

No. 93 April 2025

lhp bulletin



Volunteer Cycle Corps Len King Collection 2006



LHP Bulletin 93, April 2025

ISSN 1175-3964

The Labour History Project Inc.

5/124 Hataitai Rd, Hataitai, Wellington 6021

Aotearoa New Zealand

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Print subscriptions of the Bulletin are available.

Email treasurer@lhp.org.nz

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Design: Hayley Young

Editor: Paul Maunder

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Editorial

In their seminal 1970s work, *Anti Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari argued that late capitalism, as it operates in free flows of association triggered by subjective impulse without logic or ethic, is essentially psychotic. As we currently witness a live stream genocide, a live stream imposition of a dictatorship and the dismantling of the post WW11 global order, it would certainly seem that their prophecy is coming to fruition.

While it is necessary to detail the psychotic behaviour of the current coalition government, which our Chair Gordon Anderson does with legal precision and which Bill Rosenberg does with economic accuracy, it is, in this edition, a relief to revisit older times when, while capitalist oppression was played out, there were at least expectations of a moral society.

Colin Feslier's article linking the death of Norman Kirk to Island Bay and the Home of Compassion is touching, as we remember what can seem like a time of progressive social democracy. Jon Henning's about to be published work narrating the translation of 19th century UK workplace relations struggle to the new colony is both a comprehensive and useful literature review but also a steadying narrative. Mary Roberts-Schirato, in researching her grandfather's union career came across a robust worker's letter to the union bosses which reminds us of the important place of literacy in the life of a working man. Doug Munro reveals the complexity of moral position in the dynamic of social and political change. Finally, there are two reviews by LHP stalwart, Mark Derby, one of a successful effort to recover a silenced historical work, the other a detailed look at the individual political and social context of two down-under volunteers in the Spanish Civil War.

Paul Maunder

Chairperson's Report

In 2025 work has continued on our normal events and in particular the Rona Bailey lecture which is tentatively scheduled for November 2025. We will also be seeking a speaker for our annual general meeting in late July. The gradual updating of the Project's website continues and in due course we hope to look at improving it as a central source for those seeking information on labour history.

As always the Committee welcome new members and also welcomes suggestions as to how we may better deliver on our objectives of promoting and disseminating labour history.

Among other things, the work of the Project is 'to promote and encourage a greater understanding of trade union and labour history in New Zealand.' As part of meeting this latter objective let me offer my thoughts on the current attack on NZ workers' rights by the Coalition Government.

The wheels on the bus....

While history does not necessarily repeat itself it is almost axiomatic that the struggles of previous decades always need to be re-fought every decade or so. As all readers will be only too aware, the current Minister of Workplace Relations and the Coalition Government has launched a multi-prong attack on New Zealand workers – the most significant attack on workers since the 1990s. Among other

things this multi-pronged attack includes:

Actively putting downward pressure on wages and salaries. On the day of writing this it was announced that the Living Wage had been increased by \$1.15 in line with a 4.2% increase in New Zealand's average ordinary time hourly rate. By contrast the minimum wage increase (which came into effect on the same day) was 35 cents. A few days earlier the Government announced moves intended to encourage government contractors to cut the wages of their workers by no longer requiring contractors to pay the living wage. It also seems likely that some pay equity settlements will be threatened in the longer term and it may well be that Holiday Act reforms will see entitlements reduced.

Moves have been announced to put more emphasis on 'merit' in public service appointments, an announcement that seems more a dog-whistle to appease New Zealand First than solving any particular problem.

Significant threats to health and safety protections threatening to undermine health and safety law. It has been recently announced that health and safety duties imposed on directors will be relaxed¹. Imposition of duties on directors were key recommendations of both the Pike River Royal Commission



PSA workers and other unionists during their protest at Parliament. Photo / Mark Mitchell, NZ Herald

and the Independent Taskforce. A return to 'hear no evil, see no evil'?

In addition it has been announced that small employers will only need to manage 'critical risks.' Managing psychosocial harm will apparently not be required – that of course includes harm such as stress caused by overwork, bullying, sexual harassment and the like and is the type of harm that is often common in female dominated employment. It is also harm that falls outside ACC coverage. Other remedies are inadequate, although the failure to address the drivers of psychosocial harm might give rise to a personal grievance – oops, wait a minute.....

The Minister has also announced an attack on personal grievance protection, a battle lost in the 1990s but the Minister seems to have realised that a guerrilla war strategy may be more successful than a full on frontal attack.

And of course not seeing modern slavery as a priority.

The importance of personal grievance protection cannot be overstated – in its absence employees are totally at the mercy of their employer and what legal rights they may have become illusory. Try to argue the terms of a contract should be observed and you are queuing up at Social Welfare the next day! The common law alternative is *employment at will*, or common law dressed up as wrongful dismissal. *Employment at will* means exactly what it says – your employment is at the sufferance of the employer who need have no reason at all to dismiss you. It is probably no coincidence that much modern employment and particularly gig employment thrives on *employment at will*. Almost certainly the international companies benefiting from such employment will be pushing strongly for the United States at will model to be universalised. Indeed, the push to ensure that Uber drivers and the like are not employees is likely to be driven by this desire. Unaccountable and arbitrary exclusion from access to a gig app by algorithmic decision-making is largely premised on *at will* employment.

Being a labour history bulletin it might be useful to recall the history of employment protection in New Zealand.

Prior to enactment of the Industrial Relations Act 1973 any employee in New Zealand could be dismissed without reason as long as any, often extremely short, contractual period of notice was provided. This of course meant that any employee regarded as a 'troublemaker' could be thrown out of work on extremely short notice. A troublemaker of course was anyone who was insufficiently subservient, or who might argue for their contractual rights, or who might protest against unjust treatment. And, indeed it was far from unknown for employees to be dismissed as an example to keep other employees in their place. It might also be remembered that many of the protections taken for granted today, and especially rights of non-discrimination, were largely unknown before the 1970s. Dismissal of women for the sin of marrying or becoming pregnant had only slowly come to be challenged by the 1970s and, even then, more because of labour market shortages than principle.

It is probably not necessary to go into the history of the personal

grievance procedures in any great detail but at least some key points should be noted². The first is that protections were not legislated for as the result of employer or government largesse. When first (unsuccessfully) introduced in 1970³ the key reason for the reform was not a concern for employee security but the very high proportion of strikes attributed to unjustified dismissal disputes. The reform was intended to limit such strikes by providing a more legalistic process for adjudicating the rights and wrongs of a dismissal. The introduction of the concept of disputes of right in the Industrial Relations Act 1973 formalised the position that disputes concerning dismissal or the interpretation of industrial instruments should be settled by an adjudicative process rather than industrial processes. The right to bring a personal grievance was vested not in the individual employee but their union. While this situation weakened somewhat in later years, until 1991 personal grievances retained a strong industrial underpinning in that trade unions had the initial right to initiate a grievance and most grievances were brought on behalf of members by union lawyers or advocates.

That of course changed in 1991. Employment relationships became individualised as did personal grievance rights. As union membership collapsed, personal grievances were increasingly brought by individual employees. Moreover, the right to bring a personal grievance was extended to all employees. The group to benefit from this extension was higher paid white-collar workers and managerial employees⁴. The expansion significantly altered the characteristics of the pool of employees eligible to access the protections. These employees generally sought independent legal representation and were more willing to appeal their grievance to the Employment Court. Inevitably, as the legal profession came to dominate personal grievance litigation, they sought to shape the process to fit within their own comfort zone of an adversarial approach to litigation and advocacy based on the identification of identifiable breaches of legal rights and compensation for that breach.

Of course, the real story of 1991 was not the extension of personal grievance rights but of why they were retained. The answer to this question is not entirely clear but it seems most likely to be an issue of political pragmatism and that repeal was seen as a step too far. Whatever the full reasons it was a decision that incensed the far-right including the extremist Business Roundtable (now rebranded as the New Zealand Initiative), who launched a massive and hostile campaign in favour of employment at will. Although this campaign was unsuccessful the new-right did achieve some success through litigation in which the reactionary Court of Appeal of the 1990s significantly undercut personal grievance protection by strictly construing the test of justification and the meaning of dismissal.⁵

The personal grievance provisions were rehabilitated and reinforced in the Employment Relations Act 2000 and apart from the introduction of a new definition of 'justification' in 2004 have remained largely unchanged for a quarter of a century. One might have hoped that after a quarter of a century of relative stability that the ability to bring a personal grievance to challenge unjustified dismissal or other unjustified actions at work, had wide public

acceptance – and it almost certainly still does. That, however, means little to extreme right-wing ideologues such as the present Minister for Workplace Relations and the ACT Party generally. While the outright repeal of the provisions, as was advocated in 1991, remains politically unlikely the Minister seems to have shifted to a policy of death by a thousand cuts.⁶

The Minister's attack seems to have three facets:

- First, excluding more highly paid workers (those with an income of \$180,000 per annum) from having a statutory right to challenge an unjustified dismissal. This is likely to see a reduction in cases being appealed to both the Authority and the Court but especially the latter.
- Second, imposing a range of new restrictions on the level of compensation payable to unjustifiably dismissed employees.⁷ Effectively, the proposed reforms will significantly increase the litigation risk for employees, including the risk of an adverse costs award. Such risks are likely to make decisions to challenge an employer's actions less frequent or lead to a reluctance to move beyond mediation.

- Appointing 'the right people' to the Employment Relations Authority. In a recent statement⁸ the Minister has announced that the warrants of many Members will not be renewed so that 'that the right people are appointed'. Given the two appointments and one renewal to date 'right' might be taken fairly literally: the only Member reappointed was previously employed by Kiely, Thompson, Caisley and the two new Members were previously employment relations managers for major corporates and one also employed by major law firms.⁹

Stable labour relations and safe and productive workplaces require stability and a tripartite approach to workplace issues – not a Minister who has no experience of a workplace as either an employer or employee (putting working for ACT to one side) and who prefers to operate in an echo chamber ignoring worker representatives and indeed much other informed input. On the positive side we may be free of the invasion of the red road cones – probably the most serious threat to New Zealanders – Yeh Right.

Gordon Anderson

¹ <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/health-and-safety-governance-and-management-change-coming>

² For a more detailed discussion see Gordon Anderson (2022) "Employment Protection in New Zealand: 49 Years of Personal Grievance Law" 33 *King's Law Journal* 278.

³ Gordon Anderson (1988). "The Origins and Development of the Personal Grievance Procedure in New Zealand." 13 *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations* 257.

⁴ It might be noted that prior to the State Sector Act 1988 public servants were covered by separate legislation. The repeal of that legislation significantly extended the size of the group protected by the Labour Relations Act 1987 which succeeded the Industrial Relations Act 1973.

⁵ See Anderson (above n 1) for a discussion.

⁶ For another example of such tactics a Conservative United Kingdom government attempted to neuter the United Kingdom's unfair dismissal law by imposing filing fees that made actions totally uneconomic. This tactic was very successful until held to be unlawful ab initio by the Supreme Court in *R (ex parte Unison) v Lord Chancellor* [2017] UKSC 51.

⁷ For example "contributory behaviour" will require awards to be reduced- this could include "unproductive behaviour, ... or under-performance,

⁸ <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/employment-relations-authority-members-sought>

⁹ New appointments bring business expertise to the Employment Relations Authority: <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-appointments-bring-business-expertise-employment-relations-authority>

Articles

Labour History meets Local History; Norm Kirk's death in Island Bay

Colin Feslier (First published in the *Magazine of the Southern Bays Historical Society*, 2025.)



This month (August 31) marks 50 years since Prime Minister Norman Kirk died, here in the Southern Bays. He died at the Home of Compassion, which at that time offered full hospital services.¹ He was under the specialist care of Professor Thomas V.

O'Donnell.² Another specialist, Dr Fred Desmond, a pathologist, also attended him.³ Kirk was 51 years old.

According to the diary kept by Margaret Haywood, Kirk's private secretary, Professor O'Donnell suggested the Home

of Compassion for a period of convalescence because he was 'very impressed by the standard of nursing care there'. Kirk was suffering from goitre, a clot, a painful liver, an enlarged heart and impaired lung function.⁴

On August 28 Professor O'Donnell used his own car to drive Kirk to the Home of Compassion where a sister waited for them in a car and led them in through a back route to avoid waiting media. But an Evening Post photographer, Ian Mackley, twigged to this arrangement and was able to take the last photo of the Prime Minister walking, apparently confidently, into the Home. Once admitted, he continued to make some political calls including arranging for the former National Party leader Jack Marshall to be offered a knighthood. He was treated with both morphine and digoxin and reported on the morning of Saturday August 31 that he was feeling less pain, was more relaxed, and that 'the sisters are lovely'.⁵ A few hours later he was dead.

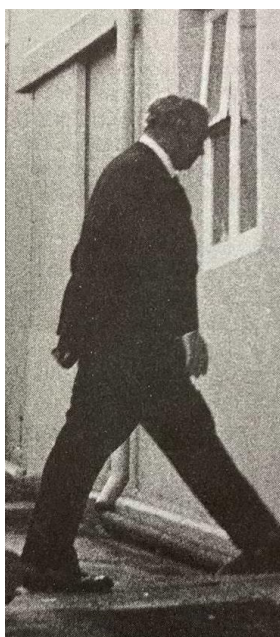
The diplomat Gerard Hensley, at the request of Mrs Kirk, who was at their Seatoun home, went to the Home of Compassion 'to make sure Norm is not on his own'. He recalled:



'I assumed that this meant a visit to the chapel but instead the sister led us down the wide polished corridors of the convent hospital until we came unexpectedly into a small sunlit room largely filled by the bed. Lying on it in his pyjamas, Norm looked like the effigy of some Roman senator carved in marble. From the large and untidily dressed

had progressed by stages to politician of his younger days he this final magnificence. I knelt beside the bed. Keeping vigil on the other side was a nun whose brother, Bernard Galvin, was a good friend. In the peaceful silence the soft, spring wind blew the curtains in and out. A paper bag stood in the corner holding the Prime Minister's last possessions.'⁶

The sister was Sister Anne Galvin a registered general nurse who in 1960 passed her maternity exams with top marks for the country. She became a registered midwife in 1962 and in 1963 received the Diploma of Nursing Administration at the NZ Post Graduate School. Sr Anne, then known by the name



of Moya, grew up in Island Bay close to the Home of Compassion where she would visit her mother's sister, Sister Zita (Lenihan), regularly.

