

THE
COMMONWEAL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES
ISSUE 1: APRIL 2022



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Published by the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies

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Cover	William Morris - <i>Marigold</i> (1875)

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the First Issue of the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies' Newsletter

BY EDITOR MARTIN CRICK

We have adopted the title of *The Commonweal*, following in the footsteps of William Morris's Socialist League newspaper in the UK, first published in 1885, and also of the New Zealand Socialist Party's publication, which made its first appearance in 1903. Ernest Belfort Bax, a member of Morris's Socialist League, reflecting on those years, said this: 'The idea implicit in not a few of those who belonged to the Socialist League was more or less that of a federation of socialist societies throughout the country...which should educate and organise public opinion especially of the working classes, so that when the cataclysm to which the capitalist system was leading up should supervene, these societies might be in a position to give direction to the revolutionary movement.' We now have four affiliated Societies, and if this *Newsletter* helps to 'educate and organise public opinion' then it will be worthwhile.

There is much to exercise the minds of socialists right now. The anti-mandate protests outside parliament provoked varied responses from the left, some surprising indeed. I have tried to summarise those, whilst Paul Hopkinson challenges those who oppose the occupation, pointing out that the left has always upheld the right to protest. As the

'team of five million' starts to fracture, and the opinion polls show a National Party resurgence, attention is beginning to turn to the Labour government's performance other than on Covid. In spite of its large majority it has done nothing to redress the massive inequalities in wealth in New Zealand, to improve the standard of health care and education, to solve



the housing crisis. The MPs who stood in the House and declared themselves to be socialists need to take a hard look at what exactly they mean by that, because there is no evidence of any socialist thinking emerging from the back benches to challenge the government's record. And then there is the conflict in the Ukraine. Again the left's reaction has been mixed, to say the least; apologists for Putin and unreserved admirers of Zelensky, cheerleaders for NATO and proponents of an international anti-war movement. History tells us that the latter are largely ineffectual. The day before the outbreak of WW1 there were massive demonstrations against war throughout Europe, with calls for a general strike. The next day most socialist parties threw their weight behind their governments and thousands upon thousands of working-class men rushed to join up. The anti-Vietnam war demonstrations only 'succeeded' when it became clear that the USA could not win the war. The Iraq war saw the largest ever anti-war demonstration in London, but to no avail. How should socialists respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine? There is much to think about, which hopefully will stimulate members to write in for

the next issue.

We intend that this will be a regular publication but that all depends on you, the members. The aim is to promote discussion and debate about things political and cultural, social and economic, historic and contemporary. No party line, no censorship, unless of course something is totally outside any reasonable left-wing/socialist interpretation. If you disagree with something then respond in the next issue, polemic is good! So we will have reports from our constituent societies, news of upcoming events etc, to keep our geographically diverse membership in touch with each other, but we hope members will take the opportunity to write on whatever inspires them – union activity, thoughts on NZ politics, or world affairs, Marxist theory, books you have read, films you have seen. In this issue our Dunedin comrade Andrew Tait sends an open letter to Jacinda Ardern and Christopher Luxon proposing turning the South Island into a Lord of the Rings theme park! So join him in contributing thought provoking articles to future issues. If you do then the *Newsletter* will be a regular feature of our activities. If you don't...



BRANCH UPDATES

Hamilton

NICK BREARLEY - HAMILTONSOCIALISTSOCIETY@GMAIL.COM

The Hamilton Socialist Society is now formally established and we are pleased to report a successful first 'pub club'. Our latest recruit is Jordan Karl. Jordan is the union representative for the Fonterra maintenance crew.

The Federation made it possible to make a substantial donation to the Unite union action currently occurring at Sky City Casino in Hamilton. Members have made the courageous move not to allow Skycity to continue in this near post-pandemic world with low wages and poor working conditions. A representative for the union was quoted as saying: "They're not going to restart in the old way, before the pandemic, people were asked to suck up bad conditions because you could be easily replaced" Finally, Unite has said - "Unite

hopes to unionise and lead strikes across this sector in 2022- we believe it's time for a fair pay agreement in the hospitality sector". The Hamilton Socialist Society stands in solidarity with the short term actions and longer aspirational goals of the strikers. Here we see a real opportunity to improve the conditions of highly exploited workers in an extremely profitable industry. The Hamilton Socialist Society will be looking to assist Unite in this goal.

At our next 'pub club' on the 29th of March, we discussed the beginning of our 'reading group'. Finally, we will be looking to host our inaugural event in the next few months. 'Last Place' has been decided on for the venue. If you can make it, we would love you to attend!

Wellington

HAYDEN TAYLOR - WELLINGTONSOCIALISTSOCIETY@GMAIL.COM

Since our founding in mid-2021, getting the Society off the ground has proved to be quite the marathon. Our first public talk was scheduled for August 2021 but was postponed without a date as Aotearoa entered its Delta wave lockdown. While we were waiting for the dust to settle, minor moves were made to formalise the Society in Wellington. By the time we had our first event on December 1st, we had a solid network of members who were willing and

able to organise and execute our inaugural event. With assistance in funding from our comrades in CSS, we were honoured to have comrade Martin Crick fly up to the Capital to host a presentation on the life and legacy of William Morris (1834-1896). Attendance at the event was roughly 50 people. The night ended up being more successful than most of us had imagined; however, given the delays we had and the generosity of our hosts at Bedlam &

Squalor, we may have just underestimated our potential. Although the membership uptake from the event was not very high, the WSS set an extraordinary precedent for the expectations of any left-wing group in the Capital. We are eternally grateful to both our comrades at CSS for helping fund Martin's trip to Wellington and Martin himself for his generosity and dedication to the cause of watering the roots of the Federation and encouraging its fecundity.

Over the summer, we waited until February to host our next event, but the wait was well worth it. Our expectations were measured appropriately with a lot less promotion and a smaller timeframe to organise the event. However, to our surprise, expectations were exceeded once again. Hosting at the same venue, Bedlam & Squalor, WSS's own Hayden Taylor delivered a public talk on British cultural critic Mark Fisher (1968-2017) and his work *Capitalist Realism*. With a turnout of around 40 guests, some of whom had travelled two hours south from Palmerston North, it was a very favourable outcome indeed. A big thank you is in order to comrade Fergus Oscar, who hosted the evening on behalf of WSS and made sure order was kept in the pub.

In discussions we had after the event, one of the members had brought up a pattern they had noticed during many of the questions asked to our speakers. A substantial amount of questions our guests were asking were unrelated to the topic at hand. Instead, our guests were asking very broad questions about both socialism and the legitimacy of capitalism. To address this, one of our members put their name forward to host a Marxism 101 public talk. Planned for winter, we look forward to bringing Marx to our guests and members alike in a more digestible fashion. In addition, given the emphasis we put on reading Marx, WSS will work to collate some Marx 101 giveaways for this event.

What seems to be a trend with us at WSS, the resurgence of Covid-19 once again stymied our plans for our scheduled event in March to celebrate International Women's Day. Working in collaboration with our neighbours, Friends of Vogelmorn, WSS had organised a panel discussion on the topic of *Women & The Working Day*; however, the window of opportunity to host the event in the real world closed as our fingers were still in the window-

“...despite our numerous setbacks, the Wellington Socialist Society has had a very successful genesis...”

sill. Rather than hosting the event via Zoom, we felt it was important that this event be held in person as it was intended to bring communities together, and Zoom atrophy is an authentic thing these days. The event was rescheduled for Sunday, April 10th, at 11 am. Because we are co-hosting this event, there is a slight change-up in the venue. Rather than being at our local haunt Bedlam & Squalor, this event will be held at the Vogelmorn Bowls Club in Brooklyn. There are still a handful of tickets for this event, so please email in to get your hands on the last remaining tickets. A special mention to our comrade Rhiannon Thomas who will be hosting this event on behalf of WSS. We look forward to her getting stuck in and representing the Society in the battlegrounds of suburban Wellington.

Suffice it to say, despite our numerous setbacks, the Wellington Socialist Society has had a very successful genesis, and we could not have done it without the patience and solidarity of the Canterbury Socialist Society

Executive. We thank them and all who have been involved in developing the Wellington affiliation to the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies. To date, WSS has a total of 18 paid members and a mailing list of 50.

We also cannot leave out our hosts. A big thank you to Bedlam & Squalor for the incredible opportunity they have given Wellington Socialist Society and for supporting us as we develop and grow our presence in the Capital. If any members of the Federation find themselves in the Capital, please make an effort to check out Bedlam & Squalor. It is one of

Wellington's best cocktail bars, and the staff there are legends.

