THE

COMMONWEAL

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Contents

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EDITORIAL

MARTIN CRICK

Welcome to the fourth issue of Commonweal, in itself something of an achievement.

When we set out with this two years ago we aimed for a modest newsletter for members, something to keep our various branches and individual members in touch and informed about events in the different centres. This we do via the branch reports in every issue. We also invited members to write for the Newsletter and got an enthusiastic response for that first issue. Would it last? Well, here we are, Number Four, bigger and better, and with an array of new contributors. I would like to thank Francisco Hernandez in particular for finding the time to write for us during a hectic election campaign down in Dunedin. The masthead still says Newsletter, but it has morphed into something more, what exactly we might call it I'm not quite sure, but a left-wing publication reflecting members' interests can only be a good thing, and *Commonweal* is garnering interest and sales outside our ranks too. Long may it continue!

This issue will appear just before our First Annual Conference, and just after the general election results. If the current polls are correct then we are heading for a right-wing coalition of National and ACT, possibly with New Zealand First in there too. Labour is polling badly, down at 27%. This is an astonishing decline, given that Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party was elected with just over 50% of the popular vote, and when Chris Hipkins took over in January it was still polling at 38%. What has gone wrong for Labour? It was elected by voters grateful for its Covid response, and persuaded by Ardern's promise to be transformative. Those hopes have been dashed. With a big majority Labour had it within its power to be just that and it has failed. My apologies for repeating below some of the points I made in the last issue but, aside from how socialists might vote in the coming election, what is to be the future of the left in Aotearoa/New Zealand?

New Zealand has become a more unequal society on Labour's watch. It has the highest rate of homelessness in the OECD. Motels, meant to be a temporary answer to homelessness, are now a permanent one. In September 2022 it was estimated that 102,100 people were living in severe housing deprivation. Aotearoa/New Zealand tops the list of OECD countries where renters spend more than 40 per cent of their disposable income on rent. Education outcomes are worse, health outcomes are worse. Cancer patients are having to travel miles from their homes and pay up to $7000 in accommodation and treatment costs; the lack of access to modern medicines is now a pervasive feature of our healthcare system; waiting lists for routine appointments

are ever-growing. Remember the words attributed to Nye Bevan (there is no evidence that he actually said them but they certainly sum up his philosophy), the founder of the National Health Service in the UK. 'Illness is neither an indulgence for which people have to pay, nor an offence for which they should be punished, but a misfortune the cost of which should be shared by the whole community.' He certainly did say that 'No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of lack of means'.

When Chris Hipkins became leader of the Labour Party he promised to focus on 'bread and butter issues' in order to deal with the 'cost of living crisis'. There is little or nothing to demonstrate that he has acted on that promise. Meanwhile corporate profits soar. The aggregate profits of the four big energy retailers, for example, have risen 14.5% to a record high of $2.61 billion. It is not pay rises that are driving inflation but greedy bosses hiking prices to boost profits. The problem for the government is that it doesn't raise sufficient revenue to deliver what should be even a minimum level of services. As Bernard Hickey has pointed out the government could have raised some $200 billion if it had introduced a fair tax system, taxing capital gains at the same rate as every other type of income. This makes Labour's refusal to raise taxes even more incomprehensible, particularly as polling shows a majority of people support taxes on excess profits and capital gains. Until it closes the loopholes in the tax system, taxes capital gains, inheritance, and wealth, it cannot deliver services comparable to those in other countries. 311 families hold over $85 billion, while ordinary New Zealanders struggle to afford the basics. The wealthiest families in Aotearoa/New Zealand pay only 9.4% of their income in taxes, as opposed to 22% for the average Kiwi. Yet Hipkins refused to consider even the modest wealth tax proposed by Grant Robertson. Why? Because the current Labour Party is still in thrall to neoliberalism, believes that by refusing to raise taxes it will keep the votes of those who lent them in 2020 on the basis of its covid response, and because it is now dominated by a professional/managerial class who make the right noises on social policy until it threatens to hit them in their own pockets. The Party's election slogan is 'In it for You'. What an insipid, uninspiring election slogan! In what and for whom Chris? Luke Malpass, writing in *The Press*, describes Labour's economic programme as 'a pastiche of jargon, buzzwords and bureaucratic sounding niceties'. Boost our premium tourism offering? Harness our digital creativity and expertise? Make New Zealand a centre of excellence for sustainable agriculture and agricultural technology? A balanced fiscal plan? Where is the focus on inequality, which should be a pre-requisite for any party of the left? What exactly do they offer families living in sub-standard accommodation, struggling to make ends meet? There is no discernible plan or vision to fix the problems, labour appears wedded to the status quo. Instead of running a positive campaign offering real and immediate gains to the working-class, Labour has run a largely negative campaign focusing on the admittedly frightening prospect of a National/ACT government, their tax cuts for the rich, their race-baiting policies etc.

Small wonder then that many of its traditional, core voters are deserting the party, disillusioned. And, as Chris Trotter noted in the *Daily Blog* on 1st September, 'Hopes raised, and then dashed, will swiftly curdle into a witches' brew of disappointment and fury.' Right-wing

PAINTING OF NHS FOUNDER ANEURIN BEVAN
MARCUS STONE

populists and conspiracy theorists are thriving; as Naomi Klein has pointed out they get their facts wrong but their feelings right: 'the system is rigged and most people are indeed getting screwed, but by capitalism rather than a cabal of uniquely nefarious individuals.' Daryl McLauchlan has described Aotearoa/New Zealand politics as a clash of oligarchies, one in which wealthy vested interests always win, regardless of how people vote. Turchin and Piketty argue that nations like ours are governed by a 'multi-elite party system, where competing parties govern on behalf of rival factions of the ruling class.' Trotter argues that 'there is no longer a credible left-wing party' in New Zealand. He defines such a party as 'a class-oriented, mass-based democratically-structured political organisation; dedicated to promoting ideas sharply critical of laissez-faire capitalism; and committed to advancing democratic, egalitarian and emancipatory ideals across the whole of society.' So, what do socialists do, even if the unlikely happens and Labour is in a position to form a government?

One commentator, Nandor Tanczos, suggests that defeat will do Labour good, that a period out of office will rejuvenate the party and lead it to adopt 'a genuinely progressive agenda'. Meanwhile vote Green so that they have the largest caucus yet seen and so that they can show what a 'strong, effective and principled opposition looks like.' My problem there is twofold. Why didn't the Greens take on that role last time out, when Labour didn't need their support to govern? What did they gain by being co-opted into government? And secondly, do we honestly believe that a defeat for Labour will somehow make them remember their roots, emerge re-radicalised?

I think it far more likely that they will double down on their current track, continuing to appeal to the' centre', a centre which is increasingly moving further to the right and difficult to define.

Post-election what alternatives are open to us? The fate of Corbynism in the UK suggests what would surely happen here if socialists attempted to convert or subvert the Labour Party from within. The Green Party and Te Pati Māori are clearly to the left of the Labour Party on both social and economic policies, and in these pages two Green Party members suggest, in different ways, that socialists should join the Greens. Wellington councillor Nikau Wi Neera, in a fascinating *Four Essays On Institutions*, makes a proposal for a movement combining both internationalism and localism. Francisco Hernandez, standing for the Greens in Dunedin argues that, rather than re-inventing the wheel, we should join an already existing left-wing party, i.e. the Green Party. Should we?

Chris Trotter is as dismissive of the Greens as he is of the Labour Party. They have moved away from their 'earlier anti-capitalist impulses' to 'identity politics' he says. Members might also like to read his article in *The Daily Blog* of 15 September, 'Delirious Hatred: The Dystopic Tendencies of Twenty-First Century Progressivism', where he declares that he cannot vote for either Labour or the Greens. 'They are joyless', he says. A Labour-Green win would only give us 'grinding economic austerity and relentless cultural warfare.' He also accuses the Greens of cynicism, putting their economic policies to the fore for electoral purposes only, before reverting to the aforesaid cultural warfare. 'Progressive politics has moved beyond the idea of uplifting and overcoming; of building a society in which there are no masters, no servants, no rich, no poor.' Is he right to think this?

In the previous issue of *Commonweal* Tom Roud argued for a revival of civil social organisations as an alternative to state capitalist politics and as a prelude to the formation of an independent party of the left. Jim O'Malley, a Dunedin city councillor, who describes himself as a 'disappointed ex-Labour voter', is standing as an independent candidate in Dunedin. He is using the campaign, he says, 'to launch the 2033 movement. A movement with a ten- year horizon to form a new left party and win the general election.' Should we then throw our support behind that movement? Michael McClelland, responding to Tom in his article *The Making of Civil Society*, warns us to exercise caution before embarking on any attempt to form a new party of the left, whilst Victor Billot remembers the last attempt to do just that, recalling his years in the New Labour Party and then the Alliance.

Our keynote speaker from the Victorian Socialist Party will give us plenty to think about too in terms of the merits (or otherwise) of engaging in the electoral process. Or do we continue in what McClelland calls our 'pre-political phase', stand aloof from the electoral fray, educate, propagandise, and occasionally agitate, just one amongst a number of competing left-wing groups on the fringes of politics? Haydn Taylor, describing his experiences at the Socialist Workers Party Marxist Festival of Ideas in London, offers some insights into the world of one of the more 'successful' and long-lasting groupings on the revolutionary left in the UK, and the culs-de-sac down which they can end up. Interesting times comrades! We have plenty to consider at our first conference.

'THE PARTY'S ELECTION SLOGAN IS "IN IT FOR YOU". WHAT AN INSIPID, UNINSPIRING ELECTION SLOGAN! IN WHAT AND FOR WHOM CHRIS?'

REPORTS

TOM ROUD

Canterbury Socialist Society

After another six months of steady activity for the Canterbury Socialist Society many of our members will now be reading tea leaves, studying the flight path of birds, or—least insightful of all—reading opinion columns in the major newspapers to 'make sense' of the outcome of the election. How this result will affect the Socialist Society is unclear. We have only existed under a Labour Government so far—and trends around people looking for alternatives depending on the make-up of parliament are hard to predict.

ACROSS: CANTERBURY SOCIALST SOCIETY MEMBERS AT SPACE ACADEMY
CREDIT: N ROBINSON

Recent educational events have been very well attended, and we've been very fortunate to be able to host visiting scholars Paris Marx (on capitalism and technology) and Brett Christophers (on the transition to renewable energy, and the ownership models of contemporary large-scale enterprise). Both these highlight events were enlightening, and helped us continue with a very productive year. Additionally, we have continued to support other branches, with executive committee member Hayley speaking in Wellington in August, and myself joining a panel there in June. Events have been mirrored by ever-more polished and engaging episodes of the CSS radio show on Plains FM hosted by Sionainn.

A significant amount of the energy of the Executive Committee is coming to fruition the weekend that this edition of *Commonweal* is published. Our first ever National Conference promises to be engaging, and an excellent way to build and consolidate the ties across the Federation. We have looked forward to welcoming members from other centres and our keynote speaker from Australia for some time, and intend to have some significant coverage of the conference in the next *Commonweal*.