The Home of Compassion received more than \$10,000⁷ in gifts following Kirk's death. The public was invited to send donations to the home rather than sending flowers to Mr Kirk's funeral and lying-in-state. Mrs Ruth Kirk thanked donors: 'The tremendous response is a moving tribute, and I am thrilled that so many people have contributed towards the wonderful work of the nursing sisters.'⁸

Island Bay has other links to Norman Kirk, especially through our former Member of Parliament, Arnold Nordmeyer, first elected here in 1954. He was a member of the 1935 Labour government winning the Brooklyn seat. He was a popular local MP and, as a former Presbyterian Minister, active in local Church affairs. Kirk challenged and replaced Nordmeyer in 1965.



Sister Anne Galvin

Nordmeyer succeeded Walter Nash as leader after Labour's defeat in 1960 but he continued to carry the blame for that failure as a result of his so-called 'black budget' of 1958 which hugely damaged Labour's popularity. Kirk's coup against Nordmeyer was long-planned. He even took to sending birthday and anniversary telegrams to the wives of caucus members in an effort to build his support. 'The men I wanted to vote for me slept with those women and I didn't want the wives telling them not to vote for me'.⁹ Incredibly, Kirk supporter Brian MacDonnell, a parliamentary undersecretary, obtained the dates for these congratulatory telegrams by pretending he was gathering them for an astrologer friend doing horoscopes of MPs. But this was but a sideshow to a methodical scheme. The Federation of Labour President Tom Skinner recalled: The Kirk group plan was to build a majority



support secretly and then to surprise Nordmeyer with a caucus vote that would strip him of the leadership'.¹⁰

And so, in 1965, it was done and the leadership went to a vote in caucus. 'As chairman [Nordmeyer] called for nominations, but there was no response until his third call. Fox then nominated Kirk. Again Nordmeyer called three times for further nominations. Mick Connelly finally stood up and nominated Nordmeyer. The General Secretary of the party was present at the meeting and collected and counted the ballot papers. Then 'he asked if members wished to be told the voting figures or if the ballot figures should be destroyed without disclosing them. Still smiling, Nordmeyer said he thought the figures should be known. Then the thunderbolt struck: Kirk had won 25-10.'¹¹

'Nordmeyer was utterly shocked. It was a terrible and unexpected blow. The lobbying had been ruthless and successful. The knife, which was to haunt Kirk for the next seven years...had been wielded skilfully. Afterwards Nordmeyer faced the press with the news. Emotion showing on his face he told reporters: There are some members of the party who believe the public will never forgive or forget the budget of 1958. They also believe that its author would be better relegated to political oblivion. Asked if he was disappointed he said, 'Very early in my political life I made up my mind that I could not expect any gratitude. I have not been disappointed'. Then he added that in Mr Kirk the party had a man that could lead it to victory.'¹²

Nordmeyer's loss was portrayed by some as resulting from a desire for a younger leader. He was to outlive Kirk by 15 years.

Arnold Nordmeyer's successor as Island Bay MP, Gerald O'Brien was a supporter of Kirk. In 1975, after Kirk's death, the *Truth* newspaper reported he was a member of a 'think-tank' set up by Kirk to help with economic advice, and which included Dr Bill Sutch (who was that year acquitted of espionage charges), former PSA leader and departmental head Jack Lewin, the president of the Federation of Labour Tom Skinner, and business leader Sir Henry Kelliher. Nothing of substance has ever emerged about the 'think-tank', and it may never have existed, although O'Brien told the Security Intelligence Service that Kirk 'wanted him to find out why Labour's economic policies had not been implemented... and that [Kirk] was unhappy that some of his Ministers, including Bill Rowling [who succeeded Kirk], were too close to Treasury thinking when [Kirk] wanted a fresh approach'.¹³ Kirk's private Secretary, Margaret Haywood thought it 'extremely unlikely' that Kirk would have selected O'Brien to head a secret policy-making group.¹⁴

As Labour Party vice president Gerald O'Brien ensured the selection of John Kirk, Norman's son, to succeed his father as member for Sydenham.¹⁵ When O'Brien was not selected for Labour in Island Bay in 1978 Norman Kirk's widow, by then knighted as Dame Ruth Kirk, supported his standing as an independent against the official Labour candidate, Frank O'Flynn.¹⁶ O'Flynn, who represented Island Bay from 1978 to 1987, later became the Chair of the Norman Kirk Memorial Trust.

The British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, asked about the greatest challenge politicians face is said to have replied: 'Events, dear boy, events'. The event of Kirk's death changed New Zealand's politics. It is arguable that the impact continues to affect all of us. Without Kirk, the National Party may never have opted for the pugnacious Rob Muldoon as leader. Without Muldoon we may never have had the Springbok Tour of 1981; (Kirk had famously cancelled such a tour), never had the Bastion Point evictions; and never had the economic policies that led to the actions of the Lange-Douglas governments: privatisation, a floating dollar and an end to subsidies. And so on. Bill Rowling might not have succeeded as Labour leader; Ruth Richardson may never have been a Minister of Finance. David Lange may have remained a hard-working criminal lawyer in South Auckland. And policies for reproductive rights, homosexual rights and abortion may have been liberalised much later, or with more acrimony, given Kirk's social conservatism.

This sort of thinking is called 'counterfactual history' and is merely speculation on what might have happened. It's a form of fiction on the one hand, but on the other produces insights into the importance of events. Kirk's death and its significance is in some ways made clearer by the consideration of what might have been rather than what actually was.

Norman Kirk's association with Island Bay was more tenuous than that of three other leaders – the first parliamentary leader, Alfred

Hindmarsh, who lived in Derwent St, Arnold Nordmeyer, and, most recently, Andrew Little. But for a moment, in the reporting of his death half a century ago, Kirk's name, and ours, were linked together in the public mind. And something that changed New Zealand forever happened here.



*The old Home of Compassion to which Norman Kirk was admitted.
Turnbull library Evening Post Photographer EP/1957/4824-F*

¹ A recent book on Kirk confuses the Home of Compassion with Calvary Hospital and suggests, incorrectly, that the Home was not equipped and staffed as a hospital.

² Thomas Vianney O'Donnell CBE MB ChB (NZ) 1950, MRACP 1954, MRCP (Lond) 1957, MD (NZ) 1959, FRACP 1963, FRCP (Lond) 1972 <https://www.ccdhb.org.nz/about-us/history>

³ Frederick Bernard Desmond MB ChB (NZ) 1951, MRCPATH 1964, MCPA 1965, FRCPA 1965. Dr Desmond had worked with Kirk on the state aid to Catholic schools issues and respected him. Pip Demond, personal communication 27 August 2024 <https://www.ccdhb.org.nz/about-us/history>.

⁴ Hayward, Margaret, *Diary of the Kirk Years* Cape Catley Queen Charlotte Sound 1981 p301

⁵ Ibid p304

⁶ Hensley, Gerard; *Final Approaches A Memoir* AUP Auckland 2006. Quoted in Grant, David *The Mighty Totara The Life and Times of Norman Kirk* Random House Wellington 2014

⁷ Inflation (CPI) \$10,000 in 19774 last quarter adjusted in 2024 last quarter Reserve Bank inflation Calculator - \$230,000

⁸ *The Press*, 11 October 1974 p9

⁹ Hayward, Margaret, *Diary of the Kirk Years* Cape Catley Queen Charlotte Sound 1981 p 139

¹⁰ Logan, Mary; *Nordy Arnold Nordmeyer a Political Biography*. Steele Roberts Wellington 2008 p 412, quoting Skinner, Tom & Berry, John Man Man to Man Whitcoulls, Christchurch, 1980.

¹¹ Eagles James *Making of a New Zealand Prime Minister* p 27 Quoted in Logan 2008 #13

¹² Logan, Mary; *Nordy Arnold Nordmeyer a Political Biography*. P 415 Steele Roberts Wellington 2008 - Image Turnbull Library Evening Post Photographer 26 Jun 1958 EP/1958/2138-F

¹³ Hayward, Margaret, *Diary of the Kirk Years* Cape Catley Queen Charlotte Sound 1981 p317

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Grant, David (2014). *The Mighty Totara: the life and times of Norman Kirk*. Auckland: Random House. p420

¹⁶ *The Press* 24 November 1978 p4

Work and wages: disempowerment by design. What is to be done?

Dr Bill Rosenberg Economist, Visiting Scholar, Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka

Introduction

Wages and salaries are important: they are the main source of income for most households, the main way income generated by New Zealand's economy is passed through to families.

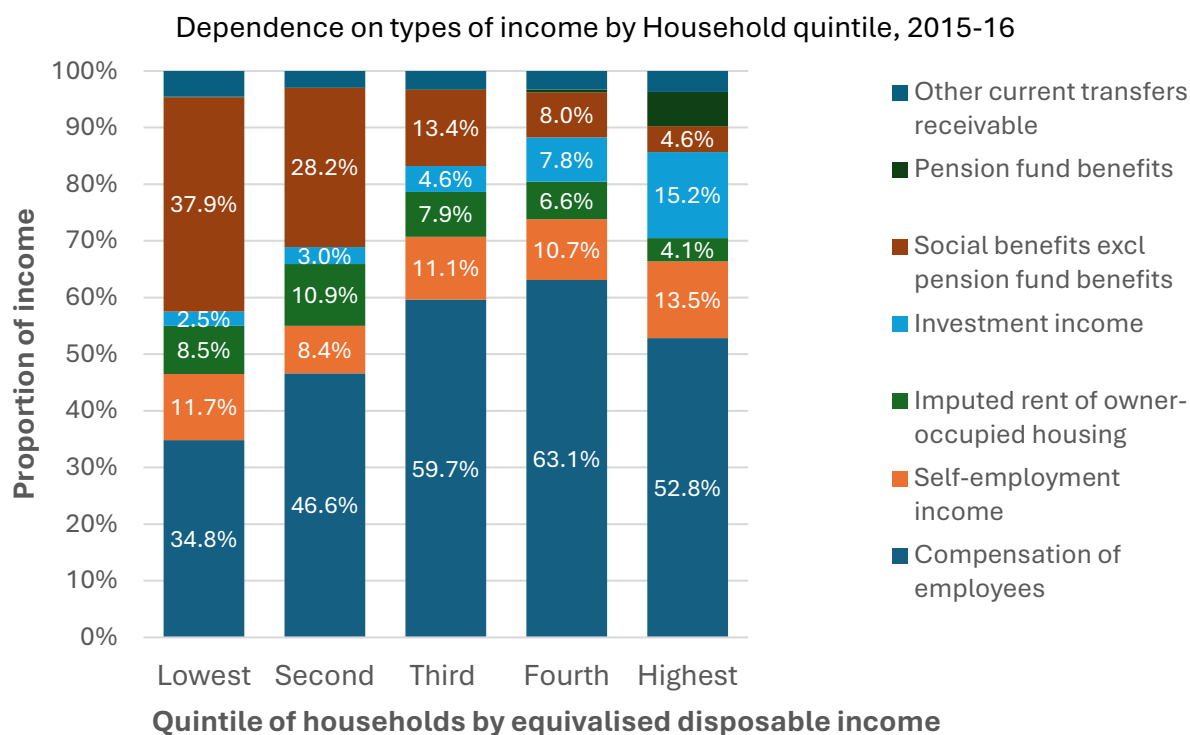
Figure 1 shows households divided into five equal size groups, in the order of increasing income in 2015-16 (unfortunately a more recent version is not publicly available). It shows from where, on average, each group sources its income. In the top four groups, wages and salaries are the majority source of income. Even in the lowest income group, wages and salaries are important.

It shows an average in each group, not a typical group household. In fact, most households depend overwhelmingly on wages and

salaries, with the majority receiving some income from social benefits but no income from self-employment or investment in any year according to Statistics New Zealand's Household Economic Survey.

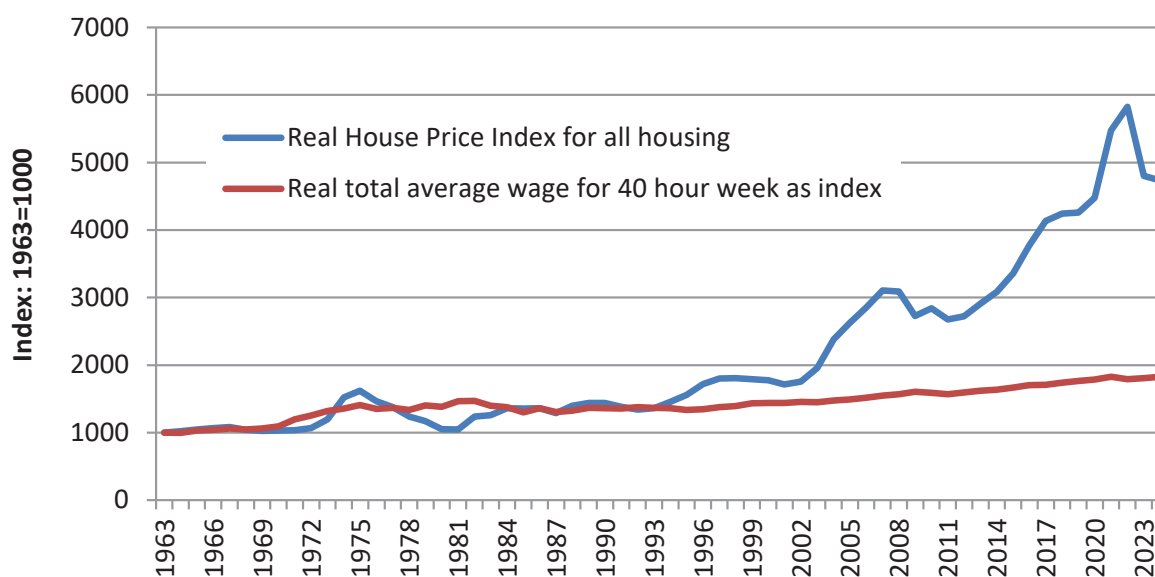
In the lowest income households, social benefits – including New Zealand Superannuation – are more important. In the richest households, self-employment and investment income are a high proportion of those households' income, over most years receiving about two-thirds of all such income. That reflects their wealth which in wealthier households becomes increasingly financial rather than housing, while other households' wealth is largely housing as the imputed rent of owner-occupied housing (the rent they save by owning a home) in Figure 1 indicates.