Lastly, a handful of members throughout the past few months have tasked themselves with reading through and discussing Capital Vol 1. This reading group has proven to be a success so far, and once we finish up Marx's tome, we will plan on opening up our reading group sessions to the wider membership. For those who would like to be involved in any future reading group in the Capital, please do reach out, and we can let you know the details.

Otago

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The Otago Socialist Society is in the process of formalising its structure. This has taken some time, but after some false starts we are now moving towards this goal. We have a number of local socialists who are remote members of the Canterbury Socialist Society. Our comrades in the CSS have been helpful in lighting the way. We have been in communication via our Facebook group for some time, as well as the national forum in which we have been in touch with other centres. In addition, many of us are known personally to each other. One of the advantages (hopefully) of being a relatively smaller city.

Our local members have many long term socialists in our ranks, from a range of backgrounds and traditions, many of whom have worked together on local events and campaigns in the past. We hope to emulate the open but organised structure of Canterbury and welcome new members to our ranks. We are very much in sympathy with the educational goals of the CSS and the other socialist societies springing into existence around

the country. A vibrant and friendly culture is a must.

Several of our members are actively involved in the local unions and are office holders on the executive of Unions Otago, the local affiliates of the Council of Trade Unions.

Otago has a strong socialist history. The Seamen's Union was founded here in 1872 as part of the Federated Seamen's Union of Australasia and was the first headquarters of the first independent national union in New Zealand. Dunedin had other strong reformist, radical, and revolutionary figures in its past. Even today, the city is regarded as "left voting" although the socialist side of things has all but disappeared as elsewhere. However, our aim is to rekindle this tradition and play whatever part we can in building the socialist cause.

We have a small steering group of members and aim to hold our founding meeting in the near future. We intend to hold a public lecture as our first project, with a guest speaker from the north if available.

Canterbury

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Over the last six months the Canterbury Socialist Society has kept up a steady pace of activities and events in the face of some obstacles due to the ongoing response to Covid-19. The Executive Committee, and membership more generally, were delighted by the establishment of the Federation of Socialist Societies, and heartened by the prompt affiliation of our fraternal organisation in Wellington. This has now been followed more recently by affiliates in Hamilton and Otago. Canterbury members were fortunate to attend the launch event for the Wellington group and to develop the camaraderie between our two organisations.

As a small example of the strength of joint activity and common cause, the Federation of Socialist Societies donated to the strike funds

of two unions who had been striking for some time in the North Island: CHEP workers organised by FIRST Union, and Skycity workers organised by Unite. By steadily maturing as a membership organisation we are able to provide better support together than we would have easily managed as individuals.

The Executive Committee is looking ahead this year to an increase in our activities and events, both public and for members, as we continue to build a vibrant and interesting organisation of like-minded working people.

To sign off, we attach the message sent to First Union to accompany the donation to their strike fund. Pleasingly, the workers at CHEP have since secured a deal they have deemed acceptable and have won their industrial struggle:

“CHEP Pallet Workers have been an inspiration to the working people of this country. Through your unerring determination, and the rare but all too valuable enforcement of a hard picket, First Union members are showing the entire working class the way forward. We, the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies, wish to express our unwavering and unconditional support for your members in their struggle.

We believe that a reasonable society built on common sense will also be one built on common wealth. A society where people who do the work that makes society run, will in turn run society itself. Until that day, working people associating together for their collective interests is essential. We applaud your members’ steadfastness and hope this contribution will help deliver a speedy and favourable resolution which puts your union in a stronger position than before.

Your actions prove correct a very old song of the union movement:

They have hoarded untold millions that they never toiled to earn—

But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn—

We will break their haughty power, earn our freedom when we learn—

That the union makes us strong

In the spirit of fraternity and solidarity,

Acting Chairs of the regional affiliates to the Federation of Socialist Societies”.

EVENT REPORTS

Surprise! It's Women's Day (Again)

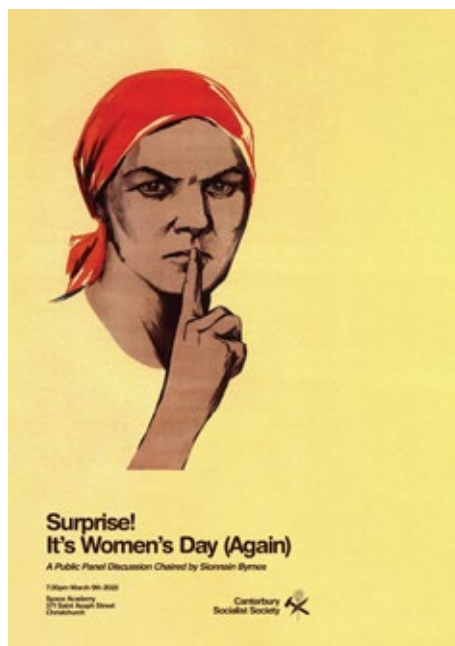
MARTIN CRICK

The CSS event on 9th March in celebration of International Women's Day was a panel discussion with a difference. Four CSS members gave a short presentation on a woman who had influenced them, followed by their views on some of the issues that these women had raised and how they resonated today.

First up was Kazia Tini, speaking about Marxist feminist Alexandra Kollontai, who briefly held the position of Commissar for Social Welfare in the Bolshevik government after the Russian Revolution of 1917. Whilst an admirer of Kollontai Kazia pointed out that some of her views were anathema to feminists and socialists today and she challenged the tendency to idolise individuals.

Kollontai fell from favour for her opposition to the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and for her criticisms of the increasing bureaucratisation of the Bolshevik Party. She was also scorned for her feminist ideals, and in 1922 was effectively exiled from the Soviet Union. Kollontai wrote extensively on traditional family structures, seeing marriage as rooted in patriarchy and holding women in conjugal slavery. She believed in free and equal relationships, and argued that child rearing should be the responsibility of the collective, thus freeing women from the double burden of factory work and domestic work. However, said Kazia, although modern feminists would agree with many of her ideas, they would disagree with some of her thinking, particularly her opposition to abortion. Kollontai saw abortion

as a bourgeois excess, which should only be allowed if the mother's life was at risk, and she



was also a eugenicist, believing that women with 'undesirable' medical conditions should be prevented from reproducing. Moreover she saw childbirth as a social obligation for women. Thus, in her conclusion, Kazia argued against placing individuals on pedestals, suggesting that real strength lies in the collective rather than with individuals. She concluded with these words from Kollontai, 'Women's Day...is a day of international solidarity, and

a day for reviewing the strength and organisation of proletarian women. It was the working women of St. Petersburg who began this revolution.'

Next Angela Rose spoke on American Olga Madar, labour unionist, feminist, softball player and 'menace'. She was the first woman on the International Executive Board of the United Auto Workers' Union, and one of the founders and first president of the Coalition of Labour Union Women. The labour movement sought to harness recreation, especially sports leagues, as a form of union and solidarity building, replacing the paternalist company sports of the pre-Depression era. Madar played softball for a number of corporate teams, and noted that companies would hire her for her skills on the diamond rather than her skills on the job. 'There was no union in the plant then', she said, 'and the fact that they would hire me when other workers were laid off just because I could play softball – was incredible. It was my first indication that a union was badly needed.' She devoted herself to building labour sports in the UAW as part of a larger anti-racist, anti-fascist working-class culture. She was director of the UAW recreational programs from the late 1940s into the 1970s, and as a result of her actions the American Bowling Congress and the Women's International Bowling Congress dropped their 'whites only' policies in 1952. Madar never forgot the power of both sport and trade unions to transform the lives of working people. She died in 1996 at the age of 80; she had been planning on being arrested in her wheelchair whilst supporting striking Detroit newspaper workers!

Hayley Roud chose the Briton Jack Monroe, whose blogs and tweets on the costs of food at the supermarket checkout have gone viral and had a considerable impact. Monroe, a single mother, was infuriated to hear a radio discussion on the cost of living which included in its index high-end, luxury food

items rather than essentials. She tracked the cost of items such as pasta, rice, baked beans, essentials for working-class families living on the margins. In one tweet she pointed out that 'The margins are always, always calculated to squeeze the belts of those who can least afford it, and massage the profits of those who have money to spare.' In one example she noted that the cheapest supermarket rice had risen from 45p (c90c) per kilogram to £1 (\$2) for 500 grams in 12 months, a 344% price increase. At a high-end store their dine in for 2 meal at £10 (\$20) had stayed the same price, whereas if it had risen proportionately it should have cost £34.40 (\$68). 'We're not all in this together'! Monroe attracted national media attention, and had an impact upon at least one supermarket chain, Asda (Walmart), which reintroduced numerous 'smart price' ranges that it had previously done away with. 'And today', she tweeted, 'I cried, quietly, to myself'.

