

THE
COMMONWEAL

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NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES
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EDITORIAL

MARTIN CRICK

Workers of the world unite, you have a royal funeral to attend!

Greetings comrades and welcome to the second issue of the Federation's Newsletter. My task as editor has felt at times very much like herding cats as I have cajoled, pleaded with, and harassed members into submitting their promised contributions but we made it! So many thanks to those members who have taken the time to contribute to Issue 2, and I hope to hear more from you and others in succeeding issues. The first issue received very favourable responses both from within and from without our membership and I hope this one is met with equally positive feedback.

The Federation is making great progress. As Tom Roud notes in his report from Canterbury the Otago and Wellington Socialist Societies are now firmly established. I have had the pleasure and privilege of giving the inaugural lecture at both of those, *William Morris* my subject, with a great turn out of over 50 attendees in Wellington and a hugely impressive 80+ in Dunedin. Equally importantly it was wonderful to be able to meet, talk and socialise with fellow socialists. Hamilton comrades continue their steady way, and we now hear of similar stirrings in

Auckland, all of which suggests that we are doing something right!

We are living in tumultuous times: an energy crisis, a cost-of-living crisis, a climate crisis, a pandemic, the war between Ukraine and Russia, in short a crisis of capitalism. The war is, in part, responsible for the cost-of-living crisis, but that is far from the whole story, as Upton Price tells us in this issue. The Governor of the Bank of England, like his counterparts elsewhere, tells workers that they need to exercise wage restraint, to avoid a wage-price spiral. But what we are actually seeing is the reverse of that, a price-wage spiral, with rising prices forcing workers to demand wage increases simply in order to survive. And why are prices increasing? Again, we are told the war is to blame, but the fact is there is a profit-price spiral, as grotesque and obscene corporate profiteering drives prices up. CEOs and bankers pocket record bonuses, shareholders large dividends, whilst workers struggle to make ends meet. What we need is not wage restraint but profit restraint! Workers don't determine prices, businesses do, and the sheer scale of the price rises will soon wipe out any wage gains. Price caps at realistic levels, nationalisation of utilities, a tax on the rich, *and* a real pay rise for all workers, these are some of the demands we should be making.

But as I write the crisis has been miraculously suspended for the moment whilst the world, or so I am told, is united in grief at the death of Elizabeth II 'by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of her other Realms and territories Queen,

Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith'. 'The nation is in mourning', according to the UK and New Zealand media, and indeed we have been treated to the unnerving sight of newsreaders in tears in both countries, whilst wall-to-wall coverage in the press, on the television, and online reinforces the impression. The banks of flowers, Paddington Bears, and marmalade sandwiches outside Buckingham Palace add a rather surreal aspect to it all, whilst the huge numbers of people queuing for up to 13 hours to file past the coffin lead one to question their sanity. But of course this national grief is illusory, it is spectacle, forged by our rulers to divert attention from our very real day-to-day problems, and to foster a spurious national unity. The Romans had their circuses, the Victorians their public executions, and in modern times we have the anachronism that is the monarchy, with its pageantry and show, its state funerals. The crowds are there to be part of an occasion, 'to be a part of history' as one told a reporter, rather than out of any genuine sense of grief or mourning. Meanwhile the ranks of the good and the great, past and present, stand in front of the microphone to tell us their stories of how they met her and what a lovely woman she was. The story is the same whether in the UK or here in New Zealand. As our member Andrew Tait commented, 'every lackey and lickspittle, toadie and flunky in the Dominion is sharing their mundane memories on air'. The media confection of so-called 'public opinion' is an enforcement of social control, and it is accompanied by more overt and increasingly draconian legislation restricting the right of free speech and free assembly. Those who dare dissent publicly in the UK are arrested for breaches of public order or for disturbing the peace, whilst in Australia indigenous rugby league player Caitlin Moran is banned for one game and



fined 25% of her season's salary for posting a disrespectful comment on Instagram. Many have traumatic memories of colonialism and empire and should have the right to say so but the State, abetted by the media, is attempting to prescribe what we are to think and feel. All of which makes Tom Rautao's warning in this issue about moves to further erode our liberties very pertinent.

So, who and what exactly is the nation 'mourning'? Tom Bramble, writing in

MARTIN CRICK
SPEAKING ON
WILLIAM MORRIS
AT OAMARU'S
CRAFTWERK BAR &
BREWERY - 2021

Red Flag (9 September), suggests that the Queen had two chief talents, 'her ability to be born into the right family' and 'her ability to avoid actual work during her 96 years of luxury.' Last year the monarchy cost the British public £88 million, whilst the Queen had a further \$500 million in personal assets. The royal train costs £200,000 a year, the royal helicopter £3 million, whilst the new royal yacht is projected to cost £200 million. Her grandson William, now next in line to the throne, sends his children to school and pays £7000 a term for the privilege. This period of mourning and the lavish expenditure on a state funeral will cost millions, and let's not forget that this is the second jamboree this year, following on from the four-day platinum jubilee celebrations in June. Elsewhere, the real world of work and family and social life goes on as before, with millions of people struggling to meet their energy bills, pay their rent, buy food for their families, living in pain as they endure horrendous hospital waiting lists. To quote Bramble again, 'The best medical care in the world kept the Queen and Prince Philip alive well into their 90s, while the working class in Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle [and of course here in New Zealand] die on average two decades earlier. This is class warfare, and the royal family have enjoyed being on the winning side.'

As scandal after scandal has enveloped the royal family in recent decades the Queen was somehow portrayed as above all that, a mother and grandmother, symbolic of all that was good about Great Britain. She was highly praised for her work as Head of that anachronism the Commonwealth. Yet let's not forget where much of her wealth came from, it was extorted from her colonial subjects in the British Empire. And whilst she presided over the decline of that empire,

as Commander-in-Chief of the British armed forces, she should be held responsible for the incarceration, torture and deaths of those fighting for freedom in Malaya, Kenya and elsewhere; for the British troops who invaded Egypt and Iraq, and for those same troops who shot down innocent civilians on Bloody Sunday in Northern Ireland.

Monarchists often attempt to defend the monarchy as a tourist attraction bringing millions of pounds into the country each year. But it is so much more than that. It perpetuates the class nature of British society, it is the pinnacle of the British establishment and class system. It upholds a whole range of reactionary values, the nuclear family, the primacy of the first-born son, the dominance of Protestant Christianity in a country where few are actually practising Christians. Ardern and other world leaders are clocking up thousands of air miles to attend the funeral, to 'show their respect'. Surely, if she must, she can do that by attending the proposed memorial service here! Many of the early settlers in New Zealand came here to escape such values, they came drawn by New Zealand's reputation as a social utopia, so why a century and a half later are we still in thrall to the crown? With the death of Elizabeth hasn't the time come to open up a debate about the country's future Head of State? Caribbean countries are gradually shaking off this last remnant of colonialism, but Jacinda Ardern and Christopher Luxon are as one in saying 'now is not the time'! Is there a better time than now? I leave you with the words of the Irish revolutionary James Connolly, written in 1910 upon the occasion of the visit of King George V to Ireland:

'Let the capitalist and landlord class flock to exalt [the King]; he is theirs; in him they see embodied the idea of caste and class; they glorify him and exalt his

importance that they might familiarise the public mind with the conception of political inequality, knowing well that a people mentally poisoned by the adulation of royalty can never attain to that spirit of self-reliant democracy necessary for the

attainment of social freedom. The mind accustomed to political kings can easily be reconciled to social kings – capitalist kings of the workshop, the mill, the railway, the ships and the docks.’

MARTIN CRICK

What is to be Done?

There are two indisputable facts in New Zealand politics at present. The first is that the present Labour government has totally failed to be transformative, as Jacinda Ardern promised it would be in 2017. The second is that there are increasing levels of disillusionment with the government and with mainstream politics generally, as evidenced by the 30% of New Zealanders who claimed to support the Wellington occupation to a greater or lesser degree. As a consequence of that the right and the far right have gained traction, and more importantly they have commandeered the oxygen of publicity via the occupation, their freedom marches, online media presence, and their headline grabbing stunts such as the appearance in court of Kelyvn Alp and Hannah Spierer etc. And worryingly, via the likes of *Voices for Freedom*, they are standing in local elections, often without declaring their true allegiances, where they are able to spread their conspiracy theories via election leaflets and billboards. We even have a new union, the Number 8 Worker’s Union of New Zealand, a Sovereign Citizen and antivax union advocating the ownership of your body and DNA. The voice of the left in response has been worryingly

absent. In fact, the left in New Zealand is worryingly absent, with at most 300 members of organised groups, our 120+ members making the Federation the largest grouping. What we do have is an active left blogosphere, with the likes of Chris Trotter, Martyn Bradbury, Bryce Edwards, and John Minto providing almost the only counter narrative, but their reach is relatively limited. Chris Trotter asks a very pertinent question in *The Daily Blog* of 18 March this year, ‘How to promote a radical left-wing agenda when so few people can even imagine such a thing?’ This is a question I urge members and readers to consider over the coming months, and to contribute their ideas to the next issue of *The Commonwealth*. In the meantime, let’s consider the two facts I posited at the beginning.

The Labour Party won the 2020 election by a landslide, with the highest percentage of the party vote since MMP was introduced in 1996, and the first time that a party has won enough seats to govern alone. This was in large part due to support for its response to the Covid pandemic. Whilst the warning signs were there in the pledge not to introduce a capital gains tax, and in the frankly derisory wealth tax, there was genuine hope that Jacinda Ardern and her government would carry out at least some of their transformative promises, for example to end child poverty. Instead, we have been told to ‘be kind’, leading Martyn Bradbury to describe the Labour government’s approach as ‘bullshit neokindness

which is all aspiration and not actually doing anything...a cautionary political failure of obscene proportions.' (*Daily Blog 7 September*) He tells us that the number of Kiwis living in cars rose from 108 at the end of 2017 to 480 in August this year; that \$1 million dollars per day is spent on motels to house vulnerable people, which he describes as 'social carnage', with no appropriate wrap-around services to support them; that 27,000 people are on hospital emergency waiting lists; that over 150,000 children live in extreme poverty

(*Daily Blog 6 September*) Chris Trotter provides the answer – ROGERNOMICS or neo-liberalism. (*Daily Blog 10 March*)

Trotter suggests that whereas the Labour Party's raison 'd'être used to be changing society for the better, Roger Douglas's neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s have led to a ferocious intolerance of the frankly moderate social-democratic thinking which once drove the party. In a subsequent article (*5 May*) he argues that since the 1980s electoral battles have been between marketing strategies not



and 100,000 food packages are distributed each month. Meanwhile \$1 billion per year is given to consultants, who produce reports which the government receives and then fails to act upon. John Minto suggests that after 5 years of a labour government we have gone from housing crisis to housing catastrophe, and asks why the government didn't enact a programme like that of the first Labour government in the 1930s.

between ideologies, that the economic principles by which a nation is governed have become fixed, and political parties just debate which of them is best equipped to implement them most effectively. Thus Max Rashbrooke describes Labour's supposed policy of 'radical incrementalism' as providing a mere 'remedial band-aid', addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of the rampant and increasing

JACINDA'S
RECOUNT

MARTIN EVANS

inequality in our society. (*Daily Blog 25 May*) Interestingly a very similar analogy is used to describe British Labour, 'the party of short-term plaster fix rather than fundamental economic transformation.' (*Chris McLaughlin in Tribune issue 15*) No matter which party is in power poverty is not alleviated, indeed inequality is becoming more and more marked, climate change is not seriously addressed, trade unions remain peripheral. Trotter quotes the anarchist slogan 'Don't bother voting – the politicians always win.' Hence the increasing distrust of governments and a search for alternatives.

In the UK, with the most reactionary and right-wing Tory government in decades and with a Labour Party even more centrist than ours in New Zealand, that search has thrown up a challenge from the left in the form of an increasingly militant trade unionism, epitomised by Mick Lynch of the rail workers, allied with left-wing Labour MPs like Zarah Sultana and Richard Burgon, and broad-based movements such as 'Enough is Enough', and 'Don't Pay'. The former has gained over 400,000 supporters, and packed out venues to listen to speakers articulating the movement's five demands: a real pay rise, slashed energy bills, an end to food poverty, decent homes for all, and proper taxes on the rich. If 'Don't Pay', a refusal to pay the huge energy bills, attracts similar support then we could see a challenge to the government on the scale of the Poll Tax riots of 1990 which caused John Major's conservative government to abandon the tax.

In New Zealand, however, with a Labour government, we have a totally different scenario. Disenchantment has led to a right-wing, populist backlash. The government's Covid response, whilst popular with most, led a significant minority to protest at what they saw

as their loss of freedom. The campaign against vaccine mandates coalesced with those protesting the Three Waters reforms, co-governance, the Groundswell movement and more, whilst attracting fringe far-right conspiracy theorists such as the QAnon movement. 'Communist Jacinda', 'socialist dictatorship' are signs often seen on their demonstrations, exhibiting a quite woeful ignorance of what either of the terms means. The latest opinion polls show Labour trailing National, ACT polling strongly, and thus a real possibility of a right-wing coalition replacing Labour at the next election. And if National needs ACT support to form a government we will see one of the most right-wing governments in New Zealand's history. Labour's response has been to move even further to the right, witness the KiwiSaver debacle, in an attempt to hang on to those centre-right voters who switched in 2020 as a result of the government's Covid response and the turmoil in the National Party. But as it does so it is losing some of its core vote, in particular that of the Māori working class. Bryce Edwards (*Democracy Project 16 September*) suggests that the Māori caucus, the most powerful faction inside Labour, has forced the government to focus on constitutional issues and assisting Māori businesses rather than on lifting living standards, thus ignoring the main concerns of Māori voters. What is to be done?

Martyn Bradbury (*Daily Blog 7 September*) argues forcefully for the Green Party and the Māori Party to decide a shared radical platform which they can then make Labour adopt. 'That's the only way Labour will act in the interests of the people, if you put a gun to their head.' He posits a 12-point programme for the first 100 days of government, so that Kiwis can actually see a progressive government doing something; the analogy here of

course is the first 100 days of Roosevelt's New Deal in the USA in 1933. If that were to happen it could be 'the greatest outcome for progressive politics since Savage', he suggests. Whether we believe in a parliamentary road to socialism or not, at this moment in time there is no alternative road to radical change. New Zealand has the lowest tax rates in the developed world except for Colombia and Chile. If it taxed like those European countries whose public services it aspires to then it would raise another \$20-\$30 billion a year for welfare, education, health etc, all those things that opinion polls tell us the voters want to see fundamentally improved. What Martyn doesn't do is suggest how the Greens and the Māori Party can be persuaded to do any such thing!