Of particular interest will be the outcome of a discussion on a local government electoral project—a contentious issue for socialists, made more so by the difficulty of answering how one could even behave 'as a socialist' in the limited and low horizons world of city and regional council politics. Should the Federation extend its current remit and engage in electoral politics? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such a project? Our keynote speaker from the Victorian Socialist Party will doubtless have some interesting things to say about this, of interest to members and supporters alike.

Regardless of the outcome of the General Election we plan to continue as we have begun, in a spirit of conviviality and camaraderie; meeting like- minded people, with room for disagreement and debate, and a sense that while we may not all decide to do precisely the same things we are still in the same chapter (if not always on the same page). Dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs may well surge, we will have to wait and see. It is paramount, nonetheless, that we continue to meet supporters, fellow travellers, and

new members with the neighbourliness we aim to encourage—that neighbourly common-sense which should not just guide our activity today, but be the guiding principle of any society that wishes to consider itself 'civilised'. Or perhaps, if what we have today is 'civilisation', we should intend to become barbarians again!

ANGUS CROWE.

Wellington Socialist Society

The last few months have been a busy time for the Wellington Socialist Society (WSS). To that end, I want to use this branch report to recap and reflect on WSS events over the last few months. In a selfish way, I hope it will allow me to remember some of the key points from those talks, however I hope it is also useful to WSS members as well as anyone else reading this, to give them a flavour of the topics we have covered of late.

First however, I'd like to acknowledge the departure of Hayden Taylor, our former Board Chair and the beating heart of WSS from its inception in early 2021. While his self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom is surely our loss, both for his enlightened and benevolent leadership and friendship, it also gives us the opportunity to grow as an organisation and harness the talent in our ranks

to further our mission of education in a comradely and convivial atmosphere, as well as extend the remit of 'civic socialism' that Hayden held so dear. Best wishes neighbour, don't let those SWP meetings depress you too much.

WSS is also happy to inform readers of the (re)establishment of the Little Red Reading Group (LRRG). The LRRG was a Wellington Workers' Educational Association (WWEA) initiative which ran from 2019-2021, mainly driven by Neil Ballantyne, and several members met through or attended these sessions. This new iteration is being run by the WWEA, with WSS providing support and promotion. The idea is that the WWEA and WSS will alternate responsibility for leading each monthly session. Ben Peterson will lead the first discussion from the WWEA side, discussing *Socialism versus Liberalism* on 20th September. It would be great if members put their hand up to lead discussions on topics they are knowledgeable about or interested in. Readings do not have to be long (some might say the shorter the better!). However, we know we have a substantial amount of knowledge in our ranks and it would be great to draw on some of that for this project. Please do let the exec know if you can help. Special thanks as well to Noah Brennan for driving this initiative from the WWEA side.

Turning to a recap of recent WSS events...

In May, Toby Boraman gave a talk titled *Lessons from the Picket Line*. Toby, a lecturer in Politics at Massey University, examined grassroots movements and workers' mobilisations in the 1970s and 80s to combat the rising cost of living and, later, deregulation. While initially often successful, a major rout occurred in the 1980s as widespread restructuring,

de-industrialisation, and neoliberalism were harshly imposed by capital and the state. While acknowledging that we are now living in the shadow of this period, Toby identified five break points in capitalism in Aotearoa today that provide opportunities for socialists to take action: The fact that New Zealand is a small trading nation; logistics and supply chains; the crisis of social reproduction; precious worker; and the 'polycrisis' (the simultaneous and mutually reinforcing economic, technological, and ecological crises we face in the twenty first century). To be sure, Toby's injunction to 'look at where capitalism is at today', rather than go back to some previous form of analysis and practice, is still ringing in my ears,

IT HAS BEEN A BANNER YEAR FOR THE WELLINGTON SOCIALIST SOCIETY
CREDIT: WSS

especially whenever I find myself having too rosy a view of the pre-WWI SPD.

In June we hosted a panel entitled *Social Democracy—Then & Now*. This event featured Jim McAloon (Professor of History at Victoria University of Wellington), Tamatha Paul (Wellington City Councillor & Green Party candidate for Wellington Central), and Tom Roud (Canterbury Socialist Society Executive Member).

Jim, speaking to the historical roots of social democracy in New Zealand, highlighted the importance of both conscription during World War 1, and the wider international tendency in international politics to seek a middle road between capitalism and imperialism on the one hand, and Bolshevism on the other, in bringing together the founders of the Labour Party in 1916. Appeals to women based on inclusion, and to middle-class progressives also helped to broaden the base and 'talk a language of solidarity' that could be taken up by more than just male workers.

On the economic front, under-consumption and an inadequate level of demand were the Labour Party's main diagnosis, drawing on Keynes and other exponents of the 'multiplier effect'. Higher levels of government spending and investment would lead to a virtuous circle in which every dollar spent would create a greater amount coming back in terms of new income, jobs, and demand. Economic

modernisation and nationalism, welfare, the integration of unions into the political structure, and the government taking responsibility for monetary policy were also key tenets of the Labour Party by 1935 when they took power for the first time.

Jim also identified a number of flaws in the social-democratic program: the tendency to think that economics had become a simple, technical matter; having no answer to what came next after the welfare state; assuming that the Tory acceptance of the welfare state was permanent. He also questioned whether social-democratic parties were accepting of the new social movements of the 1960's such as the women's, indigenous, and environmental movements. Ultimately, Jim left us with the question of whether social-democracy was a form of politics for the time, or whether it still has utility today.

'WE ALSO HAVE SEVERAL IRONS IN THE FIRE THAT I HOPE WILL CONTINUE TO SEE WSS SLOWLY BUILD ITS MANA AND ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A FIXTURE IN NOT JUST THE LEFT POLITICAL, BUT WIDER CULTURAL SCENE OF THE CAPITAL.'

Tamatha spoke about her background and experience growing up as a self-described urban Māori in Tokoroa, and how that informs her practice as a young politician today. There was a dichotomy between the neglect of the town by councillors and MPs and the mutual aid that the community provided for itself, and a recognition of how this same dynamic was now playing out in Wellington. A desire for greater provisions of public housing, transport, and basic services were also key themes, as well as the capitalist realism of her fellow councillors who accuse her and other left-wing representatives of being too 'ideological'.

Tom, echoing some of the thoughts from his article in the last edition of *Commonweal*, discussed the 'room for social democracy today'. He presented social-democracy not as a set of policies but as a process and practice. He asked are we required to be 'as radical as reality itself'? Then how should the far left accommodate itself to a reality that hasn't kept pace with its desires for radical change in the twenty first century? Positing that in New Zealand the far left has often laid claim to a heritage that doesn't seem to really exist today, he believed we could however aim to build and rebuild a living tradition in the here and now and learn from the efforts of previous traditions of practice in which self-organisation and learning through necessity were paramount. This would be a decades long process of class formation, rather than an ecosystem of political causes.

Tom also made the point that the steady expansion of the market to provide for all aspects of life (social, entertainment, cultural), including for working-class people, has meant a lot of what used to be self-organised and self-directed by working people has become mediated and integrated into either the market, or the social state. Nonetheless, the existence of groups like our own Socialist Societies, pursuing both social and educational self-organised activity, shows there are some examples of needs not being met and—most importantly—opportunities for working people to collectively organise their own lives. He described this as a 'necessary, if insufficient' process as far as affecting the enormous change to society that socialism proposes, but it provides one small way for the working class to mature into a class which can rule.

In July we hosted Russell Campbell, lecturer in film at Victoria University of Wellington and co-founder of Vanguard Films, for a lecture entitled *Wildcats: Exploring the Relationship Between Workers and Unions Through Film*. Russell took us through two films—*The Rank and File*, a Ken Loach directed docudrama closely based on the 1970 strike at the Pilkingtons glass works in St Helens near Liverpool, and *Wildcat*,

a documentary by Vanguard Films that depicts the 1977 timberworkers' strike in the Bay of Plenty. In both films, a militant workforce decides to strike despite their bureaucratic union leadership.

What struck me about these films was that the striking men were essentially fighting for democratic rights – the right to associate, organise, and make demands without interference, and to elect and recall their officials. The relationship between the strike committees, the rank-and-file members, and their families was also interesting. In *The Rank and File*, the men's consciousness of their power as producers grows as the strike reaches its climax. However, they fail to bring their wives and children, who suffer not only because the men aren't bringing in wages but also because of isolation and intimidation from hostile parts of the community, with them on the journey. In *Wildcat*, the families seemed to be more involved in the strike itself, either working with the men to harvest, collect, and distribute food and other goods, look after children, or attend demonstrations.

While both strikes ultimately fail, Russell highlighted the pattern of 'tragic employment' each follows as at first the rank-and-file movement gained significant ground, only to be thwarted by their own officials, the national union confederation, and the employers, with government support. However, lessons could still be drawn from this pattern, both about the key inflection points of each strike, and about the relative power between parties – the rank-and-file movement and the national union confederation in particular – and Russell noted that when the national union body supports rank-and-file movements they can and often have been successful in their demands.

In August, the CSS's own Hayley Roud gave the first iteration of her talk *Adorno, Aesthetics, & Alienation*. Given many NZFSS members have seen this talk in other locations I won't go into the details too much. However, our brief foray into Theodor W. Adorno's aesthetic theory brought up questions around whether avant-garde art can realise its ideals in a reified world, and what happens when art itself becomes commodified and the ability to digest, critique, and discuss art becomes just another consumer identity?

And most recently our September lecture *Confronting Fascism: Socialist Knowledge and the Far-Right in Interwar Europe*, presented by Chamsy el-Ojeili. Chamsy, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Victoria University of Wellington, gave us a rollicking overview of different socialist views on fascism, emphasising their breadth and diversity. Drawing together social-democratic, Bolshevik, council communist, and Frankfurt School interpretations of fascism (and no doubt others I'm forgetting here) Chamsy provided a comprehensive overview that still left plenty of threads for the audience to pick up themselves later. Personally, I was intrigued by his description of Ernst Bloch's ability to find utopianism and hope even in fascist ideologies and look forward to digging into that at some point.

On a personal note, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to all members for putting their trust in me to help steer the WSS ship. Hayden put an enormous amount of work into establishing WSS, so in many ways it hasn't been too difficult, however the support I've had from the committee and the general membership has been gratefully received. One of my goals has been to flatten our organisational structure so that 'board chair' isn't so much of a role outside of committee meetings and the AGM. Instead, we are

building a community of members who pitch in both at events and in between to accomplish our goals. I don't want to be in charge, merely a co-ordinator who facilitates the shared aims of the membership. I feel that we are well on the way to achieving this aim and I thank you all for making what we do happen on a month-to-month basis. We also have several irons in the fire that I hope will continue to see WSS slowly build its mana and establish itself as a fixture in not just the left political, but wider cultural scene of the capital.