And finally Sionainn Byrnes spoke about Bernadette Devlin, the Irish Republican, socialist and feminist. At 21 years of age Devlin became the youngest woman elected to the British parliament, challenging the Sinn Féin policy of abstentionism: 'I will take my seat and fight for your rights.' She was MP for Mid-Ulster from April 1969 until February 1974. She was arrested during the Battle of the Bogside, serving 6 months in prison for incitement. During an American tour shortly afterwards she drew parallels between the American civil rights movement and that in Northern Ireland. She was presented with a key to the city of New York, which she later presented to the Harlem Chapter of the Black Panthers. After the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972 she achieved further notoriety when crossing the floor of the Commons chamber to slap the face of Reginald Maudling, the British Home Secretary, when he asserted that the British Army had fired in self-defence. In 1974 Bernadette joined the Irish Republican



*CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
ALEXANDRA KOLLONTAI
OLGA MADAR
JACK MONROE
BERNADETTE DEVLIN*

Socialist Party, a break away from Sinn Féin. She was a leading supporter of the IRA hunger strikers in 1980-81. On 16 January 1981 she and her husband survived an assassination attempt by members of the Ulster Freedom Fighters, who broke into their house. Bernadette was shot 9 times in front of her children. British soldiers were watching the house at the time and it has been claimed that they colluded with the attackers. She now works with migrant workers to improve their treatment in Northern Ireland.

Four different women, four very inspiring women, four fantastic speakers! Sionainn then chaired a discussion which picked up on some of the topics raised; is there still pressure on women to have children? What issues do women face at work? Do unions look after the interests of women? An audience of 25, lower than normal probably due to the spread of the Omicron variant in Christchurch, left informed and entertained, and hoping to hear more on these women in the future

Labour's Great Betrayal of the Working Class

MATT GIBSON

Over 30 socialists braved the wet weather of Canterbury on Wednesday 9 February to attend a Canterbury Socialist Society lecture by Quentin Findlay, *What Happened to Labour? Gramsci, Postmodernism, and the Neoliberal Turn*. In this lecture Quentin explored New Zealand's unique position of having the New Right agenda implemented by the 4th so-called Labour government. He explained that Reagan and Thatcher set the scene and Britain's Labour government was keen to copy their imperialist and neoliberal economic policies; something New Zealand's Labour government was soon to follow. This was a rejection of the social democratic tradition workers had followed until then. Cutting wages and conditions and government services was the core of these policies. Economic and industrial disarray was the result.

Individual responsibility took precedence over the collective provision of services. In Britain it was called Thatcherism; in New Zealand Rogernomics. Kitchen table economics, "common sense" and "personal responsibility" were other terms used and unemployed people were blamed for their own position in life. According to British Labour politician Roy Hattersley this was "A series of clichés looking for coherent thought..." The Third Way Blair Government and the 5th Labour government in New Zealand led by Helen Clark saw a slight backtrack on the New Right agenda; but not by much. Neoliberalism was not apologised for but rather endorsed, and

Blair moved to be Bush's puppet in the imperialist Iraq conflict. Blair got rid of Clause IV of the Labour Party Manifesto which committed Labour to common ownership of the means of production and exchange and replaced it with a new clause that essentially committed the party to competition and partnership.

Questions were raised about whether people would work if they didn't get market-allocated rewards but Sionainn pointed out that many women already do a lot of unpaid work; and so do some men. Calls were made for a genuine democratic socialist party and the question was asked "what would that look like?" Martin said there are signs of optimism in community responses to the constant crises capitalism presents. Look at the response to the Earthquake in Christchurch, and the community spirit evident in the early months of this pandemic. The Pandemic also demonstrated that governments can intervene at times of emergency, and all shades of political opinion welcomed this 'big government' at that time. It was noted that single issue movements tend to dissolve once a particular crisis is resolved, so permanent socialist working class institutions are still necessary to maintain continuity for the movement. The community spirit evident in the past has not entirely disappeared but was largely suppressed by New Right neoliberals. This suggests that workers need a true alternative on offer, in the form of a socialist programme.

BIOGRAPHY

Anne Beaumanoir



CSS member Paul Piesse, having had his interest aroused by the talks on a number of lesser-known radical women, recommended alerting members to an obituary in The Press on Friday 18 March. Here is a life 'superbly well-lived', says Paul. Whilst we haven't space for the full obituary, the snapshot may encourage members to research further.

Anne Beaumanoir, as a 19 year old medical student, joined the youth movement of the French Communist Party (PCF) after the German invasion of France. Her resistance activities included hiding Jewish children from the Nazis, and for her role she was named as 'Righteous Among The Nations' by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Memorial, in 1996. She left the Communist Party in the 1950s because of the atrocities being carried out by Stalin against his own people. By now a neurophysiologist she became involved in the Algerian National Liberation Front

(FLN) which was fighting for independence from France. Practicing as a neurophysiologist in Marseille, she became a porteur de valise, a suitcase carrier, as well as a chauffeur for resistance members inside France, part of the Jeanson network which included Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. In 1959 Anne was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for her activities, was released into house arrest the following year because she was pregnant, but escaped to Tunisia and then to Algeria. After Algeria gained independence in 1962 she worked for the Ministry of Health under President Ahmed Ben Bella and was granted Algerian citizenship. When he was ousted in a coup in 1965 she moved to Switzerland, and became director of the department of clinical neurophysiology, specialising in the treatment of epilepsy. She retired to France, where she died in Quimper, Brittany, aged 98.

OUR RADIO SHOW

The End of History

SIONAINN BYRNES

On behalf of the Canterbury Socialist Society, I'm delighted to announce the return of the radio show/podcast *The End of History*, which airs monthly on the community access radio station Plains FM. As former host Mark Balderstone puts it, The End of History focuses on class struggle, contemporary unionism, economics, and current affairs in order to promote working class history and socialist ideas as they apply to the twenty-first century. The Canterbury Socialist Society thanks Mark for his time and work as host and wishes him all the best as he completes

his studies in nursing, and I look forward to continuing Mark's effort! The first episode of *The End of History* for 2022 features the Otautahi/Christchurch activist and writer Byron Clark on the topic of anti-mandate protests and their connections to the far right—it also featured a couple of songs and the short reviews reproduced below. You can access *The End of History* via the Plains FM website or else tune in to 96.9 Plains FM at 9.00 PM on the fourth Monday of each month. If you'd like to contribute something to the show, please email canterburysocialistsociety@gmail.com.

Episodes

FOURTH MONDAY OF THE MONTH AT 9:00PM ON PLAINS FM 96.9

February 28	Byron Clark on anti-mandate protests and their connections to the far right.
March 28	Toby Boraman on industrial action and shop floor strategies of resistance in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1970s and 80s.
April 25	Paul Hopkinson on the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and anti-war socialism.
May 23	Dan Richardson on connections between punk and socialism and cooperative music organisations and spaces.

MEDIA REVIEWS

SIONAINN BYRNES

Lanark

ALASDAIR GRAY (1981, NOVEL)

Set variously in the very real, working class, post-WWII city of Glasgow and the very dystopian, very divvy-to-the-point-of-hellish city of Unthank, *Lanark* is a socialist commentary on wealth inequality, war, bureaucracy, social ill-health, and hopelessness. The novel follows the titular character of Lanark (also

known as Duncan Thaw) through madness, suicide, institutionalisation, fatherhood, and environmental and economic meltdown. If you're into science fiction, fantasy, socialism, or all of the above, you should absolutely read *Lanark*. I loved it, and I'm giving it a solid 4.5 red stars. ★★★★★

The House

ENDA WALSH (2022, FILM)

The House is a stop motion film for adults, but whereas other stop motion films use clay, this one uses soft fibres. The film is absolutely beautiful. It's also very weird, and it's one of those films I've enjoyed thinking about perhaps slightly more than I enjoyed watching. The House consists of three separate vignettes, or three separate short stories, set in what are presumably three different worlds, but what's consistent across each of these stories is the manor house in which the action unfolds. The first story sees a kind of middle class, Edwardian family accept a new, fully furnished, luxurious, and strangely free house from an enigmatic architect. The

family moves in, abandons all of its worldly possessions, and the family's parents become mesmerised by the house to the point that they become literally inseparable from it. In the second story, set in a world populated by rats, a desperate rat property developer sets about renovating and selling the house only to have it overrun by vermin of another sort. The third story appears to be set after an apocalyptic flood that forces the house's cat landlord and her cat tenants finally to abandon the house for the sea. In all, the film is a really interesting take on issues of commodity fetishism and dispossession, and I do recommend it: 3 red stars. ★★★

