



Labour History Project

“AN INJURY TO ONE IS A CONCERN TO ALL”

NEWSLETTER 46 — JUNE 2009

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IN MEMORIAM

Ernie Abbott and the Trades Hall Bombing of 1984

2009 sees the 25th anniversary of one of the most tragic events in New Zealand working class history: the death of Ernie Abbott in the Wellington Trades Hall bombing.

On the evening of 27 March 1984, Ernie Abbott, the caretaker of Wellington Trades Hall in Vivian Street, shifted a suitcase that had been left in the building's hallway. The suitcase exploded, killing Ernie and substantially damaging the Hall. Twenty five years later, the terrorist responsible has still not been identified and brought to justice.

Ernie Abbott was more than just the Trades Hall caretaker. He was an active trade unionist, and Vice President of the Caretakers and Cleaners Union, the forerunner of the Service and Food Workers Union. In a tragic irony, Ernie's work for the Union had been acknowledged the day before the bombing with the award of a life membership. Ernie was a strong supporter of union actions against the Muldoon Government's continual erosion of workers' rights in New Zealand.

No one claimed responsibility for the bomb and the motive remains obscure. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Muldoon regime whipped up an atmosphere of anti-union and anti-communist hysteria. In these circumstances it appears the bombing was probably the action of a lone right-winger, aimed at union leaders. Given the modern obsession with terrorism it is worth remembering the people who have actually been the victims of terrorist bombs in New Zealand. Apart from suicide bomber Neil Roberts, killed in his own attack on the Wanganui Police computer in 1982, the only victims have been Ernie Abbott, unionist, and peace activist Fernando Pereira, killed in 1985 in the French government's attack on the *Rainbow Warrior*.

An extensive police investigation followed the Trades Hall bombing, with a \$50,000 reward offered for information leading to the arrest of the bomber. Despite these efforts the perpetrator has yet to be found.

Ernie Abbott deserves to be remembered with industrial martyrs Frederick George Evans, killed at Waihi in 1912, and Christine Clarke, killed on the picket line in Lyttelton, in 2000. Hui tatou ka tu! Wehewehe tatou ka hinga! United we stand, divided we fall!

See: <http://www.sfwu.org.nz/news.asp?pageID=2145822798&RefID=2141737637>

— Peter Clayworth

Blair Peach: Anti-Fascist

Thirty years ago Blair Peach was killed by British riot police, while protesting against fascism. Blair, originally from Napier, lived in Southall, London throughout the 1970s, working as a special needs teacher. He was a committed socialist, living and working in an area with a large Asian immigrant population.

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For more information on
LHP membership, activities,
publications and news, see
the website: www.lhp.org.nz.



Deeply concerned at the rise of the racist National Front, Blair was active in the Anti-Nazi League. On St George's Day, 23 April 1979, Blair joined with thousands of others to protest against a National Front march through Southall. Anti-fascist protesters were attacked by the riot police, the notorious Special Patrol Group, the SPG. Blair Peach was severely injured in the police attack and died within a few hours.

In a subsequent inquiry unauthorised weapons and neo-Nazi material were found in lockers of members of the SPG. Despite these facts, Blair Peach's killer was never identified. Ten thousand mourners attended Blair's funeral; he was memorialised in songs and poetry and a Southall primary school is named after him.

See: <http://johnminto.org.nz/blair-peach-30th-anniversary/>

– Peter Clayworth



ABOVE LEFT: Blair Peach (image from www.uncarved.org).

ABOVE RIGHT: Protesting against the death of Blair Peach (image from www.uncarved.org).

RIGHT: Blair Peach's funeral was attended by some 10,000 people, and he became a hero amongst the Sikh community (image from www.thefirstpost.co.uk).



RIGHT: Particia Jenkins, sister of Jack Kent (the Taranaki Tiger) with Mark Derby at the New Plymouth launch of *Kiwi Compañeros*, June 2009.



NEWS ROUND-UP

Kiwi Compañeros — New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War

Mark Derby, editor of *Kiwi Compañeros*, reports on the launch of this unique book about New Zealand’s response to the Spanish Civil War

The first and only book on New Zealand’s response to the Spanish Civil War developed from a 2006 seminar by the Labour History Project (then called the Trade Union History Project). It appeared in May 2009 under the title *Kiwi Compañeros* and since then Mark Derby, the book’s co-writer and editor, has been promoting it through interviews and public appearances in several cities.

The launches held at the Auckland Public Library, at Unity Books in Wellington and at Madras Café Books in Christchurch were all well attended, convivial and moving occasions, attended by family members of civil war veterans.

A special event took place in New Plymouth in June to honour Jack Kent, a young Hawera man who volunteered for the civil war but was drowned when his troopship was torpedoed by a fascist submarine off the coast of Barcelona in early 1937.

The ceremony was organised by well-known unionist Therese O’Connell. It was attended by several of Jack Kent’s relatives, including his younger sister Patricia Jenkins. She described how her brother had built up his physique as a youth according to the principles of Charles Atlas and eventually became a semi-professional wrestler going by the name of the Taranaki Tiger. Mark Derby then read the passage from his book describing how Jack’s ship was intercepted and sunk by enemy vessels, and how 60 of the 300-odd volunteers on board, from at least ten countries, were drowned. Therese concluded by singing songs from the civil war, including “The Four Insurgent Generals”.

Kiwi Compañeros – New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War, edited by Mark

Derby and published by Canterbury University Press in association with the Labour History Project, is now on sale. If it's not in your local bookshop, make sure you request a copy since many shops won't stock New Zealand titles until a customer asks for them.

Seminar report — Working Women's Charter

Jane Parker and Fran Laneyrie of the Auckland University of Technology report on a significant meeting about the Working Women's Charter held by the Auckland Labour History Group in May 2009

Working Women's Charter Seminar Day

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) Conference Centre, 27 May 2009

In the beginning...

In an atmosphere charged with anticipation, Margaret Wilson, Professor of Law and Public Policy at Waikato University's Law School, kicked off the seminar speeches to a capacity audience. She provided a rousing review of the origins and elements of the Working Women's Charter (WWC). Situating her 40-year analysis of the Charter in feminism and unionism, listeners were left with no doubt as to the gravity of the struggle for equality faced by working women in shifting economic and political conditions, nor of the need for a working women's 'bill of rights' to advance their interests. Hazel Armstrong (barrister and solicitor), Therese O'Connell (union activist) and Judy Attenberger (National Textile Secretary at the National Distribution Union) then proceeded to bring to life the 'heady 70s' for women activists with vivid, often personal accounts of workplace inequities. Each speaker also communicated the magnitude of the task of establishing a Charter which would unite the diverse priorities of working women. Wilson acknowledged, for instance, that while trade union and Labour Party women were focused on economic concerns, radical feminists concentrated on the social and cultural features of women's inequality. This way lay a paradox, however: the intense, and at times fierce, debates amongst women were also a source of unity in that women's perspectives began to reach the political agenda and penetrate national consciousness.

Time waits for no woman

Speakers' accounts of an unparalleled flurry of women's activism in the 1970s struck a chord with many audience members. Within trade unions and politics, for instance, this was a time when the number of women's 'spaces' grew apace. Other institutional developments also epitomised the groundswell, including the first National Women's Liberation Conference in Wellington in 1972, the first United Women's Convention in 1973 to raise the status and confidence of women and to get more women working on women's issues, and the launch of the Council for the Single Mother and Her Child as a political advocacy body for solo mothers that year. In 1974, the socialist Working Women's Alliance formed to educate women about trade union issues, and its areas of interest grew to include childcare, health and cost of living. The same year, a Committee on Women administered by the Treasury was set up to focus on the advancement of the status of women, succeeded by the Advisory Committee on Women's Affairs which subsequently became the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

The passage of various laws including the Human Rights Commission Act, the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act, the Matrimonial Property Act and the Equal Pay Act confirmed that women were no longer ignored in public policy though these steps toward equality were regarded as embryonic in some quarters. A Select Committee on Women's Rights was also established, though its 1975 report findings did not surprise many women: the main cause of sexual inequality in New Zealand was the acceptance of different traditional roles for women and men, and measures were recommended to advance women's opportunities in employment, education, the home and public life - although the issue of domestic violence was yet to be raised.