Lastly, WSS wish to extend our thanks and well-wishes to our comrades in the Canterbury Socialist Society ahead of the first national conference of the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies. It's no mean feat to organise such an event, co-ordinating local and national members, as well as international guests. Several of our members are travelling to Christchurch for the conference and I have no doubt that our party will be received graciously. I for one, am looking forward to taking part and catching up with neighbours both old and new. I'm sure it will be a great success. However, if things do get hairy, try to remember the words of Walter Benjamin: 'This storm is what we call progress'.

GARETH MCMULLEN

Otago Socialist Society

At the time of writing the Otago Socialist Society is looking forward to our AGM on September 24th. We'll be hearing from our member Francisco Hernandez, who is running for the Dunedin electorate in this year's general election on the Green Party ticket. Regardless of the outcome, which will be known by the date of this issue's publication, we're glad to see the amplification of socialist ideas in mainstream politics and wish Francisco all the best for his campaign.

On the subject of electoral strategy, in August we were proud to present the first New Zealand screening of *Oh Jeremy Corbyn: The Big Lie*. This feature-length documentary was produced by Platform Films, a production company that has a long history of making short films for British labour unions. The documentary offers the perspectives of many Corbyn supporters within the UK Labour Party who were the targets of a relentless campaign by the Party's bureaucratic corps and many of its MPs against Corbyn's leadership. It was a fascinating insight into how rank-and-file leftists at the branch level of the party were marginalized, isolated, and often expelled using disingenuous accusations of anti-Semitism; curiously, a good number of those so accused were themselves Jewish. The downfall of Corbyn and his movement within Labour poses interesting problems for the question of whether, and if so, how, to pursue an electoral socialist strategy in New Zealand.

A few of our members will be at the first ever NZFSS conference in October. We're sure lots of valuable discussions and debates will be had, and those of us who can't make it to this important gathering of socialists from across the motu look forward to hearing about it.

FEDERATION OF

SOCIALIST SOCIETIES

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

LABOUR WEEKEND 2023

CHRISTCHURCH

N. WI NEERA (NGĀTI TOARANGATIRA | KĀI TAHU)

COMPOSER, SOLDIER, WELLINGTON CITY COUNCILLOR

On Institutions (Four Essays)

Ko Tainui te waka,
Ko Whitireia te maunga
Ko Raukawakawa te moana
Ko Takapūwāhia rāua ko Hongoeka ngā marae,
Ko Ngāti Toarangatira, rātou ko Kāi Tahu, ko Ngāri Pāhauwera, ko Ngāpuhi ngā iwi.
Ko Te Rauparaha te tupuna ariki,
Ko Nīkau Wi Neera e tuhituhi ana.

Author's note: take a shot every time the word 'institutions' is written.

I. Longevity

As a young, political man, I too experienced the inevitable phase which has recently become the stuff of parody across social media—I was fascinated by the Roman Republic. I cursed Caesar, wept for hapless Brutus, and above all lamented the fate of noble Cicero. Cicero, as the authors I read painted him, was a believer in institutions. A man who loved the law and despised the legislators. Indeed, it could be said Cicero's perfect government was one totally absent of politicians—composed purely of institutions, with the law, not men, to govern.

What Cicero realised, unlike many men of his era, was that institutional vitality is the most consistent guarantor of society. Strong institutions have customarily allowed a given constitutional arrangement, for better or worse, to persist. The

most notable examples in Cicero's day, his own people aside, were the Spartans, who famously refused to adopt the heady new democracy of their neighbours in favour of living by their own constitutional arrangements, and thereby remained a pariah for three-quarters of a millennium.

However, as Xenophon writes in the *Lacedaemonion Politeia,* the longevity of the Spartans was due to fanatical adherence to their constitutional arrangements, and the stasis eventually led to their downfall. Even after the decline of their society to a small, backwater town, the Spartans still lived under the same monarchs, governing councils, and laws as their ancestors. They endured, unreformed, until they were subsumed by the great Northern superpower of Macedon, and later by the Roman-aligned Achaean League.

Moderation in the tempo of reform has, in the past, ensured the perpetuation of a given arrangement past the natural lifespan which its circumstances and traditional institutions may grant it. However, the original institutions must be designed to accept reform within certain parameters, and there exists a natural speed-limit from the reformic stress which a society is able to accept before the point is reached whereat collapse or revolution must follow.

At present, I argue, we are at terrible risk of meeting the fate of the Spartans. Our parameters of liberal capitalism allow for aesthetic reforms, whilst preserving a blind adherence to the paradigm of our institutions as we are laid low by our own existential threat; our changing climate and collapsing biosphere. At our current trajectory, we may well end up a small, backwater species persisting on a dead Earth with a MMP government elected every three years.

II. Whakapapa

What makes our institutions of the 21st century so remarkably resilient, yet so inadequate?

The historian E. Hobsbawm argues that the greatest anomaly of the 20th century was the ultimate victory of liberal democracy. Laymen and intellectuals were more or less in agreement, following the utter collapse of the international order after the defeat of the Central Powers, that the grand experiment of democracy as a phenomenon was in final retreat[1]. Certainly nobody serious would have predicted it to remain, in almost original fashion, as the predominant mode of government of planet Earth in the year 2023.

The reasons for liberal democracy's triumph are complex, but Hobsbawm identifies the key tipping point as emerging between the years of 1925 and 1950. Whereas after the First World War, social and economic reforms were implemented by a fearful, declining ruling class in the face of growing revolutionary sentiment across Europe, the alignment of ideologically diverse powers in the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s represented the genesis of a war for defence of democracy rather than advancement of the revolution. This planted the seed for 'democracy of a new kind', which arose after the Second World War as the primary opposition to international communism. In all three scenarios, we can see the institution of stable liberal democracy act as the choice defensive tool against an externally destabilising force. This is truly its greatest strength, and to us in the present day, its greatest weakness.

1 Hobsbawm, E. J. (1995). Chapter 4: 'The Fall of Liberalism'. *In The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century,* 1914-1991. Abacus.

'...THE PERFECT STASIS OF OUR INSTITUTIONS PROVES ITSELF TIME AND AGAIN TOTALLY UNABLE TO RESPOND WITH DUE AGILITY TO THE CRISES OF CLASS AND CLIMATE WAR'

Liberal democratic institutions are ostensibly created for effective allocation of resources and the prevention of power's tendency to concentrate[2]. Unlike the communist experiments of the 20th century, they are not explicitly created to deliver ubiquity or respond decisively to existential threats. Just as the democracies of the day prevaricated and dallied when faced with the global threat of Nazi Germany, we hesitate before the global threat of climate change. Without the climate equivalent of a Pearl Harbour event, our current institutions are, by design, poorly equipped to respond decisively. Further, with our institutions languishing under the domination of global capital, global problems which require pure co-operation beyond 'market forces' are seriously disadvantaged.

The novelty of the 21st-century iteration of these hallowed institutions is, of course, the internet and mass media—along with the refinement of existing global finance and military-industrial structures. Military and economic hegemony have existed since the dawn of the first nation-states, but I argue that true cultural and ideological hegemony was only made possible in the unique decade of the 1990s. It is incredible that the 1990s are routinely considered a 'nothing' decade, when they contained perhaps the most consequential transformations of liberal institutions which enabled ultimate Western ideological dominance. The fall of the Soviet Union in '91, public access to the World-Wide Web in '94, and the years leading to the passing of the US Patriot Act in '01, along with a myriad other factors, collectively birthed our current iteration of liberal democracy.

The ability to utterly normalise the paradigm of democratic institutions worldwide, short of a few states in Africa and Asia—though even these states routinely appeal to the aesthetic legitimacy of the global order with titles such as 'Democratic Republic'—is enabled in the main by the hijacking of the base sentiment of popular sovereignty promulgated via mass media. The greatest ideological challenge to the US-aligned empire is the People's Republic of China and the remnant communist states of Latin America and Southeast Asia, which are collectively the victims in the popular consciousness of the greatest ideological operation in mankind's history.

Locally, as a satellite state of this empire, we in this country are constrained by the institutions of Europe, the culture-war paradigms of North America, and the economics of global capital. Despite Aotearoa's unique potential to manifest a fusion of European and Polynesian models of government, we remain amongst the most ideologically, culturally, and ontologically repressed societies in the world. To put it contextually, a contemporary idea such as indigenous land sovereignty is so alien to our various paradigms that our institutions cannot even parse it except aesthetically; board seats for iwi members and consultation on regional plans are active self-defence by the institutions to safeguard its continuity and hegemony. It is telling indeed that one of our few locally unique debates, namely around 'co-governance', is fought on these terms, rather than on the terms of explicit indigenous sovereignty. This routine defanging is not limited to social issues; class war is reduced to taxation, climate revolution is reduced to a Green

2 Modlik, H. (2023, May). *Strengthening Democracy through Open Government*. Transparency International New Zealand. Wellington; Victoria University of Wellington.

New Deal and a $2bn green energy fund in partnership with Blackrock. This is a defining mechanism which underpins our institutions, which will ultimately lead to disaster if the system continues to operate under acceptable levels of stress and thus endures.

Liberal democratic institutions are therefore incredibly robust, defensible, and utterly incapable of addressing existential threats to mankind—because such non-ideological threats do not imperil the institution itself. The continued existence of this system seems to indicate that at least somebody must benefit, even in the face of total extinction. One hears an august old statesman ask *"Cui bono?"* Naturally, this leads us to the real question: who's in charge here?

III. Nobody

When I was younger, I assumed evil men were responsible for the world's woes, personally, intentionally, and discretely responsible. 20th-century socialist doctrine personalises the bourgeois. This is useful, because it is easier to motivate a proletarian population to action through a personified class enemy. However, in the face of the crises of the postmodern age, the personalisation of the bourgeois has been sublimated into a characteristic of our ideological paradigm, as it is easier to direct outrage towards a Bezos, or a Musk, or a Zuckerberg, than it is to recognise them as several heads of a hydra whose hearts beats far deeper down, deep within our institutions.

The true beneficiaries of the ideological dominance of our institutions are the institutions themselves. They have become undead, zombie institutions which could comfortably perpetuate and reproduce indefinitely with nobody at the helm. The bourgeoisie will die with us as the biophysical capacity of Papatūānuku is reached and the ecosphere fails. By contrast, so long as a single person casts a vote, the institution endures. It is a collective illusion which we will willingly hallucinate until the end of days, if it comes to it.

Upon my election to the Wellington City Council I was immediately shocked by how little power my colleagues and I seemed, on the surface, to wield. We frequently vote in line with officer advice, who in turn are interpreting the information provided by their staff, who are in turn acting within the confines of their job descriptions for a wage. Process suffuses and dictates everything, and prudent governance often means doing less rather than more. Our influence is largely extra-institutional, or at least outside of the confines of process; politics happens by the water cooler rather than in the debating chamber. It is my sincere belief that the dominance of process and the strength of our institutions would enable both central and local governments to operate for decades with nobody at the helm.