Figure 1. Wages and salaries are the main source of income for most households



Source: National Accounts: Distribution of household income, consumption and saving (experimental), Statistics NZ, 2018 at <https://stats.govt.nz/experimental/national-accounts-distribution-of-household-income-consumption-and-saving/>

Figure 2. Real Wages and House Prices
1963-2024



Sources:

House prices - House Price Index (HPI) for all houses linked to index for detached houses, RBNZ table HM10, series HPI.Q.H01T0.ia

Wages: Infoshare series for average total hourly wage ERN001AA, EMP013AA, QES009AA and QEM003AA , Stats NZ, linked and indexed.

Deflator: Consumer Price Index (CPI), CPI009AA.

Poverty and hardship still afflict wage-earning families. Around half of the children in material hardship are in households whose main income is from wages and salaries or self-employment (Perry, 2022, p. 33, 2024, pp. 28–30).

The growing unaffordability of both rental and owned housing is well known, but one reason is that house prices have far outstripped wages, as illustrated in Figure 2 which shows how much faster a house price index has risen compared to an average wage, including overtime, for a 40-hour week. This forces families to either rent or work more hours. It is impossible for most families to buy a house without two incomes, and increasingly, as Figure 3 shows, two full time incomes.

It is tragically no surprise that two-income families are turning to foodbanks to make ends meet (NZ Herald, 2024). This is a recipe for a return of widespread poverty in old age as these people retire without having been able to pay off their mortgage while in paid work.

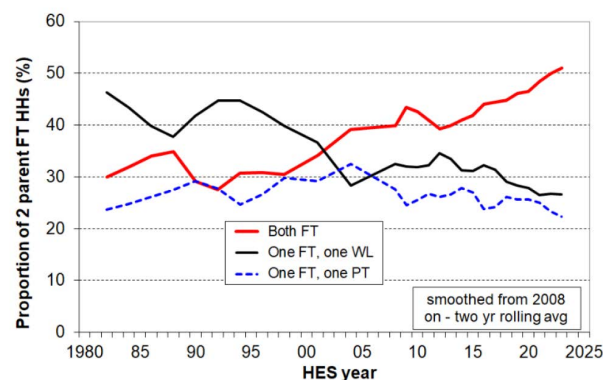
Industrial relations

This chapter is about the Industrial relations system: how wages and other conditions at work are set.

The central feature of industrial relations is the unequal bargaining power between workers and employers. This is recognised in our

domestic law and international human rights conventions, as will be seen below.

Figure 3. Increasing proportion of two-earner two-parent households with dependent children, 1982 to 2023



WL= Workless adult (less than 5 hours per week in paid employment);

FT = Full-time (30 hours or more per week); HES is the Household Economic Survey

Source: Perry (2024), Figure 11, p.31.

Those conventions also recognise that regulation, unions and collective bargaining are needed to reach the balance that is necessary for acceptable outcomes.

Until 1991, New Zealand had among the world's highest union and collective bargaining coverage under a system of compulsory union membership, industry-level collective bargaining and arbitration resulting in agreements called awards.

A landmark in our industrial relations history was the Employment Contracts Act 1991 (ECA) which was explicitly designed to deregulate, reduce wages and increase employers' control. Rebecca Macfie has documented this with great care in her biography of Helen Kelly (Macfie, 2021) who declared that our current system of poverty and low wages was *by design*.

The impacts of the Employment Contracts Act

The ECA came into force under a National Government in

working conditions was intended: it was by design.

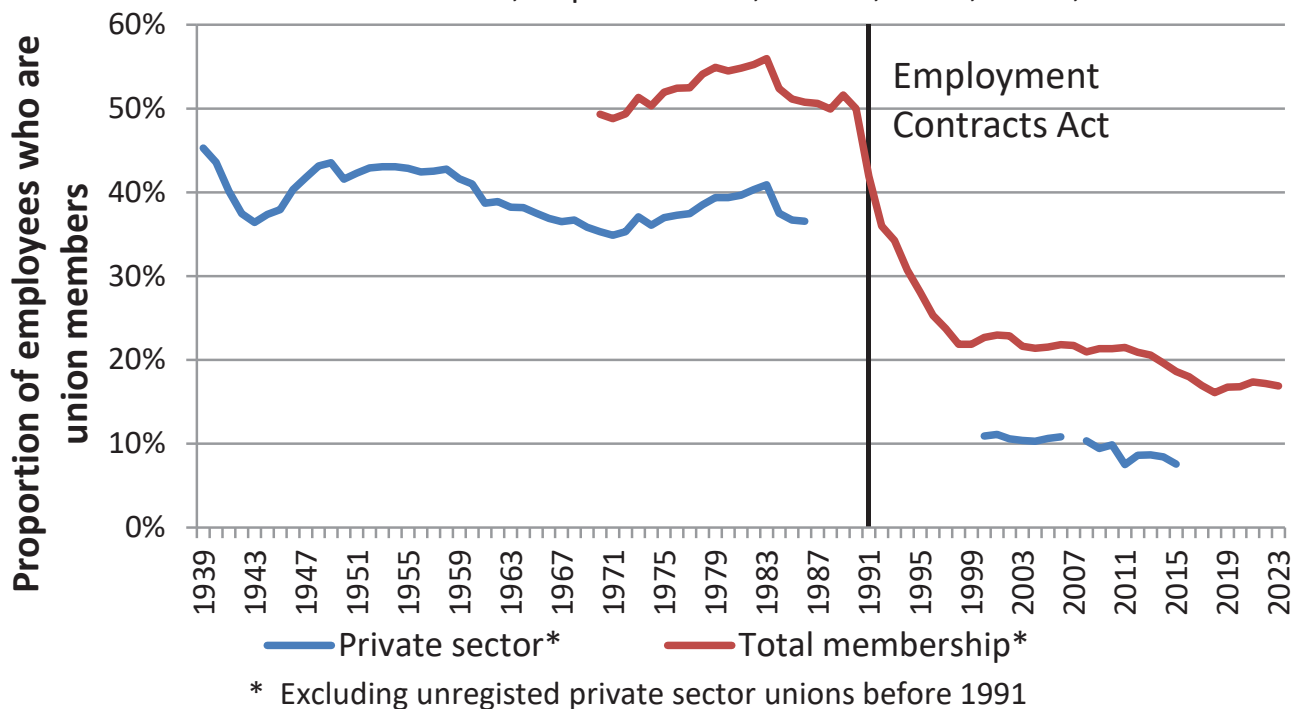
The passing of the ECA led to rapid deunionisation as Figure 4 shows – from over 50% of wage and salary workers (some had already been lost under the privatisation, commercialisation and industrial relations policies of the previous Lange/Douglas government) down to 20%, and it is still gradually falling.

Employers told workers to leave unions, take pay cuts or be sacked (Macfie, 2021, p. 135). Union officials recall fax machines running continuously as employers sent through lists of workers who had left the union.

It brought an end to many penal rates, such as for overtime and weekends, and many allowances such as for qualifications or

Figure 4: Rates of union membership, 1939 to 2023

Sources: OECD, Dept of Labour, NZOYB, MBIE, CLEW, HLFS



October 1991, its intended effects amplified by impoverishing cuts in benefits, and the highest unemployment in New Zealand since the Great Depression in the 1930s – 11% overall and 25% for Māori. There were no increases in the minimum wage for 4 years. And much more. For example, the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 greatly reduced the ability of workers to influence health and safety in their work, failed to enact the necessary regulations, and reduced enforcement, leading by 2005–2008 to fatality rates among the worst in high income countries, double those of Australia and the UK (Independent Taskforce on Workplace Health and Safety, 2013, pp. 20–21; Lilley et al., 2013).

The combination of policies that created this attack on wages and

clothing, which for some workers were a substantial part of their regular pay.

Just as important was the loss of representation and organisation of workers within the workplace, vital for health and safety and to enforce agreements and employment law, question restructuring or uberising of their work. It was a deliberate move to disempower people at work.

An example: shop assistants. My predecessor as Council of Trade Unions economist, the late Peter Conway, who represented shop workers for many years in the National Distribution Union, found in his Masters thesis that supermarket workers suffered pay losses of up to 44% following the ECA (Conway, 1998, 1999).

Figure 5. How Retail fared after the ECA



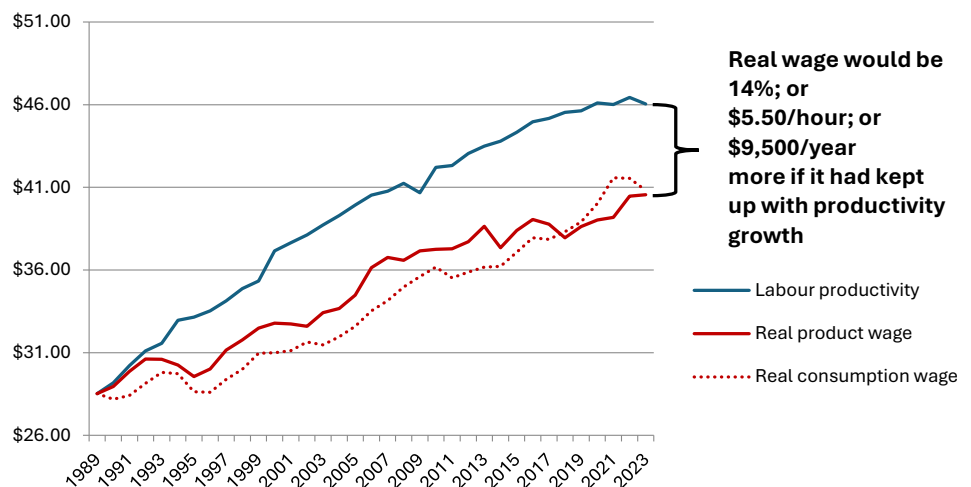
Sources: New Zealand Retail (Non-Food) Employees Award, 22 Dec 1981, p.21 (weekly/40); Quarterly Employment Survey (Stats NZ), Total hourly earnings for Retail Trade, Infoshare table QEM002AA; CPI from Infoshare table CPI009AA; Labour productivity in Retail Trade from Infoshare table PRD014AA; CPI from Infoshare table CPI009AA.

If we take the hourly rate for a shop assistant new to the job when unions and collective bargaining under the Award system were at their height in 1981, as the left-hand chart in Figure 5 shows, a 21 year old only 6 months in the job would have been paid \$22.08 per hour in March 2023 dollar values (it was \$4.71 in 1981). A similar worker today is likely to be paid the minimum wage which was \$21.20 in March 2023. That is less than the real value of the 1981 wage. In other words, starting out shop assistants are no better off than 40 years ago, and if penal rates and allowances are taken into account, probably considerably worse off. But that is not the end of it. Between 1981 and 2023 labour productivity growth in the Retail industry was strong. In a well performing industrial relations system, real wages should rise as fast as labour productivity – in this case to \$36.52. At only the minimum wage of \$21.20, there is a huge shortfall.

That happened right across the Retail industry. As the right-hand chart in Figure 5 shows, the average wage in Retail in March 1991, not long before the ECA came into effect, was \$21.80 in March 2023 dollar terms (\$10.74 in 1991). It rose modestly to \$29.03 by

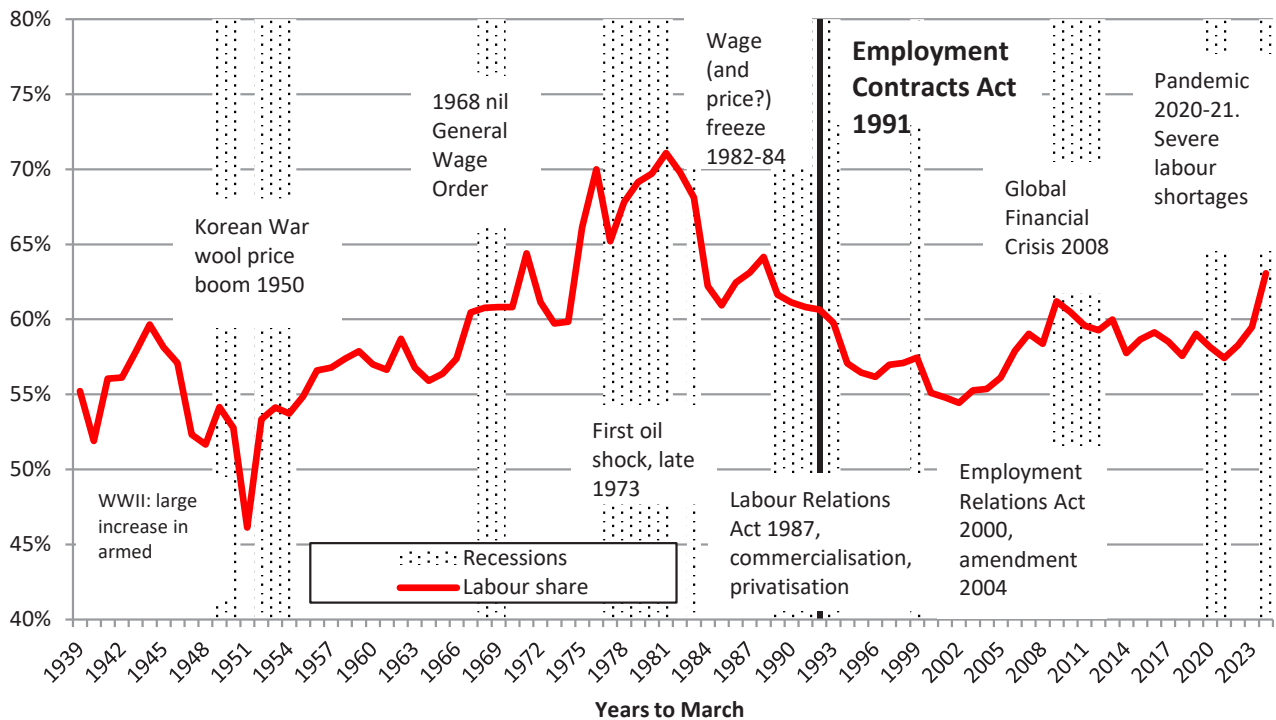
Figure 6. Real Compensation of Employees per hour compared to productivity gains, 1989-2023

March 2023 dollars, market sector



Sources: Labour productivity for Measured (market) Sector from Infoshare table PRD019AA, extended back to 1989 using Former Measured Sector series from table PRD014AA. Compensation of Employees for Measured Sector is calculated from Infoshare table SNE089AA; hours worked are provided by Stats NZ on special request. Deflators are CPI (CPI009AA) for the Real consumption wage; and for the Real product wage, GDP Deflator for the Measured Sector calculated from Infoshare

Figure 7. The labour income share of Net Domestic Income, 1939-2024



Sources: Calculated from Compensation of Employees and Net Operating Surplus and Mixed Income from National Accounts. For detail see Bertram and Rosenberg (2024) and Rosenberg (2017).