In 1978, the WWC was promoted by the Working Women's Council within the Labour Party and union movement, and the Wellington Trades Council Women's Sub-Committee was formed to educate unions about the Charter. According to Attenberger, the Council believed that something needed to be done to promote equity in women's lives as it could not be left to the government or employers. Armstrong spoke passionately about the monumental role in advancing women's struggle played by Sonja Davies, a founding member of the Working Women's Council and the first woman to be elected to the National Executive of the Federation of Labour (FOL), going on to be FOL Vice President. Sonja drew on her experience and skills from the community, local government and unionism to lead the huge activism and front the campaign to endorse the WWC and the consequent establishment of the FOL's Women's Advisory Committee and the Trades Councils Women's Sub-committees. Armstrong, Attenberger and other seminar participants including Irena Brorens (TEU Industrial Officer) and Sue Kedgley (Green MP) also paid personal tribute to Sonja for inspiring them to 'fight the good fight' for women's rights through persistence, struggle and alliance-building.

Transmission not a failure...

The afternoon session brought further reviews of events that precipitated and followed the WWC's transmission. Insights and anecdotes from James Ritchie (NZ Dairy Workers' Union National Secretary), Helen Pearce (state sector unionist) and Sue Kedgley straddled union, public sector, feminist/political and 'a male' standpoints. Images were painted of the painstaking efforts of the Council, Alliance and others to push the Charter into the public arena via the trade union movement. Listeners gained a tangible sense of the turgid, uneven pace of this process, even following the FOL and Combined State Union's formal acceptance of the WWC and their establishment of women's advisory committees.

It was also recounted that certain WWC clauses continued to court controversy (see also *Table 1*). Kedgley observed, for instance, that the call to remove impediments to safe abortion, contraception and sterilisation under Clause 15 polarised groups within labour, religious and political movements. And progress on other WWC clauses (many of which informed a women's equality programme in the 1984 Labour Party manifesto) was far from linear. Take Clause 3, which champions equal pay for work of equal value (pay equity). Since the passage of the Equal Pay Act 1972, the gender pay gap has been reduced but not closed. There have also been reversals under National administrations - such as the repeal of the wide-ranging but short-lived Employment Equity Act 1990; recent axing of public sector pay equity investigations and the imminent demise of the Pay and Employment Equity (PaEE) Unit at the Department of Labour. Many at the Seminar anticipated further difficulties ahead as the economic screws tighten.

Table 1: New Zealand Working Women's Charter

1. The right to work for everyone who wishes to do so.
2. The elimination of all discrimination on the basis of sex, race, marital or parental status, sexuality or age.
3. Equal pay for work of equal value – meaning the same total wage plus other benefits.
4. Equal opportunity of entry into occupations and of promotion regardless of sex, sexuality, marital or parental status, race or age.
5. Equal education opportunities for all.
6. (a) Union meetings to be held in working hours.
(b) Special trade union education courses for women unionists to be held with paid time off for participants.
7. Equal access to vocational guidance and training, including on the job training, study and conference leave.
8. Introduction of a shorter working week with no loss of pay, flexible working hours, part-time opportunities for all workers.
9. Improved working conditions for women and men. The retention of beneficial provisions which apply to women. Other benefits to apply equally to men and women.
10. Removal of legal, bureaucratic and other impediments to equality in superannuation, social security benefits, credit, finance, taxation, tenancies, and other related matters.
11. Special attention to the needs and requirements of women from ethnic communities as they see them.
12. Wide availability of quality child care with Government and/or community support for all those who need it, on a 24-hour basis, including after school and school holiday care.
13. Introduction of adequate paid parental leave (maternity and paternity leave) without loss of job security, superannuation or promotion prospects.
14. Availability of paid family leave to enable time off to be taken in family emergencies, e.g. when children or elderly relatives are ill.
15. Sex education and birth control advice freely available to all people. Legal, financial, social and medical impediments to safe abortion, contraception and sterilisation to be removed.
16. Comprehensive government funded research into health questions specific to women.

Herstory never repeats?

After lunch, speakers Helen Kelly, President of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (NZCTU), Brorens, Martha Coleman (Queen's Counsel) and Rose Ryan (Athena Research director) developed two major themes. First, the critiques of the union and women's movements in the 1970s and 1980s still resonate with working women's experiences today. Second, the strategies needed to respond to women's interests must acknowledge what has already been achieved and what remains to be done in the current epoch.

Kelly's unveiling of the NZCTU 'vision' of a context-sensitive, rights-based framework was thus enthusiastically received by the audience as an important plank of possible strategy through which to advance women's equality. Still in its formative stages, the framework would encourage supportive industrial relations underpinned by the good faith principles re-introduced by the Employment Relations Act's 'inclusive' model of trade unionism; an on-going leadership programme for existing and future union

leaders at all levels; and resourcing as a component rather than a driver of such a programme. The need for vigilance, activism and different forms of resistance was also stressed. Prior to the Seminar, for instance, Labour Women's Affairs spokesperson Sue Moroney circulated a petition against the closure of the PaEE Unit after the Government stopped the pay equity investigations. Signatories have disseminated the petition overseas to encourage global condemnation of this retrograde measure.



TOP: Still battling: Margaret Wilson, Sue Kedgley and Gay Simpkin at the Working Women's Charter seminar.



ABOVE: Ray Markey (New Zealand Work and Labour Market Institute director), Helen Kelly (NZCTU President) and James Ritchie (NZ Dairy Workers' Union National Secretary) at the seminar.

Chartering progress

For all involved, the Seminar was threaded through with humour, different mind-sets and private reflection. The sheer volume of 'softer' information, ideas exchange and networking by attendees during the coffee and meal breaks probably needed to be bottled! The last formal activity of the day was a participatory discussion to summarise achievements and identify what remains to be done for the WWC. As Wilson summarised it, the day's analysis had been a 'wonderful blend of personal and political'. She also pointed out the difficulties for women of working through mainstream male organisations underpinned by neo-liberal policies that suppress collective voice 'without losing one's soul, energy and spirit'. Clearly, creative communications would be pivotal to campaigns for change in the face of bullying and intimidation, and media attempts to maintain the status quo.

The Seminar oozed a heightened sense of occasion; this was not a one-off trip down memory lane but a rallying call through which to re-ignite collective struggle for working women's rights. On the ground, the practical exercise of enabling Seminar attendees throughout the day to record on a post-it any matter they regarded as 'unfinished business' and attach to a bulletin board provided a powerful, immediate tool through which to understand key departure points for change. For instance, Katherine Ravenswood, a social sciences PhD student at AUT, registered her dismay at the absence of childcare facilities at the last NZCTU Women's Conference. Their suggestions were embraced in the recommendations formulated in the final session. The recommendations, which should not be seen as a set of hard-and-fast rules but rather as a set of proposals that everyone might take back to their own organisations for consideration, fell into several broad categories: government and legislation, young working women, suggestions for the NZCTU and others (see *Table 2*).

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Table 2: Action plan emanating from the WWC Seminar

Working Women's Charter Action Plan

27 May 2009

Government and Legislation:

- Establish a statutory code of minimum standards at work.
- Strengthen and promote the flexible working arrangements in law.
- Use the Ministry of Women's Affairs five-year action plan meetings to promote the charter.
- Extend paid parental leave.
- Lobby to re-establish the Pay and Employment Equity Unit.