Were one to describe this state of affairs to matua Cicero he might weep with joy and envy. However, the perfect stasis of our institutions proves itself time and again totally unable to respond with due agility to the crises of class and climate war, as we produce plan after plan and run our city by a failed neoliberal corporate model and hope for different results. We have even undertaken novel measures to enhance our democratic processes, including my Māori ward seat, and initiatives such as Citizens' Assemblies, yet we are still immensely constrained by legislation, which is inherited from a parliament constrained by a judiciary, constrained by precedent, constrained by history itself. In politics as a day job, even the most radical of us can only amend motions, influence

policy where we can, and hope that our endless, edentated abstractions of revolutionary praxis will one day add up to revolution.

What, then, can be done outside of the so-called halls of power to bring our institutions into a form which provides ubiquity for all, or else bring society to general revolution sufficient to create ground-up institutions which both are fit for the future and deliver on the promise of the past?

IV. What?

The defining ideological paradigm of the 20th century, when compared to the postmodern age, was the dialectic. This manifested as a preoccupation with binarism, which led to the socialist doctrine of pro forma revolution, and only revolution, as the driver of meaningful social change. Whilst this holds true, the world of zombie institutions necessitates a certain level of nuance, and in an institutional environment defined by stasis at every level, action becomes the single currency of revolution, over any notions of ideological purity. Outcome is the single metric by which action can be measured.

Proponents of liberal democracy frequently espouse its universal enfranchisement as a virtue. However, its universality makes it superlatively selfish. Universal institutions absolutely cannot accommodate alternate modes of power, and the existence of dual power to such a degree as to afford communities true sovereignty would exceed the institutional parameters to an extremely stressful extent. The latent threat of unions, co-operatives, and mutual aid networks has been seen to extract heavy concessions out of liberal democratic institutions in the past, and when pushed far enough (for example, to the extent of workers' *soviets*) can be inspissated to topple entire regimes. These examples also have the benefit of being known to society, despite the enduring psychological operations to memory-hole them as a relic of the past.

Dual power, to have any chance of growing to a vehicle to shake and stress the clockwork, zombie institutions of their opposition, must satisfy three conditions if it is to be revolutionary.

Firstly, it must be sovereign. It must consist solely of mutual aid relations, and be conducted without the influence of, or support to, a 'legitimate' institutional power. Unions of the 21st century can stumble here, as dues are occasionally used (up to NZD$90,000 in a certain case this year) for political donations—mostly to the Labour Party. There is no shame in taking funding for community projects, but the executive core of any revolutionary organisation must be totally independent.

Secondly, it must be action-oriented. For power to be effective, it must present a meaningful alternative to the institutions it is challenging. This is arguably the easiest step; community food gardens, local healthcare, electricity generation, community defence, and the like are all accessible ways to subvert institutional supremacy. These actions are material, and less overtly political, and are more likely to mobilise people than purely theoretical or educational movements alone.

Thirdly, it must be sustainable. If there is one thing revolutionaries must learn from the opposition, it is that organisational robustness allows a movement longevity and resilience. Dual power must be prepared to resist infiltration, astroturfing, plants, psyops, and every tool the machine has at its disposal to undermine and destroy it—yet succeed by virtue alone. It must be distributed, to some degree, and able to operate in the event of the loss of key personalities or premises.

With all these criteria met, dual power becomes an institution unto itself, playing on and enhancing local culture and neighbourhood, and offering an immediately viable alternative to dependence on the institutions and power structures which maintain the oppressive contradictions of capitalism. The only remedy to institutional stasis is revolutionary immediacy. Localism is the ultimate rejection of Capital's institutional hegemony, and it is often said that the most revolutionary thing that any one of us can do, today, is to meet our neighbours.

Nā reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa i pānui mai.

(V. Epilogue)

Though it is easy to bemoan the personalisation of the bourgeoisie, and identify institutions as the greatest opposition to revolution, it is still useful to recognise that the shape of our society allows the Prime Minister to have more in common, in terms of class interests, with a Bunnings employee than with the true global finance carteliers of the world. It becomes us to recognise the personal expression of the tendencies of Capital, though myopic and short-lived they may be. Therefore, the following coda, as a complement to the scope of the previous essays, is appended.

The following was originally published online in July of 2023 and written in Vienna, Austria:

At certain magnitudes of personal wealth, national identity effectively ceases to exist. Capital has flowed freely around the world for centuries, and as every year passes, national boundaries mean less and less for the movement of wealth, data, and persons. Individuals doing business on a global scale can move freely across borders, live anywhere for functionally unlimited amounts of time, and speak a single language in familiar corporate or luxury environment designed to cater to them, regardless of the host country. Every hotel, every forum, every conference, every Davos meeting looks the same and serves the same monolithic class aesthetic of the Untethered, the true International. These are citizens only of global Capital, and they have no allegiance to either the country of their birth or their host tax haven at any given time. A passport is meaningless except insofar as it facilitates access to Capital.

The elite are disconnected from the peculiarities of national cultures, because those peculiarities are a fundamentally proletarian experience. Speaking local languages, cooking local kai, managing local laws, even driving on a particular side of the road are practices undertaken on their behalf. All defining performance elements of culture come from the particular proletarian experience of a place. Patriotism and cultural identity belong to working people. It is an opiate, a blinder to the nature of the world at higher magnitudes of wealth, yet also a source of strength.

The horrific, mundane reality of Capital can only be countered by internationalism, not globalism. Working people of all lands have more in common with each other than with the elites who share their passport. International struggle and localism is how culture is won and preserved. Get to know your local dairy owner, meet your neighbours, thank your bus driver, go to your marae, and spend time with your old people, and defy the capitalist to whom these mean nothing more than an increment on a bottom line.

'FOR POWER TO BE EFFECTIVE, IT MUST PRESENT A MEANINGFUL ALTERNATIVE TO THE INSTITUTIONS IT IS CHALLENGING'

FRANCISCO HERNANDEZ

We Should All Be Watermelons

I am writing this article on the morning of 2 October 2023 after having attended about 9 candidate meetings, made 2000+ phone calls, doorknocked on 690+ doors and talked to 2500+ students on campus. When it is published I will either be a Green MP elected on the most successful-ever result for a third party in New Zealand or a couple of cabs off the rank. Voting will begin in a few hours so barring any catastrophic last-minute collapses or severe polling errors, we are hopefully on track for this outcome.

This article is a response, of sorts, to comrade Roud's challenge in the previous issue of the *Commonweal*. I believe, (and I acknowledge that it is in my self-interest to believe), that rather than expending effort in establishing a new left party socialists should simply join the existing Green Party. During the Dunedin debates and candidate meetings I found myself sharing the stage with Jim O' Malley, an independent candidate and Dunedin City Councillor, who is calling for the establishment of a new 'Left of Centre' party, a so-called 2033 movement. During the debate we found ourselves agreeing with each other. The only substantial difference that came out in the debates was his slight preference for a high-income tax over the Green wealth tax. It seemed to me that rather than establishing a new left party it would make more sense to join an already existing Left Party. It might be bold to claim that the Greens are a Left Party, but I will be doing that in this article, and suggesting why socialists should get involved in the Green Party and help it to be even more left-wing than it currently is.

The Green policy manifesto in the 2023 election is the most radical policy manifesto a mainstream party has ever put forward during an election in recent New Zealand history. It calls for radical action that would dramatically improve the material conditions of the working class in Aotearoa, rebalancing wealth-cum-power between workers and the bosses, and advancing the cause of an active, interventionist state that takes climate action and works to end poverty. Let me take each of these in turn.

Improving the material condition of the working class is what I regard as the ultimate objective of socialism. The entire reason we want to seize the means of production from capital is because we want to run them in the interests of the working class and redistribute the profits back to us. In order to improve the material condition of working people in the short term you have two options: you can help reduce the burden of expenditure on households or increase income. The Green policy platform does both: the former through a programme of expanding state services such as free mental and dental care, free public transport, and transforming ACC into an agency of comprehensive care that covers all care, not only accidents; the latter through a tax-free threshold of $10,000, reforming *working for families* to a system of higher universal payments, and a guaranteed minimum income of $385 a week for everyone. Compared to the status quo, working families will be between $10-300 a week better off as a result of these changes.

The best part about the programme of redistribution is how we've tied improvements to the material condition

of workers to the urgent need to rebalance wealth in Aotearoa. The IRD report investigating the wealth tax showed how urgent the need is, when the wealthiest of New Zealanders pay less on their effective income compared to nurses and teachers and other workers. Our wealth tax, along with increases to the trust tax rate and corporate tax rate, represent a significant effort to rebalance wealth from the wealthy few to the many. And it's about time—while leftist Governments such as Spain's PSOE and even the UK's Conservative government responded to the cost -of- living crisis by levying some kind of tax on excess profits, the very wealthy in New Zealand have been allowed to get away with making the public shoulder the burden of the pandemic and inflation. As Bernard Hickey has reported asset holders here have seen their net worth increase by nearly $1 trillion and the banking sector saw their profits increase by 60% over the past 3 years.

But the wealth tax isn't the only way the Greens are proposing to rebalance wealth and political power from the landlord class to the working class. We've also proposed rent controls and a landlord register to stop bad landlords from treating their tenants as cash cows. In workplaces we have proposed moving to a system of universal union membership again, with workers defaulting to union membership but with provisions

GREEN CANDIDATE FOR TAIERI, SCOTT WILLIS, WITH DUNEDIN CANDIDATE FRANCISCO HERNANDEZ
SUPPLIED

‘THE GREEN POLICY MANIFESTO IN THE 2023 ELECTION IS THE MOST RADICAL POLICY MANIFESTO A MAINSTREAM PARTY HAS EVER PUT FORWARD DURING AN ELECTION IN RECENT NEW ZEALAND HISTORY’

to opt out. This will strengthen unions and allow workers to have a strong voice and, combined with the Green proposal to allow solidarity strikes and political strikes again, has the potential to fundamentally transform the relationship between employers and employees.

The Green policy proposal to create a guaranteed minimum income that beneficiaries, the disabled, and students, can access without an oppressive welfare bureaucracy policing and subjugating them will also embolden the working class. Capitalists use the threat of unemployment and destitution to crush the attempts of workers to organise—by ensuring that everyone has enough to thrive, we unload this machine gun and deprive the capitalists of their reserve army of labour.