But what can we socialists do in 2023? Our forces are pitifully small. A return to 'entryism', either in the Labour Party or the Green Party? Stand a socialist candidate? The first thing we need to do is to reclaim the word 'socialism', from those who use it to denigrate Jacinda Ardern and from its erstwhile supporters in the ranks of Labour MPs. For those of you yet to listen to Sionnain Byrnes' interview with Duncan Webb on the CSS podcast *The End of History (Plains FM 25 July)* it is a stark reminder of how far removed from a genuine socialist philosophy even the left of the Labour Party are. Every time it is misused or abused seize the opportunity to say so, whether via letters to the press, joining in the phone in on the radio station, or simply in conversation. We have to re-introduce socialist thinking into the labour movement, as our comrade Al Dietschin did at the NZNO conference when he spoke to the need for trade union solidarity in urging delegates to contribute to the strike funds of the Pulp and Paper Workers and the Sky City Unite members, and as the Federation has done with its

financial contributions to those causes. All members should join their trade union to argue the case for socialism, get elected as delegates, show their fellow members that socialists are prepared to do the hard yards, are prepared to stand up on their behalf. Support all strikers on their picket lines. Can we make an impact inside or outside the NZCTU Conference in Wellington next year? Get involved in campaigns like that for the Living Wage, get involved in community campaigns, distribute *The Commonwealth* and our leaflets wherever possible, bring others along to our events. Little steps, small beginnings, but decades of neo-liberalism and its dismantling of the left cannot be erased overnight. Could we even begin to think about an 'Enough is Enough' campaign here? Let us hear from you for the next issue. Whatever we do I hope to see the Federation of New Zealand Socialist Societies continue its steady progress and start to impinge on the national consciousness next year, election year!

OPINION

TOM RAUTAO

Crime Wave

While the cost of living soars, public services decay, and the impacts of climate change become ever more apparent, both major political parties have stressed the urgency of addressing a perceived crime-wave sweeping the nation. Sensationalisation of gang shootings and ram-raids in the media further a general air of malaise, with daily headlines reinforcing the narrative that crime is steadily rising. This timeless political red-herring has often been put to good use by politicians of all stripes, and seems set to be a pivotal issue in the coming election cycle.

Despite a noteworthy and much publicised spike in recent months, crime—especially youth crime—has been trending down in Aotearoa for decades. A Ministry of Justice report published in December of last year showed that youth crime had fallen by 63% in the decade prior. Overall crime rates have been largely static for years, with New Zealand consistently ranking among the safest countries in the world.

The narratives around crime and criminality have been an incredibly effective political tool in the division and control of working-class people across the globe, especially when they involve a racialised other. When workers are convinced that crime is the pivotal issue demands for real material improvements, such as adequately funded services and decent wages, are quickly forgotten. The complete failure of the ongoing war on drugs to reduce harm, crime or even drug use is a prime example of the way in which ‘crime prevention measures’ all too often simply serve to further harm working-class communities. Such measures may long have been proven ineffective, but they

remain a powerful tool in the redirection of public frustrations.

Already new laws have been proposed by both major parties which would erode the liberties of not only patched gang members but all New Zealanders. National has called for the introduction of warrantless search powers and further militarisation of the police. Similarly Labour have announced their intention to pursue an increase of powers to search and a broadening of the scope of warrants. Once written into law these changes will be near impossible to roll back and open to use by any government, for whatever purpose they deem fit.

The presence of crime in our communities should surprise no one. Average people struggle simply to make ends meet, while thousands more find themselves in precarious housing or simply left out in the cold. Decent jobs seem few and far between, with many qualified Kiwis heading overseas for brighter pastures. Ecological disaster seems near inevitable. So long as these conditions prevail, we can only expect that crime will remain a blight on our society. Faced with these challenges, an appeal to common fears and anxieties around crime becomes an easy out for governments who are unwilling or unable to address such issues. But it is only through the construction of a better world that we can hope to truly end crime. A world where the needs of all are met and every person is afforded the right to meaningful work. A world where average people can once more look to the future with a sense of wonder and aspiration, rather than hopelessness and despair.

JOHN KERR

A Good (Anti-Fascist) War?

I first met Jimmy Jones in the mid-eighties when I joined a cycling club in Manchester. Jimmy was old then but, together with about half a dozen others, formed a cadre of veterans who would ride up to 100 miles on a Sunday to marshal at races while gently chastising the younger riders for being 'soft/slow/lacking commitment/spending too much on gear' or all the above.

He was a lifelong communist and member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) until he died in 1990, just before the collapse of his beloved Soviet Union. He got his news from Radio Moscow, which he listened to in his council flat in Salford, and *Soviet Weekly*, which he passed on to me on our Sunday rides (I used to stick it up my jersey to provide some wind proofing on long descents). Before retirement he was a shop steward in the Transport & General Workers' Union while working at General Electric, who had contracts to make batteries for British submarines during the Cold War. I don't think he was much interested in productivity.

When civil war broke out in Spain in 1936 Jimmy joined the 15th International Brigade and was wounded on the Ebro in the Autumn of 1938. He was repatriated and on recovering immediately tried to join the British army, as he knew war was coming and, as he put it, he wanted to 'get his own back' against the fascists. Unfortunately for him his Party affiliation made him suspect and when Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact in August 1939 and the Soviets invaded eastern Poland in the aftermath of the German attack on that country he was persona non grata. So it happened that this trained combat veteran found himself assigned to air raid warden duties atop an oil storage tank in Trafford Park, near the Manchester Ship Canal docks, a prime target for the Luftwaffe.

Things changed in 1940 when the Allies were swiftly defeated by the German Blitzkrieg in France and the low countries and Britain faced the Axis alone. In desperation, Churchill called upon volunteers to join so called commando units to 'set Europe aflame' by launching cross channel raids on Nazi occupied Europe. Jimmy was no longer a reject and was welcomed with open arms into an

outfit that he described as being populated with 'jailbirds, communists, jews, psychopaths, devout practising homosexuals and veterans of Spain or elite British army units like the Guards'. You have to remember that being gay was criminalised at this time, so Jimmy's comment isn't necessarily negative or homophobic, it was just an example of how the commandoes were made up of otherwise marginalised recruits.

He was in the first raids on Norway, participated in the disastrous raid on Dieppe, went ashore in the first wave on D-Day and didn't get a scratch. He took part in the bloody assault on Walcheren Island to clear the Scheldt estuary and Antwerp. During the subsequent advance into Germany he managed to avoid getting hit so ended the war in the Spring of 1945 fraternising with Soviet troops on the Elbe.

Jimmy's politics were simple. While others talked about Labour or social democracy Jimmy extolled the virtues of the Soviet system. He regaled us with tales of his annual trip to the Black Sea, all subsidised for CPGB members, or agricultural production figures in Eastern Europe.

As far as fascists were concerned Jimmy also had simple views. 'You can't give them freedom of speech because they aren't interested in anyone else having it. You can't debate or reason with them. You just have to kill them because they will kill you and your family given the chance'. Jimmy didn't talk about his experiences much but we all knew he meant every word.

I liked Jimmy and I often think about him when we discuss the finer points of hate speech or freedom of expression or when there is a debate about the morality of war.

JIMMY JONES

PHOTO: JOHN KERR



PAUL PIESSE

A Matter for Debate?

All socialists with at least a smidgeon of Marx in their thinking are aware that the fundamental factors in the broad sweep of human social history are the forces, the means of production—land, tools and technology, capital (in essence the accumulated surplus extracted on top of the cost of labour), etc. and the relations of production—which social class mostly owns and controls those forces and the human labour that is applied to make them function.

That is all very well, but *individuals* are more than just their *class*—in relation to the forces of production. Their personal identity (sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, cultural affinity, sense of nationality) is to each often, even usually, felt to be more significant for their daily lives. Where there are struggles to improve the lives of individuals whose personal identity makes them disadvantaged, socialists will always be active in those struggles.

Thus, acknowledging that developing social/ethical understandings have and should always modify historical cultural behaviours and systems – the ‘conventional wisdom’—socialists can be found in the forefront of campaigns to expand the electoral franchise and, as firm internationalists, have fought against racism of any kind, and have led opposition to imperialist wars. They have supported struggles for equal rights for women, for people of varying sexual orientation, for immigrants and refugees, and for Indigenous peoples anywhere in the world. Where arguments arise, it is usually over

which cultural shibboleths are historically obsolete and should be jettisoned.

But in all that, socialists have not suffered from the illusion that all the inequities and discriminations that afflict those groups can finally and fully be overcome within the context of capitalism in any of its variants. Having women, or Māori, or refugees, or migrants, or gay people as Members of Parliament, or on company Boards of Directors, or as CEOs of State Departments or in any other senior role in the polity and economy makes little difference to the majority of women, Māori, refugees, migrants, or gay people, who are in the working class.

Capital nonetheless, willingly or reluctantly, usually the latter, adopts reforms to ameliorate the worst effects of discrimination in order to undermine pressure on it, and lest failure to do so radicalises reform demands on it. Capital is not fundamentally about race, or sex, or culture. It is about property, money, and the political power that ownership bestows. It is about class in the Marxian sense.

As the poet Christopher Logue puts it in *Know thy enemy*:

‘he does not care who lives in the room at the top provided he owns the building.’

Here we have to define what we mean by working class. To socialists it is not a matter of what kind of work one does or how much the pay is or whether one is blue or white collar, but the workers’ relationship to the forces of production: If people derive their income primarily by selling their labour power then, regardless of how they might see themselves, they are on that definition working class. And this regardless of any other identifications.

In light of all the above, how then should we see identity politics in what is loosely referred to as the ‘Left’ in this country? For example, ‘Left’-leaning people

tend to elevate racial identity (sometimes chosen as much as inherited) as in future history more significant than class. The trendy word for that opinion is 'woke'.

This raises the matter of the Waitangi Tribunal, the Treaty of Waitangi and Treaty Settlements. A treaty is simply a fancy term for an agreement between parties (usually, but not exclusively States). It can legitimately bind only the parties to it, and then for only so long as each party continues, in practice, to abide by its terms. Thus, it would be difficult to name a treaty involving a state power that remains extant for long. Waitangi is no different

The Treaty of Waitangi, of course, was between non-elected parties – the representative of the English monarch and a number of chiefs of many (not all) tribes in Aotearoa. Socialists would argue that the pacts of representatives of a quasi-feudal ruling class cannot be claimed to rule the lives of people five or six generations later. This despite the clearly unequal and discriminatory treatment of Māori

throughout those generations, their rightful sense of injustice and the empathy others feel about that.

The problem is *inequality*, not ethnicity or culture, and the Waitangi Tribunal's decisions, for the most part endorsed by Governments and the 'woke,' cannot redress that class inequality by funding the conversion of iwi into ersatz capitalist corporations. As such, to survive as inherent parts of a capitalist society, they will be obliged to act and function just like any other capitalist corporation. Recent experience indicates that this is already happening and that apart from traditional elements of an artistic/cultural nature, iwi settlements are resulting in the development of standard capitalist values and behaviours.

Tribunal settlements are enhancing the view that identity is perceived as characterised by property ownership, not culture. This entrenches the anti-socialist concept of inherited property. It is no solution to inequality.



Illustration, June 26, 1917. The Hand That Will Rule the World—One Big Union.

FERGUS STRATFORD

Vic Books and the crumbling of the managerial class: A response to Sarah Laing & Reflections on the Freedom Protests

Having been a reader for many years I can settle upon one conclusion: that the online publication *The Spinoff* is the media outlet of the urban managerial class. It presents either academic diatribes or identitarian scolding, visually complemented by patronising comics, ostensibly designed to educate the working masses about how to achieve the same sense of guilt and self-loathing which distinguishes the professional managerial classes. These articles and visually corporate comics will almost exclusively be consumed by their similarly 'PMC' readership. In general, *The Spinoff* provides the reader with a model of "left wing" neoliberal economic and social thought, peppered with identitarian pandering and apparently inspirational tales of how NFTs will result in the economic empowerment of people of colour. As a whole, perhaps 4/5ths of the articles published in *The Spinoff* are banal—'Whatever happened to Drew Neemia' (a children's television presenter) or 'Hear me out: You should cook your

lettuce'—occasionally punctuated with insight by writers like Danyl McLauchlan, ironically writing about the very same PMC for whom the website is written, and generating the predictable furore in the meeting chamber of the Central Committee for this peculiar class politics: twitter dot com. In this article I will focus on a piece by Sarah Laing published June 16th—apparently about the closure of a bookstore, but useful as an exemplar of the politics of contempt that permeate the publication as a whole and the way that 'left neoliberalism' relies on significant assumption and deception to maintain a sense of both social order and collective self-perception.

In *Vic Books and the crumbling of an ecosystem* Laing exhibits the extraordinary discomfort felt by a seemingly significant, or at least very vocal, section of the Wellington bureaucratic caste of office workers, creatives, and others of an insular and usually highly educated white collar section of society. For 23 days in February/March 2022 hundreds of protestors, described in the article as 'nazis' and 'ferals', descended upon the parliamentary grounds to protest vaccine mandates amongst other perceived crimes and offenses of the Ardern government. A mixture of anxiety and mocking contempt from the urban (self-described) lanyard-wearing employees spoke to a thinly disguised class hatred towards the protestors—made up of sections of the 'lumpenproletariat', unruly and vulgar representatives of the petite bourgeoisie, and a number of those recently unemployed due to the aforementioned vaccine mandates. The bubble of central Wellington had been penetrated, it seems, by the great unwashed.

Since the advent of the coronavirus many public servants (well outside the realm of healthcare) had come to elevate

themselves as literal heroes of the pandemic who kept the country running smoothly. Moreover, as part of the enormous bureaucracy of the modern nation-state, their ability to stay home and send emails proved their moral righteousness and ability to hoard virtue merely by ‘staying home’. The shock of ‘ferals’ invading the hallowed ground of the managerial classes, parliament itself (and especially its pristine and manicured front lawn), represented a breakdown of the appearance of order, the *symbolic order* as described in Lacanian terminology. For Lacan the order of which society is constructed is

merely made up of the symbols which constitute our perception of that order in our daily lives e.g. language, laws, and customs. These symbols exist to constrict *desire*, the deepest primal wants of the Id—the primal an instinctual aspect of our personalities. It is through our recognition of *the other* (difference) that we understand ourselves as *subjects* (become self-conscious). The other, then, by being part of our understanding of ourselves as a subject imposes a series of social norms in the form of language, customs, laws, which we accept. This becomes the *symbolic order* of a given society.