Young workers:

- Get the message out to the next generations. Young women accept things as 'good'. They don't think feminist arguments are relevant

and don't understand they don't get paid as much as men and end up in gendered occupations.

- Educate future employees at school about work rights. Provide young student employees with a voice.
- Make trade unions relevant to young workers and raise the consciousness of young women workers.
- Request CTU make a short video (for You-tube) aimed at young women workers, telling the story of the NZ Working Women's Charter.
- Develop tools to communicate with young women for the future renewal of activism.

NZCTU:

- Provide childcare at 2009 Biennial CTU Women's Conference.
- Use the 2010 CTU Conference to celebrate 30 year anniversary of Working Women's Charter being adopted by the FOL.
- Re-establish regional CTU women's groups.
- Unions as employers need to lead the way: shorter working weeks, more part-time work (quality). Organisers and (non-paid) delegates are often expected to put in very very long hours.

Networking:

- Set up connections within unions among women.
- Produce email contact list from today to continue the communication.
- Set up Facebook page for conference participants – don't just disseminate the materials.
- Set up a Working Women's Charter website with all the presentations from this conference so generation Y can connect with us.

Ethnic & Migrant Workers:

- Raise awareness among ethnic communities about workers' rights in NZ and the Working Women's Charter.
- Encourage EPMU, SFWU & NDU in their efforts to organise migrant workers, particularly by employing staff representative of women migrants.
- Organise seminars for ethnic communities.

Media:

- TV documentary on the Working Women's Charter.

Common Agenda:

- Agree to focus on what will be good for all women and all workers especially the vulnerable.
- Focus on fighting for better wages and conditions rather than fighting each other.

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Two resolutions were proposed and unanimously accepted by participants at the session. The first reaffirmed and re-endorsed the relevance of the Charter for women in New Zealand in 2009 and beyond. The second supported that recommendations made at the Seminar be taken back to the appropriate organisations for consideration and action.

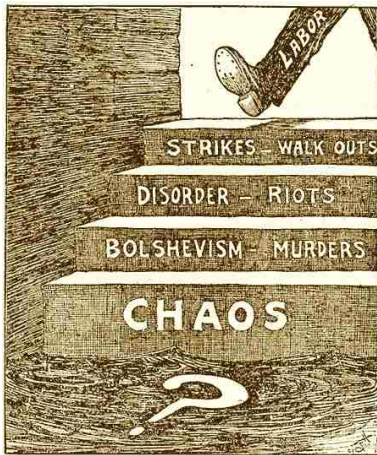
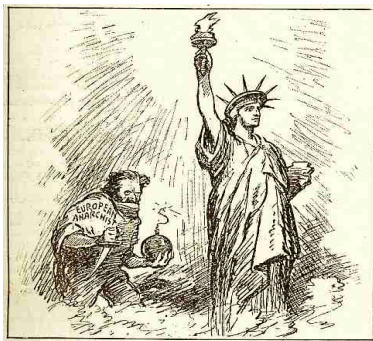
Praise you like we should

It is testament to the organising skills of a committee led by Gay Simpkin (Auckland Labour History Group) that included Fran Laneyrie (AUT), Pam Nuttall (AUT) Marilyn Kohlhase (Public Relations Consultant for American

Income Life) Judy Attenberger, Ros Hini (Working Women's Resource Centre), Gabriel Brett Kelly (long-time union educator) and Irena Brorens that an event of this nature could achieve so much in terms of garnering a diverse array of speakers and attendees; educating and absorbing participants into the history of the WWC; and instilling a strong sense of the pressing need to develop an action plan to move forward.

Sponsorship was received from Auckland University of Technology, the Council of Trade Unions, New Zealand Educational Institute, Tertiary Education Union, Post Primary Teachers' Association, AIL of New Zealand and Public Service Association. The New Zealand Work and Labour Market Institute also provided organisational assistance.

— Jane Parker and Fran Laneyrie (Auckland University of Technology)



ABOVE: Red scare is nothing new, either at home or abroad.

Grey District Councillors fight communism at Blackball

Some recent discussions and correspondence about the proposed memorial to the events in Blackball 1908 show Cold War attitudes are alive and well on the West Coast.

Following a highly successful centenary celebration in 2008, the Blackball Museum of Working Class History Trust is planning to build a memorial to the 1908 Miners' Strike. The Trust envisages that the memorial will have a series of panels outlining the story of the strike and explaining its importance for working class history and in the broader history of New Zealand. Given the historical significance of the strike, and the fact that a memorial would add to the attractions of Blackball, the Trust hoped that the Grey District Council would waive the \$1100 consent fee normally applied to developments. Council staff recommended that the fee be set aside, but the supporters of the memorial had not reckoned on the red-busting activities of Grey District Councillor Ian Cummings and his supporters on the Council. While Grey District Mayor Tony Kokshoorn and Cr. Karen Hamilton spoke in favour of waiving the fee, Cr. Cummings opposed giving any support to the memorial on the grounds that socialists had sparked the strike and the Trust wanted to build a 'shrine to Communism'. The council resolved to hold the issue over until the next meeting.

After a debate on Radio New Zealand National's Morning Report, between Paul Maunder of the Blackball Museum Trust and Cr. Cummings, the Labour History Project weighed into the struggle. We wrote to the Grey District Council to support the memorial project and correct some of the inaccuracies of the 'historically challenged' Cr Cummings.

21 April 2009

Dear Mayor and Councillors,

The Labour History Project (formerly the Trade Union History Project) is an organisation of historians and unionists with a 25-year record of studying and promoting the history of working people in New Zealand.

We have previously expressed our support for a proposed memorial to the 1908 Blackball miners' strike as a unique marker of a highly significant event in New Zealand's political and industrial history. We have also said that a permanent and appropriately designed memorial to the events of 1908 would be of real and substantial benefit to the Blackball community and to this country's cultural heritage in general. Accordingly, we support the organisers' request that the Grey District Council waive the \$1100 consent fee. We are anxious to correct certain statements concerning the historical background to the strike made on public radio by Councillor Ian Cummings.

The Causes of the Strike

In an interview on Morning Report on 9 April 2009, Councillor Cummings stated that the strike, rather than resulting from any genuine grievance, had been started by 'three guys from Australia'. In fact over 1907 and early 1908 there was a series of disputes between the mine managers and the Blackball Miners' Union over discrepancies in the weighing of coal tubs, the adequacy of ventilation in the mine and the fact that the miners only had fifteen minutes for 'crib' (lunch) in the Blackball mine, rather than the half hour allowed in most mines on the Coast. These disputes had already established a climate of grievance at Blackball before the arrival of Pat Hickey, Paddy Webb and George Hunter in 1908.

The suggestion that those three 'outside agitators' coerced the miners into striking also ignores the fact that the Blackball unionists were already fired up by the success of a nationwide slaughtermen's strike in 1907 and by a threatened strike by the Denniston Miners' Union which forced concessions from their employers. The minimal degree of influence the 'agitators' had over the miners was illustrated when the strikers several times rejected proposed deals negotiated by Hickey and Webb with the mine owners. The strike was therefore neither instigated nor prolonged by the 'three Australians'. (In fact only Webb and Hunter were Australian-born; Pat Hickey was born in Wangapeka and grew up outside Nelson).

The historical importance of the strike

The Blackball strike gained nationwide attention. While it was not the first successful challenge to the arbitration system, it was the first to combine union action with a socialist message. The victory at Blackball was an encouragement to those unionists who opposed arbitration and was a key event in ushering in the period of industrial unrest from 1908 to 1913. Three leading figures in the strike, Pat Hickey, Paddy Webb and Bob Semple, used the resulting upsurge of union activism to push for a federation of unions that eventually became the New Zealand Federation of Labour, also known as the Red Feds. This was instrumental in forming the political parties that, in 1916, became the Labour Party. It is arguable that many of the ideas of social justice and egalitarianism still seen as intrinsic to New Zealand life can be traced to events set in train at Blackball in 1908.