Traitors

BATHSHEBA DORAN (2019, TELEVISION SERIES)

Traitors essentially starts when WWII ends. The series follows the landslide victory of the British Labour Party in the 1945 general election, but more specifically it follows the twenty-something-year-old aristocrat and Tory Fiona Symonds as she is recruited first into the civil service and then by the American Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the American Central Intelligence Agency. By her American handler Thomas Rowe,

Fiona also known as Feef is assigned to gather information relating to the infiltration of the British government by the Soviet Union, and so ensues a game of cat and mouse that also functions to comment on issues of class, gender, and race in the immediate aftermath of WWII. A timely series perhaps, *Traitors* is at least an entertaining watch, and I give it 3 red stars. ★★★

Death is Hard Work

KHALED KHALIFA (2016, NOVEL)

Death Is Hard Work follows the siblings Bolbol also known as Nabil, Hussein, and Fatima as they transport the corpse of their rebel leader father Abdel Latif al-Salim from Damascus to Anabiya. Without wanting to be crude, *Death Is Hard Work* is like a most uncanny, most traumatic version of *Little Miss Sunshine* in that the novel forces the formerly estranged siblings Bolbol the hopeless divorcee, Hussein the hot headed minibus driver, and Fatima the frustrated woman prone to fantasy to confront their grief and deepest insecurities while they

also negotiate their passage and that of their father's decomposing corpse through so many military checkpoints. The novel is dark to be sure, but it never descends to the level of trauma porn. Yes, Bolbol, Hussein, Fatima, Abdel Latif al-Salim and others experience life, loss, and love amidst, but also beyond the circumstances of civil war, and so *Death is Hard Work* succeeds in humanising a reality from which real humans are too often effaced. Five red stars. ★★★★★

REPORTS

The Wellington Occupation

MARTIN CRICK

For 23 days the lawns outside parliament were occupied by a collection of unlikely bedfellows / tent dwellers: Māori, New Agers, Flat Earthers, Presbyterian fundamentalists, the alt-right and the far right, 'united' by an opposition to vaccine mandates and/or the vaccine itself. Elsewhere in NZ smaller occupations took place, with Christchurch seeing sizeable demonstrations led by Brian Tamaki's Freedom and Rights Coalition, a front for his Destiny Church. The Wellington Occupation did not achieve its stated aim of bringing about the end of the mandates, and no elected politician met with the protestors, although Winston Peters used it to try to revive his fading political career. However, it attracted enormous media coverage, and its violent ending provoked widespread comment. It revealed deep cracks in Jacinda Ardern's 'team of five million'. The response from the left was as varied as it was from the mainstream, seeking to explain, condone, condemn, and even cheering on the police action on the final day.

One of the first to comment was Chris Trotter, who openly called for the protestors to be evicted, on the grounds that they ignored the rights and freedoms of their fellow citizens. No state, he said, 'can afford to allow its citizens to gain the impression that it lacks either the means, or the will, to deploy violence against those who defy it.' The ISO saw New Zealand's response to the pandemic as a sign of social solidarity, a collective response in an emergency, and a real attempt to save

workers' lives. Thus the anti-mandate cause is an 'anti-working class demand'. According to the ISO the occupation was a 'reactionary convergence'. 'The gathering is reactionary through and through; in its demands; in the gaggle of reactionary and far-right slogans and images...in the intimidation of workers and students...as a mass gathering at a time when gatherings endangered our collective health... the freedom the rally advocates is the mirror opposite of real freedom: it is the freedom from consequences, from caring about others, from having to participate in a collective.' The ISO disagreed with those on the left who saw this as an uprising of the dispossessed, seeing the social base of the occupation as 'the classic set-up for right-wing populist and fascist organisation', seen by the right internationally as a recruiting ground. In similar vein the World Socialist Website talked of a 'reactionary mob', and suggested that the police response was muted to begin with because the central demand of the occupation, for an end to the mandates, aligned with the needs of the NZ business elite. It was only brought to an end after it had fulfilled its purpose of shifting official politics further to the right. The latest opinion polls that show National overtaking Labour suggest there is some truth in that.

Don Franks in *Redline* however, in a counter-blast to what he called the 'woke left', argued that they made no attempt to understand protestors' motives, had zero recognition of the social and economic deprivation which



had driven many to protest, and that they did not respect the civil liberties of the protestors. Furthermore he dismissed reports of harassment and threats against mask wearers as 'a few unpleasant scenes', the death threats to politicians and journalists as 'hyperbole', and argued that when the police withdrew a carnival atmosphere prevailed. The presence of supposed far-right supremacists was given far too much weight says Franks. This was a largely working-class crowd, in the main campaigning to end the mandates. However, a recent analysis of the 250 people arrested at the occupation suggests that a third were small-business owners and tradies, exactly the sort of petit-bourgeois base that sustained Fascist movements throughout Europe in the 1930s, and the Poujadists in France in the 1950s.

In a powerful riposte to Franks Canterbury Socialist Society member Al Dietschin, an NZNO delegate and member of the Health Service Workers' Network, pointed out that the anti-mandate movement had as one of its demands the removal of all public health measures. 'If that had happened', he says, 'many more in this country would have died from Covid-19, including health workers', and the health system would have been overwhelmed. 'Essentially their stance is a direct affront to healthcare workers/unions', and their 'protests, abuse and harassment of healthcare workers at hospitals and vaccination clinics...should be condemned.' Al asked Franks, 'given that we don't live in some socialist or communist utopia, what would you have done in government when this pandemic arose?'

So who is right? None of us on the left can deny the right to protest, the right to freedom of speech, the civil liberties that Franks refers to. Any demonstration or protest will cause disruption, for that is what is intended. Politicians accept being harangued, and even abused, as part of the day job. And yes there

is often violent rhetoric at demonstrations. But there is no ABSOLUTE freedom as a right. And elements of the occupation went far beyond what is acceptable – Franks downplays and ignores the harassment and abuse of school children, of mask wearers, of people on their way to work, of health workers. He forgets that the very people the protestors claimed to be acting on behalf of were seeing their businesses and livelihoods destroyed by their supposed defenders. He pays no attention whatsoever to the fact that the protestors were themselves causing a public health hazard. Yes, there was a carnival atmosphere at times, and some of the camp clearly had come for the party rather than the protest, but there is also much evidence of other motives. It is impossible to estimate how many actual members of the far-right were in attendance, although there were certainly some. Here in Christchurch Phil Arps, Kyle Chapman and others were prominent. What is more significant is the growing influence of alternative media, Telegram, Counterspin and the like, offering a counter-narrative which sucked many into conspiracy theories of secret cabals of paedophile politicians, government radio waves affecting people's brains etc. To dismiss this, as Franks does, is to ignore the growing influence of accelerationist theory on the Far Right. Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the Christchurch mosque massacres, subscribed to this theory.

Accelerationism is a term used by white supremacists to hasten the collapse of society as we know it. On the one hand they identify 'acceleration' as the escalation of 'degenerate' values such as multiculturalism, liberalism and diversity., and they see Jews as playing a pivotal role in this. The 'Protocols of Zion' writ large again!! On the other hand, convinced that the future of the white race is bleak, they see 'accelerationism' as 'the last resort of the white man of the modern age', their aim is to

bring down the system by whatever means. And that means they will ally themselves with any disruptive force, such as the anti-mandate movement, which they feel will provoke a series of reactions, whether from the state or sections of the population, which in turn will lead to societal chaos. Thus we had the disturbing sight of *Māori* side by side with the Far Right in Wellington.

The actions of the government before and during the occupation can and should be criticised from the left. As John Minto points out the government didn't heed the advice of the WHO when it argued that 'If vaccine mandates are used "individual liberties" should not be challenged for longer than necessary.' He also says that Jacinda Ardern should apologise for breaking her promise that there would be no consequences of any kind for anyone who chose not to be vaccinated. But of course the government was faced with unprecedented challenges during the course of this fast-moving and ever-changing pandemic, and she couldn't have predicted the scale of the threat when she made that promise. Where Minto is undoubtedly correct is to echo the same WHO statement where it says that high priority should be given to threats 'to public health and confidence amongst historically disadvantaged populations, ensuring that cultural considerations are taken into account...such populations may regard mandatory vaccination as another form of inequity or oppression, making it more difficult for them to access jobs and essential services.'