Laing’s article is merely one example of the inability of many in the bureaucratic managerial classes in Wellington to cope with a break in the symbolic order within which they conduct and make sense of their lives and occupations. Moreover, these occupations operated to maintain



and strengthen that symbolic order. ‘I hadn’t appreciated the quiet order my fellow lanyard wearers kept’, says Laing, who goes so far as to compare herself and her peers to a vanguard defending against the politically misaligned and undesirable, lamenting this sudden invasion by people representing the politically loathsome, her colleague exclaiming that ‘I just want *my* city back’ (emphasis mine). The message is clear—Central Wellington is a sacrosanct playground for the ‘chattering classes’, not a place where *those protesters* deserve to occupy space, their tents a ‘blister’ on the parliament green. The grounds of parliament have been fair game for protest ever since there has been a parliament, and suppression of protest on those grounds is traditionally opposed as a crackdown on political expression. Except this was the *wrong type* of occupation, aligned to a disagreeable and unpopular cause.

CARTOON:
J. SHARP

The article contains a theme of discomfort inflicted upon us by the pandemic, elucidated by talking instead about *comfort*. ‘We kept working from home. We were scared to catch Covid. We had become comfortable in our Microsoft Teams camaraderie. We paired smart shirts with comfy pants. We drank our own coffee. It’s so great to be able to get your washing in when it begins to rain,’ we agreed. We worried that we were killing our city through neglect. It depended on us, the lanyard wearers. We were an ecosystem. Would they be able to keep on making bánh mì if I failed to buy one each week? Shops emptied, cafes closed. David Jones said it wasn’t renewing its lease’. Such hubristic spiel represents the disconnectedness of the managerial class of Wellington, with anyone else mentioned seeming to exist merely to serve them. Christopher Lasch in his 1997 book *Revolt of the Elites* predicted the demise of the city as a class-diverse place of living: ‘Mere remnants, our cities are increasingly polarised; upper-middle-class professionals, together with the service workers who cater to their needs, maintain a precarious hold on the high-rent districts and barricade themselves against the poverty and crime threatening to engulf them’. So too Wellington has become a barracks for low paid service workers who solely exist to provide the *enlightened classes* with gourmet breakfasts and flat whites, barricading themselves within bland architectural monstrosities. Lamenting how Wellington city used to be *cool* and *creative* while insisting on the sterilisation of countercultural existence, as every dive-bar music venue is turned into a craft beer swillery, and noise control is called zealously upon anyone who dares to make the city an interesting place to live. Meanwhile rents skyrocket, and while these socially conscious ‘left wing’ neoliberals lament

the fact, all their vitriol against boomer landlords usually hides the awkward reality of their own looming inheritance from the very same ‘boomers’.

I found the hesitancy of the office workers to return to their well ventilated and socially distanced workplaces rather funny, as at the time of the protests I was a maintenance worker for a property management company which ran a hotel in central Wellington. This hotel served as public housing, trying to plug the enormous gaps in social housing successive governments have failed to address. It provided the poorest people in the city with a decrepit high rise of damp, leaky rooms at eye watering rental prices, subsidised by the public purse. You couldn’t hide from the reality of decades of neo-liberal status quo in our once impressive state housing sector. Physically impossible to socially distance, due to the extreme weight of the furniture and objects fellow maintenance staff and I would be required to move around the dilapidated hotel, we were required to report back to work immediately on the first day of level three in 2021 with loss of a job and income hanging over us if we did not come back. This was the reality for all construction and maintenance workers in New Zealand. Contrast this to the ability to make twee conversations about the comfort/discomfort of working from home, joking along with the encouragement of peers and supervisors alike while entirely shielded from the traumatic real of potentially contracting coronavirus.

Laing concludes her article with a lament for the closing of Vic Books. ‘I returned to work with my paper bag full of books. I would try not to read them too fast. Or maybe I would read them fast and cancel my Netflix, Disney+ and Neon subscriptions to free up some funds. I felt good because I had supported a local business. It needed me. But I was not enough.’

A fairly ordinary cafe cum bookshop closes, and it is given an obituary as though a loved one had tragically died. Of course, it was an outcome of the politically backward protests and not a knock-on effect of covid lockdowns. We can all find politically attractive scapegoats if we are willing to shop around!

As someone who is on the left these protests were not something that I could align with due to the many disagreeable elements involved. Although I felt sympathy for the workers in attendance who were fired from their jobs for choosing not to be vaccinated, it was still an unabashed display of right-wing populist fury. From unashamed and geographically confused Trumpians, to evangelical Zionist millionaires and archetypical Motueka hippies this ramshackle gathering nonetheless represented a coming together of New Zealand's political outcasts who would never normally be given this much air-time. Bryce Edwards described it correctly as a 'festival like atmosphere'. It genuinely was like a festival, though that phrase has stuck in the craw of many of the commentariat. The three times I visited it did seem that way, albeit a festival without working plumbing or quality music acts. The official soundtrack of the convocation being \$2 Shop Immortal Technique on the 'main stage' in front of the Beehive, where any person who had a loud voice and conviction was handed the microphone and allowed to speak on whatever topic they felt like.

Like Laing, the responses from the commentariat consisted of excessive solicitousness, through to authoritarian fantasising. Commentators such as Morgan Godfery quickly dropped the ACAB posturing they had latched onto when the global spectacle of the American 'racial reckoning' of 2020 hit. Morgan seemed disappointed when writing in the pages

of *The Guardian* 'that there was only a moderate display of State force – unarmed police and parking wardens'. A far cry from his 2020 piece *Manifesto*, written with his partner Hana Aoake, in which they called for 'the immediate overthrow of the government' and to 'fry the pigs until they are crispy'. This more 'radical' left response seemed to be motivated by the belief that the politics of 'the street' belongs to the left. A sense of invasion of 'our turf' where we are righteous while they are merely riotous. The protests themselves were hardly a villainous hive of fascists or the beginning of the *machtergreifung* stage of New Zealand's history, more just a gathering of buffoons and misanthropic social oddities. Political incoherence eventually took hold and the majority abandoned the occupation. When the police did decide to use force it was only the most extreme zealots who remained, further damaging the lawn and even setting fire to a playground, images of the latter being shared as though it was Notre Dame Cathedral. From this commune of eccentrics so far the only thing to arise has been Brian Tamaki's coalition of fringe political parties *Freedoms NZ*, consisting of the New Nation Party, Outdoors and Freedom Party, and Vision NZ. I imagine that like Tamaki's other failed political projects, the Family Party and the Destiny New Zealand party, we will once again see right to far-right populism is about as popular as Tamaki himself—extraordinarily popular with a tiny handful of people, and utterly despised by the vast majority. The prophetic panic from the Op Ed twitterati will once again appear hysterical, but they will have some solace. The lawn at parliament is once again a lush shade of green.

'...we were required to report back to work immediately on the first day of level three in 2021 with loss of a job and income hanging over us if we did not come back'

REPORTS

TOM ROUD

Canterbury

The last six months have been exceptionally busy for the Canterbury Socialist Society. In this time our members have had the privilege of traveling to speak to our fellow Federation members in both Wellington and Otago. In the same period we have concluded a four month series of event programming that saw us deliver sixteen public educational lectures, a four part lecture series *Introduction to Political Economy*, four film screenings, four radio shows, and four social events with our members and supporters. Finally, on September 14th we completed our 5th Annual General Meeting as an

organisation, electing a new Executive Committee containing members from previous years alongside new members serving.

The winter period can be a harder time for organising. The short days, cold evenings, and general malaise militate against our efforts to attend events, even with all the best of intentions. Nonetheless, it has been worthwhile testing our organisational capacity with this busier programme of events and the Society has learnt a fair amount in the attempt.

We continue to be heartened by the efforts of our fellow affiliates to the Federation of Socialist Societies. Welcoming an Auckland affiliate, with a very low key 'meet and greet' of some members is promising, we are looking to do what we can to support the

CSS MEMBERS

CELEBRATING
LABOUR DAY '21 IN
WOODHAM PARK
CREDIT N
ROBINSON



development of a group in this country's largest city.

Since the first edition of *The Commonweal* it has been reported that the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies constitutes the largest socialist organisation in the country, and contains more than one third of all 'card-carrying' members of explicitly socialist groups nationwide. This news came as both gratifying and alarming to all affiliates of the society and may speak to a period of political volatility for the more radical partisans of the labour movement. However, we take this news as instructive that our focus on patiently building our organisation, that a focus on face-to-face meetings, and that our structure is an appropriate model for the immediate term and current conditions in this country.

Looking forward, the new Executive Committee considers our Society as entering a new phase. We are now, unreservedly, part of a national Federation of like-minded groups. As the most established of the affiliates we feel great responsibility to build on the camaraderie that has made the project possible thus far, but also that we need to deepen opportunities for participation for our current members. Moreover, as the Society grows in Canterbury our usual channels for communication and reaching new people

start to reach the end of their utility, and we will need to find new avenues to reach socialist or socialist-adjacent Cantabrians.

For now, we look forward to some of the highlights of our year: The Fred Evans Memorial Lecture in November, and our end of year BBQ where we tend to gather a majority of the local members (plus partners, family, well behaved dogs) to celebrate the year past and look to the year ahead. We can see that the pressures of inflation and cost of living are pressing workers to industrial action. We can see that two terms in a so-called Labour government has not delivered for labour in any meaningful sense. The opportunity for political intervention with a genuine working-class political project is almost palpable. Will we rise to the challenge? Time will tell. One is reminded of the overused quote from Antonio Gramsci: 'Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. Some in our movement seem to have misinterpreted this to mean that being deeply pessimistic proves one's intellect... Others, perhaps, believe it suggests that the will to succeed can overcome all obstacles. Neither is particularly compelling, but this quote—while at risk of becoming a bromide—should still challenge us to think seriously about the situation in which we find ourselves

VICTOR BILLOT

Otago

Otago Socialist Society had a successful official launch with a well-attended lecture on William Morris at Toitū Early Settlers Museum in August. Thanks to Martin Crick and CSS for their assistance. We've

had a couple of meetings as well, which have been great. We are still trying to find a regular venue. We've outgrown people's houses and have tried a pizzeria. We are looking at our AGM in October in the North East Valley community rooms (TBC.) The Society is looking at updating some of the roles on our executive in order to distribute tasks more equitably. We have several new members and a steady trickle

of inquiries. Several of our members are also active in Unions Otago, which held a good mayoral candidates forum. At this stage we are looking at some options for

future educational events. We have not had any polemics, splits or sell-outs since the last report.

HAYDEN TAYLOR

Wellington

Tēnā koutou to all the readers of *The Commonweal*

The Wellington Socialist Society finds itself at the dusk of its first year as an official affiliate of the New Zealand

members strong. So to those who have moved to Te Whanganui-a-Tara from north and south, we are stoked to have you with us, and we hope the Society has been a happy home. And to those we have picked up along the way, we also wish you a very warm welcome.

Since April's issue of *The Commonweal*, the Society has hosted five events at our regular haunt, Bedlam and Squalor, with an average of 30 attendees at each event. While we have noticed a slight decline since our early heights of attendance, in which the winter weather may be playing a factor, we are still seeing new faces at each event, and the quality of speakers we host remains impeccable. Additionally, the engagement we are receiving from our audiences has been of considerable note, and we thank all of them for their contributions so far.

In May, the Society co-hosted a panel discussion with Unions Wellington in which we had the honour to hear Ben Peterson (*First Union*), Tom Roud (*CSS*), Hector McLachlan (*Te Nuku Mauī*), and Teanau Tuiono (*Green Party MP*) speak on their assessment of the state of the working class movements in Aotearoa and 'what is to be won' in seeing it's growth in the wake of the Pandemic.

I also want to acknowledge two Federation members we have hosted in the past few months, Sionainn Byrnes from CSS, who delighted the gathering with a discussion on her PhD thesis, a critique of postcolonial literary theory with regard to 'magical realism', and Ashok Jacob from WSS, who took us through a

SIONAINN BYRNES
SPEAKING IN
WELLINGTON
CREDIT HAYDEN
TAYLOR



Federation of Socialist Societies. While we are still yet to encounter the owl of Minerva, we know she is around here somewhere. So, with a great sense of pride, I bring to you, dear reader, a brief wrap-up of the last six months of activity for WSS here in our nation's Capital.

With the help of some recent internal migration, the Society in Wellington is now sitting at a not-so-insignificant 30

brilliant exposé on the origins of the housing crisis in Aotearoa. WSS thanks you for contributing to the civic socialist spirit we are growing here in the Capital. It was an honour and a privilege, comrades.

Within a few days of writing this, the Society hosted its September event entitled *This New Democracy* in which we had a historian from the New Labour Project, Jim McAloon, come to take the mic at Bedlam. Jim spoke to us on the history of the Maritime Strike in 1890 and the political rupture our forebears had created for themselves in the wake of their monumental actions. If traditions are to be passed down, they should be done so in the spirit of passing down questions and problems, not answers. Jim certainly embodied that spirit. WSS thanks him for his generosity and time with us.

As we are closing in on our first year as an affiliate of the Federation, we are also

working towards holding our first official AGM, where we will be concretising some of the structures of the Society moving forward so we can further develop our presence in the Capital. In 2023 we feel it to be vital that the Society start looking to hold events outside of the CBD, in more explicitly working-class communities, and through what we have planned for our AGM, such a task is well within our capabilities.

Lastly, we must once again thank the crew at Bedlam & Squalor. Without the support, assistance, and fellowship they bring, the Society would not be what it is today. We are eternally grateful for everything they do.

Until the next edition, we bid you farewell and hope to see you at an event in the new year.

Noho ora mai rā, nā

NICK BREARLEY

Hamilton

The Hamilton Socialist Society has seen steady growth over the past few months with a number of new members. Our ‘pub club’ has continued to be a great source of comradeship, and our newly formed reading group provides an opportunity to discuss some of the core concepts of Marxism. We have kicked off the reading group with Karl Marx’s *Wage, Labour and Capital*.

With local elections looming, our next ‘pub club’ is sure to be filled with discussion around the absence of a left-wing alternative alongside the fielding of multiple fringe and right-wing populists. A common theme expressed by the

proletariat of Hamilton is the desire for the development of a city-wide public transportation system to enable better access to employment and services. Of concern has also been the decline of public spaces and venues for various communities within the city. There has been little to no publicity, resistance, or solution from elected officials around these matters. These are among some of the concerns we will be putting to those running for local election this year.

We’d love to see you at one of our casual ‘pub clubs’ or ‘reading groups’ if you’re in the Waikato area. Find us on Facebook or email hamiltonsocialistsociety@gmail.com.

HAYLEY ROUD

Canterbury Socialist Society Film Season

The 2022 CSS film season was held from May–August as part of the *Winter of DisContent* programme, each accompanied with a zine by Sionainn Byrnes. Occasional film screenings with introductions by members have been a mainstay of the CSS events calendar since the early days, and in 2021 we first trialled the separate winter film series format.