March 2023. Yet if it had followed labour productivity, it would have been \$41.91, almost \$13 higher.

Wages also fell behind labour productivity across the whole market economy as Figure 6 shows.

It shows compensation of employees per hour, which includes the effect of non-wage employment costs such as longer annual leave, ACC levies and employer KiwiSaver contributions. The blue line shows labour productivity across the whole market economy (excluding government services which are provided at no cost to the recipient, or subsidised). The red lines show two measures of real wages: from the worker’s viewpoint adjusted by CPI to reflect the rising cost of living (the “real consumption wage”); and from the employer’s viewpoint adjusted by the prices products sell for (net of non-wage costs) to reflect the rising revenue employers pay wages out of (the “real product wage”). In either case, the shortfall between real wages and productivity growth is there again.

The hourly wage would be 14% higher, or \$9,500 per year in March 2023 for the average wage and salary worker if wages had risen as fast as labour productivity since the early 1990s – a considerable sum.

These are striking stories, but my colleague, Geoff Bertram and I asked ourselves whether we could tie it down to the ECA more rigorously (Bertram & Rosenberg, 2024). One way economists look at the sharing of income, before taxes and social benefits,

between wages and employers’ profits, is to look at the share of total wages and salaries in the total income generated in the economy.

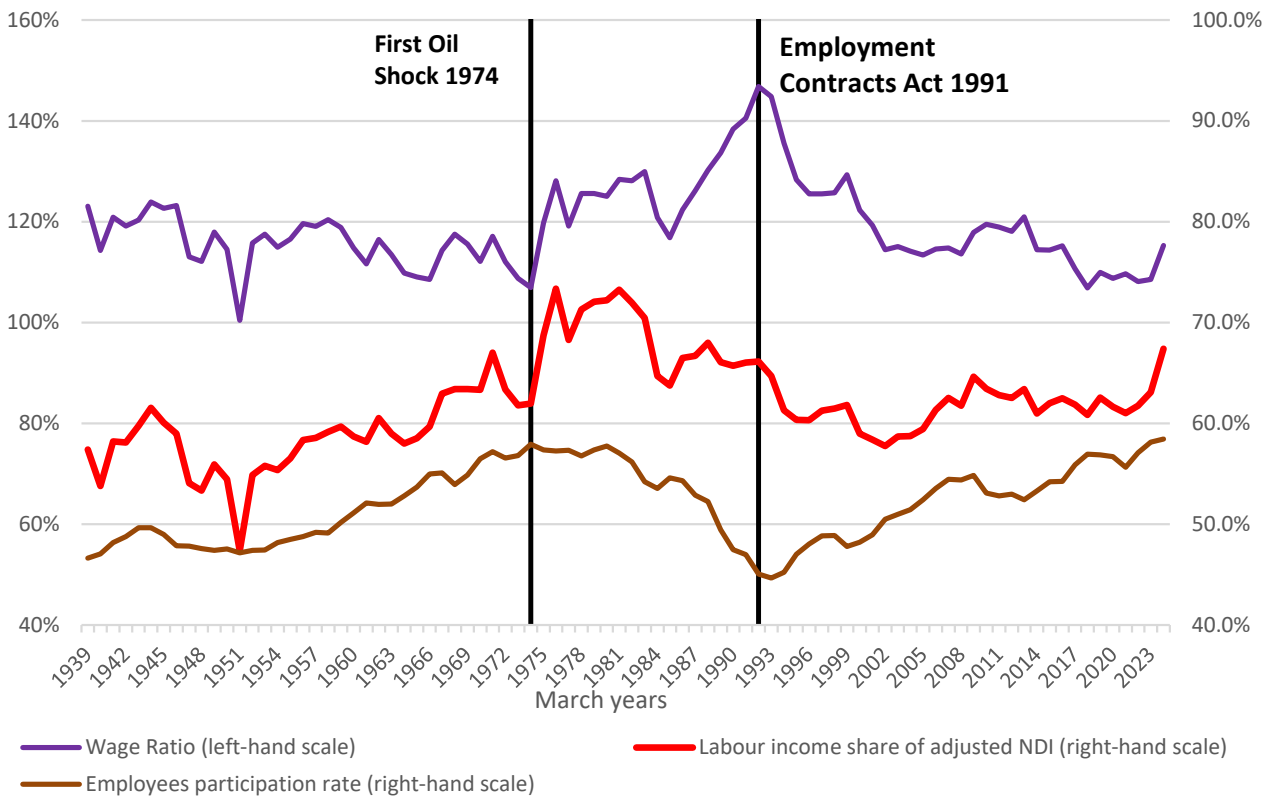
Figure 7 shows the labour income share since 1939. It rises gradually until 1981 and then falls under the influence of a wage freeze and then the neoliberal reform period in the 1980s and 1990s, bottoming out in 2002. It rose a little until the Global Financial Crisis, and then fell until the two most recent years.

The fall during the 1990s is obvious – but the ECA does not stand out as a marked break in the downward trend as our stories suggest did happen. Why is that?

Some other researchers suggested an answer (Bichler & Nitzan, 2020; Blaug, 1974, p. 57; Pen, 1974, p. 166). The labour income share is affected by the wage rate but also by how many wage and salary workers are employed. A measure we call the Wage Ratio captures that. It is the ratio between the average annual wage and the average annual income per adult. (Equivalently, it is the ratio of the Labour income share to the employee participation rate – the proportion of employees in the adult population.)

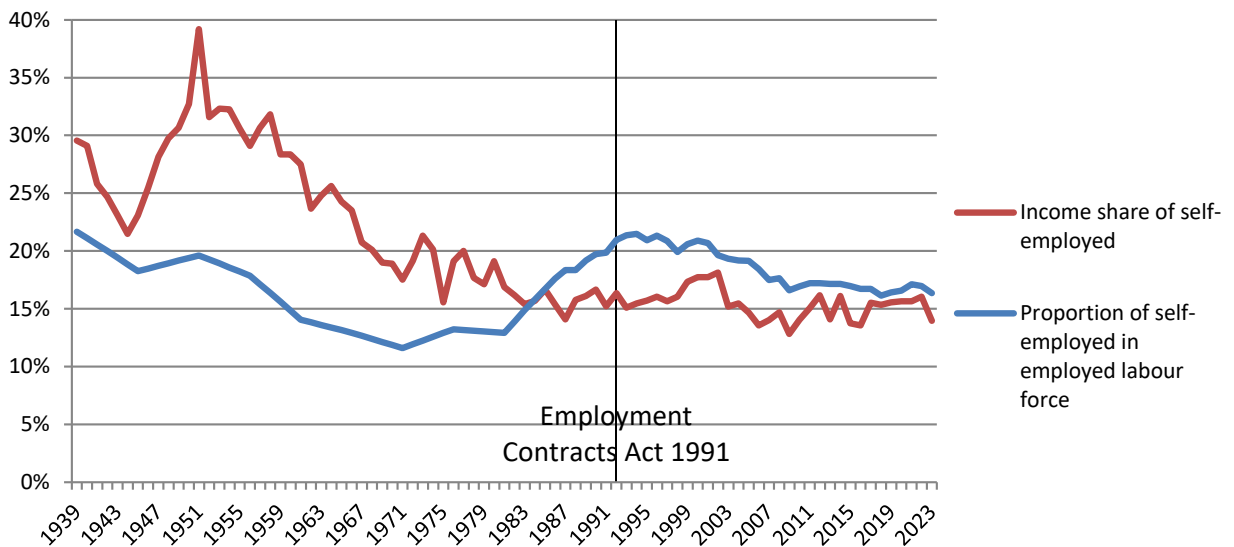
The purple line in Figure 8 shows what it looks like. Before the 1980s it is roughly flat. But it rises to a peak in 1992 – because profits were falling in a severe recession with high unemployment – and then crashes and continues to fall. The crash is in the year ended March 1992 so it includes the October 1991 date when

Figure 8. The Wage Ratio 1939-2024



Sources: see Bertram and Rosenberg (2024).

Figure 9. Income and employment share of the self-employed, 1939 to 2023

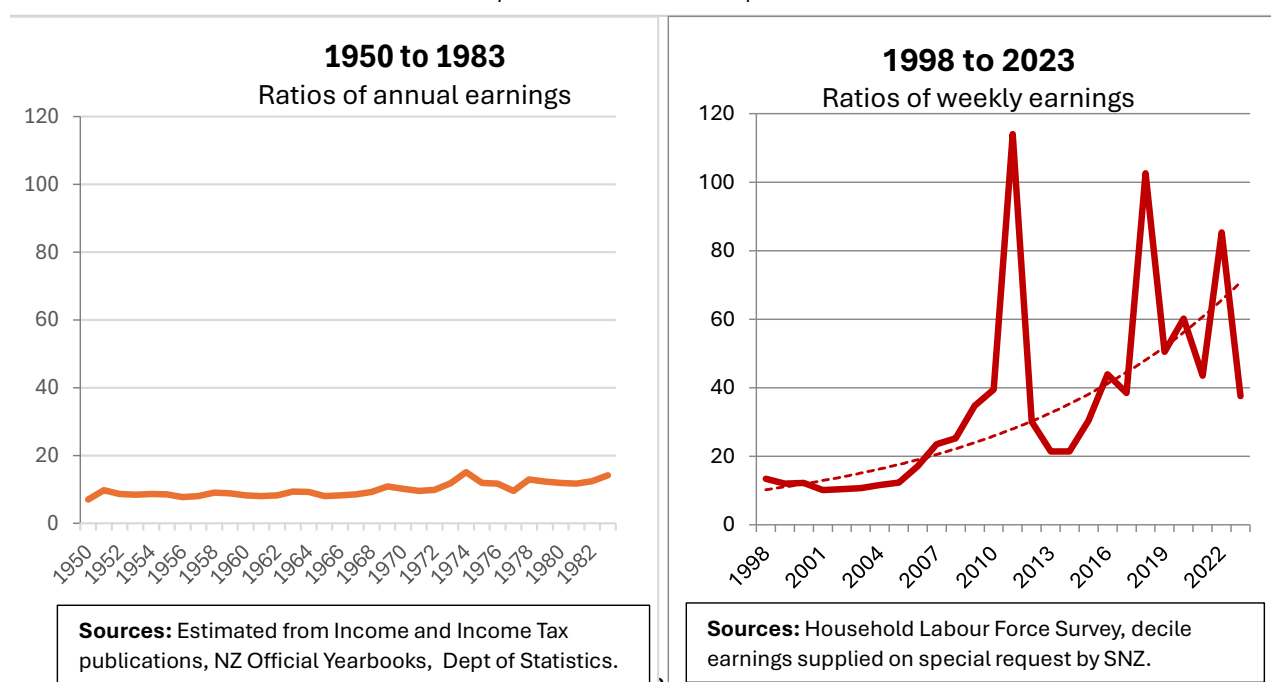


Sources: Income from SNZ's National Accounts; employment from Chapple (1994) and author's calculations to 1985, HLFS from 1986 with corrections since 2016. Further details in Bertram and Rosenberg (2024) and Rosenberg (2017).

Figure 10. Income inequality among the self-employed

Ratio between top 10% and second to bottom 10% income shares

Note: the comparison between the two periods is not exact



the ECA came into force. Our econometric analysis confirmed that this is a statistically significant change in the Wage Ratio. We interpret the change as a sudden loss of employee bargaining power. Where before the ECA, workers could bargain to increase their pay when employment conditions were tight, following the ECA that power disappeared.¹

Compare the labour income share, the red line in Figure 8, which has a quite different peak, and the employee participation rate in brown, which before the ECA supported the labour income share and following it went in the opposite direction.

We can conclude that the ECA had a disastrous effect on the bargaining power of workers, which in essence has not recovered.

The changed position of the self-employed

There are also changes among the self-employed. Very low income self-employment, by its nature providing very insecure working conditions, both takes advantage of vulnerable workers and undermines wage and salaries. Uber and contract courier drivers are just two examples. In Figure 9 you get a hint of this trend. The income share of the self-employed fell from a peak in 1951 until the 1980s since when it has been relatively unchanged. At the same time the proportion of self-employed in the employed labour force fell until the 1970s, rose to a peak in the early 1990s and has been falling since. But that doesn't tell us about the distribution of incomes of the self-employed.

Figure 10 shows a measure of income inequality among the self-employed. It is the ratio between the average income of highest income 10% of the self-employed to the average of the second-to-bottom 10%. The bottom income share is negative (they make losses) in many years.