This point is emphasised by Tina Ngata, a Ngāti Porou activist on the East Coast, in an excellent piece by Toby Morris in *Side Eye*. She points out that the poorer you are the less likely you are to be vaccinated. Your level of wealth plays a massive part in your level of engagement with the health system; in some parts of the country your nearest vaccination centre is three hours away. Poverty doesn't

just mean a lack of money it means a lack of options, Tina noting a vicious circle of poverty, poor education, low-paying or no jobs, poor health. Where there is already widespread distrust of the government, and *Māori* have plenty of historically legitimate reasons to distrust governments, are they now going to be swayed by the government asking to be trusted? Did the government recognise this? No! Did it adjust the vaccine roll out to help those who needed it most? No! Businesses were given \$18.8 billion, the poorest sections of the community got \$48 million. By the time marae were engaged, and partnerships established, misinformation had been given time to spread. As Tina Ngata says, the system 'expects you to receive every policy as if you are pākehā. It expects you to erase all of your experience and receive this treatment as if you are a Paurua 40 year old with 2.4 children and a dryer.'



A left response to this should have been to argue that those opposed to vaccinations for health, cultural, religious or whatever reasons should have been offered redeployment into other jobs, or been guaranteed their jobs back and paid until the mandates were rescinded. The argument that mandates infringe our civil liberties I have no time for – preventing us from eating out or socialising – wider communal health and safety, the good of the collective, override individual choice during an emergency. What should worry the left is the arrogation of ‘freedom’ by the right. Isaiah Berlin pointed out that there are two types of freedom, negative and positive, and this right-wing freedom is wholly negative. Its conflation with national identity is even more worrying – the sight of all those NZ flags is reminiscent of Trumpism. And we have a very similar evocation of the enemy – big government, the media, the socially liberal values of an educated urban elite. The working -class, who were undoubtedly present in Wellington and elsewhere, have nothing to gain from the

alt-right who, as Ian Hyslop has pointed out, are engaged in a self-interested game of power, and who wish for nothing more than a society made up of ‘individualised, marketized and commodified personas.’ What we saw on the lawns at Wellington was the ultimate consequence of neo-liberalism. The puzzle for the left is how to combat this. In New Zealand the left could not have turned out a fraction of those numbers, and it has no vision to offer the dispossessed. Hyslop urges us not to ‘disparage the feral mob and order another latté’ but address the social and political divisions that enabled the parliament protest. That is the true failure of the Ardern government, presented with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to effect radical change it failed long before the arrival of Covid, and the gap between the wealthy and the poor continues to widen. In the face of a far -right emboldened by the events of the past few weeks, the radical left has to organise its scattered ranks and present a vision of society based on the redistribution of wealth and true community values.

Anti-Mandate Protests & the Left’s Failure

PAUL HOPKINSON

The left should be principled and stand by the right to protest and to freedom of expression, including for those we disagree with. It should also always be guided by compassion and empathy to all people, not just those it deems worthy. The hypocrisy, vitriol, demands for violence and authoritarian behaviour from the state towards the anti-mandate protesters from much of the left in NZ showed none of the principles and values mentioned above. Nor did it even attempt to apply dialectical materialism to try and understand the social and

economic forces that created these protests. The dominant force undermining civil liberties and rights across the western world is the majority of the ruling elite adopting and enforcing an extreme liberal ‘progressive’ response to any perceived prejudice or discrimination, often referred to as ‘woke culture’. This version of ‘woke’ has little in common with its origin as an American Black activist term to stay alert for the deceptions of other people. Unfortunately, much of the left has not only bought into this ‘woke



culture', it's often become a champion of it. Rather than debating people and treating them with respect, compassion and empathy, much of what constitutes the left are keyboard warriors for modern day virtual witch-burning, carried out across social media platforms that often have real-world devastating effects on people's lives. This is applied with more vigour if the transgressor is someone from the left who has dared challenge the 'wokest' perception of a perceived prejudice or discrimination. Suddenly the general public are not competent enough to have freedom of speech or expression in the age of the internet, algorithms, and commercially run social media platforms. New powers are given to the state such as hate speech laws, limiting freedom of expression and the ability to confront and debate ideas. People who have ideas deemed dangerous or offensive are deplatformed, especially if these ideas are unpopular to the extent they might cost these platforms money or go

against their interests.

Into this left political milieu, combined with a pandemic and over two years of fear, and the strictest social restrictions in living memory, come the anti-mandate protests. As is normal in times of crisis the media lines up behind the government's message with little criticism or challenging journalism. As the pandemic develops and the government message changes this continues. So when we go from needing over 70% vaccinated for herd immunity to over 95% it is not challenged or debated. When we go from the PM's promise that no New Zealander will be forced to be vaccinated, to a vaccine mandate that means you might lose your job and your ability to feed your family and keep a roof over your head, it is cheered on by the mainstream media and the left.

With many ordinary working-class New Zealanders barely scraping by for decades, and with a housing crisis that has left tens of thousands of people homeless with families living in cars, shacks, garages etc, for some the mandates were the last straw. With no progressive political leadership after over 30 years of neo-liberalism, the defiance of the anti-mandate movement was inarticulate and without any clear strategy. The right immediately seized this opportunity to offer their support and attempted to provide answers and leadership to the movement. The left joined in the abuse of them with the government and the media, calling them fascists, selfish and mad, and ridiculed them and called for state oppression.

The left in the west laments the rise of the right and calls on more laws for the state and applauds the new restrictions on freedom of expression while they're being used on the right. Rather than showing empathy, understanding and listening to the protesters, while not necessarily agreeing with them, it chose abuse, ridicule and oppression.

INDUSTRIAL NEWS

CHEP Strike

MARTIN CRICK

CHEP workers in Auckland, members of First Union, have returned to work after two weeks on strike. On 3 March they unanimously ratified an agreement containing meaningful pay increases, overtime rates for weekend working, and a union sign-on bonus of \$500 each. CHEP is an Australian multi-national company, part of the Brambles Group, a multi-billion dollar supply chain group. CHEP operates in 45 countries and employs 7500 workers. It is the largest supplier of pallets in Aotearoa. In 2020 its profits rose by 173%, and during the pandemic it has paid out £50 million in dividends to shareholders, whilst its highest paid director received £386,000 pounds per annum and £33,117 into his pension fund. CHEP

workers in Manchester, UK, have been on strike for 3 months over the same issues, having been offered a paltry 2% pay increase in spite of being classified as essential workers during the pandemic, which emphasises what a significant victory this is for the Auckland workers. A First Union statement said 'Over two weeks of full labour withdrawal, facing animosity and scare tactics from the company, it took a lot of guts for these workers to stand together for over two weeks to get what they rightfully deserve, and #FIRSTUnion could not be any prouder of these steadfast, incredible members who are more united than ever! If one thing rings true, it's 'direct action gets the goods!'



WORLD

Neither Washington nor Moscow!

MARTIN CRICK

‘A war on western civilisation’, proclaimed one headline. Putin has crossed a red line, and must be resisted argued another. In more measured tones Mark Rice-Oxley in the Guardian Weekly, suggested that ‘Nazis, genocide, NATO, history: Russia has no shortage of apparent justifications for its war in Ukraine’. This is, of course, true. Memories of Hitler’s invasion remain embedded in the Russian psyche. Many Russians believe that their country was swindled at the 1990 Berlin summit, where the Soviet side thought they had a guarantee that NATO would not extend its borders, in return for a Soviet acceptance that a united Germany could join the pact. Mikhail Gorbachev dreamed of a common Europe where all countries were members of a single defence pact.

So how should we view this conflict? The left’s response to the Russian invasion has been far from coherent to say the least, ranging from wholehearted support for Zelensky and Ukraine, and de facto for NATO, through to one of our members suggesting that ‘The Ukrainian bourgeoisie in cahoots with NATO are largely responsible for the current situation.’ There has been much ‘what aboutery’ too. What about US imperialism? What about British imperialism? What about the Iraq war? What about Afghanistan? But two wrongs do not make a right...do they?

Yes NATO has expanded into Eastern Europe since 1991, and given Russian experiences of invasion from the West their fears

are understandable. As the Russian foreign minister put it in 1993 ‘NATO is a four-letter word!’. We might criticise NATO for this expansion, and the USA in particular for its cheerleading of this expansion as ‘freedom on the march’, but the fact is that these countries were eager to join, having good reasons

*“Our sympathies
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task of rebuilding
the country which
lies ahead”*

to be afraid of Russia. Ukraine, however, is in many ways a unique case. It is the second largest country in Europe after Russia, heavily industrialised and also an important agricultural producer. Without its large population, industry and agriculture both the Russian empire and the Soviet Union would have struggled to maintain their great power status.

It is also strategically situated on the Black Sea, bordering many NATO countries as well as Russia. For the first twenty years after it achieved independence Russia kept a close eye on Ukraine but interfered in its affairs only minimally. The large Russian speaking population and the affinities between the two nations seemed to guarantee that the country would not stray too far from the Russian sphere of influence.