Opening the season was *Love and Power*—part one of the 2011 documentary series *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* by Adam Curtis. Covid prevented our planned screening in 2021, but the wait was well worth it both for Sam Hope’s expert introduction and the informative episode. *Love and Power* presents the influence of Ayn Rand’s Objectivist philosophy in America’s technology and financial sectors. Rand died in 1981 but her ideas endured in American politics and financial policy via Alan Greenspan, her long-time follower and friend. *Love and Power* traces the impact of America’s financial foreign policy in Asia in the 1990s, manipulation of interest rates in the 2000s, and concludes with China’s buying up of American bonds and the 2007–2008 financial collapse. Sam’s introduction drew the audiences’ attention to contemporary instances of techno-utopianism, such as NFTs and big data.

In June Quentin Findlay introduced Tim Robbins’ 1992 mockumentary *Bob Roberts*. The opening lyric ‘Some people will work, Some simply will die’ set the tone for this irreverent film. The plot follows the conservative hopeful in a Pennsylvania senator race against the incumbent Democrat played by a near-unscripted Gore Vidal. Having observed the United States’ actual 2016 election, following this successful businessman turned media figure turned politician in a mockumentary seemed uncanny, and when asked about this in an interview in 2017 Robbins said he had hoped his film would not be prophetic. The prevailing sense in chatter following the screening was that if pitched today the plot would be far too obvious and on-the-nose, so we can be thankful it was made when it was, as it is a fun watch with a catchy

soundtrack.

For the July event, Nick Robinson introduced Alister Barry’s 1996 documentary *Someone Else’s Country*. This critique of the 1984 Labour government’s economic changes, with particular consideration of the social effects, nicely complemented the May panel discussion and June economics lecture, both of which touched on the same era of Aotearoa | New Zealand history. The documentary makes extensive use of archival footage and interviews with those who were there at the time. Its popularity at the time of release was driven by word-of-mouth and film festival screenings – it was not aired on TVNZ until 2003. Writing in 2015, Barry said of *Someone Else’s Country* ‘Even as the human and environmental costs of the neoliberal experiment increase, we are finding it harder and harder to imagine how things could be better. I hope you will find this film a useful antidote to forgetfulness.’

The final film of the series was *Brassed Off*, introduced by Tom Roud. Tom’s introduction was enlivened with anecdotes from his own background as a cornet player in the Addington Brass Band, and generally contextualised both the social-economic-political setting of the movie, and explained the class assumptions surrounding brass bands that are embedded in English culture. The movie is set in the mid-1990s, in the midst of pit closures in mining communities still feeling the lingering effects of the Miners’ Strike about a decade earlier. The title is an expression used in the North of England meaning ‘angry’. The story follows members of a colliery band, juggling the uncertain future of their employment and the toll this takes on their personal lives, whilst the band conductor Danny focuses on qualifying for the national band competition despite his failing health. When the band wins the final trophy at the Royal Albert Hall in London Danny makes one of the most powerful and heart-rending speeches to end any film. He states that it is only human beings that matter, not music or trophies, and rails at the government for destroying his community ‘all in the name of progress. And for a few lousy bob.’ The audience was prepped for the possibility of mass public crying, but kept suitably hydrated and we made it through.

Between additional event commitments, cold evenings, and winter illness, attendance was lower than it had been for similar events in the past, sitting around 15-30 people, with the more light-hearted offerings drawing the bigger crowds.



SOMEONE ELSE'S COUNTRY

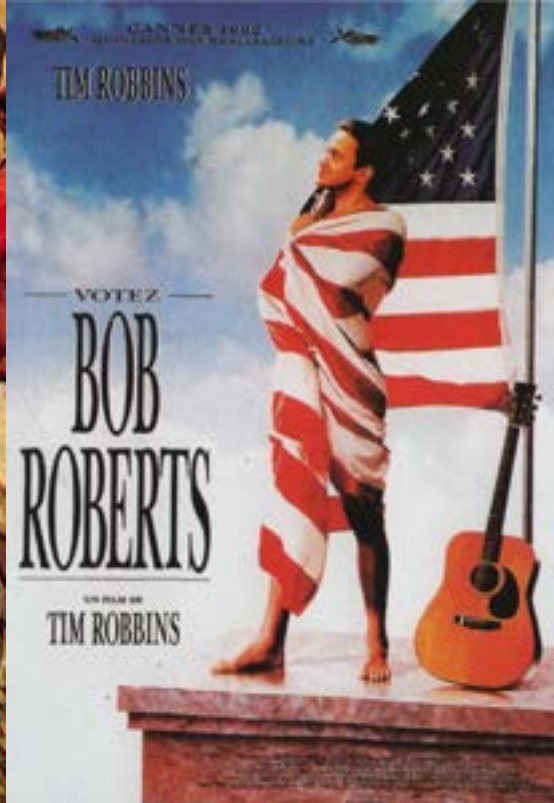
The story of the New Right revolution in New Zealand

PETE POSTLETHWAITE TARA FITZGERALD EWAN MCGREGOR



Hit up with the system.
Take all in the establishment.
And mad about... each other.

BRASSED OFF!



TIM ROBBINS

VOTEZ

BOB ROBERTS

THE FILM BY
TIM ROBBINS



ALL WATCHED OVER BY MACHINES OF LOVING GRACE



REVIEW

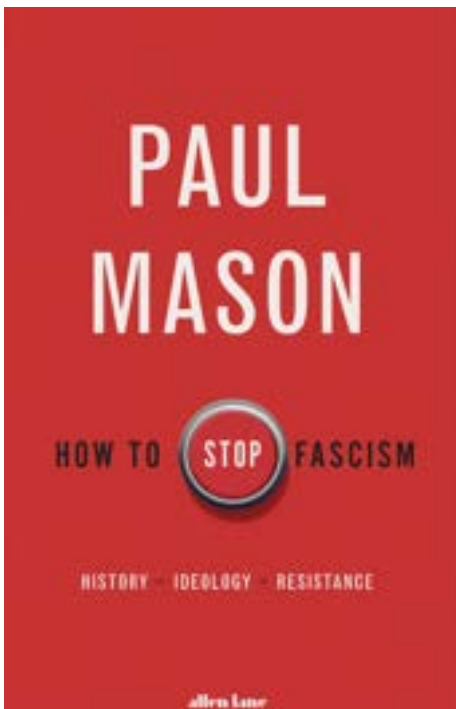
PUBLISHED BY ALLEN LANE 2021
REVIEWED BY JOHN KERR

Paul Mason— 'How to Stop Fascism History- Ideology- Resistance'

Paul Mason, the former Economics Editor for Channel 4, inhabits a niche that one critic describes as the 'edge of the Overton window, sometimes slightly outside it'. His oeuvre is a left analysis of contemporary global politics that is rooted in a thought-provoking interpretation of history and economics.

How to Stop Fascism is a call to arms to the left and the progressive wing of liberalism, alerting us to the danger of Fascism's 21st century mutation. The viral analogy is important, as Mason argues getting bogged down in debates about definitions is counter-productive because the far right mutates so quickly 'definitions aren't that useful'.

Modern fascism consists of, but is not limited to, groups such as The Proud Boys in the US and online networks of white supremacists. Three signifiers of 21st century fascism are highlighted: performative violence used to create a mythological narrative (think about the storming of the capitol); the 'planned absence of plans' or deliberate chaos that wrongfoots opponents and enables quick changes or U-turns around actions and/or policies (think about the police struggling to negotiate with 'leaderless' protestors in Parliament's grounds); and anti-feminism fuelled by the social, cultural, and legal gains women have made in the last hundred years. These groups are being given legitimacy by right-wing populists and authoritarians such as Erdogan, Trump, and Bolsonaro. The latter act as their proxies, allowing fascists to wield influence beyond their numbers, and they have legitimised hostility to so-called



‘antifa’ opposition.

Mason is a devotee of network theory and his analysis of 21st century fascism posits that these people don’t need a fascist state or mass party to advance their agenda which, he argues, is to start, fight and win a global ethnic civil war motivated by a fear of other’s freedom. This fear is that ‘a group that is supposed to be subordinate...might be on the verge of achieving freedom and equality’. Misogyny, racism, and homophobia are thus the vehicles to mobilise support on the streets. The Proud Boys and their allies in online anonymised spaces such as 4Chan and Telegram spread fantastical theories of hate, violence and conspiracy, and right-wing populist politicians act ‘as the accelerant, not the firewall’.

The fact these groups managed to storm the Capitol of the oldest existing liberal democracy on the planet is proof enough, in Mason’s view, that they should be taken seriously. Here in Aotearoa the Christchurch mosque shooting and the occupation of Parliament’s grounds by a motley so-called ‘freedom convoy’ is proof we are not immune to this phenomenon. In one particularly arresting passage he posits that if a group of Nazis were able to jump in a time machine and join us from 1945 Berlin they would find much to please them.

There is some very well-written historical analysis of the struggles against fascism in the 20th century, with the stern warning that it prevailed in Spain, Italy and Germany because ‘neither the liberal left nor Marxist left understood what they were dealing with’. Perhaps most controversially for those of us who identify as socialists, Mason argues that fascism was only ever successfully defeated by a popular front of the centre and the left and he makes a heartfelt plea for a similar temporary alliance to beat the current threat. In

short, economics are important, particularly in a world where we are experiencing climate system breakdown and profound changes to the future of work and the price system driven by technology, but the culture wars are too. In this argument only a combination of a war of ideas from below, winning the culture war, and an institutional response using the coercive power of the state—cue the surveillance of far-right groups—will defeat modern fascism

A stimulating and thought provoking read that many will disagree with in whole or in part, nevertheless one that I recommend to a broad church of socialists such as ourselves, if for no other reason than to stimulate debate about a way forward.

PAUL MASON
CREDIT:
RWENDLAND



ABOLISH THE FAMILY?

TOM ROUD

‘...the indissoluble marriage based on the servitude of women is replaced by a free union of two equal members of the workers’ state who are united by love and mutual respect. In place of the individual and egoistic family, a great universal family of workers will develop, in which all the workers, men and women, will above all be comrades. This is what relations between men and women in the communist society will be like. These new relations will ensure for humanity, all the joys of a love unknown in the commercial society of a love that is free and based on the true social equality of the partners.’

—Alexandra Kollontai, *Communism and the Family*, 1920.

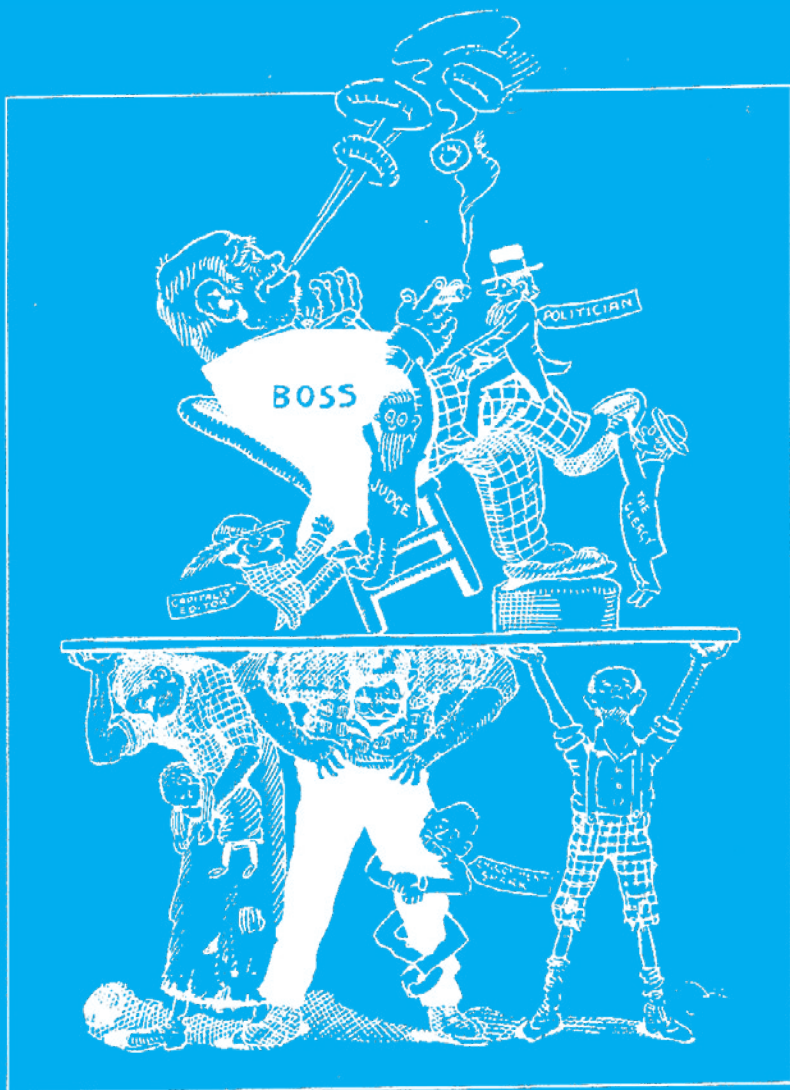
The abolition of the family, advocated by Marx and Engels in texts as early as *the Communist Manifesto*, has consistently alarmed great numbers of people who encounter it as a demand. Recently the topic has resurfaced, particularly through thinker Sophie Lewis who has authored *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against the Family* (2019), and *Abolish the Family: a Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (2022).

Rather than respond directly to these texts, whose true audience resides in the publishing houses of Brooklyn, New York,

and Ivy League college campuses in the United States, I will try to contextualise the perspective as posited by the then bleeding edge of the historic labour movement—that is, the thinking going on in the 19th and early 20th Century where the slogan ‘Abolish the Family’ was first articulated as part of a socialist or communist programme.

Firstly, it is worth noting that critiques of the family unit are not *especially* new in 1848. Utopian thought as early as Plato’s *Republic* discussed how the class of guardians charged with running the state would hold all spouses and children in common. So too this elite class would be barred from owning property, a theme that permeates a great deal of utopian literature ever since—neither family, nor property. If calls for the abolition of the family are not novel, where Marx and especially Engels (in his later work, *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*) present something original is through the explanatory power of ‘historical materialism’ to account for the form of the family throughout human societies. In short, historical materialism claims that the prime organising principle of a society is to be found in its economic foundation—the structure of classes, the how/what/why of the production and distribution of goods, etcetera. Antagonistic social classes within different periods of human society compete with one another for supremacy, and through this process society and its economic base is transformed from one system to another.

The abolition of the family, then, rests on an analysis of the family in a capitalist society—and, in particular, on the form of the *bourgeois* family: the nuclear family of the Victorian period. ‘On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain.’ The bourgeois family is one of contractual agreement, a relationship of property



and of securing patrilineal inheritance—wealth and property, usually from father to son. In Engels' later work he presents a compelling argument that this nuclear family with its essential logic tied into private property is, at that time, a modern phenomenon and that previous societies naturally had different familial structures.