A Shrine to Communism?

Councillor Cummings argued on Morning Report that his major objection to the Blackball Memorial was that it was a 'shrine to the birth of Communism'. This is an historical impossibility since the New Zealand Communist Party was not founded until 13 years after the crib time strike. At the time of the strike Hickey, Semple and Webb, along with many other Grey Valley unionists, were members of the New Zealand Socialist Party. This was absorbed into what became the NZ Labour Party. Hickey was one

of those who moved to expel members of the Communist Party from the Labour Party in the 1920s, while Semple eventually became notorious in left-wing circles for his 1940s pamphlet 'Why I Fight Communism'.

The memorial at Blackball will permanently record and interpret the remarkable contribution of the early Blackball miners to the history of unionism and ultimately to our national life. In the view of our organisation it is being developed professionally and appropriately. It is a project that deserves the full support of your Council and its elected representatives.

Sincerely
Dr Peter Clayworth
Executive Committee Member

Grey District Council's reply

28 April 2009

Dear Dr Clayworth,

Your letter will be put to the Council as soon as we have received the wording of the inscription to be used on the memorial plaque. I get the impression that Council members are sensitive about the potential of public money being used to further a political viewpoint rather than an important historical event.

If there is to be no single plaque I suggest that you confirm in writing that the memorial will depict the events as important historical events rather than supporting a particular political doctrine.

Yours sincerely

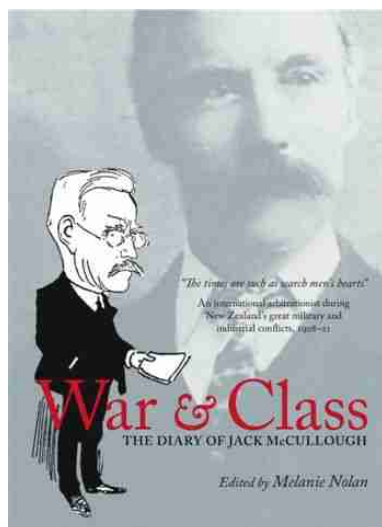
Paul Pretorius
Chief Executive Officer
Grey District Council

Comment:

It appears from the reply to our letter that the Grey District Council presumed the Labour History Project is involved in the process of setting up the memorial at Blackball. The entire exercise is in fact being carried out by the Blackball Museum of Working Class History. The LHP's letter was simply sent in support of the memorial project.

The current debate follows an incident just before the 2008 election, where Radio New Zealand National pulled the reading of Eric Beardsley's novel *Blackball '08* from its slot on the Nine to Noon programme, on the grounds it might be seen as politically biased during the run-up to the General Election. Perhaps the strikers of 1908 would be pleased to know that their actions can still spark controversy over a hundred years after they downed tools at the Blackball mine.

— Peter Clayworth



REVIEWS

Book review

Kerry Taylor reviews *War and Class: The Diary of Jack McCullough* edited by Melanie Nolan. Palmerston North: Dunmore Publishing, 2009. 408p. ISBN 978-1877399-37-4. \$49.95.

Jack McCullough was for a time quite literally the personification of the New Zealand working class. During the period 1907 to 1921 he was the Worker's Representative on the Arbitration Court, and charged with putting forward a worker's perspective in the deliberations of the all too powerful court. In this context McCullough met the great and the good, and the not so good, from the full range of camps within the complex and fluid New Zealand industrial relations scene. In January 1908 he began to record his interactions, thoughts and experiences in a diary. This volume, edited by LHP stalwart Melanie Nolan, is the first published version of that diary. It provides a unique lens on a period that saw many defining events in New Zealand history including: the syndicalist upsurge of the Red Feds, the horrors of World War I, and in 1916 the consolidation of many labour factions into the New Zealand Labour Party.

Melanie Nolan has been linked to, and made use of, the McCullough diaries for more years than I imagine she wishes to recall. Her 1985 MA thesis from Canterbury University explored McCullough's work on the Arbitration Court, and is still one of the best studies of this period. She wrote the entry on McCullough for the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, and later she told the story of the wider McCullough clan in her innovative study *Kin: A collective biography of a working class family* (2005). Each of these publications drew on the McCullough diaries.

With this volume we now have available to the general reader a judicious selection from the 250,000 word handwritten manuscript located in the Canterbury Museum. More than that, we have considerable added value from the editor in the form of informative footnotes on the individuals, organisations and events noted by the diarist. These notes are a testament to the rich world that McCullough inhabited, and also Nolan's impressively deep knowledge of New Zealand labour history.

This book is best approached by the tried and true reading method of 'grazing'. Few will read it from cover to cover, and while this is perhaps how it should be read, diaries by their very nature seldom have a unifying argument that needs systematic reading, so grazing does not do the subject a disservice. The index helps the reader to dip into McCullough's interactions with the key figures of the labour movement and politics more generally. Much interesting material is brought to light on well known labour activists, and also on lesser known figures from the past. Via the index one can also look for comment on categories of workers and various organizations.

All indexes have limitations, and for me there could have been more attention to geographical place, as one of the features of McCullough's work was constant travel throughout the country. Living in Palmerston North, I always look for references to the history of this place. The index provides a sole reference to the Palmerston North Trades Council, even though there are numerous other references to this fair city in the text itself. Perhaps the geographical terrain of the labour movement could have been highlighted more systematically.

The other weakness of the index is with regard to the realms of social and cultural practice. Having stumbled across horse racing I thought we may have had such leisure activity indexed, but there is no reference to the Addington Trots. It is revealing that in November 1912 McCullough, having spent some time in his vegetable garden, later went to the Trots. Even more interesting is his guilt at investing £4 for no return! The entry records: 'I am disgusted with my self at my weakness, or is it at my greed. Returned home very tired & went to bed early' (p235). The tiredness may well have resulted from the earlier gardening, but it is also associated with moral self-criticism over gambling. There are rich insights here into the mindset of a central figure in the New Zealand labour movement; few published sources provide this. We learn that he liked opera and football, read extensively and eclectically, and spent a lot of time in the vegetable patch. Yet as is so often the case in our labour history the more formal business of the labour movement, and the experiences of work itself, are more closely indexed than the life and leisure of the working class. This is understandable and all indexes have to set limits, yet there is rich material on all aspects of the class experience in the diary, which could have been made more accessible.

The introduction to the diary is very useful in setting McCullough's pacifism in context. His anti-conscription activity was extensive, yet he very consciously stopped short of potential charges of sedition, concluding, with some feelings of guilt, that it was for younger activists to challenge the state more directly. The introduction also sets the context of McCullough's arbitration activity very well. What is strangely missing, except for a very brief timeline, is a discussion of the broader life of McCullough. Perhaps the editor considered this had been well enough recorded in the publications mentioned above. But to make this a more successful stand-alone publication more biographical detail on McCullough's life would have been useful.

Melanie Nolan is to be congratulated for the production of this volume. Many historians will find it a useful source to have readily available. It will also be a rewarding volume to have beside the fire as winter sets in; I predict hours and hours of pleasure for readers as they graze through the text. Having said that I for one await with anticipation a full biography of Jack McCullough, he deserves one and so do we! In the interim, this is a tantalising insight into a rich and rewarding life.

— *Kerry Taylor*

A lens on the left: labour history and left wing causes on film and television

Alex Burton explains what's available at the Film Archive.