Moreover, Ukraine has a strong nationalist movement with powerful historical memories of its independent place in Europe pre-Peter the Great. For Ukrainian nationalists the most significant event of the 20th century was not the German invasion but the Holodomor, the 'murder by hunger' inflicted by Stalin in the 1930s. Democracy is deeply rooted in Ukraine's political tradition, dating back to the radical democracy of the Cossack hetmanate of the 17th century. Since the break up of the Soviet Union it has had frequent changes of government, reflecting genuine differences of opinion as to what direction Ukraine should take. But slowly, as more people have been born in Ukraine rather than in the Soviet Union, then more have come to see Kyiv as their capital rather than Moscow. They have noted the erosion of democracy in Russia by Putin, they have seen what the Russian puppets have done in Donetsk and Luhansk, and pro-Western sentiment has increased.

Nonetheless support for NATO in Ukraine was far from overwhelming, many fearing, realistically, what the Russian response might be. But when Russia massed its troops on the border, support then rose dramatically to some 60% of the population. Most people in Ukraine speak both Russian and Ukrainian; there are strong ties and affinities between the two peoples, but outside the Donbas region there are very few

voices supportive of this invasion and many now vehemently anti-Russian. Yes there are neo-Nazis in Ukraine, as there are in many countries, but the far right occupies fewer than 1% of the seats in parliament. Certainly the Azov Battalion being integrated into the National Guard is not something we would support, but Putin's wild claims of fascists running the government are surely a ploy to conjure up images of the 'great patriotic war.'

Perhaps the time for theorising and analysis should come after the conflict has ended? The simple fact is that a democratically elected government, whatever our views on the regime, is under attack by another country led by an autocratic ruler who allows no dissent at home, an embittered ex-KGB agent who believes that the collapse of the USSR was the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century, who denies Ukraine's right to exist as a sovereign state. Moreover he has form...Chechnya, Georgia, Crimea, the capture of the DPR and the LPR. Having failed in his aim of a swift victory and regime change he now resorts to the tactics perfected in Aleppo, targeting civilians and destroying cities in order to bring Ukraine to its knees.

It is perfectly possible to be pro-Ukraine in this conflict without cheerleading for NATO, it has a right to defend itself. Our sympathies must lie with the millions of displaced people, the thousands of dead civilians, the sheer scale of the task of rebuilding the country which lies ahead. If we are to sloganeer then I remind comrades of the old IS slogan, 'Neither Washington nor Moscow!', although perhaps that should now be extended to 'Neither Washington nor Moscow nor Beijing'. The task of socialists is to argue for a new world order, the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a society based on Marx's maxim, 'from each according to their ability to each according to their needs'.

OUR HISTORY

The Commonweal

MARTIN CRICK

By the turn of the 20th century there were only a few hundred active socialists in Aotearoa: a Socialist Church and a Fabian Society in Christchurch, Fabians in Dunedin, a Socialist League in Wellington. However, the arrival of 190 men and women from the UK in 1900, intending to form a co-operative colony, almost doubled that number. New Zealand was seen by progressive forces worldwide as a sort of laboratory test case of social-democracy, thanks to the reforms of the Seddon government. The colony was backed by William Ranstead, the financial supporter of the *Clarion*, a popular socialist weekly magazine published in England. The colony was never established and the 'Clarionettes' dispersed throughout New Zealand. Soon disillusioned with this supposed socialist utopia, and realising the need for an independent party of labour, they helped to establish the first New Zealand Socialist Party.

The first branch was set up in Wellington in July 1901 and was a broadchurch of socialist thought and was loosely organised. Soon after other branches were formed in Auckland and Christchurch. British Socialist Tom Mann was an early organiser for the Party. Mann along with Ben Tillett, who also visited Aotearoa, had been organisers of the successful 1889 London dock strike. By 1903 the Party had established a journal called the *Commonweal*, based in Wellington and edited by Robert Hogg. Wellington became the centre for a group of anti-parliamentary socialists. Hogg

declared in the first issue of *Commonweal*:

"Our aim is revolution, not reform, because we mean to abolish the foundation of all existing institutions."

The paper, he said,

"is the organ and advocate of an aggressive political party which takes the field for the first time in the April municipal elections in this Empire city, but which will remain in the field till it has captured the government of New Zealand, abolished poverty and wage slavery, and turned Maoriland into a Cooperative Commonwealth, where each shall be for all and all for each, where, in the words of grand old William Morris, - All mine and all thine shall be ours, and no more shall any man crave For riches that serve nothing but to fetter a friend for a slave."

At its peak the NZSP numbered some 3000 members. *Commonweal* merged with the newly-founded *Māoriland Worker* in 1911, and the NZSP, after unity discussions with other labour organisations, merged into the Social-Democratic Party in 1913, to become the New Zealand Labour Party in 1916. For further information look to Wellington comrade Mark Dunick's Master's thesis *Making rebels: The New Zealand Socialist Party 1901-1913*:

"the New Zealand Socialist Party played an important role in spreading new ideas and educating a generation of socialists', and its journal *Commonweal* was influential in that role".

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The Commonweal.

Vol. I., No. 1.]

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 31, 1908

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Important Dates in Socialist History March Through May

14 March 1883	death of Karl Marx
17 March 1883	funeral of Karl Marx
1 April 1649	Gerrard Winstanley and 30-40 men and women occupied St. George's Hill, Surrey and began collectively tilling the land. Numerous local people joined them and the movement became known as the Diggers, spreading to numerous localities across England. The politics of the Diggers were a form of protocommunist anarchism, advocating direct action, common ownership and the dissolution of hierarchy. They have been called 'England's first socialists'. The world turned upside down, by Leon Rosselson, is a song about the Diggers and their activities. It has been recorded by the likes of Dick Gaughan, Billy Bragg, Chumbawumba and others.
4 April 1968	assassination of Martin Luther King jnr
10 April 1919	assassination of Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata
23 April 1971	1000 Vietnam war veterans return their medals to the government by throwing them over a fence surrounding the Capitol. One, Peter Brannigan, said 'I got a purple heart here, and I hope I get another fighting these motherfuckers.'
28 April 1945	execution of Benito Mussolini by anti-fascist partisans.
1 May 1886	up to half a million US workers went on strike for the 'eight-hour day with no cut in pay.' Three days later, at a protest in Haymarket Square, Chicago, against police violence during the strike, a bomb was thrown by an unidentified individual. Police opened fire on the crowd, killing several. Eight anarchists were subsequently arrested, although none had any connection with the bombing, and four were later executed. One committed suicide in prison. 1 May was later designated International Workers' Day, 'May Day', by socialist organisations to commemorate the Haymarket martyrs and the eight hours movement.
12 May 1916	Irish socialist, trade unionist and republican James Connolly executed by firing squad at Kilmainham Gaol, Dublin, for his part in the Easter Rising against British colonial rule. Wounded during the fighting, he was unable to stand, so was strapped to a chair and shot. -
13 May 1968	a general strike is launched in France during the May 68 rebellion.
25 May 1978	police attack a Maori land occupation at Bastion Point near Auckland. 222 people were arrested.
31 May 1921	the Tulsa massacre, the single worst incident of racial violence in the USA. Three hundred members of the black community were killed by white mobs.

Karl Marx

THE FOLLOWING SPEECH WAS GIVEN BY FRIEDRICH ENGELS AT THE GRAVE OF KARL MARX IN LONDON'S HIGHGATE CEMETERY ON MARCH 17, 1883.

On 14 March, at a quarter to three in the afternoon, the greatest living thinker ceased to think. He had been left alone for scarcely two minutes, and when we came back we found him in his armchair, peacefully gone to sleep — but forever.

An immeasurable loss has been sustained both by the militant proletariat of Europe and America, and by historical science, in the death of this man. The gap that has been left by the departure of this mighty spirit will soon enough make itself felt.

Just as Darwin discovered the law of development or organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice versa, as had hitherto been the case.

But that is not all. Marx also discovered the special law of motion governing the present-day capitalist mode of production, and the bourgeois society that this mode of production has created. The discovery of surplus value suddenly threw light on the problem, in trying to solve which all previous investigations, of both bourgeois economists and

socialist critics, had been groping in the dark.

Two such discoveries would be enough for one lifetime. Happy the man to whom it is granted to make even one such discovery. But in every single field which Marx investigated — and he investigated very many fields, none of them superficially — in every field, even in that of mathematics, he made independent discoveries.