This is not to claim that the pre-capitalist family was always free of tensions

that continue to plague the social institution today: domestic violence, male chauvinism, the uneven burden of domestic labour,—in short the oppression of women. However, even today we can see the way the family unit is influenced by economics. Consider the simple difference in familial size between subsistence farming communities and the wealthy urban core in so-called developed societies. In

**‘One can
no more
easily
abolish
the family
with
words...
than one
could
establish
a nation
with the
same
process’**

the former, sons and daughters can be an economic boon providing additional labour for the family. In the latter a child tends to be an expense rather than an enrichment of the family. This trend is particularly telling in that the average family size in a given country is often closely related to urbanisation rather than by cultural prohibition of contraceptives, or mere unavailability of the same. Human societies have for centuries practised methods—some safer than others—for women to have some agency over the number of children they bear, much to the chagrin of many ruling classes who wished to undermine this control for economic and political reasons (see Sylvia Federici’s work in *Caliban and the Witch*). Conversely, politics has sought in the last century to intercede in various ways regarding family size—whether through the recriminalization of abortion in the Soviet Union in 1936, China’s one child policy, or the ‘contraceptive first’ supposed solution to poverty in the third world advocated by the likes of Bill and Melinda Gates. We can even be more granular with these observations—even within urban developed societies family size can vary greatly, and among the working class sometimes children do become a part of the family as a productive economic unit rather than as a merely consumptive one. They may take up part-time or even full-time jobs in adolescence as an expectation to contribute to the household financially, or be conscripted into child rearing younger siblings to enable parents to work longer hours.

If it is the case, and I believe it is, that the nuclear family of those with property is essentially itself a contractual relationship about said property then the reason ‘Abolition of the Family’ appears in *The Manifesto* and elsewhere becomes obvious: communists predict the next stage of

human society to be one that includes the abolition of private property. If the same family can be seen as a microcosmic representation of the state itself, and communists also predict the withering of the state, then once again we see the impossibility of a specific form of the family persisting into a communist society. For Marx and Engels the bourgeois family will vanish *as a matter of course*.

But what of the proletarian, ie. working class ‘propertyless’ family? The claim was that the families of working people are not based on this contractual relationship for the simple point that there is nothing over which to have a contract—there is no property at play. Both Engels, and later August Bebel, saw in the working-class family an admirable—if distorted and mangled by the pressures of capitalist society—expression of genuine affection. While none can act entirely freely in an unfree society, the family which forms and maintains itself out of mutual affection and respect (and perhaps some abstract sense of responsibility) is not easily comparable to the family-of-property. This conception is, in a contradictory way, both affirmed and shattered by later thinkers like Kollontai and Zetkin who all too rightly note that there was no absence of brutality, domination, chauvinism, and oppression among the working classes. This domination of men over women is no doubt exacerbated under certain economic conditions, though Engels also notes that it is conceivable that the ‘original’ division of labour in our species in the form of sexual reproduction may have been significant in the resulting gendered oppression with the advent of class society. As Irish revolutionary James Connolly put it, ‘The worker is the slave of capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave.’ Nonetheless, the unpropertied familial form of a communal society would also be distinct from

the current working-class family in that rather than an inheritance of in-or-near poverty, the new form of common ownership means all families have the common inheritance of the wealth of society in general.

With this in mind, what those dedicated to human freedom have sought in articulating a vision of the family beyond capitalism has been the liberation of that genuine affection and familial love from

up' or a 'sublation', the integration of one thing into a larger whole.

Let us compare the origins of the family, as well as its potential transformation, to that of the nation state. In his seminal work *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson traces the origin and persistence of nationalist sentiment/nationalism. The work details the way that social, economic, and technological changes that expanded the outer borders



the unpropertied family, while alleviating those forces that result in the emergence of oppression within the family. Furthermore, the goal is set to expand this sense of duty and care beyond one's kin and instead establish a 'fellowship of toil', the commonwealth of labour, an affective community that encompasses all of humanity. The abolition of the bourgeois family is achieved through a change in property relations from private to common property. I would argue that the abolition (*aufhebung*) of the family in general is better conceived as a 'lifting

of 'community' changed the self-perception of those within that community. The move from direct kin groups and small clusters of intertwined familial communities to the steady expansion of some form of 'state' right to the boundaries of some of the largest landmasses in the world was a process that took centuries—and often occurred very unevenly. The spread of literacy was an enormous part of establishing the nation state, as a people could consider themselves part of the same polity without ever meeting or really having much to do with each other. As economic and social

processes have become more and more intertwined nation states have developed a basis beyond just a shared language. The historical *recentness* of this process cannot be overstated. It has been said that when Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi toured the country in the mid 1800s he was met with cries of ‘Viva Garibaldi!’, to which he would respond ‘Viva Italia!’. His countrymen, assuming Italia was his mistress, would respond in kind ‘Viva Italia!’. It is entirely plausible that the concept of an Italian-American has a longer distinct and unified cultural weight than being Italian. Nonetheless, this steady expansion from kin, tribe, region, and then larger self perception as part of a nation state or even an international community, develops through a combination of technology, social structure, cultural exchange, and how production is organised.

Why this brief digression into the development of national sentiment? To emphasise a point that I believe is in conflict with those who would ‘abolish the family’ through phraseology, or a revolution in the hearts and minds of humanity. One can no more easily abolish the family with words, nor with a moralistic transformation of one’s own attitudes and practices, than one could establish a nation with the same process. The transformation of the family in a system beyond capitalism can no more be declared by fiat from our current standpoint than any other dramatic social change. What materialist politics demands is to see in the present the seeds of the future, to study history in a way that illuminates how people lived and how we may live again in a new form, and to build these considerations on a firm foundation—that the economic organisation of a society is the primary factor in shaping the social practices of human beings. We know that the bourgeois family will not survive the end of bourgeois society, for

it would have no basis on which to do so. We can infer that the forms of the family we see that are not primarily concerned with maintenance of property may be the ones that persist and develop in a new system. Human society will be different, we will organise ourselves more freely as our survival is disentangled from inhuman commercial imperatives.

The utility of extreme claims about ‘abolition of the family’ strikes me as at best absurd. The demand comes so diluted with qualifiers and backtracking as to be confusing—imagine explaining to your fellow worker that you had no intention of taking away their children or forcing them to hold their romantic partners ‘in common’. On the other hand the impression left by the demand for universal surrogacy, relying on biotechnical wombs that do not currently exist, manages to bring the adolescent and anti-humanist qualities of ‘fully automated’ communism into the realm of sexual reproduction—a trend in contemporary left wing musings I consider the ‘Wall-E-fication of socialism’. Finally, such statements will merely conjure a vision of socialism where an ideological elite will tell you how to live your life, and will legislate endlessly to ensure your adherence. We already have a society like that! Instead let us pursue those immediate and medium term changes that will strengthen the working class in its task of achieving socialism—that includes fighting for both the provision of child care for all who require it alongside the economic advancement of working people so that if they wish to stay home with their children they are able to do so, and includes those measures that encourage the equality of the sexes, effectively doubling the ranks of the organised working class.

As for the family in the future form of society—*que sera, sera*.

The Cost of Living Crisis

UPTON PRICE

The phrase ‘cost of living crisis’ has been a feature in political discourse in recent months. But aside from being a good cudgel for the opposition to beat the government with, what can we say about the cost of living in New Zealand? What is inflation and what are its implications in a capitalist economy? And what responses are appropriate to best insulate workers and build capacity to cope with future shocks?

What is inflation, how is it measured, and what are its effects in real terms?

Economists define inflation as a general increase in prices in an economy. An increase in prices means that money is losing its value. In an economy with high inflation, a dollar today has less purchasing power (i.e. it purchases less goods and services) than it did yesterday.

The main measure cited in debates

about inflation is the consumer price index (CPI), which measures the prices of a representative basket of goods and services purchased by consumers and aggregates them into 11 subgroups such as food, alcoholic beverages and tobacco, housing and household utilities, and transport. The CPI increased 7.3 percent in the year ended June 2022, the largest increase in 32 years. Construction of new dwellings (up 18.3 percent), petrol (up 32.5 percent), and rents (up 4.3 percent) were the main contributors to this increase. Existing dwellings are excluded from the CPI as they do not add to the current housing stock.

Other less talked about measures are the household living-cost price indexes (HLPis), a suite of 13 different indexes that cuts the CPI data by different household types: beneficiaries, Māori, superannuitants, income quintiles (five groups), and expenditure quintiles (five groups). This data also includes interest payments rather than construction costs, a feature of it being a cost-of-living measure. In the year to June 2022 the HLPis all-households measure increased 7.4 percent, beneficiaries 6.5 percent, Māori 7.6 percent, superannuitants 6.6 percent, lowest spending households 6.5 percent, and highest spending households 8.1 percent. However, over the long run, lowest spending households have seen their costs increase much more than highest spending ones – up 39.5 percent compared to 25.9 percent since the series began in June 2008.

Stats NZ also produce two monthly inflation measures, the food price index (FPI) and rental price index (RPI). In the year to July 2022 the FPI increased 7.4 percent, while the RPI stock measure increased 3.9 percent. Another important measure is the producers’ price index (PPI) which measures input and output prices in various industries. In the year ended

June 2022 the PPI input index increased 9.7 percent, while the PPI output index increased 8.5 percent. This indicates that there are further price increases to come for consumers, as firms pass those costs on.

What does all this data tell us? Effectively, incomes are going backwards without a pay rise. If you work 40 hours a week on minimum wage you earn \$848.00 (before tax). At the current rate of CPI inflation, your purchasing power has declined 7.3 percent. Your real income is only \$786.10 per week compared to \$831.04 if inflation was 2 percent. It's useful to compare these indexes to a measure of wage inflation. The labour cost index (LCI), which measures the cost of labour paid by employers for equivalent units of labour (not wages received by workers,) increased 3.4 percent in the year to June 2022.

What is driving inflation?

New Zealand is not the only country currently experiencing higher levels of inflation. Indeed, it is a global phenomenon which has generated much debate. But is this current surge driven by demand supply?

The demand story emphasises the effects of central bank quantitative easing ('money printing'), low levels of unemployment, and excess savings built up during the pandemic, to explain why inflation has suddenly risen. This led to excessive demand, pushing prices up in a case of 'too much money chasing too few goods'. However, quantitative easing had a much greater effect in the housing and stock markets than in shops. And, as we saw above, wage inflation is lagging consumer inflation by a considerable amount. The dreaded 'wage-price spiral' is not a real-world phenomenon.

In my view, it is the massive supply and production shock caused by COVID-19 and the chaos it has wreaked on supply chains that has driven inflation. Lockdowns meant goods were not being produced as workers stayed home (or were in hospital), supply chains and logistics came to a halt, and normal social life was replaced with isolation at home. Any increase in demand was caused by this shock to supply. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has also sent commodity prices for crude oil, cereals, and metals skyrocketing.

Added to this supply story is corporate profiteering. FIRST Union researcher Ed Miller has shown that corporate profits spiked by 'an unprecedented 39 percent' in the year to March 2022. 'Make hay while the sun shines' appears to be the mantra in the corporate sector as firms take advantage of the current crisis to increase their profits.

How should we respond?

These differing explanations have consequences for how we respond to inflation. The standard response is for the Reserve Bank of New Zealand (RBNZ) to raise the Official Cash Rate (OCR), the wholesale interest rate at which the RBNZ lends to commercial banks. Raising the OCR increases the interest rates banks charge. Higher rates for consumers and firms dampens demand by making credit (mortgages, personal and business loans) more expensive and making saving more attractive. Money is effectively drawn out of circulation, and inflation subsides as demand is curtailed.

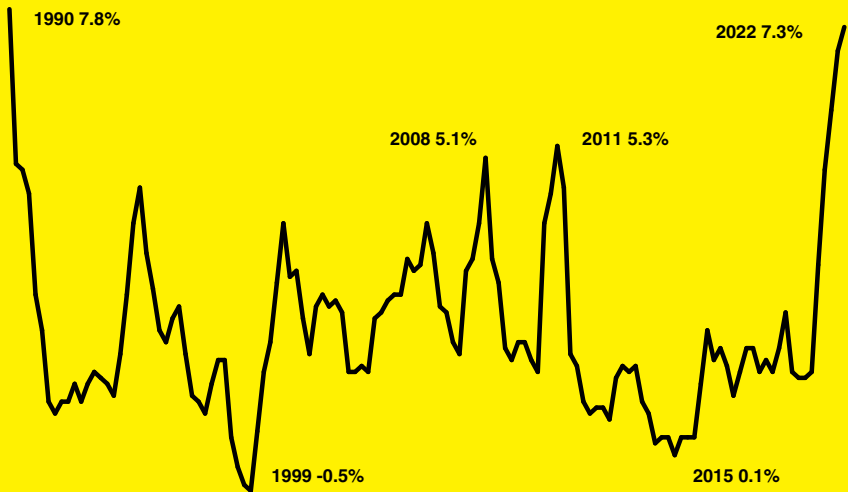
But when inflation is supply driven, particularly by foreign goods, raising the cost of borrowing has little effect on inflation. If anything it could make the

situation worse, as mortgages, rates, and rents rise further with higher borrowing costs, whilst the price of imported fuel, and food which is grown here but sold at world prices, keep rising too.

So, what to do? National and ACT claim that reckless government spending during the pandemic has contributed to inflation and we need to reign it in to relieve cost of living pressures. This isn't supported by the data. Analysis by the Council of Trade Unions shows that inflation rates are similar across countries, regardless of whether they spent a little or a lot (in percentage of gross domestic product terms) on their COVID response. Other orthodox responses are for wage

help consumers get a better deal. These measures might help in 'normal' times, but I fail to see how, say, five supermarket chains rather than two would lead to better outcomes. Indeed, in countries the liberal commentators often point to as examples of well working markets, such as Denmark, we still see similar levels of inflation as here.

More heterodox analysts argue for measures such as strategic price controls, more akin to those enacted during both World Wars than under Muldoon. Economist Isabella Weber has put forward the case for the U.S. and argues that the end of World War Two 'required a sudden restructuring of production which created



restraint and higher unemployment, options that obviously fall disproportionately on workers.

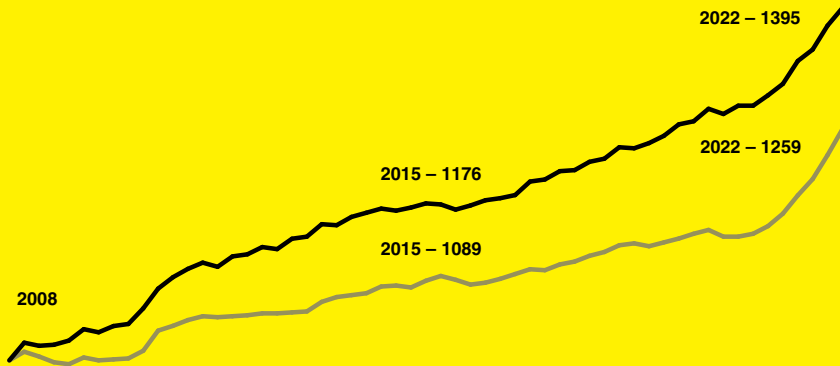
Another argument, common in New Zealand and popular with liberal commentators, is that we need more competition, particularly in the food and fuel retailing sectors. More industry players will drive prices down and better regulation will

bottlenecks similar to those caused by the pandemic. Then and now large corporations with market power...used supply problems as an opportunity to increase prices and scoop windfall profits.'