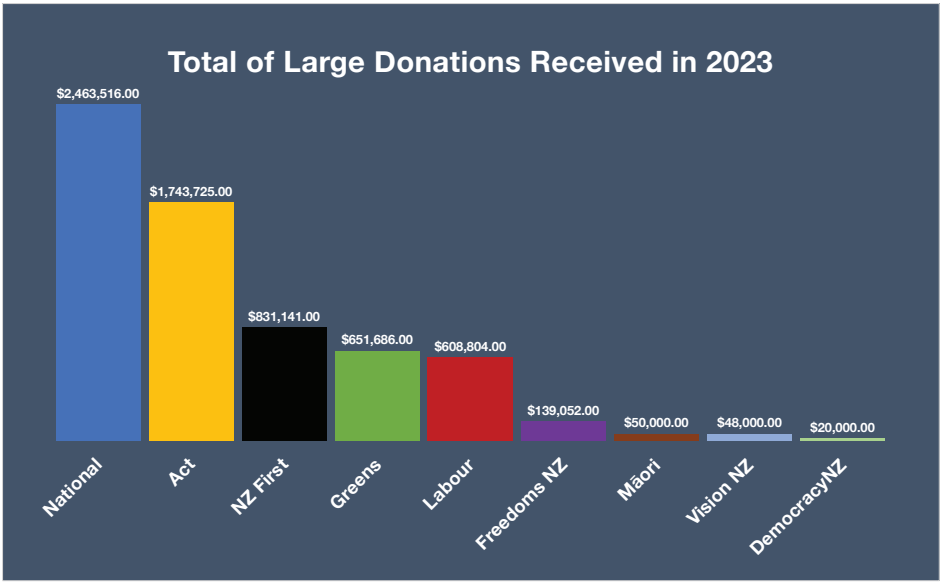
Last but not least—the Greens have also proposed electoral reform to block the ultra-rich from trying to buy elections—as they seem to be trying to do in this year’s election.

Whilst a big, active, interventionist state does not necessarily a socialist state make, solving the wicked problems that plague today’s 21st century post-capitalist hellscape will require us to embrace and reimagine collective action that will require the state to coordinate it. During this term of government the Greens have already led moves away from the neoliberal ‘contractor’ state towards a state that actively embraces it’s strength to procure at scale and command vast capital reserves. The move away from the PTOM (Public Transport Operating Model) to Sustainable Public Transport Framework (SPTF) will enable councils to directly own and control public transport operations. The Green manifesto also commits to the creation of a Ministry of Green Works which would work alongside the Ministry for Climate Change to procure and build the green infrastructure that Aotearoa desperately needs. From inter-regional rail to light rail within cities, to nature-based solutions such as wetland restoration and native tree planting, Green solutions not only cut to the heart of the climate crisis but will form the basis of a full employment policy.

This bold, beautiful vision for a more just, more prosperous and more sustainable Aotearoa was what convinced me to be a candidate for this year’s election. Don’t get me wrong—I have also been disconcerted by how quiet the Greens have been under the Labour government and how we seemed to be drifting under the threshold thanks to our seeming silence in the face of Labour’s inaction on climate change and inequality—but this campaign has taken a decidedly left populist path and I think we can keep the party in this orientation as (I am predicting) the country lurches towards a National-Act-NZF 3- headed monster.

But this manifesto didn’t come about by accident. It was the hard work of the Green Left that enabled us to take the commanding heights of policy making within the Green Party and sell it to the wider membership. That the wider membership not only accepted, but endorsed and sold these policies, including the moderate co-Leader James Shaw, shows how much promise there is in the Green Party.

If the ultimate objective of the Socialist Movement in New Zealand is to create an independent left party with which to pursue electoral politics, then the Green Party already exists as a vehicle. As the most radically democratic party in NZ, with the policies and list ranking set by membership, surely it would be far easier to use the cadres, branding and material that already exist within the party rather than reinventing the



wheel? There is no real harm in socialists getting involved with the Green Party. If I am elected to Parliament I will be in a caucus with six self-identified socialists and with a strong and active Green Left and Union Greens network. We can form the anchor with which to drag the party to the left and continue the fight against the right-wing government's programme of austerity.

Socialists will also be able to practise electoral politics in a relatively well-resourced and competent political machine. Another good reason is to form networks and connections with like- minded people across New Zealand politics. For better or worse, the Green Party of Aotearoa has recruited a strong cohort of leftist cadres and getting involved in the party is a good way to form relationships.

Last but not least, there is the ability for socialists to exert influence within the Green Party itself. The party, for all its flaws, is highly democratic to the point where the co-leader and sitting minister could randomly get rolled in a putsch a year before the election. Socialists getting involved in policy making and candidate voting will enable us to push like- minded comrades. There are understandable concerns that the Greens could drift in a rightward direction—the oft-raised spectre of the teal deal. If that were the case, a strong nuclei of socialists within the Green caucus would be able to split off and establish an independent left party—similar to how the Greens broke away from the Alliance over objections to NZ's participation in the war in Afghanistan.

No other political party in New Zealand has ever successfully entered parliament from outside parliament since the beginning of the MMP era. Other less 'successful' minority parties under MMP have been defections from pre-existing parties. Rather than trying to bash our heads against the wall in a long march to futility, let us turn our attention to the Green Party and make it better.

TOTAL OF LARGE DONATIONS RECEIVED IN 2023 (ONLY COUNTS DONATIONS WORTH $20,000 OR MORE).

SOURCE: ELECTORAL COMMISSION

MICHAEL MCCLELLAND

Before and After the 'Pre-Political'

In the most recent issue of *The Commonweal*, Canterbury Socialist Society's Tom Roud addressed with a sense of foreboding the stormy weather that lay between that issue of the Federation's newsletter and the forthcoming New Zealand general election. Chagrined by 'the appearance of opposition, competition, [and] difference without any content of significance' under capitalism, Roud spoke of the ongoing 'left/right/left/right hoof beat' of electoral politics, before signing off, 'vote if you want to, or not, but let's get on with discussing what actually needs to be done'. Capitalist state politics and its criticisms are by no means particular to New Zealand; Roud's assessment of Labour and National as 'two sides of the new Party of Order' could be swapped out for Gore Vidal's famous quip about the 'two right wings' of the 'party of property' in US politics. Yet, this does not diminish the fact that such claims are needed, and perhaps the reason for Roud's weary tone is that his message bears repeating in this country. For those living in far-flung lands, there is always a sense that the world might be changing under our feet—that is, continents away. As the Australian Marxist Guido Baracchi said in 1920, 'a Communist Europe and America will mean a Communist Australia, whether the proletariat of this country likes it or not [...] but it must "do its bit".' If there is any truth to this, the New Zealand Left would similarly do well to not let its particularity turn into provincialism, as it would risk further disorientation with respect to the outside world. The convenient thing about political elections, at least, is that they function as signposts at which we can all stop and check our bearings in our race to catch up with the reality that capitalism produces. For socialists, elections present a periodic opportunity to look at capitalism's latest efforts to reform itself, and compare these efforts with the past.

While we approach our election, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the USA is slumping in number compared with its high point in 2021. Momentum, in the UK, are reportedly down a third from their peak membership during the Corbyn years. The *Jacobin Show*, for a brief time, even folded, and the magazine's headlines are no longer gleeful as they were in the Sanders years. In other countries, like Sweden, Germany, and elsewhere, the more popular Left groups are experiencing similar pangs of torpor, which poses the question of whether the disaffection will trickle down to our part of the world. However, the reverse appears to be true. The Federation of Socialist Societies, which, while much smaller than the groups mentioned above, charts as the largest socialist organisation in the country, and one whose membership has grown while overseas groups have started to decline.

This appears peculiar for an organisation that is not dedicated to gaining recruits, but hosting educational and social events. Yet, its formation followed the successes of international equivalents that were similarly amorphous. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) had, for some years, been publishing sober-minded Left analyses in the *Weekly Worker*. There was also the emergence of the Marxist Unity Group (MUG), a DSA-adjacent group inspired

by the neo-Kautskyan formulations of the CPGB. Further, both CPGB and MUG featured on panels and in journalism hosted by the Platypus Affiliated Society, another Left educational organisation that grew despite this period of Left demoralisation, and which I belong to.

Still, these groups were by no means titanic. If their small memberships suggested anything, it was not only that their theoretical inclinations might have limited their numbers, but that critics might have felt justified in accusing them of parochialism, especially given the post-Occupy period's shift towards immediate forms of activism (electoral or otherwise) premised on 'consensus'. Neo-social democracy's mass appeal, likewise, seemed to spring from this wish for unity (while inflating it: suddenly anyone who supported public spending was a 'socialist'). Further, sectarianism's ever-exploding infinitesimal chunks were reaching their vanishing point, and young recruits were simply unable to suspend their disbelief in the revolutionary necessity of theoretical bone-picking any longer. In the eyes of students energised by, say, an average Chlöe Swarbrick campaign, hardly appealing were the few remaining 'revolutionary' groups on campus with member tallies that needed decimal values to make any sense.

So, if the Federation's quick growth has offered a model for how the Left might harness its few points of agreement to resist electoral, activist, or sectarian Left trappings, it also explains Roud's confidence in arguing that a future independent political organisation might build on such successes and 'intervene in [this period] of decay'. Now, Roud says in his *Commonweal* article that by forming organic alternatives to capitalist state institutions, we might form the basis for a party to emerge that would have a 'dynamic and deeply rooted life of its own'. For Roud, this independence is possible because, 'while social reality is often codified and reflected by the state and the law, it is not over-determined by it'.

Civil society, broad and narrow

For Roud, that which can thrive beyond the remit of the state and the law is located in civil society. In his article, he offers the turn-of-the-20th-century German Social Democratic Party (SPD) as a useful model of an organisation for civic and social betterment, in that, beyond its explicitly political aims, it included 'an enormous variety of social clubs, sports teams, vocational organisations, and so on'. Such activities allowed for working people to come together in numbers it is hard to fathom today. However, although social clubs and fraternal organisations continue to exist in the 21st century, they no longer possess a socialist orientation, and Roud notes that the few remaining working class bases for 'community, connection, education, and conviviality' will degenerate further under conditions of austerity and economic downturn.

The all-important question, then, centres on what has produced these conditions. At present, it is typical for proponents of 'civil society'—NGOs, trade unions, co-operatives, community groups—to counterpose it against neoliberalism. But, in order to avoid limiting our thinking, we might avoid this framing. In addition to being a slippery term, 'neoliberalism' is insufficiently historical, placing the issue only in terms of the present or recent past. Additionally, it casts the blame for the degradation of civil society outwards, ignoring the Left's self-inflicted injuries. This is not to say neoliberalism is

'FOR SOCIALISTS, ELECTIONS PRESENT A PERIODIC OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK AT CAPITALISM'S LATEST EFFORTS TO REFORM ITSELF, AND COMPARE THESE EFFORTS WITH THE PAST'

not relevant, but rather that it is bound up in a larger historical problem.

To avoid confusion, going forward, I will refer to two different aspects of civil society. There is civil society in the narrow sense, which pertains to collections of freely associating individuals or organisations that exist outside of the state. This is the civil society that neoliberalism has troubled in recent decades, and it is that which underlies Roud's argument. However, there is a much broader description of civil society that I wish to raise, and it is one that has fallen out of use for similar reasons that have produced the gradual generational decline of genuine civil social participation that Roud hints at. Although this latter meaning is more overwhelming and less precise, it is worth recovering in that it allows for a better apprehension of civil society as a *process*.