So where do you see Rudy Sunde and Lou Robertson's illegal footage of the 1951 Waterfront Lockout? Where's the best place to go for the TV news on May 15 1991 (the Employment Contracts Act)? And where would you find viewing copy of Cecil Holmes' filmmaking output before and after his satchel was snatched? These examples and others are available for viewing and research in the New Zealand Film Archive medialibrary in



Wellington and at its Auckland Office and various off-site video access and medianet sites — in Whangarei, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Otaki, Christchurch and Dunedin. Check the Archive's website for catalogue and access details.



The Film Archive is a Charitable Trust, a non-government organisation with no exclusive institutional remit affecting the breadth of film and television material it collects: it has an extensive amateur collection; the largest collection of New Zealand documentaries, features and short films available; a large collection of Taonga Māori footage; the Chapman collection of television current affairs (1960s - 2000); off air and master archiving of daily current affairs and NZ on Air material since the early 2000s; and the less obvious types such as experimental film, television commercials, animation, industrial footage, newsreels and so on.



In terms of left wing material the catalogue is strong. Footage that would never have been officially sanctioned on the early theatre circuit or in later television programming is heavily represented on our public access shelves. Contextual footage from official sources and other genres complement the material. More well known material is kept as a matter of course in the interests of building a collection of national importance.



In terms of labour history, film material is scarce in comparison. Official sources steered clear of labour movement events and concerns. But a look at the early current affairs footage from the Chapman collection, particularly from 1984 when it became a continuous daily record, allows you to see that coverage of the FOL and strikes and wage rounds was almost a nightly affair — compare that with today.

In 2001 the LHP/ TUHP began an association with the Film Archive in a combined effort staging a 50th anniversary exhibition of the 1951 Waterfront Lockout. At the memorable seminar held in Wellington in conjunction with the opening of the exhibition, Gaylene Preston and John Bates made an extensive video record of the speakers and panels over the course of the weekend. Since that time almost all the major seminars and conferences initiated by the LHP/ TUHP have been videoed for future use and research.

At present Archive staff are annotating this collection which includes a record of 1951, the 1913 seminar, The Spanish Civil War Conference, the Federation of Labour Seminar and Rod Prosser's record of the 1968 seminar. At least half of these recordings have been transferred to DVD format for research purposes.

Over the next few months a listing of available labour history material at the Film Archive will be prepared, and will be included in a later issue of the LHP newsletter. Meanwhile readers are welcome to use our online catalogue and our free public viewing facilities.

The Film Archive catalogue: <http://www.filmarchive.org.nz/catalogue/advancedsearch.htm>

The Film Archive Libraries:
Wellington: cnr Ghuznee & Taranaki Sts
Auckland: L1/300 Karangahape Road

Video Access / Medianet sites:
<http://www.filmarchive.org.nz/viewing/viewing.html>

— Alex Burton

RIGHT: From *Fighting Back* by Cecil Holmes.



Fighting Back

One of the films available through the Film Archive is Cecil Holmes' 1949 film *Fighting Back*, now 60 years old. Dean Parker wrote about its background for a celebration of the film in 2008.

'The first on-the-spot film of an industrial dispute ever recorded in the Southern Hemisphere... Workers demonstrate through Queen St, Auckland... Trade Unionists' solidarity meetings... Boycott scenes: watersiders, drivers, railwaymen... Police interference with pickets... On-the-spot pictures of a real scab meeting... This living record of the Auckland carpenters' dispute is available for showing to working-class audiences. Get your union to ask for it!'

It was probably the most fascinating event of Auckland's Heritage Week last September — the showing of a fiercely left-wing movie documentary made nearly 60 years ago on the streets of a class-divided Auckland.

And speaking before it was one of its stars.

Fighting Back is a thirty-minute documentary feature made in 1949 by two famous names from New Zealand movie history — famous way before Peter Jackson, way before Jane Campion, way even before Sam Neill. One of the names was a notorious communist, the other a celebrated pioneer feature director.

In February 1949, Auckland employers had initiated a major confrontation with the local Communist-led carpenters' union. Union members were locked out of work. All building work in Auckland came to a standstill.

In a parallel piece of red-baiting at the National Film Unit in Wellington, Cecil Holmes, a Film Unit director, had his satchel stolen from a car. The contents of the satchel mysteriously appeared in Parliament. Among them was a membership card of the Communist Party and a letter discussing a stop-work at the Film Unit. Holmes was suspended.

With time on his hands, and, in his own words, 'itching to make a film' which utilised documentary techniques pioneered in Britain, Holmes came up to Auckland and talked to the Auckland carpenters' union. 'Maybe they could muster up a few quid,' he later wrote, 'and I could make a movie, telling their story.' The chippies said yes.

Holmes worked for nothing, bought film stock and brought in pioneer New Zealand film-maker Rudall Haywood, who had made films back in the days of silent movies and had built his own gear.

This wasn't your normal movie-shoot along Ponsonby Road. Said Holmes, 'We had a rough time making it, as I had anticipated. Wherever we went we had the support of union heavies for protection against the Catholic Action bully boys, but happily their aim in stone-throwing wasn't up to much. When one missile wrecked the sound gear, Rudall spent all night fixing it and was back on the job, as phlegmatic as ever, next morning'.

One of the union members who starred in the film was Cecil's younger brother Basil. He currently lives on Waiheke Island.

'Time has flown,' he said in an interview in the New Zealand Herald. 'I suspect I must be the last of those who were in or near the centre of the '49 Carpenters struggle.'

What was great for those who watched the Heritage showing was that Basil Holmes attended the showing, introduced it and then took questions on it, addressing a new century's audience on the film's relevance to today.

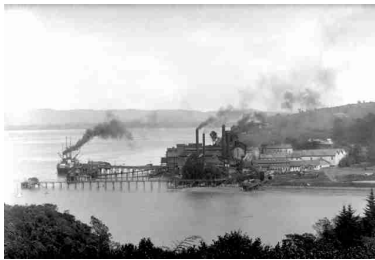
It's a unique 30-minute documentary of industrial war in Auckland. It analyses the specific circumstances of the carpenters' lock-out — which was almost a dry-run for the major confrontation that would shatter New Zealand two years later, the 1951 waterfront dispute.

It recounts the employers' tactics and shows the response those tactics got, that of widespread solidarity among Auckland workers. Scenes from the carpenters' struggle are skilfully re-created, but the film also sets the dispute against the more general background of a class-divided Auckland. We see the poverty of 1940s Freemans Bay slums, and then we see its contrast, the luxury homes of Auckland's eastern suburbs — homes that we even enter in a wonderfully over-the-top dramatised scene of Remuera

matrons discussing the latest ocean cruise they'd taken.

Nothing like *Fighting Back* had ever been produced in Australia or New Zealand. And it would be another thirty years before anything like it would be seen again in this country. *Fighting Back* was presented by the Auckland Labour History Group with the assistance of the New Zealand Film Archive who cleaned up the sound track on the original 16mm print and transferred the print to digital format. DVD copies are available from the Film Archives.

— *Dean Parker*



ABOVE: The Chelsea sugar refinery.

RIGHT: Workers handled sugar bags by hand prior to 1961.



FEATURE ARTICLE

The 1920 Chelsea sugar workers' strike

Auckland City Libraries' Local History Librarian, David Verran, looks back to a sugar workers' strike that left a sour taste.

Dairying, horticulture, gum digging, ship maintenance and building, and naval defence were the main activities for those living and working on the northern shores of Auckland's Waitemata Harbour in the mid to late nineteenth century. Devonport was the main population area, with much smaller communities around the Northcote and Birkenhead wharves. There were also more isolated communities in the eastern coastal bays to the north of Devonport, and around the Glenfield and Albany areas.

This balance changed with the building and opening of the sugar refinery at Chelsea for the Australian Colonial Sugar Company in 1884. The

population of the Birkenhead area soon overtook that of neighbouring Northcote, and Chelsea became a separate population centre.