So, what can we do? Grant Robertson is quite right in saying that the government can't influence prices for commodities on international markets. Is it just a storm we

must weather? Marxist economist Michael Roberts points out that: "There is an alternative to monetary or wage restraint, these

parliamentary protestors, but if we didn't have this kind of pressure on people's pay packets it's possible there wouldn't have



policy proposals of the mainstream, acting in the interests of bankers and corporations to preserve profitability. It is to boost investment and production through public investment. That would solve the supply shock. But sufficient public investment to do that would require significant control of the major sectors of the economy, particularly energy and agriculture; and co-ordinated action globally.'

That might be a pipe dream right now, especially the global part. But the commanding heights were once our goal and current conditions should sharpen our focus back to those lofty peaks. In New Zealand we didn't have a Sanders or Corbyn, we got Jacinda Ardern and the politics of kindness. But kindness doesn't buy nappies or keep the lights on. Kindness runs up against material limits. And even if Labour lose in 2023, we will continue to lurch from one cost of living crisis to another, regardless of whether Labour or National occupies the government benches.

I don't agree with the politics of the

been such ugly scenes at parliament, or that up to 30 percent of the population would support their cause. Yes, there were provocateurs, right-wing conspiracy pushers, and some genuinely dangerous people participating. But there is still the question of why there was fuel to spark their ideas and their anger. The failure to invest in public infrastructure, distribution, and production which has led to the accelerating costs, must surely be a contributing factor.

Socialists should continue to put forward the case for public investment and socialised production and distribution. The cost-of-living crisis opens this conversation up and highlights many of the fallacies of conventional economic thinking, as well as the limited nature of the politics of kindness and the corrosive social outcomes of politicians who refuse to rise to the challenges of governing. As the British Enough is Enough campaign states: 'Fair pay, affordable bills, enough to eat and a decent place to live. These aren't luxuries—they are your rights!'

**LOWEST VS
HIGHEST
EXPENDITURE
HOUSEHOLDS**

BASE: JUNE
2008=1000

OUR HISTORY

MARTIN CRICK

Labour Day in New Zealand

Labour Day has been a statutory holiday in New Zealand since 1900. Originally fixed as the second Wednesday in October it was 'Mondayised' in 1910 and moved to the fourth Monday of that month. The origin of this holiday is closely linked to the struggles for a legal eight-hour working day.

Samuel Parnell, a 29 year-old London-born carpenter, came to New Zealand in 1840, on one of the first ships to reach Wellington. He was asked by a fellow passenger, merchant George Hunter, to erect a store for him. He agreed, on condition that he worked no more than eight hours a day: 'There are 24 hours per day given us', he said, 'and eight of these should be for work, eight for sleep, and the remaining eight for recreation and in which for men to do what little things they want to do for themselves.' Although Hunter protested he had no option but to agree, due to the shortage of tradesmen. Thereafter others followed Parnell's example, meeting incoming ships to tell new arrivals that they must insist on an eight-hour working day.

When Dunedin was settled in 1848 the men were promised an eight-hour day by the Otago Association. The following year Captain Cargill, the local agent of the New Zealand Company, tried to undermine the agreement, posting a notice that 'according to the good old Scottish rule'

10 hours was to be the norm. The settlers refused to accept this and he was forced to back down. Auckland building workers launched a campaign which led to the introduction of the shorter working day in 1857. But although the *Handbook of New Zealand* for 1875 boasted that 'in all mechanical trades, and for labourers in general, the standard day's work is eight hours', this was far from the case, and many worked longer hours. Moreover, it was by custom only and was threatened whenever economic conditions deteriorated. What the trade unions wanted was a law limiting daily hours in all occupations to 8 and weekly hours to 48.

In 1882 an Auckland unionist committee decided to hold an eight-hours demonstration on Wednesday 19 April. Many building trade employers agreed to release their staff, and the demonstration set the pattern for future events; a procession in the morning, sports and picnics in the afternoon, and a ball or concert in the evening. Otago Trades Council called a public meeting instead of a demonstration and a Dunedin MP, M.W. Green, introduced an Eight-Hour bill in parliament in May. It passed the Lower House but was defeated in the Legislative Council. Similar bills, introduced almost annually, failed for the next 20 years.

Late in 1889 seamen, watersiders, and miners joined forces in the Maritime Council. In July of that year an international labour congress in Paris had called on workers everywhere to demonstrate on 1st May 1890 for a legal eight-hour working day. Reports of the huge demonstrations in Europe and the USA clearly impacted in

THE SOCIALIST
PHOTOGRAPH:
MARTIN CRICK

New Zealand and the Maritime Council, meeting on 10 May, called upon all Trades Councils to support demonstrations on 28 October, the date of the founding of the Council in 1889. Premier Harry Atkinson agreed to close all government offices for the day. However, a nationwide Maritime Strike erupted in August and its defeat led to the collapse of the Maritime Council. Nonetheless, the Labour Day demonstrations were a huge success, a show of strength and a signal that labour was still a force to be reckoned with, but they were certainly not the revolutionary

gatherings calling for the overthrow of the capitalist system that were witnessed in the May Day celebrations overseas. There was no socialist party or movement to lead such a call. Wellington watersiders, whose union and jobs were about to disappear, to be replaced by scab labour, carried a banner with the clasped hands symbol and the motto 'Defence not Defiance', and the equally doomed Lyttelton wharfies' banner depicted a merchant and a labourer shaking hands and the inscription 'Labour and Capital as they should be'.

Perhaps the only exception to this came in the Christchurch Labour Day parade the following year. There the Socialist Church float flew a banner with imagery drawing upon the symbolism of Walter Crane: a representation of labour at the plough, carrying Atlas and upon his shoulders the world, whereon sat triumphantly an obese capitalist. The script on the banner read 'Labour is mocked, its just reward stolen; On its bent back sits idleness encouraged'. Inserting such sentiments into a day devoted to baby contests, bicycle races and other sporting contests didn't sit well with the press, *the Star* calling it a 'cynically primitive view of things', and 'a bitter doctrine of faith.' (*Christchurch Star*, 10 October, 1901)

After the defeat of the Maritime strike many unskilled and semi-skilled unions collapsed, and Labour



Day processions became dominated by tradesmen's societies. Increasingly too business firms entered floats in the processions, along with theatre groups and even circuses. The numbers of union marchers declined, and Christchurch and Auckland soon abandoned processions, Dunedin persisting a little longer. The afternoon sports and entertainments remained hugely popular however. In 1894 the Trades and Labour Conference agreed on the second Wednesday in October as a uniform date for the holiday and William Pember Reeves, the Minister of Labour, agreed to close government offices on that date. Once an Arbitration Court was established in 1895 many unions included an eight-hour day and a Labour Day holiday in their claims, but many still worked between 10 and 14 hours per day. Eventually, on Labour Day 1899, Parliament agreed to declare the second Wednesday in October a public holiday. Premier Seddon was well aware of calls for an independent Labour Party and wanted to ensure the Liberal hold on the unionist vote. Official recognition led to renewed enthusiasm for the processions, the one in Wellington in 1900 reported as the largest yet, but the *Evening Post* reported that 'the parade is getting every year more into the hands of the enterprising businessman and out of the jurisdiction of the unionist.' (*Evening Post*, 10 October 1900) Soon only Auckland of the major cities continued the traditional parades. *The Industrial Unionist*, journal of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW/Wobblies), commented in 1913 that "Labour Day" is the bosses' Labour Day...a street display of goods, a cheap advertising method for employers...more like an acknowledgement of subjection than an assertion of dignity', and it urged New Zealand Workers to adopt May Day, the International Labour Day. (*Industrial*

Unionist, 1 November 1913)

After World War 1 Auckland trade unionists made strenuous efforts to revive Labour Day parades, but after 1923 they too collapsed. The miners' unions under communist leadership began to celebrate May Day with marches and meetings, but May Day functions received little support in the cities. One exception was a huge 'united front' May Day march in Christchurch in 1932. Attempts to revive Labour Day processions after Labour's election victory in 1935 failed to gain much support and eventually even the sports and picnics faded away.

'For about two decades after 1890', wrote Bert Roth, 'the annual Labour Day celebrations were a significant spectacle in New Zealand. They were an expression of class consciousness, an affirmation of the strength of the union movement and, for the tradesmen's societies in particular, an opportunity to present the members' skills and pride in their craft.' However, with the coming to power of the Liberal Party after 1890, they were also an expression of class collaboration, workers parading side by side with their employers, reflecting the Lib-Lab ideology of a partnership between labour and capital. This was seen in a banner carried by Auckland boot-makers in 1891, just after their defeat in a long strike over pay and conditions. Their banner showed the traditional symbol of solidarity, a clasped handshake, but one hand issued from a rolled-up shirt sleeve, the other from a black coat-sleeve, signifying, said *the Auckland Star*, employer and employee as they should be. The same paper, in 1920, wrote that 'Labour Day is a holiday to be enjoyed rather than a day of aggressive demonstration as May Day is on the continent.'

MARTIN CRICK

The Christchurch Socialist Church

The Christchurch Socialist Church was the first overtly socialist organisation in New Zealand, although a Fabian Society was in existence slightly earlier. It was founded in May 1896 by Harry Atkinson, whom Bert Roth has called ‘the father of New Zealand Socialism.’ He was the nephew of the former Premier Sir Harry Atkinson. An autodidact who read the likes of Kropotkin, Stepniak, Edward Carpenter, Thoreau and the *Fabian Essays*, Atkinson spent three years in England from 1890. There, in 1892, he joined the Labour Church movement established by John Trevor, a former Unitarian minister. Trevor saw God as working through the labour movement: ‘the great religious movement of our times is the emancipation of labour’, he said. Atkinson became the secretary of the movement, and the publisher of its journal, *The Labour Prophet*. He was also exposed to the ideas of Robert Blatchford and the Clarion movement, and helped to form the Independent Labour Party.

Atkinson moved back to New Zealand in November 1893, arriving the day after the general election that saw Richard Seddon elected as Premier, and to a country in the process of a significant legislative programme of social and industrial reforms. He found employment at the Addington Railway Workshops in Christchurch, before founding the Socialist Church. It differed from Trevor’s Labour Church in that Atkinson saw socialism itself as a religion. Shortly before

his death he said that to him ‘Socialism was not a set of dogmas but a living principle, a striving after human betterment under all circumstances.’ The Church’s prime object was to promote ‘a fellowship amongst those working for the organisation of Society on a basis of Brotherhood and Equality.’ It affirmed the principle that ‘only as we learn to lead purer and better lives can we benefit by any measures of social reform.’ This is very much the ethical socialism that underpinned the Clarion movement and the ILP in Great Britain. The Socialist Church emphasised associational activity and self-education.

Members met weekly to listen to a range of speakers or to discuss a wide variety of literature. Speakers included the visiting English socialist Ben Tillet, the maverick professor of Chemistry Alexander Bickerton, described by Jim McAloon as an anarchist, and members of the local women’s movement such as Eveline Cunnington, Christina Henderson and Louisa Blake. Cunnington argued that socialism was the economic interpretation of the teaching of Christ, Henderson that the capitalist system was ‘the most unjust that the mind of man could have conceived’, whilst Blake promoted free and compulsory technical education, with ‘all industries being protected for the benefit of the workers by the State.’ Literature studied included Marx’s *Capital* and the *Fabian Essays*. Open-air meetings were held every Sunday afternoon in Cathedral Square, and a short-lived journal, *The Socialist*, was published between August and October 1897.

By 1899 the Socialist Church was relatively successful, and growing in numbers. A notable recruit was Jack McCullough who was to become, says Jim McAloon, ‘the single most influential figure in Christchurch socialism of the period.’ It suffered a temporary setback when it

became one of the few groups to oppose the Boer War, arousing much ill-feeling amongst a patriotic public, but one positive was the recruitment of Jim Thorn, who volunteered to fight in the war but returned disillusioned and a convinced pacifist. He too went on to become a leading light in the labour movement, and he left us one of the few contemporary records of a Socialist Church meeting. It was, he said, 'a queer mixture of atheists, Fabian socialists and radicals, all of them idealists...Having read a very excellent (as I thought) paper, I was treated to some ferocious criticism, and got the impression that I had strayed into a hornets nest of very angry and disagreeable people. It was a sort of baptism of fire, a running of the gauntlet.'

The Socialist Church promoted a range of ideas: old age pensions, state control of industry, municipal reform. It was almost a lone voice in criticising the Liberal government, giving an insider view of the so-called State Socialism in New Zealand, attacking the arbitration system and the levels of inequality. It achieved some notoriety on Labour Day 1901 with its attack on the capitalist system (see p.36) However, it ceased to exist in mid-1905. Atkinson suggested depleted finances and changing priorities as the reasons for its demise, but a more likely explanation is the arrival on the scene of the New Zealand Socialist Party, formed in 1901 and with a Christchurch branch commencing operations in January 1902. What then was the significance of the Socialist Church?