On the left you see the post-war period. Inequality was moderate and rising slowly. The ratio doubled from 7 to 14 between 1950 and 1983. Contrast the 1998 to 2023 period on the right. Starting at around the same level as the early 1980s, it took off, with large variations, rising to between 4 and 8 times the inequality at the start of the period. This is huge and very different from earlier times.

Currently, around 40% of self-employed earn less than the minimum wage per hour.

However, the relationship between self-employed and wage and salary worker incomes, shown in Figure 11, is also revealing. For most of the earlier period, on the left, the self-employed received annual incomes on average about double those of wage and salary workers. They were among the rich in society. From the mid-1970s this difference declined rapidly, due to falling self-employed incomes. By the current period, on the right, we see that the average self-employed income is very similar to the average for wages and salaries. Inequality is within the self-employed rather than – on average – with wage and salary workers.

Who are the very rich and the very poor self-employed?

Figure 11. Self-employed and wage and salary worker incomes compared

Real average annual incomes in March 2024 dollars

Note: the comparison between the two periods is not exact

Sources as for Figure 10.

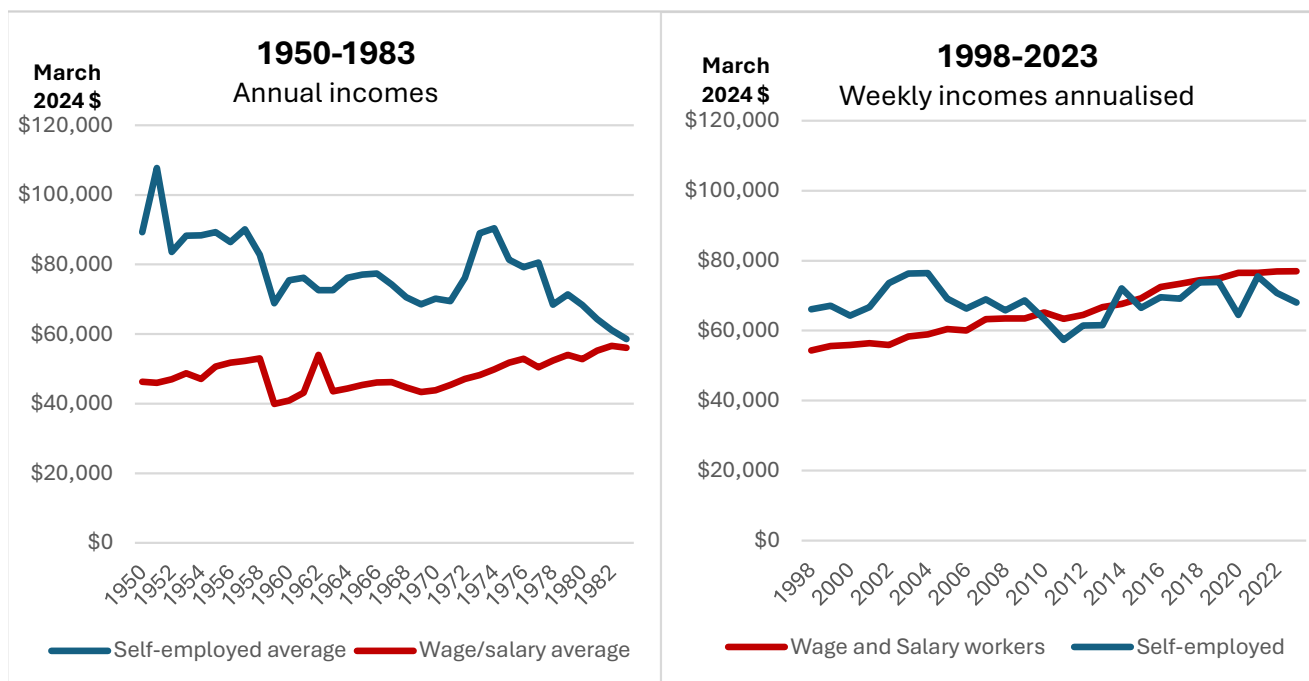


Figure 12 provides a tentative answer – tentative because of poor data. It shows which industries most frequently have the highest or lowest mean annual incomes (in the earlier period) or median annual incomes (in the recent period). This does not show the disparity of incomes within each industry which is also important, nor does it distinguish part time self-employed from full time, for which data is not available.

On the left, in the early period we see that the industries with the lowest average incomes were in clothing and textiles manufacturing, which would include outworkers, mainly women, making clothing for factories; a large collection of services notably including accommodation and food services; and Forestry, hunting and fishing.

The table on the right shows median annual incomes for those whose main earnings is from self-employment, which excludes many who are self-employed as a second or third job. Accommodation and Food Services, Arts and Recreation, and Grocery and food retailing unsurprisingly are among those at the bottom, and often below an annualised minimum wage. In Arts and Recreation think of the controversy over poorly paid contract workers working on Lord of the Rings films, and artists trying to make a living. A surprise is education and training, but Administrative and Support Services includes clerical and cleaning.

Among the top earners, the picture has some common themes over time: the professions, health, and finance and insurance. The exceptions are that the small sectors of Mining and Polymer product and rubber product manufacturing replace Agriculture (where incomes are very variable, and the self-employed benefit from capital gains which are not recorded). A surprise is that Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services is missing in the recent period, again a sector with unrecorded capital gains.

So we do see evidence that some self-employed are very low paid, and have changed in nature from the earlier period, but more research is needed.

What is to be done? Change the design

So what is to be done to improve this situation, which not only contributes to poverty but also to our people leaving New Zealand in their hundreds of thousands, and insecure, poor quality work for many.

Firstly, this is about incomes sufficient to meet at least modest needs and a live a dignified existence, but it is not only about incomes. Security of ongoing work, healthy and safe working conditions, respect of rights and protection against discrimination, control over one's work conditions such as hours, tasks, safety and work arrangements, access to sick, domestic and holiday leave, and opportunities to gain transferable skills are all important too. Their opposite spells precarious, insecure work (see for example

Figure 12. Polarisation of incomes within the self-employed: who are they?

A tentative answer.

1 = most frequent

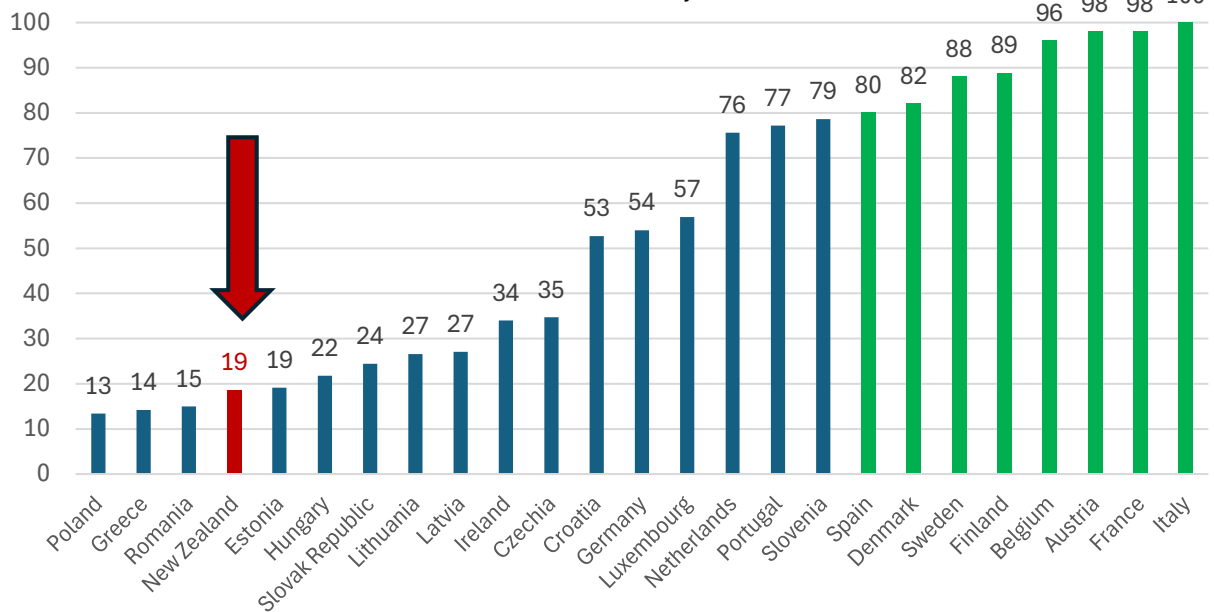
1950-1977 Average annual incomes		2000-2022 Median main annual earnings	
Lowest 20%		Lowest 20%	
1	Apparel, textiles, footwear manufacturing	1	Accommodation and food services
2	Other Services, community (includes hospitality)	2	Education and training
3	Forestry, hunting, and fishing	3	Arts and recreation services
Highest 20%		Highest 20%	
1	Professional (includes medical)	1	Polymer product and rubber product manufacturing
2	Other Commerce (mainly Finance, Insurance, Real Estate)	2	Auxiliary finance and insurance services
3	Sheep farming	3	Professional, scientific and technical services
		4	Mining
		5	Health care and social assistance

Sources: Income and Income Tax publications, NZ Official Yearbooks, Dept of Statistics. These are from 15 industries.

Source: LEED Table 1.6, Median main earning source by industry. These are from 53 Level 3 Industries in the NZSIOC classification.

Figure 13. Collective bargaining coverage (%) in the EU and New Zealand

2021 or most recent earlier year available.



Source: OECD-AIAS-ICTWSS database at Sept 2023, available at <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/datasets/oecdaias-ictwss-database.html>.

Tucker, 2002, p. 7).

Given what we have today is by design, to change the design we need regulation such as for adequate minimum wages, reasonable hours of work, health and safety. Regulation is useless without effective enforcement, but the full range of necessary regulations cannot be enforced successfully in all the 175,000 workplaces in New Zealand, and regulation does not empower workers nor bargain for pay and conditions. So representation through unions and collective bargaining must be supported through legislation and enforcement. The importance of this is recognised in binding UN human rights and International Labour Organisation conventions which New Zealand is party to.

Orthodox opinions on these issues changed notably after the Global Financial Crisis and the public anger at growing inequality. The OECD historically treated unions and collective bargaining as a barrier to economic growth but changed its focus to what it calls inclusive growth – economic growth that is widely shared. In a landmark Jobs Strategy (OECD, 2018) the OECD recognised that the quality of jobs mattered as much as the number of jobs. It recommended multi-level broad-based unions and employer organisations who engaged with each other on employment and economic conditions. For inclusivity, it recommended sectoral – such as industry-wide – collective bargaining over enterprise bargaining which is the form that dominates in New Zealand. The evidence was that this was not harmful to productivity, the OECD reported. The Fair Pay Agreements developed by the previous government are an example of sectoral bargaining.

A practical step was taken by the European Union in a 2022 Directive requiring all EU member states to work towards 80% collective bargaining coverage (see Müller & Schulten, 2024). Figure 13 shows their coverage in 2021, when New Zealand's coverage was only 18.6%. Eight members already had over 80% coverage, the majority had over 50% including most of the highest income members, and only three had lower coverage than New Zealand.

But more is necessary. To raise the overall level of wages sustainably, to stem the loss of New Zealanders overseas, we must increase productivity – and make sure that this is fully passed through in higher wages and salaries. Low wages themselves encourage low productivity because employers have weak incentives to invest in new equipment, technology and better management, and workers feel unappreciated, so raising wages would help create

a virtuous circle.

This requires change in the structure of the New Zealand economy away from its reliance on low wages which is encouraged by our current industrial relations system, to high productivity, high wage production and jobs. Structural change is also necessary to reduce carbon emissions, and to increase economic resilience in the face of international instability and the threat of pandemics. This requires industry policy where the government takes action to move the economy in a new direction.

This would create significant change in jobs, skills and working conditions. There are other major trends creating change: technology, globalisation and the aging population.

Currently workers frequently bear the brunt of change, suffering significant long-term employment and income losses when laid off. Recent research for the Productivity Commission found only 50% of laid-off workers find new work immediately, and a third still haven't found work after 6 months. There is a substantial earnings loss for almost three years for those who find work, often accepting lower skilled work or jobs with lower skill matching. Other research shows income losses of 25-30% in the first year, 13-22% after five years. (for example Hyslop & Townsend, 2017; Mare et al., 2023; New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2024).

Workers need effective income and practical support through such changes: a just transition. Otherwise we are likely to see increased polarisation and breakdown in social trust and cohesion as we see in the US and elsewhere.

Figure 14 provides a list of changes that would together make a real difference. They address effective wage setting and the negotiation of other conditions at works, the plight of vulnerable self-employed contractors, employment regulation, health and

Figure 14. A redesign for better jobs and wages

- Sectoral wage bargaining (e.g. Fair Pay Agreements, simplified)
- Opt-out union membership (like KiwiSaver)
- Speed up pay equity negotiations
- Protections for vulnerable contractors
- Effective enforcement of employment, health and safety laws
- Link minimum wage to average wage and set automatically
- Empower workers in improving health and safety, strengthen enforcement
- Industry policy with tripartite + Māori governance to raise productivity, reduce emissions, improve resilience
- Active assistance to find good quality jobs, including retraining, relocation
- Learning entitlement to retrain, throughout working life
- Income support to guaranteed minimum adequate standard of living

safety, industry policy and supporting workers through change.

They would provide a sound basis for an industrial relations system designed to provide good jobs and higher wages.

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¹There is another statistically significant change at the time of the first oil shock. However bargaining power did not fall significantly after that shock.

In the Workers' Interest: an extract from Mr Burns's Mill: a New Zealand labour history, 1840 – 1890

Jon Hennings

Arthur Burns, Member for Roslyn in Dunedin, privileged son of the respected but perhaps sometimes severe Reverend Thomas Burns, who was one of the two leaders who had brought settlers to the Wakefield settlement of Otago nearly three decades previously, argued in the house of representatives in late 1877 that the women should have the right to work longer hours than allowed under the *Employment of Females Act*. This was a time before working men and women had their own voice in parliamentary debates. Excepting that in this case, Burns had to hand a petition from female workers supporting the proposed change. The interest coincided with a circumstance in which as the founder of the Mosgiel Woollen Mill he had suffered reputational damage from a charge laid against the company for breaching the legislation. This was also a time when politicians felt entitled to use parliamentary status to openly advance personal interests.