Oral history preserves the memories of the hard manual work at Chelsea, with high production targets and an absentee Sydney-based board of directors. Bulk handling wasn't introduced to the works until 1961. Nevertheless, for local farmers dependent on seasonal crops and town milk supply for a living, the extra income they formerly derived from digging for kauri gum now came from working at the sugar works.

The Birkenhead Sugar Workers' Union was registered under the Arbitration Act in 1901, and eventually secured an Award from 23 December 1902. Its first president William Wallace had been fired from the works because of his prominence in the union, but nevertheless had sufficient financial resources as a small farmer and later as a real estate agent to continue as president to 1906. He then succeeded the first secretary Arthur Rosser as secretary from 1906 to 1911. Rosser was the secretary for a number of different Auckland unions. The union was cancelled about June 1911 and a second attempt at organising a cohesive union saw its re-registration in 1920.

James Purtell, like Rosser, was also the secretary of a number of Auckland unions and led the reorganisation of the sugar workers' union as its secretary from 1920 to 1926. The Australian-based company took delight in claiming Purtell was an 'outsider' from across the harbour — as opposed to across the Tasman of course. Some of the workforce also lived across the harbour and came over by ferry each morning. The company also tagged him as a 'radical', but Purtell was later noted for his conservative approach in industrial matters. Nevertheless, he had been active in the carters' union in the 1913 General Strike in Auckland.

In 1920, as earlier, the grievances concerned working conditions, pay rates, paid holidays and a reduction in the working week. The 1902 Arbitration Court case had allowed for a decrease in the weekly hours of work to 48. Now the workers sought a 44-hour week in line with other industries.

An approach to the employers on 2 July 1920 was met with a requirement to get authority from Head Office in Sydney. At a stopwork meeting the workers feared this would delay bringing a case before the Arbitration Court in September. Eventually they resolved to strike from midnight Saturday 14 August, and did so despite a last-minute attempt by the government to continue the round of meetings. The strike involved about 170 workers. They were banned from having on-site meetings, but set up picket lines in what is now Colonial Road, and the wharfies (Auckland Waterside Workers' Union) refused to assist in the unloading of sugar. This came at a time when New Zealand sugar stocks were low. Chelsea was and is the only sugar refinery in New Zealand.

The strike ended after five weeks. The workers had won a wage increase and a 44-hour week, so long as production levels remained the same as they had been under a 48-hour week. However, because the company regarded them as ceasing their employment, the striking workers lost their membership of the contributory Provident Fund for funeral benefits and family medical expenses. In addition, some more active union members were refused re-employment. Resentment between the management and workers continued until at least the mid 1930s. In 1934 a local resident

became union secretary and a new general manager started the year after.

— David Verran

(David is currently writing a history of the North Shore of Auckland).

SOURCES

— Contemporary issues of 'Brett's Almanac', 'Auckland Star' and 'New Zealand Herald'.

— McClure, Margaret *The Story of Birkenhead* (Birkenhead City Council, 1987).



ABOVE: Jack Lyon in uniform in WW2 (top) and WW1 (below).

Jack Lyon — soldier, democrat, internationalist

The following account is an edited version of the programme notes by Mark Derby for the inaugural Jack Lyon memorial dinner, which took place on Auckland's North Shore on 24 April 2009. The dinner, organised by the North Shore branch of the New Zealand Labour Party, is intended to be an annual non-partisan platform for ideas and actions covering the broad field of New Zealand's security, defence and peace-making, international relations and national identity. The inaugural guest speaker was Bob Tizard, a former Labour Minister and veteran of World War II.

'Jack Lyon was one of the most lovable Members of Parliament, respected by all sections,' said acting Prime Minister Walter Nash, on learning of his colleague's death in Crete in 1941. The tributes that followed from both sides of the House prove that this was no empty phrase. William John Lyon, invariably known as Jack, was an unapologetically left-wing member of the first Labour government, as the member for Waitemata from 1935. Yet he was highly regarded by both colleagues and Opposition members for his broad knowledge and sparkling debate, his dedication to principle and above all for his undoubted courage, demonstrated in two world wars and the Depression in between. During his political career those qualities saw him recognised as a potential leader of his party. His death under fire while still an elected MP prevented the realisation of his full promise.

Son of a silly old Tory

Jack Lyon was born in England where his father was a 'silly old Tory', and educated at a Brighton grammar school. An outstanding student, he was offered a scholarship to Oxford University. The outbreak of World War I caused 17-year-old Jack to put his age up instead, and volunteer for active service. With the East Kent and Northamptonshire Regiments he served with great courage in the trenches of the Western Front and was twice mentioned in dispatches. He was promoted from the ranks and eventually given a captain's commission. He was fluent in German and worked at times as a field interpreter and for military intelligence. His wartime experience convinced Jack that a radical change in the nature of British society was needed to increase equality and secure basic living standards and he worked as an organiser for the British Labour Party in two general elections. Although he was a keen sportsman who played football at senior level, Jack's health had been permanently damaged by mustard gas during the war. On medical advice he left the acrid atmosphere of London in 1927 and emigrated with his wife and daughter to New Zealand; a second daughter was born in Parnell in 1932. The family first settled at Hastings where Jack qualified as a teacher but worked for the

well-known stock and station agents Williams and Kettle. He also joined the local Labour Party and stood for Parliament in what was then a safe conservative seat. He trebled the Labour vote but did not win, although he was elected to the Hastings City Council and Napier Harbour Board.

Socialism on a soapbox

The family later moved to Auckland's North Shore where Jack gave Workers' Educational Association (WEA) courses in public speaking and debating. As the international economy lurched into prolonged depression, he spent some time working on relief gangs. He was a tireless representative for the vast numbers of the unemployed and became president of the Auckland Provincial Unemployed Workers' Association. Jack remained a dedicated and clearly left-wing Labour supporter, campaigning vigorously for a democratic socialism in line with his Fabian principles. He regularly and eloquently expounded these principles, literally from a soapbox, at prominent spots around the North Shore. In 1935, while living in Mays St, Devonport, Jack Lyon won the seat of Waitemata to become its first Labour MP, and entered Parliament as part of the first Labour government under Michael Savage. He retained the seat three years later. He aligned himself with the left wing of the party led by John A. Lee and Frank Langstone and was a member of the committee that established the country's free national health service and benefit scheme. He twice moved to nationalise the Bank of New Zealand but did not live to see this goal achieved in 1945. Jack was also a vocal and effective representative of his local constituency and a prominent early advocate for a bridge across Auckland harbour.

'A nation of self-reliant people'

He was widely read and well informed, especially on international affairs, and this made him a dauntingly skilled debater in the House. He gave the 1936 Address in Reply, the first to be broadcast live on radio in New Zealand, in which he supported the then farsighted idea of 'a British Commonwealth of Nations consisting of the British Empire and any nation which voluntarily desired to join it.' Jack also served as chair of the House Defence Committee. Unlike several of his Parliamentary colleagues, he did not subscribe to the view that New Zealand could not defend herself against the forces of fascist aggression then massing in the northern hemisphere. He told the House, 'Some people have suggested that a Labour Government would be completely pacifist in outlook ... the Government does intend to fulfil its obligation to the League of Nations and it will work to the uttermost to secure to this country and to every other country... some form of collective security to maintain world peace.' His proposals for securing the defence of New Zealand were founded on his conviction, by no means widely shared at that time, that it was the USA rather than the UK that would prove the most significant military partner in the Pacific. 'It is time that we as a nation of self-reliant people had a self-reliant Government which was attempting to make some form of treaty in conjunction with the British Empire, to bring the big American nation into a comprehensive Pacific defence plan.' His fellow World War I veteran and good friend John A. Lee later said, 'When Jack Lyon believed, he was prepared to risk his life for his cause. He fought for his beliefs in politics; he fought for his beliefs on the battlefields of the Empire.' Jack had retained his captain's commission in the reserve forces of the British Army and on the outbreak of World War II he applied for and was granted leave to serve with the forces of his adopted country. This time he took several years off his age to ensure he was sent overseas. He was the first Member of Parliament, and one of the first New Zealanders, to

enlist, leaving with the First Echelon.