According to Bert Roth it was important because it attracted numerous professional people to its ranks at a time when the labour movement elsewhere was confined almost entirely to manual workers. Equally importantly, in my opinion, it was instrumental in the formation of a socialist sub-culture in Christchurch through its educational activities and its social events

such as picnics, dances and teas. And above all it was the first openly socialist organisation in New Zealand, and the first to call for an independent labour party; it began the shift away from the dominant liberal progressivism and lib-lab alliance of the late 1890s



1. SOCIALISTIC EMBLEM: LABOUR AND CAPITAL.
Displayed by the members of the Socialist Church.

Important Dates in Socialist History October Through December

- 3 October 1935** Invasion of Ethiopia, formerly Abyssinia, by fascist Italy under Benito Mussolini.
- 4 October 1936** The battle of Cable Street. Over 100,000 residents and anti-Fascists prevented a march through the East End of London by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists.
- 15 October 1966** Bobby Seale and Huey Newton found the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California.
- 16 October 1968** African-American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their gloved fists in a Black Power salute during the medal ceremony at the Olympic Games in Mexico City.
- 23 October 1956** Beginning of the Hungarian uprising v Soviet rule. Thousands organise themselves into worker' councils and militias demanding not a transition to capitalism but a socialism controlled by the working class itself.
- 24 October 1975** 90% of women in Iceland went on general strike for equality with men.
- 28 October 1916** Conscription to the Australian army during WW1 defeated in a referendum. The Labour Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, blamed the influence of the Industrial Workers of the World and banned the organisation, jailing many of its members.
- 31 October 1986** 5000 nurses in Victoria, Australia, begin indefinite strike against pay cuts. The government caved in on 19 December.
- 1 November 1954** Beginning of the Algerian War of Independence.
- 7 November 1917** The October (Bolshevik) Revolution begins in Russia, so-called because Russia still used the old-style Gregorian calendar at the time.
- 10 November 1995** Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ogoni indigenous author and environmentalist, and 8 others, hanged by the Nigerian state, their crime organising resistance to the destruction of indigenous lands by the Royal Dutch Shell Oil Company.
- 13 November 1912** The murder of New Zealand unionist Fred Evans by police and scab labour storming a union hall during the Waihi Miners' strike.
- 19 November 1915** The execution of Joe Hill, IWW organiser and songwriter, on trumped-up murder charges. Some of his last words were 'Don't waste any time in mourning. Organise.'
- 1 December 1955** Arrest of Rosa Parks in Montgomery, Alabama, for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger on the bus. This led to a bus boycott, a seminal moment in the civil rights movement.
- 4 December 1969** Chicago Black Panther leader Fred Hampton murdered by the police and FBI whilst asleep in his bed.
- 9 December 1987** The first Palestinian Intifada against Israeli occupation begins.
- 11 December 1983** 50,000 women encircle Greenham Common US military base to protest the arrival of cruise missiles in the UK.
- 22 December 1988** The assassination of Chico Mendes, Brazilian rubber worker activist, environmentalist, and indigenous rights advocate. 'At first I thought I was fighting to save rubber trees, then I thought I was fighting to save the Amazon rainforest. Now I realise I am fighting for humanity.'
- 29 December 1890** Massacre of over 200 Lakota Sioux men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

RHYS MAXSTED.

Daniel Guérin

PART 1: NEITHER GOD NOR MASTER

Daniel Guérin, a self-described bisexual anarcho-communist, may be an unfamiliar name to many nowadays but as Ian Birchall has pointed out he ‘lived a life of extraordinary political commitment, from anti-fascist and anti-colonial struggles to his pioneering advocacy of gay liberation’, and he argues that ‘Guérin’s writings and record should be a touchstone for the modern left.’ I hope in this two-part series to delve into his life and examine his contribution to the lives of oppressed and queer people around the world.

Born in 1904 to a wealthy family in France, Guérin showed great literary talent in his early years, even publishing a collection of his poems at the age of 18, future Nobel Prize winner François Mauriac claiming his poetry to be ‘an exceptional gift.’ Guérin, like many of the French elite, enrolled at the Institute of Political Sciences. He quickly grew bored though, saying ‘For me, studies are idiocies that make life hardly worth living.’ He felt unmistakably out of place among his classmates of ‘future ministers and inspectors of finance, experts in their fields, hungry to succeed and to be in charge.’ Finding himself clashing ideologically with his classmates, Guérin started reading and learning of more left-wing politics, which led him to start writing in the revolutionary syndicalist magazine *La Révolution Proletarienne*.

After graduating and completing his obligatory military service in 1926, he moved from job to job until finally becoming a journalist, which led him to Beirut, at that time under France’s flimsy post-war

protectorate. This was to be a turning point in his life, as Guérin had had a fairly sheltered conservative upbringing and now was witness to the hypocrisies and brutalities of French colonialism first hand. During the early 1930s he continued to travel across France’s vast colonial empire including Indochina, and was now immersing himself in the works of Marx, Trotsky, and Lenin. But as Guérin himself acknowledged, the reading alone wasn’t enough to inspire political conversion. It wasn’t until he visited villages in northern Vietnam that he felt a genuine transformation take hold: ‘Slowly but surely, the marvel inspired by landscapes and folklore gave way to political observation. I learned, at the same time, how Europeans treated indigenous peoples and how the colonised despised their yoke.’

While there he was able to help fight for the downtrodden people of Indochina by using his journalistic skills to investigate the truth in matters of law between the locals and the French authorities and businessmen. To the French, he played the part of dispassionate observer. With Vietnamese nationalist intellectuals, he assumed the more comfortable role of sympathiser and traitor to the French Republic. Upon returning to France, he declared to have ‘more or less found himself.’ Much to the dismay of his family, he moved to the working-class neighbourhood of Belleville, shedding the shell of his bourgeois upbringing, and dedicating the rest of his life to political and social issues.

Guérin was one of the earliest Marxists to make a detailed study of fascism, at a time when many on the left were still hoping that the problem would simply go away. Guérin recalled that one Socialist Party member claimed that talking about fascism would simply encourage the fascists. A couple of months after Hitler came to power, Guérin did a cycle tour



DANIEL GUÉRIN

around Germany, observing and studying fascism first hand while distributing communist leaflets hidden within his bicycle frame.

In 1936, Guérin published *Fascism and Big Business*. In it, he demolished the idea that fascism can be explained by national characteristics i.e., Italian backwardness or the German temperament – and showed that it could potentially spread to any country. He also rejected the myth that fascism was in some sense ‘anti-capitalist,’ arguing that it is ‘an instrument in the service of big capital,’ sponsored in particular by owners of heavy industry. While recognizing fascism’s ideological power, he showed that this was firmly rooted in material circumstances. He concluded that the only effective way to fight fascism was by opposing it with a socialist alternative.

Upon joining the Socialist Party, Guérin aligned himself with the

‘Revolutionary Left’ led by Marceau Pivert. He and fellow activists fought in vain to stir the Party into taking more direct action and to embrace revolution over reform. Guérin played an active role as a Party and trade union militant during the great wave of factory occupations in 1936. The Revolutionary Left was a far-left faction of the Socialist Party, characterising Stalinism as the ‘syphilis of the working-class movement.’ In the aftermath of a failed fascist coup in France, the French socialists and communists joined forces to form the Popular Front alliance and won a parliamentary majority in the elections of 1936.

Guérin’s initial analysis was that the Popular Front had encouraged ‘a genuinely popular movement in the sense that it drew behind the working class a not inconsiderable layer of petty bourgeois and poor peasants’, but as it moved rightwards he became disillusioned, accusing it

of abandoning those same groups. When the Socialist Party entered the government in 1936, Pivert was offered governmental office. He consulted the executive of the Revolutionary Left; Guérin was the only one to vote against.

In 1938, the Revolutionary Left was expelled from the Socialist Party and Guérin went on to be a founding member of the Workers and Peasants Socialist Party (PSOP). But a current which in 1936 could mobilise tens of thousands of supporters now only gathered together 6,000 members. In 1939 Trotsky wrote a letter to Guérin, whose revolutionary integrity he respected, urging him to persuade the PSOP to turn to the Fourth International. But it was too late and the loose organisation of the PSOP collapsed at the outbreak of war.

Guérin spent much of WW2 working with the small group of Trotskyists around the German Jewish exile Martin Monath, who produced a paper in German called *Arbeiter und Soldat* and attempted to organise resistance activity among the occupying soldiers. Post-war he didn't share the West's seemingly uncritical enthusiasm for the USA, and travelled there for two years between 1946 and 1949 to see for himself. This was a time when some, not only on the right but also on the left, were arguing that there was no class struggle in the US, but Guérin pointed to the deep-rooted class and racial divisions in American society. Already in 1950 Guérin was writing of the 'black revolt' in the US. His short history of American trade unionism (translated into English as *A Hundred Years of Labour* in the USA) remains a useful introduction to the subject. Written from a revolutionary standpoint, it is sharply critical of both governmental anti-communism and the manoeuvres of the American Communist Party.

Guérin first came into politics as an anti-colonialist, and this was to remain a constant theme in his writing and activity. Among other things, Guérin worked tirelessly in support of Algerian independence. He first met the Algerian nationalist leader Messali Hadj at the time of the Popular Front (Algerian workers participated in all the main anti-fascist demonstrations in the 1930s) and he published articles on North Africa before 1954. In the Thirties, he corresponded with the leading Vietnamese Trotskyists (later murdered by Stalinists) and in the Fifties and Sixties he campaigned actively on behalf of independence for the West Indies. Thus, we can see that Guerin was a staunch advocate of solidarity with all people that are oppressed, from indigenous people to African Americans.

In the 1960s Guerin's sympathies shifted towards anarchism, and he edited an anthology of anarchist writings entitled *No Gods, No Masters*, but he emphasised that he saw anarchism as 'but one of the branches of socialist thought' and continued to try to act as an 'honest broker' between the various factions. He supported the student revolt of 1968 from the beginning, when many on the left, particularly the Communist Party, were very ambivalent in their attitude. And the Sixties also saw Guérin's sexuality come to the forefront of his political activism. I do not want to side-line his bisexuality, like many did throughout his life, so the next instalment will be dedicated fully to Guérin's involvement in queer communism, from his participation in the Homosexual Front for Revolutionary Action (FHAR) in France to how many today see him as a leading figure in, even the founder of, Queer Communism.

OBITUARY

JOHN KERR

Ken Douglas

The late Bob Crow, General Secretary of the British Rail and Maritime Union (RMT), once said: ‘if you fight you might lose, if you don’t fight you will lose’. It’s a saying we would do well to keep in mind as we look back at the career of Ken Douglas, who died on 14th September.

The obituaries and tributes published in the mainstream media were largely positive, extolling the virtues of the man who went from being a truck driver to leader of the Wellington Drivers’ Union by the age of 23, and eventually became the inaugural president of the Council of Trade Unions in 1987. But much of the coverage airbrushed over the defining moment of Douglas’s career, the failure to resist one of the most devastating attacks on organised labour in the history of western liberal democracy as Jim Bolger’s National Government successfully passed the Employment Contracts Act (ECA) in 1991.

The ground for this piece of legislation had already been laid by the fourth Labour Government, which had begun the process of dismantling the national wage fixing mechanism and started the march to so-called enterprise level bargaining in 1987 with the Labour Relations Act. Douglas failed to lead a concerted opposition to Labour’s neo-liberal agenda and in 1991, when a National government emboldened by the zeitgeist of the immediate post-cold war era came for the unions, he was sorely lacking.

In April of that year hundreds of thousands of New Zealand workers took to the streets in what has been described as the ‘largest display of popular outrage in New Zealand history’. Mass meetings of workers, beneficiaries and students called for a general strike. Douglas failed to heed them and, together with the leadership of the teachers’, nurses’, public servants’, engineers’, postal and financial workers unions—in almost every case acting without a clear mandate from their rank and file—quashed the call for a general strike at a CTU special affiliates’ meeting.

Douglas’s excuse was that this was a fight that could not be won and that a better strategy was to hold on until Labour was re-elected.

Marshal Ganz defines leadership as ‘the practice of empowering people to achieve shared purpose in conditions of uncertainty’. We don’t know if a general strike would have successfully stopped the ECA in 1991. We do know that 1991 was not 1913 or 1951. In 1913 the union movement had been too small to defeat the state. In 1951 Fintan Patrick Walsh calculated there was too



much to lose and sacrificed the wharflies. In 1991 650,000 workers had nothing to lose that the state wasn’t going to take from them anyway. ‘If you don’t fight you will lose...’

We do know that the architect of the Act, Bill Birch, expected and was prepared to concede much of its content had public resistance been strong enough. We do know that the fifth Labour government repealed the ECA but kept much of its anti-strike provisions. We do know that the union movement has never recovered and Aotearoa has amongst the lowest percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining in the OECD.

In the conditions of uncertainty that prevailed in 1991 Ken Douglas, a self-professed communist and the leader of organised labour in Aotearoa, chose not to fight. And, in the words of Bob Crow, we all lost.

DAVID COLYER

In Memory of Jimmy O’Dea (1935-2021)

Last November veteran socialist Jimmy O’Dea died in Auckland at the age of 86. Jimmy was involved in some of the most well-known struggles of the past six decades. He was an early activist in the anti-nuclear and anti-apartheid movements from 1960, then in opposing the Vietnam War and supporting struggles for tino rangatiratanga on the Land March and at Bastion Point and Raglan occupations. Through the 1990s he was part of the long, and successful, state house rent strike against market rents. Underpinning all of this, he was a rank- and- file trade union activist and a vocal champion of socialism.

This tribute to Jimmy’s life is based on two interviews I recorded with Jimmy in 2009 and 2010, as well as my own memories of working with him. Jimmy was a great storyteller with an amazing memory (apologising for not remembering the name of a union delegate from 30 years earlier, only to recall it soon after).

There were many areas of his life and activism we never talked about, so these are not really covered. I’ve also left out much mention of his family – they will have their own stories to tell. The things we did discuss, his early life, and what led to him joining the Communist Party (CPNZ) are covered in some detail here in Part 1. Part 2, in the next issue of *the Commonweal*, will focus on Jimmy’s early trade union activism, what socialism meant to him, and his role in the Bastion Point occupation.

The texts in quotation marks are

Jimmy’s own, unless otherwise stated.

Part One: The terrible injustice of Ireland

Jimmy was born in Newcastle West Poor House, County Limerick. Because his mother was unmarried, he was taken by the Catholic Church. His mother managed to get him back, but then had to move where she wasn’t known. Jimmy spent his childhood in the villages of Kilmallock and Old Pallas in eastern Limerick.

It was ‘a very nationalistic area’, which is to say people had strongly supported the Irish independence movement. The history of the anti-colonial struggle was passed on in a traditional manner. If you look up Irish storytelling traditions on the internet today, you will find reference to ancient myths and legends. No doubt there was plenty of that, but Jimmy remembered learning much more recent history. ‘All the old people would come on a cold winter’s night, around the fire in a big thatched house, and there’d be about ten or twelve old guys talking. They called it “tracing”, tracing history, another name for it was “cuardach.” Jimmy pronounced this ‘kooor-deek’. An Irish dictionary translates cuardach as meaning searching, rummaging or looking for something.

‘And you’re listening there until about twelve at night, pitch dark, and you’d be listening there to all the things that happened—the Land League days, the evictions, all the things that happened in past history, up until that time.’ He heard of the two attacks on the Kilmallock barracks of the Royal Irish Constabulary, first during the Fenian Rising of 1867, then when it was burned down during the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921); and of the Soloheadbeg Ambush, the first

ACROSS:
KEN DOUGLAS
CREDIT: NZME



**JIMMY O'DEA
SUPPLIED**

action of this war, which happened just down the road. Jimmy recalled being shown holes in the walls of houses from when the Constabulary's Black and Tans shot up the village with machine guns.

Despite its nominal independence from the British Empire, Ireland in the 30s, 40s and 50s remained a miserable place for working class people, full of 'terrible injustice'. The rural economy remained semi-feudal. One of Jimmy's earliest memories, from when he was about four, was going to a hiring fair by the Kilmallock railway bridge with his mother. Here workers were hired by farmers to work for the year, but only received pay at the end of that time.

