Days"

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## Thanks, Rod

*It is with three of my many hats on that I wish to give my tribute to the tireless work of Rod Donald I have witnessed over the last decade. The hats are as President of Rod's union, UNITE, Industry officer for the Clothing Union, and Board member of ARENA which worked closely with Rod over this time on issues of free trade and globalisation.*

Rod joined UNITE when he entered Parliament because, in his words, MP's should be seen as workers with no higher status than any other. One of the co-founders of UNITE was Sue Bradford who went on to become a Green MP, and Rod was attracted by the campaigning and social justice programme of the union trying to organise low paid, vulnerable and unemployed workers.

The Clothing Union or CLAW was the union where Rod put much of his political energy. It was this union, led by Maxine Gay, which was and still is instrumental in highlighting the cost of unfettered free trade on the lives of clothing and other workers in New Zealand. Rod would ensure through the work of his wonderful parliamentary secretary, Bronwen Summers, and a most obliging parliamentary library that CLAW

had every available statistic on loss of clothing and footwear jobs, imports and exports of clothing and footwear, NZ terms of trade etc, etc.

Maxine and I joined Rod on a number of panels organised by either CLAW, ARENA or the Green Party to push the message that free trade is not healthy for working people in NZ or in the third world. This would take us to the main cities, but also to the smaller centres such as Levin and Blackball.

Blackball was a yearly event. A celebration of international workers day, May Day, in the birthplace of the NZ Communist and Labour Parties by an unlikely combination of big city unionists and West Coast greenies.

Yet it was these delightful contradictions that permeated the life of Rod; someone who was at the same time a visionary and a pragmatist. An idealist and a realist.

Even getting to Blackball was a contradiction for Rod. Three years ago, the anti-coal but pro-rail Rod hitched a ride from Christchurch to Greymouth on a train, a coal train. He probably rationalised it on the basis that he was on an empty coal train, returning to the West Coast. And on the way back to Christchurch he hitched a ride with the ARENA

contingent. It was the longest that we had ever talked to Rod uninterrupted. It was a great conversation, but Rod was going cold turkey. There was no cell phone reception for almost two hours straight. Although very frustrating for Rod, you knew that if any community en-route had been protesting about the location of a possible cell phone tower, Rod would be out there with them.

Rod worked with and supported ARENA in a similar way as he did other cause groups such as CAFCA (Committee Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa) and the ABC (Anti-Bases Coalition). Murray Horton from CAFCA and ABC put Rod's relationship to these groups very well in one of his obituaries to Rod. He noted that we absolutely appreciated Rod's support and collaboration on the projects that he and we felt so passionate about. However, there was also a nervousness that Rod would become the magnet of media attention rather than the independent cause that we were trying to promote. But, as Murray Horton pointed out, without the publicity generated by Rod, there was usually no publicity at all for our cause.

Rod was not, as his detractors always accused him, anti-trade or anti-business.

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*He was probably one of the few MP's to have been a trader and business manager before coming to Parliament. What Rod opposed was "free" trade and the dominant business ethos that puts the interests of capital above all other interests including labour and the environment. He simply could not understand how any*

*government could preside over a continuing blow-out of NZs trade deficit without taking remedial action. So it is fitting that one of Rod's last successes was to persuade today's Government to actively promote a 'Made in NZ' campaign.*

*Thank you Rod for all you have done in your far too short*

*a life to support the NZ workers who made these products. And thank you for your uncompromising opposition to free trade and globalisation and the havoc it has brought to workers and the environment in this country and around the world.*

*Robert Reid*

## *Reminder: TUHP Seminar 2006*

### *New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War*



At the Battle of Jarama in February 1937, the British Battalion (with Irishmen, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans etc.) was at full strength: three rifle and one machinegun company, totalling about 600 men. During the battle, in which the 'British' helped to check the nationalist advance on an important 'lifeline' road that linked Madrid with the port of Valencia, the Battalion lost a lot of men and was never to regain a full complement. Each Battalion had a Spanish component, but by the time of the last great Republican offensive in July 1938, the Battalion — as with all the Battalions in the International Brigades — was substantially Spanish in national composition.

*From Aussies in the Spanish Civil War 1936/39 by David Leach,*  
<http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-conflicts-periods/other/spanish-civil-war.htm>

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And MMP not only resulted in smaller parties like the Green Party being represented in Parliament; it has also sometimes enabled them to play a key role in the parliamentary process.

The Green Party under Rod's co-leadership certainly did that in respect of the many important measures the CTU has actively supported and promoted during the past six years.