Simply, it is that 'civil society' is *society itself*. The literal meaning of civil society is 'urban society', which is to say the general condition of modern life, which itself can be traced to the end of feudalism. Civil society's beginnings were not sudden, but gradual, taking shape over hundreds of years from the late Medieval period onwards, when rural peasants started migrating *en masse* to the emerging towns and cities of Europe (hence *urban* society). With this shift also came the transformation of social relations in general. The society that had long been defined by the medieval caste hierarchy and subsistence agriculture transitioned into one predicated on the free exchange of urban labour. With this new predominantly civil, not rural society, there emerged a distinct worldview which we now associate with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. By the end of the 1700s, this cosmology of urban labour had congealed into new and different forms of literature, philosophy, art, and science, leaving only politics to appear as the last unconquered frontier of civil society. Hence, the successes of the Atlantic revolutions that took place in America and France (following those in the Netherlands and England in earlier centuries) did not prefigure the new civil social reality, as it is sometimes

TOM ROUD, CANTERBURY SOCIALIST SOCIETY CHAIR

CREDIT: N ROBINSON

anachronistically thought, but belatedly inscribed civil society into law.

Although urban social relations persisted and grew during the 1800s through to today, the advent of industrial capitalism—which made production not a means to an end but an end in itself—altered their meaning. It was no longer the case that the division of labour, trade by small manufacturers, and public reason articulated by free individuals could contribute to the prosperity of society in general, as the Enlightenment *philosophes* had thought. Instead, industrial machinery accelerated the private accumulation of capital while undermining labour's share in it. As a result, civil society's buoyant enunciations of a free and universalist cosmology began to appear ill-fated to subsequent generations. As capitalism proceeded, the Enlightenment and its hopes receded. By the time of the 20th century, social co-operation based on free labour appeared little more than a myth so long as machines existed to render, in Max Horkheimer's words, 'not work but the workers superfluous'.[1] Given the physical, mental, and social deterioration of workers' lives, organisations dedicated to personal, civic, and social betterment took on a remedial character to combat these ill effects of capitalism. These organisations, or rather, their successors, are what many consider as belonging to 'civil society' in the narrow sense today.

I raise these historical points not to quibble with Roud's application of the concept of civil society—which is not wrong—but to broaden it for further consideration. So, where Roud writes, 'as austerity knocks at our door, and economic downturn appears likely, the atrophying of what remains of civil society will no doubt accelerate', he is right; only, the situation might be regarded as being even worse. That is, not only does laissez-faire capitalism impinge upon the ability of ordinary people to organise themselves into free social and political collectives, as Roud suggests; but, also, civil society in general *is its own obstacle*, in as far as it is unable to transition beyond capitalism. Hence, we can regard civil society not only as a practical and immediate problem—wherein we, the activists and thinkers, are tasked with organising ourselves towards the best possible outcome—but as a historical one. To elide or flatten this dynamic would be to reify it, treating as a fixed state what is really a process that simultaneously arises from and obscures at least 150 years of regression under capitalism. Thus, a complete awareness of civil society, including its apparent untenability at present, comes prior to an apprehension of the tasks of socialism, since it is socialism that is to handle civil society's unfinished business and to go beyond it.

To elucidate this point, we might consider the part in Roud's *Commonweal* article where he rightly admits that a narrow social democratic movement, and not a far-reaching or revolutionary one, might be the best hope we have at present. He argues that the goal of socialism lies in 'establish[ing] a state of affairs where working people come to power at all levels of society and set about reorganising it'. In a certain sense, this is like how Marx, in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, says that 'freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it'.[2] But Marx recognises that this claim, by itself, is not socialism, but

1 Horkheimer, M. (1926–31). 'The Little Man and the Philosophy of Freedom'. Dammerung.

2 Marx. (1875). 'Critique of the Gotha Programme'. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker.

merely a traditional civil social demand (indeed, it could have come from the pen of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, or Thomas Jefferson). What causes Marx to raise it is the fact of it having become self-contradictory under capitalism. Capitalism's historical advance through (and on top of) civil society has meant the outstripping and undermining of such universalist objectives. The state—*qua* the dictatorship of capital—intervenes in affairs that were once adjudicated by those who owned their own labour, but who are now deprived of it and are at the mercy of the state. All of this means, for Marx, that there have emerged problems which are not for civil society to resolve, as it once might have, *but for socialism to raise*.[3]

Our pre-political moment

The good news is that even though we live with the intensification of this quandary, we have not yet lost the ability to reflect upon its conditions. There is hope in as far as familiarity with the debris field means knowing where the path to socialism might lie. If nothing else can be said favourably about socialism's prospects in our lifetime, there is at least still the fact that free and open discourse about capitalism as a project remains available to us, which indicates that civil society has not lost its chief influence and product: The tradition of critique. Critique, in this sense, means the ability to reflect upon conditions of possibility for change, which is as significant for any civil social organisation as it is for politics in general. Further, I suspect it is of no insignificance for the Federation, since it underlies its openness towards new members, chapters, and discussions, and enables its growth.

Yet, as I addressed earlier, such healthy currents appear to be slowing down in our moment, which Roud has previously described as being 'pre-political' in character.[4] That we live in 'pre-political' conditions is a unique claim on the Left, and the only group I am aware of who shares this sentiment is Platypus (a point I will return to later). There is plenty of reason for it, but it requires elaboration. To find clarity, we can start by looking at the term 'pre-political' and assessing what it conveys. The 'pre-' prefix suggests there are barriers standing in the way of genuine politics. For the Left, admitting to these obstacles is an act that dredges up the past, recalling memories of overarching failures and defeats that have beset the socialist cause. Also, more uncomfortably, it raises the ideological obstacles that the Left itself has produced (Marx: 'The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living').[5] In brief, if capitalism has not produced its own overcoming, neither has the Left

3 This is why we cannot say that socialism develops within capitalism. Those civil social relations that have developed within capitalism are to be realised through their negation, which would be the responsibility of a proletariat that is conscious of its own role via the dictatorship of the proletariat. Rather than offering the model of a future society, the dictatorship of the proletariat—which refers not to a totalitarian dictatorship so much as the Roman Republican sense of a dictator as a temporary magistrate who was granted extraordinary powers in order to deal with state crises—would be the manifestation of the current society's crisis, but with the proletariat, not the owners of capital, in charge of it.

4 Roud, T. (2023). 'Room for Social Democracy?' address at Wellington Socialist Society panel (Social Democracy—Then & Now), 13 June 2023.

5 Marx. (1852). 'The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte'. *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker.

proved that it understands the way beyond the problem.

Yet, the phrase 'pre-political' would not have its utility if it did not also suggest that a properly political stage might eventually be reached. What glues together the 'pre-' and the 'political' aspects of Roud's thesis, then, is his suggestion, summarised above, that there be the further establishment (or strengthening) of civil social organisations by socialists. By this, Roud means groups dedicated to 'community, connection, education, and conviviality' that once made Social Democratic parties 'not merely electoral vehicles but [...] social and civic organisations'. By offering the emergence of such an 'ecosystem' that might be 'self-reliant' and not dependent upon capitalist politics, Roud poses a foundation that might make a genuinely political project for socialism possible. Specifically, he identifies this project as being a socialist party. This party would be defined by its independence from, its opposition to, and its programme to circumvent the aforementioned 'two sides of the new Party of Order'—among other representatives of capital. Further, its roots in working class life would guarantee its independence from capitalist state political machinery, which would, in turn, strengthen its oppositional character as well as its programme.

It might be too soon to tell whether Roud's idea for a civil social 'ecosystem', or the independent party it would support, would survive very long. Lacking a fitting example of either in recent memory, all we can do is hypothesise about the possibilities and pitfalls lying ahead. Yet, that we live in a pre-political time should not foreclose the prospects of doing political work. We can reasonably deduce that *the potentials offered by political work are constrained, but not doomed, by pre-political conditions*. It also follows that, in order to remain dynamic, such a project should consciously inscribe in itself an awareness of its limitations. The problem, however, is that we are not yet fully aware of what these limitations might be—only that they exist.

The most cautious adherents might admit that the way we have so far thought about socialism and capitalism has been all wrong. Indeed, the Marxist value critic Moishe Postone might have been right when he said that we live in a '*pre*-pre-revolutionary moment' (emphasis mine).[6] This, at least, would be preferable to conceding that society is simply too far gone; that, as Walter Benjamin warned, 'our poverty of experience [might not be] merely poverty on the personal level, but poverty of the human experience in general'.[7] Still, from the vantage point of the present, there is little to contradict such doubts. It is plausible that the degeneration of civil society has been the degeneration of the Left and *vice versa*.

However, if plausibility is the measure of how things appear to common sense, there remains the question of *why things appear the way they appear*. To answer this, we might admit a broader meaning of 'pre-politics' (or 'pre-pre-politics', if you like) that encompasses the subjective dimension of our current impasse. By admitting that we cannot merely, by force of will, spontaneously 'think' or 'act' our way outside of our pre-political moment, we allow ourselves some room to consider ways in which we can, at least, understand its causes. Indeed, this was Marx's entire

'CIVIL SOCIETY IN GENERAL IS ITS OWN OBSTACLE, IN AS FAR AS IT IS UNABLE TO TRANSITION BEYOND CAPITALISM'

6 Blumberg, B. and P.C. Nogales C. (2008). 'Marx after Marxism: An interview with Moishe Postone'. *The Platypus Review*, issue 3, March 2008.

7 Benjamin, W. (1933). 'Experience and Poverty'. *Selected Writings*, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds).

'...LIBERAL DEMOCRACY HAS COME TO APPEAR AS A VEXED PROJECT TO ITS SUPPORTERS AND A DOOMED ENTERPRISE TO ITS DETRACTORS'

point in his method of immanent dialectical critique of capitalism (and, crucially, of socialism as its byproduct). So, in as far as we can know that we retain some historical memory of the meaning of critique as civil society's way of reflecting upon itself, i.e., the capacity to imagine how the *new and the different might emerge from the given and the same*, we might yet suspend our disbelief in a project for a socialist party.

The Campaign for a Socialist Party (CSP)

This was effectively how the USA's Campaign for a Socialist Party (CSP) began. This project, founded by Platypus members in Chicago in 2016, set out not to initiate a socialist party, but, as its founding statement said, to 'explore interest' in doing so. Although it might sound passive (academic, even), its 'exploration of interest' has principally taken the form of sustained activism in the community—e.g., holding workshops, hosting anti-police brutality demonstrations, organising renters vis-à-vis landlords, etc. By concrete methods such as these, part of the CSP's aim as a genuinely independent socialist organisation is to undermine local organising bases belonging to the US Democratic Party (particularly in the city of Chicago; a historical Democrat stronghold). Since the CSP exists to serve the interests of working class people, it operates in working class areas in ways that will draw attention to the possibility—the necessity—of a future party that will be able to stand firm outside mainstream politics. For instance, CSP members who joined the door-knocking efforts of 33rd Ward Working Families in Chicago did so not to 'get out the vote', but to have political conversations to raise awareness of the limitations of present forms of (e.g., electoral) politics. In this way, the CSP raises its own pre-political character as a cause in itself, and as such, it might be regarded not as a theoretical intervention, nor simply an activist group, but as *a thought experiment put into practice*.