While his mother was away working, Jimmy was left in a private foster home with a dozen other children. They were

often cold and hungry. One night some of the children snuck into the grounds of a mansion to scavenge bark for the fire, only to be confronted by the landowner, a Captain Lindsey. Terrified, Jimmy narked on the older girl who was hiding their axe down the front of her dress. When he was older, Jimmy learnt how to use ferrets to poach rabbits and became known for his skills as a rabbitier. As he described things in a TV interview in the 90s, 'We were the Peasants, we were the dispossessed. Our existence came from rabbits and anything you could get.'

At the age of 19 Jimmy, like millions of other young Irish people before him, left to work overseas. Working on building sites in London, Jimmy found his anti-English prejudices challenged by the kind treatment he received from the family he boarded with, and by fellow workers who took him under their wing. One in particular warned him not to enlist in the army, pointing out the war cripples 'who fought for freedom' and now begged on the street.

Returning briefly to Ireland, Jimmy looked further afield. He saw an ad for assisted immigration to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The application required a certificate of 'good character' to be signed by a garda (police officer). The local garda chief demanded a £10 bribe (about NZ\$500 today), which Jimmy refused. This dispute led to the guards attempting to beat Jimmy up, which didn't end well for them. When I first heard this story, I wondered if it might be a case of an old man exaggerating the glories of his youth. However, corroboration came in a TVNZ program about the Irish in New Zealand. A film crew interviewed two old fellows from Jimmy's village. They remembered the incident more or less as Jimmy described!

Looking back Jimmy considered it a lucky escape. Had he gone to Rhodesia, he

joked, 'I might have become a racist'. In the end he headed for Australia and found work in mines and railway yards. He celebrated his 21st Birthday while working on King Island, between Tasmania and the mainland. And it was there he had a conversation with another worker who had recently been in New Zealand and said the wages there were good, adding, 'You've come this far, you may as well go right to the end of the world'.

A New Zealand road to socialism

Arriving in Aotearoa in 1957, Jimmy's first job was working on the foundations of the Meremere power station, a coal-fired station in the north Waikato coal fields, 64 kilometres south of Auckland. At first he thought he was in paradise, 'The conditions there were incredible, the food, the wages, it was all new to me... There were 40 gallon drums of orange juice and pineapple juice. There was pig, cold and hot, and chicken, you name it.' When Jimmy praised the generosity of the employers, his union delegate Terry McCosh, a Communist originally from Liverpool, pointed out that everything on offer had been fought for by the workers. 'He said "we're the workers, we make all the profits" and the bosses were just giving a bit back to the workers because the union was that strong.'

Jimmy described himself at that time as 'a naive young guy' but said 'I got my education at Meremere... hours and hours of discussion...' McCosh explained 'the history of Ireland and the history of capitalism' and for Jimmy, who 'was very angry, angry because of the injustice I'd seen and experienced', the pieces fitted together like a jigsaw.

In the late 50s and early 60s the militant wing of the union movement

was recovering from the defeats of the Auckland carpenters in 1949 (when the Labour government and conservative Federation of Labour leaders had stepped in to smash a Communist Party led union), and the 1951 Waterfront lock-out. A booming economy and a shortage of workers made it hard for bosses to blacklist militants and more profitable to settle economic demands than fight them. As Jimmy put it, 'It was the great years of capitalism', and the boom allowed communists and other militants, including those who had lost their jobs in '51, to establish networks throughout many blue collar unions.

There were a number of Communist Party members working at Meremere and socialist literature was distributed and party meetings were held on-site. Pat Kelly, later a prominent union leader and father of former CTU president the late Helen Kelly, also joined the CPNZ around that time. Jimmy remembers him as the walking delegate (a senior union delegate still paid a wage by the boss, but who is free to spend their time on union issues). As with many big government projects, the leading contractor was an American firm. Racism from American bosses, such as calling Māori workers 'boy' and trying to 'order them about', caused one of several strikes on the job.

There was also plenty of local racism in the South Auckland and North Waikato towns at the time, many of which had segregation in hotels, movie theatres and barbershops. Jimmy mentioned the refusal of the Papakura Hotel to serve Dr Henry Bennett, a senior Psychiatrist, bringing the issue to national attention in 1959. Also brewing was the issue of Apartheid in South Africa, with Māori players being excluded from the New Zealand Rugby Union's 1960 tour of South Africa. Working with Māori organisations and

trade unionists, the Communist Party supported the 'No Māori, No Tour' campaign.

Other prominent CPNZ members, such as Bernie Hornfeck, later leader of the timber workers' 'wildcat' strike, and Ken Douglas, future president of the Federation of Labour and Council of Trade Unions, were drawn to the Party as a result of this campaign. Discussions I've had with other Party members suggest that while they often first came in contact with the Party through their union activism, it was the links the CP made between workplace struggle and issues like racism and imperialism that was the catalyst for them taking the plunge and signing up.

Jimmy himself joined the CPNZ in 1959. Around the same time he moved to Auckland, and over the next few years got married, had children and settled in a state house in Kupe Street, Ōrākei where he lived for the rest of his life.

Afterword: Tracing socialist history in Aotearoa

In Jimmy O'Dea's story we hear the voice of someone who was involved in many of the most celebrated campaigns of the past 60 years. Yet, while the anti-nuclear movement, the Māori Land March, and anti-apartheid protests are now heralded by historians and politicians alike as shaping New Zealand society for the better, the vital role of socialists and the wider labour movement in these struggles is left out.

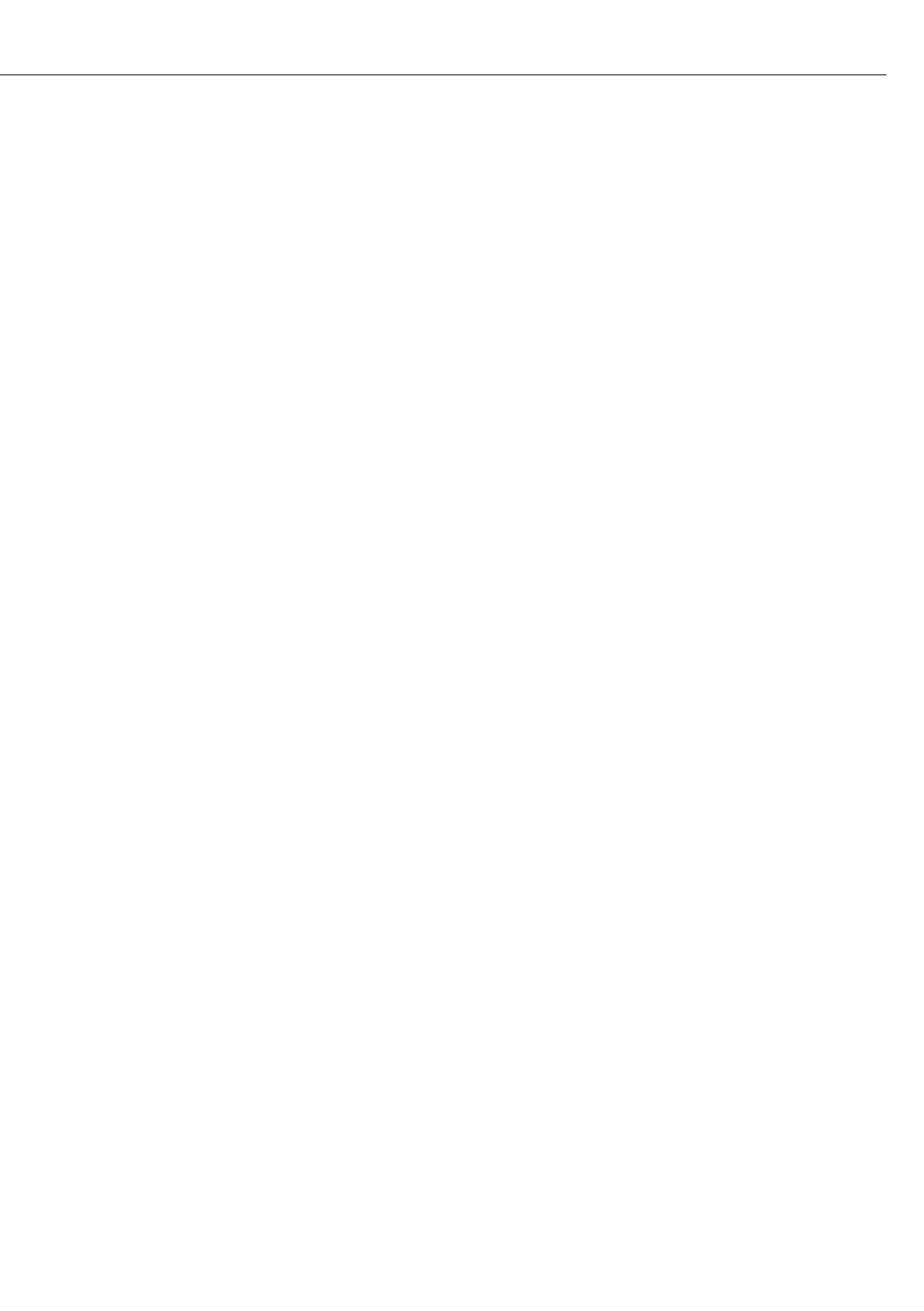
In accounts of the history of the left (rare though these are) it is commonplace to counterpoise these 'new social movements' of the late 20th century with the increasingly out-dated 'old left' of the trade unions. But this narrative never fitted with the stories I heard from older socialists in the 90s and 2000s. As well as listening to

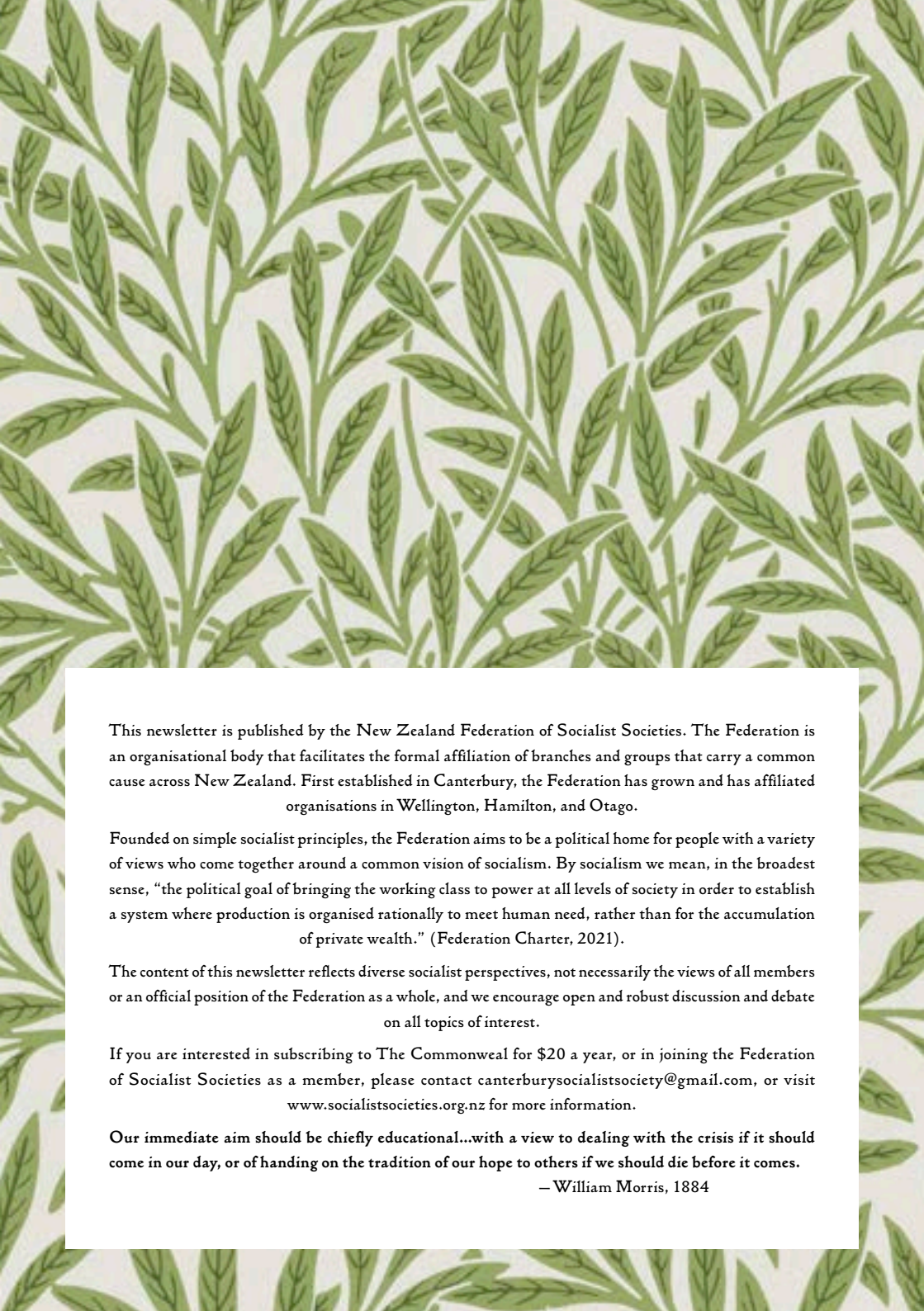
his village elders around the fire, Jimmy gained much of his historical education through discussing with fellow workers on the job. Few of us have such opportunities today, with trade unions (let alone a socialist workers' party) simply not existing in most workplaces.

The smashing of the union movement three decades ago created a terrible break in the continuity of our movement. Recovering something of what was destroyed is indeed a work of searching and rummaging. 12 years ago, I started interviewing three of the oldest members of Socialist Worker: Bernie Hornfeck, Len Parker and Jimmy O'Dea, all of whom had joined the CPNZ around 1960. I wanted to record not only their memories of historic events, but to ask what socialism meant to them and what being a socialist meant for their lives. This work was cut short by the dissolution of Socialist Worker in 2012. However, the idea of tracing the history of socialism through the words of socialist activists themselves remained and gradually broadened from a focus on one party to the entire movement.

The sheer scale of the project delayed the next steps; however over the past year, thanks to the work of a small co-ordinating committee, the *NZ's Road to Socialism Oral History Project* is underway once more. Recording an oral history of the socialist movement in the second half of the 20th century remains an enormous task, and we need many more people to get involved.

Anyone interested in supporting this work can follow the NZ's Road to Socialism page on Facebook and join the related Facebook group. Alternatively email nzroad2socialism@gmail.com





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.

If you are interested in subscribing to *The Commonwealth* for \$20 a year, or in joining the Federation of Socialist Societies as a member, please contact canterburysocialistsociety@gmail.com, or 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