The CTU co-operation and joint advocacy with the Green Party began early in the life of the Labour - Alliance Government with the re-establishment of ACC as a national public fund scheme; the Employment Relations Bill in 2000; the International Treaties Bill; the Anti-Terrorism Bill; Paid Parental leave and minimum wage legislation; the workplace health and safety legislation; and many others.

And it continued during the second term with crucial Green support for the new Holidays Act, and the 2004 amendments to the Employment Relations Act. Those measures would not have been passed without that support, and we will not forget that.

Rod, thank you for that very direct contribution to the legislative gains which have been made for the 300,000 working people and their families the CTU represents, and the many others who have benefited as well.

So the Green Party under Rod's co-leadership has had a

strong focus on fairness at work and social justice issues. It has been a party with which we shared a common approach to many issues, both domestic and international.

Many of the current generation of union leaders, like Rod, were involved in "movement politics" which grew out of the 1960's and 70's — the peace movement; the anti-nuclear movement; the environmental movement; the anti-apartheid movement.

Rod actively supported union campaigns, including the Rail & Maritime Union's "Take Back the Track" campaign, and the recent health sector campaigns.

And of course we regularly discussed and co-operated on many other issues. Kyoto, human rights and trade were among those. Rod's limitless energy and innovative campaigning ensured a high profile and public interest in many of the human rights issues we shared a concern for; labour rights in China; entrenched forced labour in Burma; and the recent tour de force with Henry Longa against the Mugabe regime abuses in Zimbabwe.

Rod had moved on from 'movement politics' to 'party politics'. He had played a crucial role in leading his party into the real world of party politics; the hotbed of principle, rhetoric, and compromise which is MMP. He clearly loved politics and had become a very skilled politician.

We shared Rod's disappointment that the Greens were not able to become a more integral part of the new Government, and despaired at the short sightedness and prejudice of the political and business interests who blocked him. But an enduring memory is the dignity with which he masked that disappointment and engendered a genuine respect, even among those who conspired to block him from Cabinet.

And within a few days he had applied his positive spirit to the challenges which were within his grasp. With Rod's appointment as the Government spokesperson on 'Buy New Zealand Made' we were looking forward to working and campaigning with him.

We share his concerns about the negative impacts of globalization and our open economy, and saw this Government/Green initiative as an opportunity to highlight the issues and develop support for an economic and social development strategy which has a sustainable high value, high skill and high wage manufacturing sector at its heart.

And, I share Jeanette Fitzsimmon's public commitment to ensure that Rod's work continues. The CTU continues to have shared objectives with the Green Party and of course we also have excellent working relationships with the leadership and at other levels.

Ross Wilson  
President NZCTU

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## Tributes to Rod Donald

Green Party MP and co-leader Rod Donald died suddenly on 6 November 2005, aged just 48. While his work for the environment and associated issues was well-known his close links with trade unions were not. On 21 November, Wellington hosted the third in a series of public memorials to celebrate his life and work in Parliament's Legislative Chamber and Grand Hall. TUHP members Ross Wilson, President of the Council of Trade Unions, and Robert Reid, president of the trade union UNITE both addressed this gathering. They kindly allowed edited versions of their speeches to be printed in this issue of the Newsletter — Ross's address appears below (and on page 13), and Robert's on pages 11 & 12.

***Rod's sudden death was a real shock for us at the CTU, and we were deeply saddened by it. Rod had attended our Biennial Conference only 10 days or so earlier and was in his usual good spirits and apparent good health.***

*I now feel I missed an opportunity to thank him for his work. I didn't do so because he was there to support Sue Bradford, who had been invited to address our conference, and of course we all expected Rod to be around for many years to come.*

*So I appreciate this opportunity to tell his family, his colleagues and his friends how much we, in the union movement, valued our relationship with Rod, and appreciated his tireless work in our joint causes.*

*Principled, passionate, tireless, relentlessly positive, and good natured are all*

*words which come to mind when I think of Rod.*

*I got to know Rod well over the six years since I was elected CTU President. Rod was a key influence in bring-*



*ing the Green Party and the union movement closer together and I have enjoyed working with him on many issues over that period. His*

*working life is a testimony to his commitment to the values and principles he so strongly believed in.*

*For the CTU one of his key achievements was as the National Spokesperson for the Electoral Reform Coalition. With his usual passion and energy he clearly articulated the case for proportional representation and played a key role in the introduction of the MMP system; and with it the diversity, interest, and more representative politics we now enjoy. In that role he worked closely with the CTU, and union activists and leaders, including the former PSA General Secretary, Colin Clark.*

*So thanks Rod for that important contribution to making Parliament more representative and democratic. We certainly appreciated that reform after the excesses of the 1980s and 90s.*

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