As to the Campaign's broader mission, a fellow traveller of the project described it as an act of 'generational sacrifice'. In other words, if mass socialism is not possible in the present, the project might at least sustain the questions that socialism would raise, so that future generations would not have to begin from scratch in uncovering socialism's historical memory. The CSP does not have a positive programme, for instance, but rather a loose collection of ideas captured in a founding document titled 'Points of Agreement'. Among the 'Points of Agreement' is the claim that the Campaign would not limit its membership to Marxists; anyone on the avowed Left would be welcomed, from liberals to anarchists. The Campaign would, simultaneously, oppose the strategies of many sections of the extant Left in the USA, who have 'more or less support[ed] the Democrats'. Further, it would recognise that the building of a socialist party would be a 'painstaking and patient' process that would likely take decades. Most important, though, is the Campaign's final claim, which calls attention to socialism not as an alternative to capitalism, but as a way beyond it: 'Socialism will be the realization of the social potential made possible—but held back—by capitalism. We need a party to pursue the politics of this task.—Join us!'

So, if the CSP's 'Points of Agreement' and Roud's idea for a party both accept the pre-political character of the present, there emerges a question that

remains open to Federation members who are interested in similar party-building efforts. That is, *how pre-political would it need to be?* This would require assessing what reality dictates, and examining the peculiarities of politics in this country. Whether the project would be pre-political, or pre-pre-political, or even *pre*-pre-pre-political, would depend on the local terrain.

The New Zealand experiment

I began this article with Roud's suggestion that there is currently a fundamental lack of democracy in this country's political system. As I argued, the path towards rectification would not only be clouded by the state of capitalist electoral politics at present, but by every objective and subjective manifestation of the crisis of civil society in general. For Roud, elucidating a way forward rests with and tasks those who are committed to building socialism—and particularly those who see a genuine socialist movement as a meaningful alternative to electoralism. Yet, with civil society at a choke point, liberal democracy has come to appear as a vexed project to its supporters and a doomed enterprise to its detractors. Thus, for many sections of the avowed Left, the idea of being an 'alternative' to the status quo has come to mean simply opposing liberalism. This would be a problem for civil social and party organising, in as far as civil society *is liberal society*. Liberalism here does not mean Labour, the Greens, or the US Democratic Party, since mainstream capitalist politics has, ironically, lost sight of the meaning of liberalism as a socially progressive project. Instead, a properly civil social project—including aspirations towards building a socialist party—would seek to *defend* civil liberties in the most modest sense. This would not make for a 'socialist' project *per se*—but nor would our pre-political moment. By the inevitable frustrated character of any attempt to salvage civil society in ideal terms, socialism would arise *in absentia* as a deeply and broadly felt need. This would first require liberal activism in the purest sense.

This might not be popular with sections of the Left, for whom it has become normal to join ranks with conservatives in denouncing liberals—so-called 'libs'—as deluded optimists or even reactionaries. This assessment is not entirely wrong, of course, especially in a time when the 'good liberals' of old are dwindling in number. Still, such pessimism flies in the face of civil society in the ideal sense just as it proves that it is in a sickly way in reality. In fact, it was not the case for the historical socialist movement that liberals were the enemy; rather, they laid the foundation for what would eventually need to become socialism. Unfortunately, with the declining stature of liberalism as principally belonging to elites, its true memory has been forgotten. Thus, the disaffection is not misplaced; however, it should not be regarded as benign, either. Already, we see instances of the Left not only abandoning causes for civil liberties, but calling for their abolition by the state. During the vaccines, lockdowns, and mandates of recent years, few were the voices on the Left who openly questioned the state's policing of ordinary peoples' lives. The Left's awkward silence in this country, perhaps born of ambivalence, turned into outright projection during the Freedom Convoy protests in early 2022. Here, it meant that those exercising their right to protest outside Parliament—ignorantly motivated or not—were deplored; many Leftists simultaneously regarded them as foolish clowns

FIRST MEETING AND READING GROUP FOR 2018 OF THE CAMPAIGN FOR A SOCIALIST PARTY IN CHICAGO, USA

CREDIT: CSP

and criminal masterminds. Whereas the anti-protest narrative was to be expected from (bad) liberals in the media and elsewhere, what little 'healthy disagreement' existed on the Left went, with few exceptions, unpublicised, meaning that the eventual violent police crackdown on protesters was either met with silence or outright celebration. (The Federation, to its credit, was one of the few homes for nuanced, if restrained, discussion during that time.) Such reactions were not the product of a lapse in judgment by the Left, but a significant link in the Left's gradual abandonment of civil liberties. Hence, it is no coincidence that the historical bulwarks of civil society—the right to protest, freedom of association, freedom of the press, etc.—are taken up as causes by the Right, not the Left. A properly pre-political project would need to recognise the appeal these causes have in working class society, and that perhaps there is good reason.

Just as an unpretentious assessment of the mass appeal of the Right allows for a better diagnosis of the present, the same goes for the liberal-left. The fallout during the pandemic years showed the extent to which liberalism's international crisis has reached into this country. If Guido Baracchi, who I quoted earlier,

WELLINGTON PARLIAMENTRY PROSTESTS 2022

CREDIT: KIWICHRIS WIKIMEDIA

was right that communism in Europe or America would mean communism in the South Pacific, we might similarly observe that the abandonment of Left politics to the state in America might mean a Democratic Party New Zealand. Indeed, we must not underestimate the influence of American-style social progressivism's way of setting the agenda on which the Left speaks; it is a living paradigm in which Labour, the Greens, and other major liberal-left parties are no exception. Alertness to this reality would be relevant for pre-political organising in as far as it would anticipate the mindset of the youngest (and the typically most active) recruits. Those with experience in Left activism might, ironically, present greater resistance to such a project than those who are uninitiated, in that many young activists would be used to the tactics of mainstream parties and NGOs, which is to say organising via false premises. Many under-25s are introduced to activism by way of apocalypticism, misleading infographics, tricks of language, and other forms of opinion-mongering and emotional blackmail that masquerade as politics. That such sophistry was once the sole preserve of evangelicals and hucksters shows such groups' bankruptcy of genuine appeal. Nonetheless, it has been effective,

and it is now the norm. Further, not only do these talking points barely depart in substance from those deployed by the power brokers who side with the 'progressive wing' of overseas capital—e.g., the Democrats—but they close off pathways to critical thinking. The consequence is that young minds are excused from thinking independently and openly; a tragic foreclosure of what is a necessary and vital part of one's entry into maturity as well as civil society. Without a *bona fide* Left movement to counter these tendencies, (sub-)liberal talking points will only intensify their stranglehold over present and future generations under the name 'Left politics'.

'...A SOCIALIST PARTY WOULD NEED TO LOOK HONEST, AND THIS WOULD BE BEST ACHIEVED NOT ROMANTICALLY OR GLIBLY, BUT SOBERLY, BY ADMITTING TO THE PROJECT'S OWN CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS'

Working through history

A pre-political project should not assume it exists outside of this unfortunate paradigm. Nor would eschewing mainstream electoralism guarantee an opportunism-free playing field. After all, 50 years of activism should have taught us by now that even where there are co-operatives, trade unions, and community groups who oppose electoralism, their successes have expanded, not diminished, the territory for liberal-left parties to expand their voting blocs and for NGOs to seek fundraisers. The point is that if the Federation might foster or participate in an 'ecosystem' of genuine civil social organisations, it must know about invasive species. Such is the reality of operating within a fraught paradigm. In other words, if a project for a political party is to appear credible, it must first accept what has become the false dichotomy of theory and practice, and then choose the latter. Yet, it should also know that practice *per se* is limited, both in the way it is apprehended and the way it is conducted. Although practice (in the narrowest sense) has come to appear as more 'respectable' than theory, on the Left, a pre-political project should not discount that its inherited presuppositions—undigested perspectives inherited from the Left's decline and defeat—are inescapably theoretical problems.

This is why a pre-political socialist project should not be thought of as an antithesis to opportunism in the undialectical sense, but as a working-through. In other words, although a truly pre-political project would not aim to fail, it would ready itself—along with its members and the general public—for that likely outcome. By such a project not only revealing its shortcomings, but foregrounding them, it would offer to future generations the hope that they might learn what can be done to practically overcome them. Until then, every failing would need to be recognised in advance as inevitable, not accidental, since we have no reason to expect our generation would succeed any more than previous ones at building a successful party for socialism.

This would not, in fact, be the pre-emptive resignation that it might look like, because there is failure on the one hand, and there is *failure* on the other. In the one sense, there are immediate and particular failings; on the other, there is the much more perilous abandonment of the historical tasks of socialism. Under the current conditions, no activism towards building socialism can be expected to succeed on every count—it would instead offer the impression of a series of false starts. However, quantitative gains would not be the goal so much *as setting qualitative precedents*. By these, the historical failure of socialism might gain its meaning, and the necessity of its fulfilment might be revealed. Although this world-historic ambition is too grand to be aimed at—needless to say, it is far

beyond the scope of a tiny organisation like the Federation—hope for it springs from the knowledge that it might, one day, be indirectly achieved, and that this could not occur without the accomplishment of smaller pre-political goals.

So, how might civil society be raised not as a solution, but properly, as its own *problem*? It is not so clear. However, there are obvious starting points where the state's vampire-like possession of the Left and civil society can most easily be noticed. Through direct interventions—public-facing organising efforts in the community, the workplace, the university, the press, and elsewhere—there might be the hope of undermining the strongholds where Labour, the Greens, and other parties try to make themselves look credible in the eyes of ordinary people. By contrast with these parties, a project for a socialist party would need to look *honest*, and this would be best achieved not romantically or glibly, but soberly, by admitting to the project's own constraints and limitations.

In order to begin positioning itself for forward movement, a pre-political project might function not to one-sidedly affirm 'alternatives' against mainstream politics, but as a *critical intervention into the present state of politics in general*. The concerns it would raise would not be esoteric, but exoteric. A proper 'exploration of interest' for socialism among working class people would begin not with novel 'pitches' or policies, but familiar talking points addressed in a refreshing and no-bullshit way. Fortunately, it is easier to say of our country than other, larger ones, that such a project might offer some promise. After all, this country's small size has been useful for capitalism as a testing ground, from the Wakefield plan ('systematic colonisation') to Rogernomics ('the New Zealand experiment'). Likewise, a pre-political project would not need to aim too high in order to leave a measurable imprint. Localities are close together; inhabitants connected. Nor does it seem too difficult to make the national news in this country, even though publicity and other means to quantitative gains would be less important than achieving qualitative precedents. To be a successful sacrifice for future generations, a pre-political project would need to make its mark in the memory of the culture, so that its depth can later—when the crisis reveals itself in fuller terms—turn into breadth.