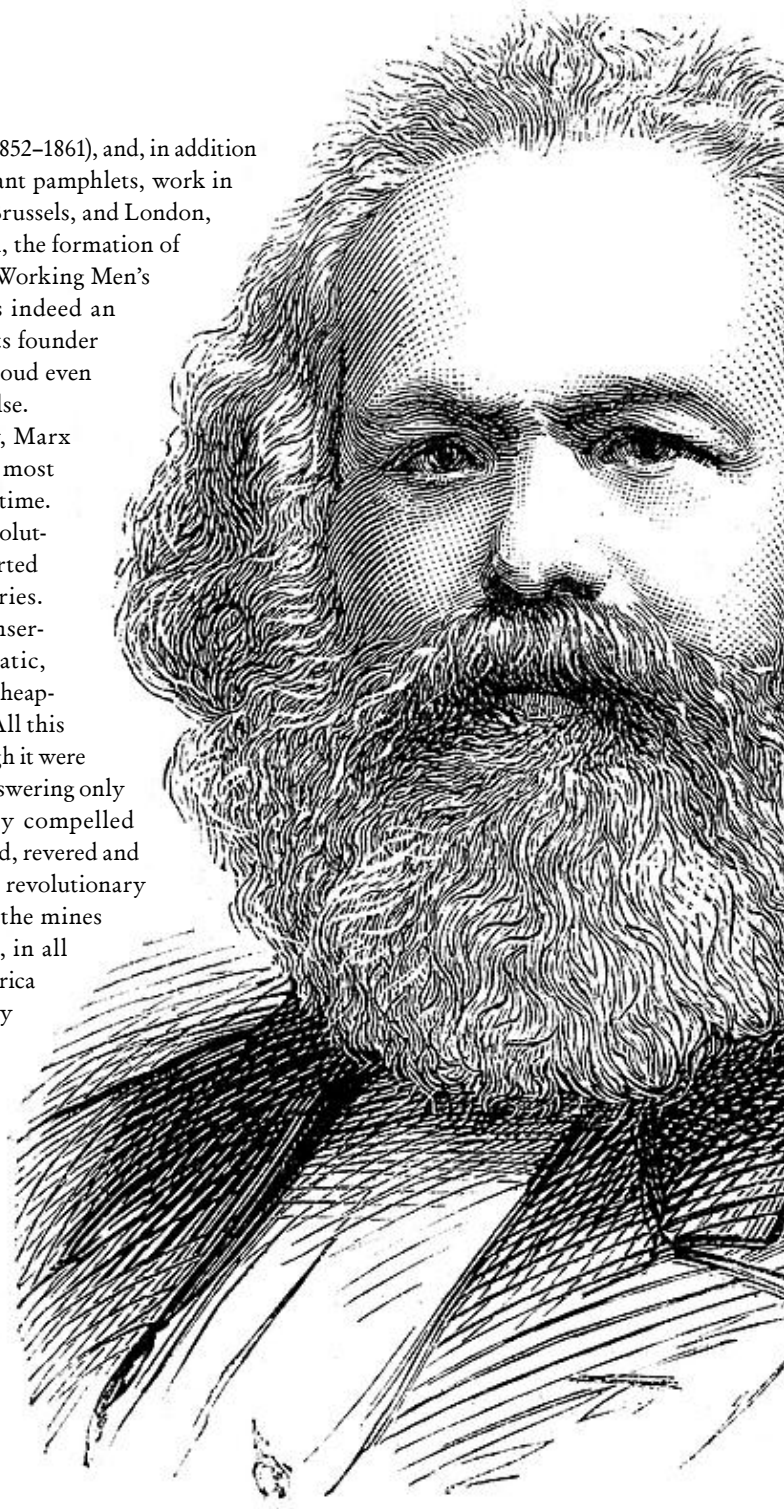
Such was the man of science. But this was not even half the man. Science was for Marx a historically dynamic, revolutionary force. However great the joy with which he welcomed a new discovery in some theoretical science whose practical application perhaps it was as yet quite impossible to envisage, he experienced quite another kind of joy when the discovery involved immediate revolutionary changes in industry, and in historical development in general. For example, he followed closely the development of the discoveries made in the field of electricity and recently those of Marcel Deprez.

For Marx was before all else a revolutionist. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, which he was the first to make conscious of its own position and its needs, conscious of the conditions of its emancipation. Fighting was his element. And he fought with a passion, a tenacity, and a success such as few could rival. His work on the first *Rheinische Zeitung* (1842), the *Paris Vorwärts* (1844), the *Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung* (1847), the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (1848–49),

the New York Tribune (1852–1861), and, in addition to these, a host of militant pamphlets, work in organizations in Paris, Brussels, and London, and finally, crowning all, the formation of the great International Working Men's Association — this was indeed an achievement of which its founder might well have been proud even if he had done nothing else.

And, consequently, Marx was the best hated and most calumniated man of his time. Governments, both absolutist and republican, deported him from their territories. Bourgeois, whether conservative or ultrademocratic, vied with one another in heaping slanders upon him. All this he brushed aside as though it were a cobweb, ignoring it, answering only when extreme necessity compelled him. And he died beloved, revered and mourned by millions of revolutionary fellow workers — from the mines of Siberia to California, in all parts of Europe and America — and I make bold to say that, though he may have had many opponents, he had hardly one personal enemy.

His name will endure through the ages, and so also will his work.



OPINION

A Modest Proposal for the Conversion of the South Island of New Zealand into a Park Themed upon The Lord of the Rings

ANDREW TAIT

Dear Ms Ardern and Mr Luxon, I would like to propose the conversion of the South Island of New Zealand into a theme park based upon the films of Sir Peter Jackson, KCBE, of the “Lord of the Rings”, the great history of Middle Earth.

I am not unaware of the challenges and hardships such a proposal entails but, like the fellowship of the Ring, I have faith in the boldness of our leaders and the obdurate determination of our Hobbit-like folk here in New Zealand.

Your immediate reaction, understandably, is likely to be one of disbelief. To convert the South Island into Middle Earth on the face of it is a physical impossibility - not only (you would imagine) is Middle Earth many times greater than the South Island but, damningly, north is north and south is south: are we proposing turning the world upside down?

To answer the first, and lesser, objection: surprisingly enough the Middle Island of New Zealand is actually larger (by some 4000 hectares in modern measurements once converted from the calculations of travel time). We forget too often how massive our land mass

is in comparison to the old world. Admittedly, our island is narrower but this is far from an insurmountable problem.

The polar orientation of the entire planet, which allows for a frigid north and balmy south is a like problem, or is it? Why not simply relabel our compasses? Let Bluff be Inverness and Marlborough Marseille. This apparently unbreakable knot is easily undone.

Although I am sure your honourable selves spurn gold for its own sake, prudent stewardship is the watchword of both your regimes. It is on this head that our proposal best distinguishes itself.

The South Island of New Zealand is but sparsely settled and most of its contribution to our exchequer is derived from agriculture and tourism, with a notable exception too, of electricity. The first and the third will continue unabated but the second will swell to a river of gold.

Theme parks are plentiful around the world but they are also plastic and all too often underpinned neither by natural beauty nor deep ideas. Our Middle Earth will have both - and will through its vast scope and dedication

to the vision of Tolkien and Jackson bring the age of magic back to this weary world of men (and other genders).

From the moment a tourist - nay, better, an adventurer, a traveller, a wanderer, a pilgrim - sets foot on this enchanted isle they will live, breathe and dream of Middle Earth.

Yes! It will require vast changes to erase all signs of the 21st century technology - milking sheds must be clad in wattle and daub, wire fences will give way again to gorse hedges and barges and riverboats will take the loads currently carried on trucks and trains.

Yes! It will be difficult but without great difficulty there can be no great rewards. And these rewards will be enormous. Against an age of globalisation, relentless population flows willy nilly across the world, wars and refugees, redundancies and new technologies, the eternal verity and certainty of Tolkien's moral clarity is the greatest argument in our age for a return to law and order. The wind-blown, careworn, rootless and ragged cosmopolitan finds in the Shire peace and healing. What wouldn't you pay to bathe even briefly in such a balm?

Students new qualified, their lives mortgaged to meet the needs of the modern labour market, would happily trade a decade of debt to live one bright season of adventure. Salarymen and women would fight tooth and nail for the chance to escape the office, toxic with electrosmog, social media and endlessly evolving identity politics, to breathe the clean air of Rivendell and Rohan. Phalanxes of Chinese tourists, intrigued by our Western culture, would be given a glimpse not into what is, to be frank, a poor colonial imitation of England, but the mystical heart of the West's true mythology, distilled and revealed by Tolkien and Jackson, our own Gandalf and Saruman. With a wrinkled wizard or grizzled ranger to guide them and Tolkien's immortal words to inspire them, tourists from every



PETER JACKSON

corner of the earth would shiver in awe at a world of wonder reborn!