A bad knock for A Company

Jack's first posting was to Egypt, to train untried New Zealand volunteer troops. He was aged over 40 and found the physical demands of wartime gruelling. In a light-hearted letter to a Parliamentary colleague, he described how he planned to recreate those conditions on his return. 'When I get back I am erecting a tent on the dunes of Takapuna with hot-water pipes underneath, heating the sand to a temperature of 115 degrees to 120 degrees... I will go to bed in darkness at 6 pm and freeze.' He was then sent to the battlefields of Greece where he managed to maintain frequent contact with fellow MPs. He had been one of John A. Lee's greatest supporters but was disgusted by the article attacking Savage that led to Lee's departure from the Labour Party. In a letter, he told Nash that they shared identical political goals although he felt the party should have accelerated the pace of change. 'What a tragedy it was that personal issues were allowed to obscure political ideology and the culminating tragedy, the death of our beloved leader. I realise more than ever how puerile some of our fights in Caucus were, and how ridiculous it was that most of our discussions took place in an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion and the comradeship of 1935 was allowed to be dissipated.' He added that military movements were approaching a climax; they would soon be 'in the thick of it'.

Against numerically superior and better equipped German forces, the New Zealand troops fell back and in late April 1941 they were withdrawn to Crete, leaving much of their arms and equipment behind. Their orders were to hold the island against an expected attack by massed airborne troops. On 26 May 1941, a week after the first attack on the island began, Captain Lyon was commanding A Company of the 18th Rifle Battalion at Maleme airfield. His company was subjected to heavy aerial and paratroop attack and he began to evacuate his men in small groups. As the regimental history says, 'you can't move 300 men through several miles of straggly olive groves without occasionally coming into view. Suddenly two big Messerschmitt 110s whisked low over the treetops... Again and again they circled and dived, machine guns hammering away, peppering the whole area. A Company caught most of it before it could take cover. Captain Lyon and five others were killed, another half dozen wounded – a bad knock for A Company, already very short of men. The battalion could not afford to lose many like Captain Lyon, one of its few senior officers still on their feet.'

Jack Lyon was killed by a machine gun bullet in the neck at the age of 43. He left a wife and two daughters, Dorothy and Pamela, living at Eversleigh Rd, Takapuna. When confirmation of his death reached New Zealand, his seat in the House was draped with a laurel wreath and the flag of his country of birth. Mr Tirikatene, Member for Southern Maori, paid him a Biblical tribute. Kahore he aroha kia rite ki tenei, kia tuku te tangata ia ia ano kia mate mo ona hoa. (Greater love hath no man than this, that he lays down his life for his friends.)

– Mark Derby

TOP: Waterside workers entering the Trades Hall in Vivian Street, Wellington 12 May 1932 (Ref. 1/2-084855-G) Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

BELOW: Trades Hall, Vivian Street, Wellington.



Searching the Wellington Trades Council Archives

Lisa Saksen remembers attending smoke-filled meetings at Wellington Trades Hall in the 1970s. Here she discusses using the Wellington Trades Council archives for her research on second wave feminism and communist parties in New Zealand from the 1960s to the 1990s.

The Beaglehole Room in Victoria University of Wellington's Library holds the complete archives of the Wellington Trades Council (WTC). The Council, as well as being a forum for debate among Wellington unionists, also formed part of the structure of the New Zealand Federation of Labour (FOL), and therefore also dealt with the issues that faced the national body, particularly those related to the Court of Arbitration.

When I was a delegate to the Wellington Trades Council it met in the Wellington Trades Hall in Vivian Street, (now sadly mostly a car park with a few shops in front and the Gryphon Theatre to one side). The Social

Hall in which the meetings were held always reminded me, as a one-time member of the Cleaners' Union, of Victorian urinals - the type with tiling half way up the walls, for the convenience of men with poor aim. The colour of the tiles, as I remember them, was a submarine green which did not add much to the jollity of the surroundings, and which in the 1960s offered no clue to political leanings.¹ I would join a queue of people waiting to pass scrutiny by the doorkeepers, everyone intent upon the agenda for the meeting, and the chances offered by the items on it to debate, not only issues facing the trade union movement, but also the burning concerns of the day faced by everyone. Once inside the Social Hall, it was difficult to see the people sitting at the head table as cigarettes and the occasional pipe filled the room with pungency and fumes. Despite this, I must stress that it was exciting to go to Trades Council meetings; horns would be metaphorically locked between those representing differing elements of the 'Left' in the trade union movement and occasionally all the leftist strands would join forces to oppose the Catholic Right. Amendments and counter-amendments marked the progress of the battle-line, and one had to keep one's wits about one lest one inadvertently vote the wrong way in the plethora of motions and amendments.

I am in the process of researching and writing a PhD thesis on the history of four communist organisations in New Zealand from the 1960s to the 1990s. Currently I am completing a chapter on the effects of second wave feminism on the theories and the practice of these organisations. The minutes of the general meetings of the Trades Council provide a valuable insight into the concerns of member unions and I expect to trace the growing participation of women delegates to the Trades Council. There were rarely fewer than 40 delegates present.

I believe I will find that the way feminism intersected with trade unions had an impact on the way communist parties came to adopt or reject parts of the ideology of second wave feminism. One of the organisations in the scope of my thesis (the Communist Party of New Zealand: CPNZ) was reluctant to engage with trade unions, believing that they formed part of the superstructure of the State, and would inevitably sell out the interests of the working class. This study of feminism and trade unions provides a convenient bridge for my research on the women's movement and on trade unions.

In order to show the wealth of material contained in the Wellington Trades Council archives I will discuss findings that relate immediately to my thesis as well as other matters of interest which I have uncovered in my research up to 1968, but which have little or nothing to do with my study.

The Leadership

In 1960, at the start of the period covered by my research, Fintan Patrick Walsh ('the Black Prince') was the President of the Wellington Trades Council. By 1968, Toby Hill, someone with good reason to distrust and dislike Walsh, had taken his place. Through an irony of history both Walsh and the Drivers' Union's representative to the council Chip Bailey, died within weeks of each other, and the Council had the difficult task of memorialising two polar opposites at the same meeting.² Both had been members of the CPNZ. Bailey remained in the Party but Walsh (a Party foundation member), had not only left it, but had expended a huge amount of time and energy in discrediting his former comrades and trying to have them debarred from union office, as well as informing authorities in the USA about the activities of communists in New Zealand. Bailey laid the



ABOVE: Fintan Patrick Walsh ca. 1956
(Ref. 1/2-C-014466-F) Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington, New Zealand.

foundations for participative democracy in the Drivers' Union, while Walsh used every means at his disposal to secure his own authority. He had, as his entry in the DNZB says, 'an instinct for power'.³

The minutes duly report the after-effects of a series of defamation actions brought by members of the Catholic Right (most notably by Peter Butler and Tony Neary), including details of one of Walsh's few reversals. Neary had been subpoenaed to give evidence in one of these actions, a case against Walsh for slander, brought by Robert Adams who had been rejected for membership of the Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand and allegedly physically assaulted by Walsh and his associates. Disregarding the fact that legally, Neary had been compelled to give evidence in the case, Walsh organised a motion that would have suspended Neary from membership of the Council because he gave evidence against Walsh. This caused the Attorney General to become involved with the Council, advising them that in penalising an individual for giving evidence, they were placing themselves in danger of being in contempt of Court. Hastily the Council backtracked and claimed that it was unaware that Neary had been subpoenaed to give his evidence.⁴

I have always wondered why Neary and Butler and others within the Catholic Right were so opposed to Walsh – he was, after all, as vehemently anti-communist as they could wish. How too can one explain the animosity that Walsh displayed towards them? Walsh at this time was President of both the WTC and the FOL. Based on the matters recorded in the WTC minutes, it is clear that despite his right wing credentials, Walsh, because of his singular appetite for power, was a major impediment to the Catholic Right's own designs for hegemony. And the attacks they made upon him, coupled with his disenchantment with the Labour Party after the death of Peter Fraser, explains, to some extent, his own move leftwards in the last few years of his life.