Burns had support in the house for his amendment. Others were unconvinced and opposed. His critics included his fellow Otago representative, Robert Stout, by profession a lawyer and to be premier in 1884, and former governor and current premier, George Grey. The latter stated that an inquiry into the matter was needed. It was late in the session and a royal commission carried out an investigation the following year. The commissioners were or had been parliamentarians, magistrates, and men of business. The commission reported its finding and recommendations back to the government just before mid-year.¹

Burns argued the joined interest of capital and labour at his factory. In this there is the sense of the commonplace promotion of capitalism as a matter of interest for and of benefit to the entire community.² Capital could have the best interest of labour at



Women working in Roslyn Woolen Mill, 1907, photo, NZ History

heart and was in the best position to advance this interest. To give clarity to the supposed mutualism, it is: what is good for business is good for the community and vice versa.³ The conceit is integral to the *laissez faire* tradition and at the very least partly self-interested misrepresentation by capital.⁴ It is a general political economic interpretation that obtained hegemonic intellectual substance with and following the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. Smith spoke of a political economy that creates the greatest opportunity for 'the nation' to obtain wealth. He explained 'the causes of this improvement, in the productive powers of labour, and the order, according to which its produce is naturally distributed among the different ranks and conditions of men in the society' and provides for 'the general welfare of the society'.⁵ The importance of the idea in New Zealand is evident from the very beginning of the organized British colonization of Aotearoa. The later Burns episode in parliament also reflects nuance and tension. The *Employment of Females Act*, which sought to protect children as well as women from exploitation, was relatively new legislation. Burns accepted some need for the enactment, but not for benign employers, these well-meaning men and businesses including of course the Mosgiel Woollen Mill.

The New Zealand historical discourse includes analysis and modern assessment that underscore the importance of Smith in developing a paradigm that with some significant adjustment by Edward Gibbon Wakefield provided a basis for the British colonization of New Zealand. The idea of shared interest and benefit for capital and labour was fundamental to Wakefield's scheme, described as systematic colonization, and helps explain why there was no discussion of specific legislation to protect workers from exploitation until the 1870s. The colonization of New Zealand, in Wakefield terms, was a project designed in part to resolve the problem of poverty and distress in Britain, particularly in the industrial towns and in relation to conditions in factories. The colony was to be agrarian and its towns to operate as service centres for farming activities. Its workers were to be relatively prosperous. The most important contributions to the discourse relating Smith to New Zealand through Wakefield are two similar essays by Erik Olssen. The essays are not outliers and others provide useful information that support and substantiate the content of the discourse. These sources include the contributions that sit alongside the Olssen essay in *Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the Colonial Dream: A Reconsideration*.⁶

The current prevailing historical narrative also discloses in terms of the attempts of the Wakefield colonizers to put into practice the Wakefield scheme – also termed experiment – of systematic colonization significant modification to and strategic retreat from the generally positive Smithian framework and the gushing Wakefield promotion of joint interest and prosperity and describes a range of impacts. The start of the colonizing experience for workers was in part affirming but did not last long.

The available evidence of an initial response from workers who participated in the attempts of shared interest and benefit, has long demonstrated their assertiveness, particularly relating to the



Prouse and Saunders Flaxmill Workers at Patarau. From Stuff article, 24/10/2018

core issues of hours of work and wages. This first foray makes the later reformulation by Burns appear rather brazen and ironic. In general, however, New Zealand historians have found the results of the experiment wanting. Part of the evidence is the voiced discontent of worker migrants that arose relatively quickly after the commencement of five of the six Wakefield colonies. The change involved a general move from loud worker enthusiasm that reflected the interest of workers who were constructing the basic infrastructure of the new towns to complaints from workers who either came to New Zealand to work the land or decided after arriving that this was their best option and that they needed at the very least to access small landholdings that could provide a subsistence living. The voices of capital also changed and the sunny prospects of capitalism for all became dour; significant worker sacrifice was required if the small settlements under the leadership of the landowners were to flourish. Immediate circumstances required struggle by workers in a subordinate role. Effort and prudence could result eventually in workers taking some places in the ranks of capital and to become employers of workers themselves. Failure would be the fault of lazy workers. Beyond the first days of the Wakefield settlements and the immediate aftermath, John Martin notes the persistence of concern to exit the labour market, principally as agricultural labourers or some farming specialists, for land ownership. Rollo Arnold provides essential detail of workers of limited means seeking land. This was a goal for individuals, couples and family groupings. Roth notes information more directly related to the labour relations activity of workers within the labour market of the small settlements.⁷ Both the matters of land ownership and employment conditions in the towns involved change relating to interest and voice, that is who said what about the interest or interests. Expressions of worker interest varied: sometimes from workers, mostly articulated by others; sometimes about the town, mostly the land and the country; sometimes impossible to ignore, sometimes not even a whisper.

A new industrial regulatory aspect emerged in the first half of the 1870s, marked by the enactment of the *Employment of Females Act*. There are at least two likely reasons for this development: the influence of progressive British legislation and the growth

or the potential for growth of factory employment in the colony. Specific individual agency is also a consideration. Concern over the legislation and subsequent amendments brought about the parliamentary debate in 1877.



Edward Gibbon Wakefield, NZ History

From Wakefield to Burns, men of social, economic and political status – members of the elite – advocated on behalf of workers; what they did, or so they said, was in the apparent best interest of workers. The logic included the paramountcy of capital; there was little or nothing to share if capital did not succeed. After the spasm of optimism associated with the settlement of the first Wakefield settlements in New Zealand, workers were effectively told that it was their interest to delay gratification while the landowning capitalists found their feet. The later Burns argument and that of his supporters, in the more sanguine context of a safer economy that appeared to be on an upward trajectory, was about getting more rather than putting up with less but spouted from the same well-spring. The argument itself was mechanistic. The engine at the front of the train was capital. Workers were better off fitting in with the needs of business rather than slowing it down. The normal operation of the Burns factory supplied benefit to the community. The expansion of the mill, which was proceeding at the time, would increase the benefit. The legal action faced by the mill threatened the normal operation of the business and the loss of efficiency and economy.

Reflective of the British factory owners' visceral resistance to reductions in hours of work in the first half of the nineteenth century, employers did not like to be pressured to consider and introduce compensating functional change, whether spelt out in detail for them or not. Employers had an untrammled right

to control and for others not to interfere with what was theirs. They determined and decided, not government, not workers. Central to Burns's appeal for the amendment was that not only could he see the benefit of business unrestrained by the control of hours but his female workers could see the same. His argument was again that this was to the advantage of labour as well as the benefit of capital. His business was being prevented from helping workers. Furthermore, as much as workers in the earlier struggling Wakefield settlements had been blamed for failure because of a lack of the virtuous application of determination and effort, legislation now impeded women workers and prevented them from working with as much energy and stamina as they could and ostensibly wanted.

Yet also central to the Burns matter was that he was involved in an argument. There had to be of course at least two sides. There was continuity in terms of the source of the main voices involved in the disagreement. They were, on both sides of the dispute, as they had been in the past, members of the elite, now distinctly a colonial elite based on an amalgam of degrees of advantageous social, economic and political status. The other men, of not dissimilar rank to Wakefield and Burns, particularly from the 1870s, argued the need for some protection for workers, who have appeared to have been largely quiet themselves apart from the first years of the Wakefield settlements. Their voice was principally that of Grey and likeminded members of the social and political elite, with only a modicum of explicit support heard from labour. That said, some of the thoughts of workers that percolated below the level of the high-profile public debate and relate to the Burns dispute and prior differences have been rescued from obscurity and amplified by the estimable work of such historians as Olssen, Martin and Arnold.

Paternalism was a feature of both camps. But change is also registered in the parliamentary confrontation and the commission's recommendations. The elite sought out the views of workers to support their positions. Again, referring to the historical discourse, the legislation – the *Employment of Females Act* – has been regarded as largely ineffective even though Burns wished to reduce it. It was not changed for better or worse. To this point, the prevailing view is that without improvement it was to provide little shelter in the economic storm to come. The view is a naïve interpretation of industrial and political realities of the late 1870s. To express a partisan perspective, a progressive might also consider from this prevailing interpretation that the only acceptable part of the outcome – and a small part in relation to the great gap in our understanding to this point – was that Burns received no benefit and left parliament shortly after to work as the manager for a mining company on the West Coast.⁸

¹ NZPD (*New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*), v. 27, 1877, p. 543ff; 'Employment of Females Acts', *AJHR (Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives)*, H.-2, 1878.

² For continuity to the present day, see for example, Penelope Brook, *Freedom*

at Work, Oxford University Press, 1890, and parliamentary remarks cited in J Henning, 'The Fix', *NZJH (New Zealand Journal of History)*, v. 56, n.1, 2022; for a relatable, very contemporary comment also see Will Hutton, 'The rich were led to believe they were different. Those days are numbered', *The Guardian*, accessed 15 July 2024.

³ This was famously and succinctly articulated, in relation to General Motors and the United States, by Charles Wilson, who led the company and was secretary of defence in the Eisenhower administration, Charles Erwin Wilson - Wikipedia, accessed 30 September 2024.

⁴ While skewed by the prejudice of his time, it is possible to distil a generalisation from Thomas More's view of the predisposition among controlling economic factors to conceal "worldly wyning" and "pryuate malice" under the "the pretext of a great zeal unto the common wealth", Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1998, p. 348.

⁵ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Bantam Dell, 2003, pp. 1-4, 7.

⁶ Friends of the Turnbull Library, *Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the Colonial Dream: A Reconsideration*, GP Publications, 1997.

⁷ John Martin, 'A "Small Nation on the Move"', *Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the Colonial Dream, and the Forgotten Worker*, Allen and Unwin, Wellington, 1990; Rollo Arnold, *The Farthest Promised Land*, Victoria University Press with Price Milburn, Wellington, 1981; Bert Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, Reed, Wellington, 1973.

⁸ *Evening Post*, 25 May 1878; *Otago Witness*, 6 July 1878.

Letter From Archie Phillips To NZ Waterside Workers Federation: Edited Version

Note about the letter by Mary Roberts-Schirato

The letter comes from the James Roberts collection at the JC Beaglehole Room/ Tapuaka Collection at Victoria University of Wellington. (Papers of James (Jim) Roberts. Series B. New Zealand Waterside Workers' Federation. Correspondence with Branch Unions. Ref: B219/19, Box 686/2, Tapuaka – Heritage and Archive Collections.)

It was written by Archie Phillips, a member of the Wanganui Waterside Workers' Union, to the New Zealand Waterside Workers' Federation. It is undated, but filed with the 1921 correspondence and is addressed to 'Dear Sir' rather than to the Secretary, Jim Roberts, or the President, Lewis Glover (most of the letters from local Unions to the Federation are addressed to one of those two officials). It's possible that Phillips was not quite clear who he was writing to or it's possible that either Glover or Roberts had visited Wanganui and spoken to the wharfies and Phillips simply assumed he was writing to that man.

After the defeat of the Great Strike of 1913, the Waterside Workers Unions of New Zealand suffered a heavy blow to their organisational structures and membership numbers. Glover and Roberts, both members of the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Socialist Party, played major roles in re-establishing and rebuilding existing local Waterside Workers Unions as well as establishing new ones throughout New Zealand. As part of this effort they were instrumental in the 1915 establishment of the New Zealand Waterside Workers Federation with Glover as President and Roberts as Secretary (Taylor, 2005, p.206).¹

This letter gives a particularly lively take on Boss/Worker relationships on the Wanganui wharf and an equally lively view of the stresses and tensions between the workers, both union and non-union. Archie Phillips presents a vivid image of life on the wharf over a hundred years ago. We don't often hear directly from the pen of the wharfies – and perhaps it is even rarer to hear from a man working at one of the regional ports. Phillips' letter allows us to eavesdrop on part of that history.

Although Phillips is a forceful and engaging writer, he uses no paragraphs, almost no full-stops and his use of capital letters harks back to the 18th century. I have lightly edited the letter, adding in some conventional punctuation in order to make it easier to read. I have not changed the spelling: any spelling 'errors' are Phillips' own.

Sadly, there is no answer to Phillips in the file. It would have been interesting to see how 'head office' would have replied. However, the lack of a reply is not that unusual. The earlier files of the

Federation are somewhat randomly maintained and the reader gets the impression that there was a lack of support for the day-to-day office work at that time. There are no further letters in the 1921 file from Phillips. I have not yet finished reading the files from later years but, to date, I have not come across another letter from him.

If anyone could give me any more information about Archie Phillips, I would be delighted to hear from them. I read this letter in the course of researching the life of my grandfather, Jim Roberts, Secretary of the Federation from 1915 to 1941. One of the delights of the research is reading the letters from all over New Zealand, written to the Federation and it would be exciting to know a bit more about this particular writer.

My email address is robertschirato@gmail.com

Archie Phillips
3rd house past Hotel
Braeburn, Putiki

Dear Sir

As our Secretary is away from the Wharf working on the home Boat, (While the Cat is away the Mice will play) I just make it my Business to report to you some the doings at Wanganui. This week on Monday they Engaged for the Breeze at One O'clock - not having enough men they filled the Vacancies with Railway Employees what (I myself) call Scabs. I rang up Castlecliff for the acting Secretary, Bert Marr. When they got him he rang up Wanganui. Instead of finding me they found Fred Nelson - and he Compromised things much to my Disgust.

Well when the Breeze was finished they Engaged for the Kapiti [?]. There not being enough Union Men they Engaged free Labour. I had no Objection to that, that was Wednesday One O'Clock but what I do Object to was on Thursday Morning they were a man short Landing for the Kapiti [?], there were 3 men Staking [stacking] Benzine to Each Hold they took one of my three and put him Landing while there was a Union Man in the Donga or within A hundred yards of the Wharfe but the Bosses did not trouble to find him as he had committed that Unpardonable Sin of growing old. So, the result was another one and I had to work shorthanded, three Stacking to one hold, two to the other. There was no Alternative but to Submit as there was no representative of the Union Except one of the Executive, and that was the very fellow that was transferred from our gang to the Kapiti[?]