But the true genius of Jackson, true to Tolkien, is the magnificent scope his imagination has made for recognising and rewarding the towering talents of the truly extraordinary.

For while the average New Zealander most resembles the simple hobbit, Tolkien's world is not a dull democracy. CEOs and HNWI's will revel in a society that welcomes, honours and exults in inequality - because who are the heroes, warriors of wide renown and kings of old such as Thorin Oakenshield but glorious eagles of inequality who soar far above the lives of simpler folk. They do not demean Middle Earth, they are its ornament, its justification and its purpose.

New Zealand is now ready to recognise this new reality - our unquestioning adulation of Sir Peter Jackson (the title does not do him justice) and other auteurs like Jane Campion has, if we can permit ourselves a brief moment of honesty, more to do with their elephantine success overseas than any old-fashioned

appraisal of the inherent artistic merit of their magic formula - plodding plots glued together with SFX and scenery. Sir Peter is knighted by the Queen. He is friends with Presidents and movie stars and most importantly he is the wealthiest entertainer in all of the millenia our species has existed! And he's from New Zealand!

Labour and National stand ready to recognise him - and recognise him we must, for the intellectual property rights, the great store of value he has single-handedly created can only be purchased, I would suggest, at the cost of fundamental constitutional changes.

What these might be I leave to you, as the acknowledged experts in the laws of the land, but Arch-Duke of Gondor (formerly known as Christchurch) would not be too much - the lands and incomes devolving of course upon his heirs in perpetuity.

Who could rule Rivendell? Who better to hold Imladris, the last homely house, than Sir John Key, who proved by the love he inspired the readiness of New Zealanders to embrace the new world order. And where is Rivendell? Why, Queenstown of course. Yesterday that region was ruled by Muldoon, a goblin king if ever there was, with his delight in "wheels and engines and explosions", drilling away at the land with his hordes of Ministry of Works engineers and excavators and for what? Electricity and other such devices that serve only to ease the lives of lesser folk. His day is done and now is the age of Elrond's close brother - Sir John Key. He has the wise and witty eyes of the ever-young elves. When he does grow old - may that day be long delayed! - we will be consoled by his music-loving son Maximillian and his artistic daughter Stephanía.

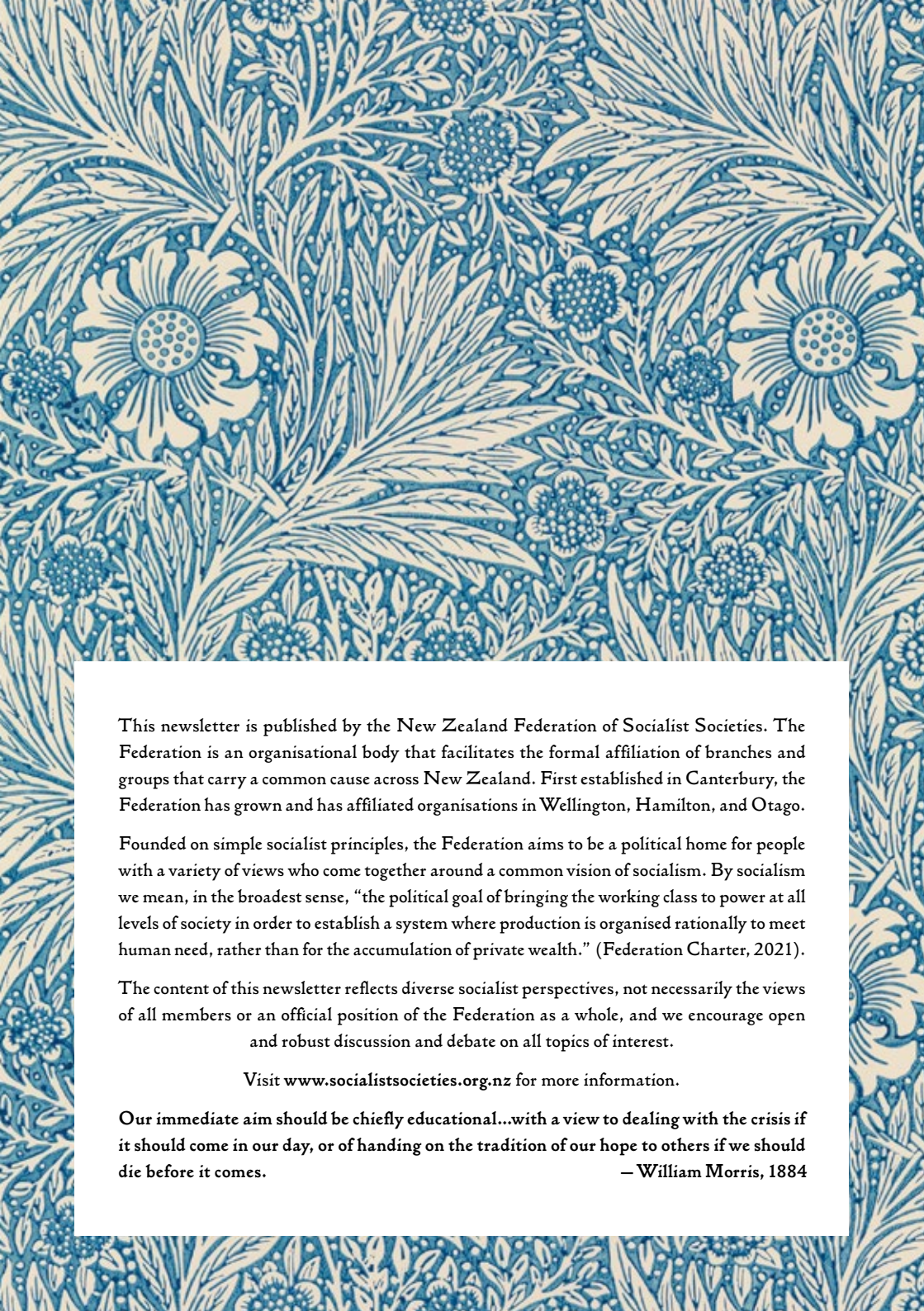
Further east (remember we have turned the map upside down) Lothlorien arises. There dwell in dappled dells a folk more wild and free - the Or-tel-quessir, or forest elves.

I do not think I need to spell out who best could rule this realm, a true Galadriel, surpassing nearly all others in beauty, knowledge, and power, with her consort Celeborn and daughter Niamh. Through the forests of Fiordland your court can ride, free from the prying eyes of journalists. With your green cousins you can hunt down such trolls and orcs as trouble the primal woods.

In fine, such is the outline of this modest proposal. I cannot delve into the details - the complex reclassification of our many intermingled strains into the pure and distinct races of Tolkien's world - the Roharrim, tall, blonde, and blue-eyed, their men large, husky, and handsome, their women particularly beautiful; the brown-skinned men of Near Harad and the black skinned race known as "half-trolls" out of Far Harad - and this is before we even start assigning roles to the non-human races - the elves, hobbits, trolls, orcs and goblins (though I am sure you too will have acquaintances who readily spring to mind). Nor is this the place to explore the renaissance of the languages of Middle Earth but I will note that only one language - Hebrew - has been successfully resurrected in the modern world and the means by which that was done - compulsory military service for all. Hebrew was reborn in the barracks and on the frontlines of Israel's innumerable wars against its neighbours.

Stern measures may be needed. There will be some who are recalcitrant, no doubt - conspiracy theorists, anti-vaxxers and others of that motley minority. But we cannot doubt that the great love our country has for Sir Peter Jackson and the Lord of the Rings will carry the day.

I'm sure you will agree this is a very fine proposal, that I am very fond of, though only quite a little one in a wide world after all. Now hand me the tobacco jar.



This newsletter is published by the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies. The Federation is an organisational body that facilitates the formal affiliation of branches and groups that carry a common cause across New Zealand. First established in Canterbury, the Federation has grown and has affiliated organisations in Wellington, Hamilton, and Otago.

Founded on simple socialist principles, the Federation aims to be a political home for people with a variety of views who come together around a common vision of socialism. By socialism we mean, in the broadest sense, “the political goal of bringing the working class to power at all levels of society in order to establish a system where production is organised rationally to meet human need, rather than for the accumulation of private wealth.” (Federation Charter, 2021).

The content of this newsletter reflects diverse socialist perspectives, not necessarily the views of all members or an official position of the Federation as a whole, and we encourage open and robust discussion and debate on all topics of interest.

Visit www.socialistsocieties.org.nz for more information.

Our immediate aim should be chiefly educational...with a view to dealing with the crisis if it should come in our day, or of handing on the tradition of our hope to others if we should die before it comes.

— William Morris, 1884