Women and the Wellington Trades Council

During the period of my study, economic conditions declined for most New Zealanders. The Council, which could be criticised for having a bit of a tunnel vision on the importance of wages, now had to consider the effects of prices on the living standards of its members. The Campaign Against Rising Prices (CARP) which was a women's united front vehicle for the CPNZ, addressed meetings of the Council, pointing out not only deceptive packaging of products, but also the stress which housewives experienced with constantly increasing prices for essential food items.⁵ At this time (late 1960s) the Council, along with the FOL and most unions, was wedded to the notion of the 'male breadwinner' wage. That is, that a man's wages should be enough to support himself, his wife and their children.⁶ This concept, which had been strongly supported by the first Labour government, still received lip service from the then National Government. John Gould has argued that of all developed capitalist countries post-war New Zealand 'kept its women the most bound to house and children'.⁶ Indeed when the Council held a special meeting (open to the public) to discuss economic matters in 1968 it was reported that

A housewife said that she has been a unionist for many years and she could not afford to take time from work to attend this meeting. Prices far outstripped wages, it was necessary to start policing prices. She claimed that the proposed stoppage was only a red herring, arranged by professional union officials to divert attention from the real need – policing prices. The lady was reminded by a

delegate that if her husband was paid a living wage she would not be forced to work.⁷

This exchange I think sums up the attitude of the Council and its associated unions at the beginning of my period. A women's place was in the home, supported by the wages earned by her husband. Note that although the woman speaker had identified herself as being in work, she was still described as a 'housewife'. There was a degree of shame in having a wife who worked. It was only in 1939 that married women were allowed to continue to be public servants or teachers after their wedding. And union officials were generally suspicious of the influence that 'housewives' had on their members, believing that they would almost inevitably be opposed to strikes and other militant actions. Trade unions, however, had to come to terms with the growth in married women's employment, and with changes to the nature of the New Zealand workforce. The male-only sites of employment, such as bus-driving, the freezing works and the automotive industry were all being 'feminised', and for unions to succeed they had to find ways of gaining the participation of their female members. I look forward to reading the minutes of the Women's Sub-Committee of the Trades Council as I progress through the years.

There are other examples of the support which the 'male breadwinner' wage enjoyed among the delegates to the Council, including some women delegates. This is linked with the distrust that many delegates felt about 'moonlighting', that is, working a second part-time job on top of a full-time position. This was seen as taking an unfair share of the work available, thereby causing distress to men who could not find work. Despite the strongly-argued case put forward over a number of months by the Boilermakers' Union, the Council in the end reluctantly came to the conclusion that there was nothing that could be done about it.

Visitors and other matters

The minutes show that Wellington Trades Council was visited and addressed by leading public servants. J K Hunn, for example, the author of the influential 1961 Hunn Report on the Department of Maori Affairs, addressed the Council on 'the conditions of the Maori population today and the urgent need for opportunity and encouragement to the Maori people to further their education to the point where they would be in a position to play their full part in our increasingly industrialised society.'⁸

In addition delegates to the Council were kept abreast of changes to the currency of New Zealand, through speeches given by members of the Decimal Currency Board and of the various precursors of the Accident Compensation Commission, through visits from representatives of the Workers' Compensation Commission.

I find it interesting that senior public servants sought to develop a relationship with the trade union movement and tried to do this through speaking to the general meetings of the Trades Council. Perhaps it is an example of the 'flatter' society that New Zealand then experienced, that a leading figure in government service such as Hunn, would have thought that a night at Trades Hall was a night well spent.

Other visitors to the WTC showed the international scope of trade unionism and the continuing importance of trans-Tasman union relationships particularly with the Seamen's Union of Australia. But sometimes these international relationships went awry. One of these occasions was when

Mr L. Zosel, Director of International Affairs of the American Brotherhood of Railway Clerks was welcomed to one meeting and then in the next meeting the WTC was forced to issue a statement dissociating itself from remarks he had made which had been reported in the press.

The Cold War made its appearance with the FOL and therefore the WTC being affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (the USA-supported world body for trade unions). Indeed, Walsh had attended its inaugural meeting. Despite this, individual trade unions kept their affiliation to the World Federation of Trade Unions, the Soviet-supported world trade union organisation, and there was much competition to be elected as a delegate to the international meetings of these two bodies. In addition the FOL sent representatives to the International Labour Organization. Reports were received back from the successful delegates and from those members fortunate enough to be granted all-expenses-paid trips to the USA, the USSR and China via friendship organisations or other agencies. The reports back by members of the WTC who had been on these trips certainly broadened the horizons of other members of the Council.

A vital source

These archives are an important, vital record of the concerns of organised working class people, and I thank the Beaglehole Room for its care of them and for allowing me access. I recommend them to fellow labour historians.

— *Lisa Sacksen*

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1 — On advice from a fellow member of the LHP I visited the remnants of Trades Hall, but could not find any of the original tiles still attached to the walls, so I have no evidence that they were green, only memory.

2 — Minutes of General Meeting of the Wellington Trades Council, 25 July, 1963, Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington.

3 — Walsh, Pat. 'Walsh, Fintan Patrick 1894 - 1963'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007. URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> and Franks, Peter. 'Bailey, Chip 1921 - 1963'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007. URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>

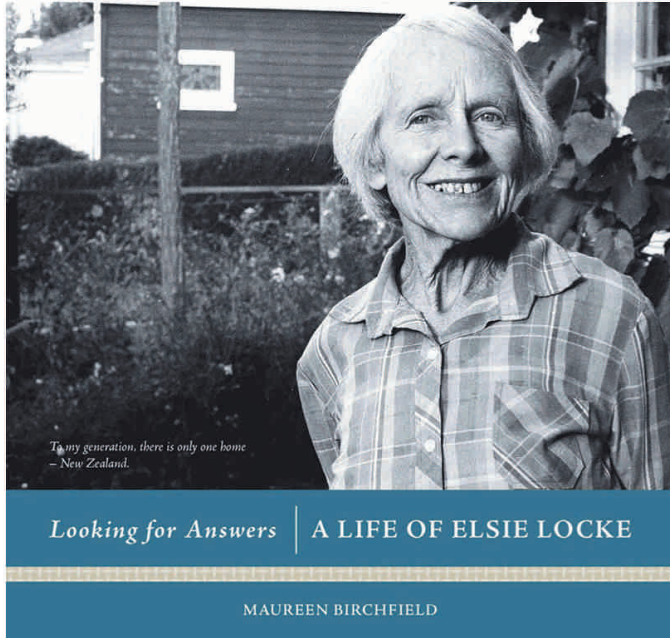
4 — Tony Neary and Jack Kelleher, Neary, *The Price of Principle*, p109, Auckland 1986.

5 — Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Wellington Trades Council, 25 September 1968, Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington.

6 — John Gould, *The Rake's Progress? The New Zealand Economy Since 1945*. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1982, p93, cited in Melanie Nolan and Raelene Frances: 'Gender and the Trans-Tasman World of Labour' *Labour History*, No. 95, November 2008, p29.

7 — Minutes of a Special meeting held by the Wellington Trades Council, 21 June, 1968. Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington.

8 — Minutes of General Meeting of the Wellington Trades Council, 18 April 1962. Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington.



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