Landing, while there [sic] was a Union man Idle and he (Charlie Martin) knew it. So much for our Union Officials.

Yesterday morning they Engaged for the John. Now I have been on the Wharfe 3 years and I have never seen the John worked without the gaget [gadget?], as they call it. That is a staging to land the Cargo on a three Wheel trolley and run into the Shed on a level but yesterday they would not Erect the gear but made us pull small Barrows up the the [sic] ramp which has a grade of about 2 feet in sixteen. I remonstrated with the Boss. He said the the [sic] gear could not be Worked as the Ship was not in line with the Door. I said well shift the Ship. He said I am not going to Shift the Ship. I'll bet he would have had to shift the ship if our Secretary Bill Rogers had been there but the only representative of the Union was the man who would Condecend [sic] to be transferred from our gang to a longer job (what a grand Member of the Executive eh?

Well when they would not Erect the gear for the John I said to the rest of the gang let's refuse to work. I never got any answer Except from one Man named Crassey. When a Sling came up they all Crept out with with [sic] their Barrows like a lot of Cowed Dogs (and every one was a Coward) While I stood there Calling them to their faces they were a lot of rotten Bastards and worse than scabs. Now if they were not a lot of Cowards they would not allow an aged man of 48 years to stand and Call them the worst names I could think of and I can think of a few as I am a Cockney. Well we worked til 5 O'clock. The Boss Shouted 'back at six'. I said 'not me 8 hours pulling up that ramp is quite enough for me'. Crassey and three others said 'Same here'. The Boss said 'we are going to work the gear after tea'. I said 'you can f—— the gear and yourself too'. So am I am going to work this morning to finish the John and Ill [sic] bet that will be my last job I shall get [sic] unless they are stuck for a man. That is the penalty for having the Audacity [sic] for sticking up for your rights and speaking your mind.

This is the first time I have Written to you but it will not be the Last as I could not get a hearing or a following from the few rotten Bastards that are on the Wharfe. I thought through The (Waterside Worker) my Expressions might be Conveyed to the more Stauncher [sic] Members of the Union.

I might mention that the reason they allowed me to call them fancy names is because I am a man of some repute with the Mittens. I have Demonstrated to the Wharfies what sort of a? [[saint]/[joint]] I am as one night in the Donga we were playing Banker a fellow tried to grab my lot and failed. He said I'll give you a punch on the nose. Now I am never the aggressor but always on the Defensive so I said I will take my Nose's part. As soon as he shaped up I just tapped him lightly with the Left to Draw him which it did and as he came I shoved my right acrossed [sic] and he was out, two Punches.

I must now Conclude trusting you will use my Information regarding the Doings at Wanganui and hoping you will make it red Hot

I am yours Sincerley [sic]
Archie Phillips
Late of London



Victoria Avenue, Wanganui. Smith, Sydney Charles, 1888-1972: Photographs of New Zealand.

Ref: 1/2-048797-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [records/22886634](https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22886634) via Whanganui History Online facebook page

¹ Taylor, K. (2005). Cases of the revolutionary left and the Waterside Workers' Union. In Nolan, M. (Ed.), *Revolution: The 1913 Great Strike in New Zealand*. CUP in association with the Trade Union History Project, pp203-216.

Methodist Missionaries and the Abolition of Indian Indenture in Fiji ¹

Doug Munro

The export of indentured labourers from India commenced in 1834 and continued until its abolition in 1916. During that time some 1.33 million Indians entered contracts of indenture in locales in the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean, east Africa and in Fiji.² During that time the first of an eventual 60,553 Indian labourers, or *girmitiyas* arrived in Fiji and were overwhelmingly employed as field labourers in the expanding sugar industry.³ These formed a small proportion of Indians who were indentured for overseas service – nothing like the quarter of a million to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean. The export of Indian indentured labour to Fiji did, after all, commence at a relatively late stage. But 60,000+ is still an appreciable total; of that number almost 15 per cent were Muslim, a miniscule .01 per cent Christians and most of the remainder were Hindus drawn from a cross-section of the castes.⁴

When the export of Indian indentured labourers was abolished in 1916, as a result of a prolonged campaign in which local dynamics

interacted with imperial entanglements, there were still Indians who had to see out their contracts.⁵ These contracts were cancelled on 1st January 1920. It was indeed the end of an era and yet, after all the tumult and shouting of the previous decade, the final erasure of Indo-Fijian indenture was barely mentioned by the major news outlet, the *Fiji Times*. Perhaps it was such an anti-climax that little needed to be said. But a number of Methodist missionaries had been prominent in the abolition campaign and my purpose in this paper is to tease out the extent of their significance in ending the Indian indenture system.

The labour flow of Indians to Fiji was instigated by the colonial government of Fiji in order to encourage large-scale plantation development and thus secure the colony's finances as well as being a device to ensure a protective native policy designed to ensure the preservation of the Fijian way of life and keep ordinary Fijians safe from the encroachments and demands of European interests.



Indentured labourers in Fiji Photo: Global Girmit Institution

To that end the Sydney-based Colonial Sugar Refinery Company was persuaded to heavily invest in Fiji. On the missionary side, three missionary societies were prominent in Fiji. The Methodist Mission arrived in 1835 and was followed by Catholics eleven years later in 1844, which resulted in the usual sectarian bitterness of the time. The Anglicans were latecomers, arriving in 1874, the year Fiji became a British Crown Colony. To this day, Fiji is one of the few countries in the world whose Christian adherents are predominantly Methodist.

The missionary bodies were not party to the decision to import *girmitiyas* and initially they had little or nothing to do with the newcomers. They were preoccupied with their work among the Fijians, consolidating their gains and pushing for more converts. Moreover, the Methodists in particular felt that their converts would become contaminated by exposure to the 'superstition, immorality and vice of a shrewd, vigorous and ingenious foreign population'.⁶ Eventually the Methodist Mission did proselytize among Indians, as much for the protection of their Fijian converts as for the salvation of Indians, but that would have to wait until increasing numbers of *girmitiyas* fulfilled their 5-year contracts of indenture and settled in the wider community.

What the Methodists did not do until much later was to agitate for better conditions on the plantations. Following a catastrophic fall in the world sugar price, there was pressure on overseers to reduce costs – with the result that the *girmitiyas* were routinely overtaken and ill-treated, suffered wage theft and were dragged through the courts for minor infractions.⁷ The colonial government, the judiciary and the *Fiji Times* turned a blind eye. The bottom line was that the CSR held a monopsonist position and the colony's economic solvency depended on the Company turning a profit and paying its taxes. In the words of a senior official in Fiji: 'Were the affairs of the Colonial Sugar Company to become crooked, the Colony would utterly collapse'.⁸

The Methodists did eventually attempt to evangelise among Indians and in 1885 proposed that a catechist be sent from India. Financial impediments prevented the move for another seven years, until the arrival of an Indian, incongruously named John Williams, who mostly operated in and around the capital city, Suva. He was an energetic preacher but he was constantly obstructed by planters from entering the plantations and he received scant moral and practical support from the organisation itself. What progress he made in establishing a network of preaching places and attracting congregations fell away when he departed two years later in 1894.⁹

Another attempt was made, in 1897, to evangelise among the Indian settlements in and around Suva with the arrival of Hannah Dudley, an Australian who was fluent in Hindustani and who established schools for Indians, and took in orphans, among other things. This time the work was undermined by parents taking their children out of her schools for fear the children would be induced to become Christians, although this impediment lessened over time. Ultimately, the various missions went some distance in filling the void left by the government in providing basic education.¹⁰

It did not help that Miss Dudley was not a team player and her confrontational style alienated her male colleagues. But the root problem from a mission standpoint was the reluctance of Hindus and especially Muslims to convert to Christianity. In fact Muslims sometimes taunted the Methodist missionaries that they would convert Fijians from Christianity to Islam.¹¹ As late as 1911 there were a mere 314 Christians in the Indian community in Fiji, rising to 710 in 1921 – a miniscule proportion of the total Indian population.¹² As historian K.L. Gillion wryly points out, 'Christianity was the religion of the European who was regarded with suspicion by those who had lived [and suffered] under the indenture system'.¹³

Miss Dudley was part of the so-called 'Indian Mission', a separate branch of the Methodist Mission in Fiji. The first two appointments were Cyril Bavin, a lay missionary, in 1901, the Rev John Burton the following year and the Reverend Richard Piper in 1907 – this in addition to a number of missionary sisters and catechists from India. The 'Indian Mission' needed all these personnel because *girmitiyas* were arriving in Fiji in ever-increasing numbers as well as the numbers of free Indians rising all the time at the conclusion of their five-year contracts.

Burton was a pivotal figure in the campaign to end indenture in Fiji. He was not only concerned about the plight of the *girmitiyas*. Burton was initially neutral about indenture but he became convinced that the evils of the system as he saw them were an impediment to missionary work. He expressed his concerns in a pamphlet titled *Our Indian Work in Fiji* (1909), which barely caused a ripple. But matters came to a head the following year when his book *The Fiji of Today* condemned indenture and urged an ending of the system. The indictment formed a small portion of a large book but it caused uproar in Fiji, including a lengthy rebuttal from the Governor. For its part, the Methodist Synod distanced itself from the book, disassociating itself from the author in the strongest terms.¹⁴ But Burton caught, and fed into, the mood of the moment. A campaign to abolish indenture began in South Africa.¹⁵ Overseas indenture was also becoming highly unpopular in India, being seen as an affront to national dignity and a groundswell of vocal opposition was on the rise. As well humanitarian circles in Britain, including the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, were viewing indenture with askance. Various official enquiries into Indian indenture were also in train, reflecting the fact that Fiji was now the focus of anti-indenture sentiment in India. The Sanderson Committee on Indian Emigration (1909) and the McNeill-Lal Report (1913) did nothing to mollify the critics of indenture.¹⁶

The McNeill-Lal Report, in any case, was completely overshadowed by another event that same year (1913) – namely, the harrowing accounts concerning Kunti, an Indian *girmitiya* in Fiji, being sexually assaulted by her overseer and driven insane by the experience; the Fiji's governments claim that the story was exaggerated, together with impassioned letters by Kunti and Hannah Dudley, only served to fuel denunciation in the Indian press and further inflame public opinion in India.¹⁷

Fiji had become the focus of the movement for abolition for several reasons. First, indenture to Natal had been effectively abolished in 1910 and attention now turned to Fiji because far more *girmitiyas* were going there than to any other destination. Second, the many condemnations of the system coming out of Fiji were being widely publicised in India, each reinforcing the other, and Methodist missionaries were prominent among them. Such criticisms of indenture intensified with the arrival in Fiji of the lawyer Manilal Mangalal Doctor who championed the Indians' cause and was thoroughly disliked in government circles for it.¹⁸ Another nail in the coffin was the widespread distribution of a book titled *My Twenty-one Years in the Fiji Islands* by Totaram Sanadhya, a former *girmitiya*.¹⁹ It culminated with the interventions of Charles Freer Andrews, an Anglican clergyman, who unrelentingly committed himself to abolition. His activism and advocacy were decisive, not so much in ending Indian indenture but in ensuring its earlier timing. Thus in 1916 – a full 37 years and six months after the arrival of the first *girmitiyas* in Fiji – the traffic was brought to a halt.²⁰

Several themes run through this paper. One is a pattern of indifference to involvement on the part of the Methodist Mission in Fiji. The Methodist missionaries initially resented the *girmitiyas* presence in Fiji and ignored their plight on the plantations. When they did show an interest, largely in response to a growing population of unindentured Indians, it was belated and initially ineffectual. Eventually – a dozen years after the arrival of the first Indians – an Indian Mission was formed and we find that the Methodist Mission in Fiji was not a monolith but often an arena of competing ideas, or wheels within wheels, as we saw with Burton's *The Fiji of Today* being condemned by some of his colleagues. Neither did Burton see eye to eye with Cyril Bavin,

another member of the Indian Mission, who supported indenture on grounds that it was an uplifting influence and all for the good. On another occasion, in 1914, when Bavin's colleague Richard Piper denounced indenture in the *Calcutta statesman*, he in turn was condemned by Bavin and his fellow missionary A.J. Small.²¹ There was clearly an interesting dynamic going on within the Methodist Mission in Fiji concerning indenture.

This points to something else. The importance of personality is well recognised among historians of missions, which is no less so when coming to the abolition of Indian indenture. Certain individuals such as Burton and Andrews, by force of personality and effectiveness, made an appreciable contribution to the abolition of indenture. They were by no means the only ones. Even more important was Gopal Krishna Gokhale, whose work for the cause in both South Africa and India was decisive.²²

My final point is that Fiji was an important arena in the campaign for abolition, an essential cog as it turned out in the networks involving an interplay between local dynamic and imperial entanglements. Some of the Methodist missionaries in Fiji more than added their mite to the cause of abolition and their interventions played a part in a successful outcome. One cannot quantify these things, and it has been well said that 'Historians cannot rewind the film of events, remove one seemingly important factor, and then let the film run again to see how much difference the missing element made'.²³ I would suggest that the existing literature does not bring out just how important Fiji was in the campaign for abolition. The same applies to Burton and his anti-abolition colleagues. While being not as influential as Gokhale or Andrews, neither have they been given quite the prominence they deserve in hastening the end of indenture.

¹ Revised version of a Zoom presentation to the 139th *Thought Leaders Forum* (on the theme 'The Impact of Christian Churches on the Indian Diaspora') organised by the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Centre, Trinidad and Tobago, 23 December 2024.

² David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 156–57, <https://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/cam034/94038289.pdf>; Ralph Shlomowitz and Lance Brennan, 'Epidemiology and Indian Labor Migration at Home and Abroad', *Journal of World History*, 5:1 (1994), 53.

³ K.L. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants: a history to the end of indenture in 1920* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962), 212–14.

⁴ Brij V. Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History, 1983), <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:408318>; Lance Brennan, John McDonald & Ralph Shlomowitz, 'The Origins of South Indian Muslim Indentured Migration to Fiji', *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 13:2 (1992), 402–09.

⁵ An incisive summary of the run-up to the abolition of Indian indenture is in Radica Mahese, *Why Should We Be Called Coolies? The End of Indian Indentured Labour* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2021), 190–204.

⁶ Quoted in Andrew Thornley, 'The Methodist Mission and Fiji's Indians: 1879–1920', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 8:2 (1974), 138.

⁷ Brij V. Lal, *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey Through Indenture in Fiji* (Canberra: Division of Pacific & Asian History, Australian National University; & Suva, Fiji Museum, 2000), 167–93, <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p212781/pdf/book.pdf>.

⁸ Quoted in Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 78.

⁹ Robert Nicole, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji* (Honolulu:

University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 172.

¹⁰ See Morven Sidal, *Hannah Dudley, Hamari Maa: Honoured Mother, Educator and Missioner to the Indentured Indians of Fiji, 1864–1931* (Suva: Pacific Theological College, 1997).

¹¹ Thornley, 'The Methodist Mission and Fiji's Indians', 145.

¹² Thornley, 'The Methodist Mission and Fiji's Indians', 141.

¹³ Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 151.

¹⁴ Christine Weir, 'An Accidental Biographer: On Encountering, Yet Again, the Ideas and Actions of J.W. Burton', in Brij V. Lal and Vicky Luker (eds), *Telling Pacific Lives: Prisms of Process* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2008), 216, <https://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p22891/pdf/ch162.pdf>; John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific), 162. Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 166–67.

¹⁵ Goolam Vahed, 'Gokhale, Polak and the End of Indian Indenture in South Africa, 1909–1911', in Neilesh Bose (ed.), *South Asian Migrations in Global History: Labour, Law and Wayward Lives* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 37–62.

¹⁶ See Robert B. Cochran, 'The Imperialism of Performative Rationality: Commissions of Inquiry into Britain's Indentured Labor System, 1836–1918', PhD thesis (Brandeis University 2024), <https://www.proquest.com/openview/11f13ba85cce2602fc2c0bacc2245e01/1.pdf?cbl=18750&diss=y&qpq-origsite=gscholar>.

¹⁷ Lal, *Chalo Jahaji*, 195–214. A sampling of the press coverage is quoted in Rajsekhar Basu, 'Kunti's Cry: Responses in India to the Cause of Emigrant Women, Fiji 1913–16', *Studies in People's History*, 7:2 (2020), 180–91. See also Charu Gupta, '“Innocent” Victims/“Guilty” Migrants: Hindi Public Sphere, Caste and Indentured Women in Colonial North India', *Modern Asian Studies* 49:5

(2015) 1345–77.

¹⁸ Hugh Tinker, 'Odd Man Out: The Loneliness of the Indian Colonial Politician – The Career of Manilal Doctor', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 2:2 (1974), 226–43.

¹⁹ Totaram Sanadhya, *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands & The Story of the Haunted Line*, edited and translated by John Dunham Kelly and Ultra Kumari Singh (Suva: Fiji Museum, 2003 edn).

²⁰ Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 177–81.

²¹ Gillion, *Fiji's Indian Migrants*, 174; Thornley, 'The Methodist Mission and Fiji's Indians', 150.

²² See Vahed, 'Gokhale, Polak and the End of Indian Indenture in South Africa'. *Passim*.

²³ Trevor Wilson, 'Some Reflections for the Fontana Edition', *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935* (London: Collins, 1968), 12.

Reviews

***Citizen Army – the New Zealand Wars Lost Official History* by Roderick MacIvor, edited by Peter Cooke, Defence of NZ Study Group 2025. ISBN 987-0-473-73318-6**

Mark Derby

Richard Hill, Labour History Project stalwart and longtime committee member, can recognise historically significant archival material when he sees it. In 1989 he noticed a thick stack of typed foolscap pages among a number of files marked for destruction by his then-employer, the Historical Publications Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, and felt the material warranted a closer look.



Rod MacIvor

It proved to be the incomplete manuscript of a history of NZ Army ground forces from the colonial period, commissioned in 1947 by the Department's War History Branch (predecessor to the Historical Publications Branch.) Its author, Rod MacIvor, was pulled off the unfinished project after about five years and the War History Branch then shelved it.

Thirty-odd years and several changes of office address later, the hapless manuscript was headed for the shredder when Richard Hill saw its importance. He tried placing it in a suitable repository such as the National Army Museum at Waiouru, but none were interested. So he hung on to it for a remarkable 35 years, when it was dusted off by the energetic and innovative Defence of NZ Study Group, co-ordinated by Peter Cooke.

Peter edited the surviving portions of McIvor's manuscript, added a very valuable introduction, and oversaw its impressive production, which features the Study Group's characteristically splendid array of illustrations. Some amendments made at the time the work was written have been retained along with the original text, so the reader can choose their preferred version. The result is a peculiar, tantalising, uneven and frequently fascinating addition to the country's historiography of warfare.

Much of this book's quality is due to the perspective and assiduity of its author. Rod MacIvor was an outspoken member of the Invercargill branch of the Labour Party as a student in the 1920s. At Auckland University in the '30s he was part of a group of "young, hard-left, new-generation rationalists," and became a freelance journalist. In WW2 he was sent to New Caledonia with the 3rd NZ Division, which saw action in the Pacific against the Japanese. He began recording the history of the army engineers he served with, and joined the War History Branch in 1947. This book's introduction notes that a number of the Branch's publications were first commissioned and then suppressed, because they revealed information that the defence forces preferred to keep secret. One, on the seemingly unobjectionable subject of coastal

defences, was not released until the 1980s.

The Branch's general editor, Maj-Gen. Sir Howard Kippenberger, wanted a history of NZ armed forces from their origins, and MacIvor began working on it at Army HQ in May 1947. Several years later Kippenberger wrote that it would become "a history of the NZ Army from 1840... A great many original documents never before examined are available and when completed this work should fill a serious gap in NZ's history." By 1955, however, MacIvor's manuscript had been rejected for publication. Peter Cooke speculates that part of the reason may have been official reluctance to examine the state's role in its actions against Māori in the 19th century.

He estimates that the stack of typed pages carefully preserved by Richard Hill comprises only the first half of MacIvor's original manuscript. Several further chapters are referred to but not present, and the current published version therefore peters out in the early 20th century. Its introduction ends with a plea to readers to pass on any information as to "where the remaining chapters ended up, or other salient facts."

Yet the substantial fragment now in print, complete with insights into its editing process, and supplemented with more than 300 photos, maps and other illustrations, is a significant addition to the official record of 19th century warfare in this country. It deals, at times unevenly, with the wars of the 1840s, the early and later periods of the New Zealand Wars, and subsequent developments such as the territorial army and compulsory military training. MacIvor's research into early military archives "opened the way," thinks Peter Cooke, for the publication in 1968 of *The Shadow of the Land*, a study of the wars of the 1840s by his colleague Ian Wards. Two further volumes dealing with the wars of the 1860s and their aftermath were planned but, to Wards' great disappointment, rejected by the War History Branch.

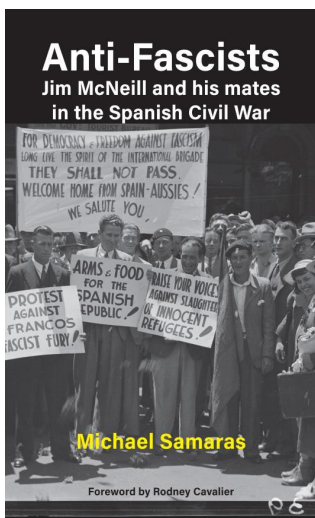
This flawed and fragmentary, yet fascinating, predecessor work is a fortunate survivor of the process of official extinguishment of undesirable presentations of our history. Both Richard Hill and the Defence of NZ Study Group have done us a service by circumventing that process.



Volunteer Cycle Corps Len King Collection 2006

***Anti-Fascists – Jim McNeill and his mates in the Spanish Civil War* by Michael Samaras, Connor Court Publishing, 2025**

Mark Derby



Hollow-eyed, gaunt, weary and shabbily dressed, seven men pose for a photograph in 1938. Two of them are New Zealanders - William MacDonald (standing third from left), and Bert Bryan (front row, centre.) The others are Australians - Kevin Rebbechi, Lloyd Edmonds and Joe Carter (standing, l. to r.), and Jack Franklyn and Jim McNeill (front, l. and r.)

They are waiting in the town of Ripoll, on Spain's northern border, to return to their own countries. They

have been fighting with the International Brigades of Spain's Republican Army, defending a democratically elected left-wing government against a military coup backed by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. Their army has been defeated, and the Spanish people are about to endure 36 years of brutal dictatorship under Generalissimo Franco.



Antipodean volunteers, Spanish Civil War, 1938 (Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington)

How did these men, with no prior military experience, come to fight for a country they'd never seen before? The stories of each of these antipodean anti-fascist volunteers, and of several others like them, are told with skill and vivid detail in this impressive new book from a prominent Australian historical researcher.

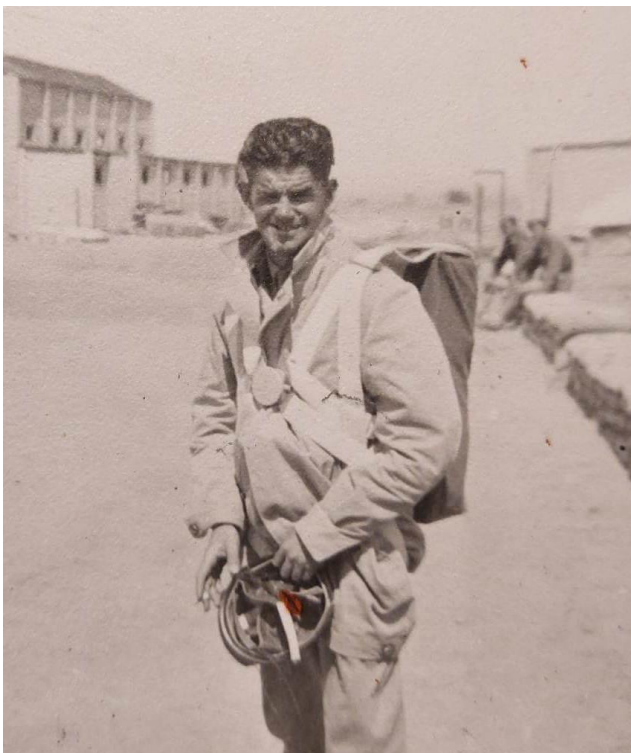
Samaras manages to avoid recycling the already vast historiography of the Spanish Civil War by focusing primarily on the social and political climate in his subjects' own countries, both before and after their service in Spain. The central figure, Jim McNeill, was a tall and lanky digger with an instinctive contempt for authority. He joined the IWW (the Industrial Workers of the World, or Wobblies) at the age of 20, and became one of its most compelling public speakers. He and fellow Wobblies were arrested and fined repeatedly for giving speeches without the required permit, and served jail time when they refused on principle to pay the fines. By 1931 the Australian IWW was defunct and Jim McNeill joined his country's tiny Communist Party, working in its Propaganda Department. Their public meetings were frequently disrupted by a home-grown fascist movement, the New Guard. McNeill, by then a steel-worker at Port Kembla, south of Sydney, said, "seeing what vicious types they were and how much they hated us, and what they do if they were in power," motivated him to join the International Brigades in 1938.



Bert Bryan and Australian Jack Franklyn (obscured) fighting in the Battle of the Ebro, 1938. (Australian War Memorial)

In the early '30s seaman Bert Bryan became a member of the NZ Communist Party's central committee and the editor of the *Red Worker*, the party's official paper. He and other party members published a pamphlet, *Karl Marx and the Masses*, and were charged with encouraging lawlessness and violence. In court, Bryan told the magistrate that this pamphlet had already been published in Britain and Australia and was not held to be seditious in those countries. The magistrate was unmoved and the defendants were all given six months in Wellington's Mt Crawford Prison. Bryan then worked his way to Britain on a ship and arrived in Spain in March 1938. There he proved to be a capable, although hard-drinking, soldier.

Returning to civilian life was not easy for him. He drank more than



W. MacDonald, paratrooper training, Egypt 1942

ever and some disbelieved his claim to have fought in a particularly vicious battle in the Ebro Valley. Recently a photograph has reappeared showing him in action during that battle.

A peculiar and troubled character, William Macdonald came from a well-to-do Dunedin family but carried out a bungled bank robbery in Palmerston North at age 19. He served two and a half years in a borstal, then left for Europe. In Spain he joined the mainly-US Abraham Lincoln Battalion, where he served with courage and distinction, becoming a driver in the transport section. On returning to Britain in 1938, Macdonald was made a sergeant-major in an anti-tank unit, and used his Spanish experience to lecture British troops on anti-tank tactics. "The sudden appearance of tanks can be terrifying, but determined infantry can halt them. Another efficacious method is to lie flat on the ground, under the tank's line of fire, and to throw grenades under the tank, where there is usually a vulnerable spot." He became a paratrooper and commando, took part in a disastrous raid on Tobruk in September 1942, was captured, and spent the rest of WW2 in various prisoner-of-war camps in Italy, Austria and Germany, making repeated escape attempts. He eventually became a pillar of the establishment as a British colonial administrator in Libya.

Most of the surviving former volunteers, however, continued their left-wing agitation and union organising through the unpromisingly conservative conditions of the 1950s. Jim McNeill, by then one of Australia's best-known anti-fascist figures, lived quietly in Sydney's western suburbs with his English wife and young daughter, but was closely watched by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, whose declassified files provide the most detailed account of his postwar activity. While selling the party newspaper, the *Tribune*, McNeill met a left-wing New Zealand film-maker, Cecil Holmes, who made him the star of his documentary on the history of Australia's radical and working-class press, *Words of Freedom*.

Samaras's wide-ranging and careful research for this book underpins his well-told narrative, which amounts to a history of left-wing and labour movements in 20th century Australia (and to a lesser extent New Zealand), through the actions of those who chose to fight in Spain.



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