If New Zealand is sensitive to the prevailing winds that blow from other parts of the world, as I posed earlier with the Guido Baracchi quote, it is also vulnerable to the shifting weight of history. Were we to fetishise civil society without reckoning with its fullest implications (i.e., its historical stakes and its crisis), we would yield to the same hazards that have rained upon all aspects of the Left in the last few decades, from activist movements liquidated into capitalist state politics to revolutionary groups obliterated by sectarianism. Likewise, if we have learned anything from the repeated defeats of the Left, we should be wary of the 'left/right/left/right hoof beat' that Roud ascribes to electoral politics. Given its loud echo, the Left might inadvertently fall into step with this rhythm. If we are in a 'pre-political' moment, the most pressing task for a movement for socialism is not to abandon its most important questions. The 'new Party of Order' that Roud rightly condemns must not gain another wing.

VICTOR BILLOT

The Alliance—a political tragedy Part I.

I was a founding member of the NewLabour Party and then the Alliance. I was a member through to the Alliance's deregistration in 2015 (although the party never formally dissolved) apart from a brief lapse in my membership when I was attending journalism school in 2002.

In the years when the Alliance was doing well in the 1990s I was a loyal foot soldier. Later on, after the Alliance disintegrated and left Parliament, I found myself promoted to senior positions and stood several times in elections, generally polling poorly. My commitment could not be questioned, but my timing was not so good.

To be honest, my Alliance experience was not a good one. I don't regret it but I do think there are many lessons to be learned. Unfortunately those lessons are mainly negative ones. When I entitled this article a 'political tragedy' this is not cynical humour. The tragedy of the Alliance is the tragedy of the New Zealand left (and the state of our society) and over the years since its defeat and decline, I have often had moments to wonder—what if things had been different?

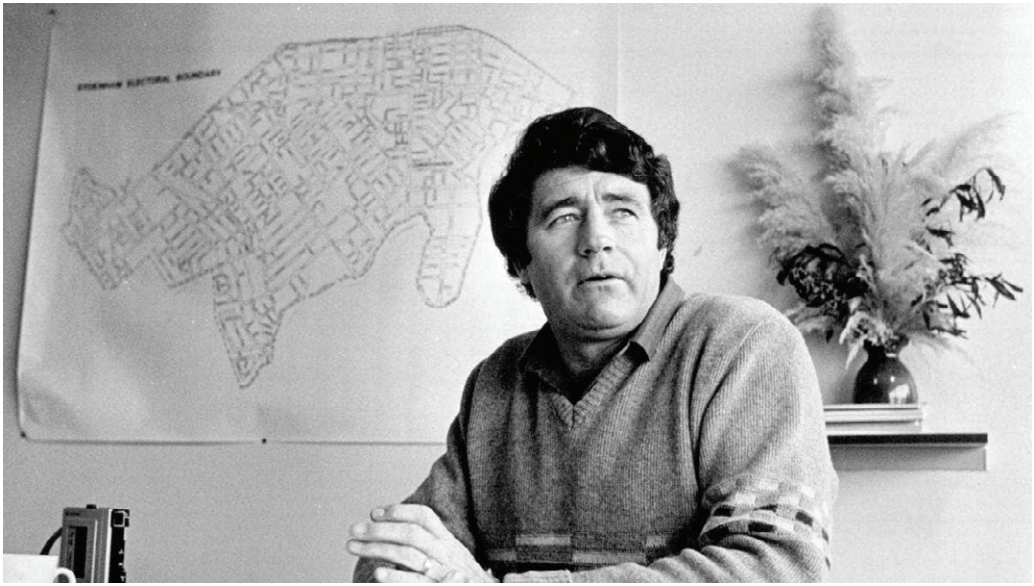
The Alliance was the last attempt to build a genuine social-democratic mass party in New Zealand. I don't think there is anything directly comparable in the English speaking countries. The Alliance failed, or rather was wrecked by, a series of poor strategic decisions. But these decisions were made in the context of and under pressure from the hostile environment it operated in, or perhaps particular features of New Zealand politics and MMP power politics that proved too hard to navigate.

There were several distinct periods in the history of the Alliance. This article is a broad brush report from my perspective of the Alliance's first three phases—the New Labour Party (NLP) prelude, the pre MMP Alliance, and the post MMP Alliance and time in Government. I will follow in a future article the post-Parliament decline of the Alliance. My account here is a highly compressed one.

The first period of the 'Rebel Alliance' was the 'prequel' of the series (I will end the Star Wars metaphors here). This was the foundation of the NewLabour Party (NLP) in 1989 as a left wing split from the deeply dysfunctional Labour Party of the late 1980s. The NLP people were always the core of the Alliance. The Green Party was formed in 1990, and was a founding constituent party of the Alliance, but left the Alliance in 1997. You could say the Green Party has been more successful, in that it is still a functioning minor party, but these days it seems to be something of a pale shadow of its former colourful self. Anyway, that story is for others to tell.

The NLP was dominated by a few big personalities. Jim Anderton was its greatest asset and eventually its biggest flaw. A sitting MP, ambitious and extremely dogged, Jim left the Labour Party in 1989 after several years of battling against the Rogernomics faction during the Fourth Labour Government. His strong personality probably gave him the ability to survive all this, but it was also to be something of an Achilles Heel.

As a credible figure and a popular local MP, Jim managed to retain his Sydenham seat in the 1990 election. In pre MMP days this was the only shot at



JIM ANDERTON AT HIS CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS IN SYDENHAM

CREDIT: NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NEW ZEALAND

getting Parliamentary representation. The NLP was dominated by Jim, as he was the only MP, and the Party depended on him for its existence. On the other hand, Party President Matt McCarten was a youthful and impressive organizer who formed an effective team with Jim. Jim was a Catholic, an ex-businessman, a traditional social-democrat with traditional values and principles. Matt was a mercurial socialist who had come up the hard way and established himself as a blue collar union organizer. Later on, this unusual but effective relationship would sour.

Meanwhile, I was one of a group of young people who got sucked into politics at the time. Many of the people I remember from that era have gone on to do sometimes impressive and sometimes interesting things, which I suppose is not surprising considering how small New Zealand society is. I was politicised at high school. My family was what I would describe as respectable working class but some bad experiences for my parents with employers had focused my mind on the ugly realities of capitalism. As a young University student, I was aware of class differences with the middle class or even wealthy background of many of my contemporaries. I joined what was at that point a volatile scene.

Out of curiosity, I attended a protest of leftists outside the Labour Party conference in Dunedin in 1988. Jim Anderton had narrowly lost out to Ruth Dyson on his bitterly contested challenge for Party President from the left. He came out to address the crowd and some misguided individual threw an egg at him. I bought a copy of the *Peoples Voice*. It was an exciting evening. Within a few months, Anderton announced he was leaving Labour and starting the New Labour Party. I recall the first NLP meeting in Dunedin in the YWCA Hall, probably around May 1989. I went with my dad. The room was filled with rows of solid and serious middle-aged blokes. It was an old school Dunedin working-class crowd, something that you

don't really see anymore. Jim spoke and received a positive response.

The next few meetings, without Jim, were smaller. They seemed to involve union organisers arguing with one another. Chris Trotter was one of the leading lights. It all went above my head at this point, although I was learning that the worst arguments in politics are those between people on the same side. I started going around handing out leaflets and even canvassing. It was an interesting experience. I realised there were a lot of lonely people out there living quiet forgotten lives, who would haul me inside for a cup of tea. They were often only politely interested in politics. It was just a chance for them to talk to someone.

I also spent some time honing my debating and heckling skills. I must have been quite intolerable and self-righteous, but the people I was annoying deserved it all. At one public meeting at the Otago Polytechnic, the lame duck Labour PM Mike Moore was giving a speech. He blathered on and in question time I jumped up in my seventeen year old fury and denounced his Government for selling out the working class. He offered some weak reply—something about the sharemarket bouncing back or something. 'But I don't have any shares', I yelled back. 'That's a bit below the belt', he replied in a hurt tone. The crowd hooted with laughter and I saw the glare of the local Labour MP Pete Hodgson boring into me.

This was a revelation. I had argued with the Prime Minister—and I had the distinct feeling I had come off best. Whether or not this epiphany did me any good is another question. I had a later encounter with David Lange, after he had resigned as Prime Minister. It was a vaguely sad afternoon. He had been a national hero a few short years ago—the man who had got rid of Piggy Muldoon. This lunchtime there wasn't a big crowd and when I argued with him about the harm of Rogernomics he rebutted me but his heart didn't seem to be in it. He referred to me as 'John the Baptist' over there, which I have always recalled as an odd insult and perhaps not much of an insult at all from the former Methodist lay preacher.

We got through the 1990 election. Labour was trounced. Jim Anderton was back in but we had not done that well in the overall party vote with just over 5%. The victorious National Party had promised a 'decent society' but aggressively extended the neoliberal right-wing agenda of the Rogernomes. Unemployment soared, benefits were cut. The Employment Contracts Act smashed the union movement, wages and conditions were ravaged, and it left workers stunned and disoriented. Privatisation continued. Even traditional conservative rural communities were left reeling. In a very short time frame, power and control had shifted.

It was obvious that none of the smaller parties were going to get into Parliament, with the First Past the Post voting system creating an effective duopoly. The lesson was provided by Social Credit, which had peaked at over 20% of the vote in the early 1980s, but had only 2 MPs to show for it (one of them, Gary Knapp, beat a National candidate by the name of Don Brash.)

Thus the Alliance was born. It brought together unlikely bedfellows—the NewLabour Party and the Green Party, the Democrats (formerly Social Credit), Mana Motuhake, and a little later the Liberal Party, which was comprised of two middle of the road National MPs horrified by the extreme lurch to the right of the National Government (they later decamped to NZ First). The Democrats

by this stage had passed their peak. They represented a conservative force in the Alliance, but also brought a network in the provinces and a large war chest. Mana Motuhake was a sort of precursor to Te Pati Māori, led by former Labour MP Matt Rata who had been unable to break the Labour hold on the Māori electorates.

From the beginning the Alliance was a marriage of convenience. It was there to unite the forces outside Labour and National and bypass the electoral grip they held. But it did have a political logic—it was made up of all the forces opposed to the 'New Right economic revolution. The Alliance was defined by what it was against. It managed to cook up a manifesto that presented a social-democratic, managed and mixed economy model, that sought to redistribute wealth and rebuild the welfare state. It was not socialist, but most socialists (outside the revolutionary fringe) saw it as the best option, even as a defensive step against the rapidly advancing free market agenda.

While the Alliance was seen as the challenger from the left, in 1993 Winston Peters broke off from National to form New Zealand First. I always interpreted Peters as a Muldoonist if anything, with a gift for attracting the discontented but politically naive with empty slogans and manufactured outrage. He is still doing it in 2023, a remarkable achievement of longevity if nothing else. For periods in the past he tacked to the left, attacking finance capital in the 1990s (remember the Winebox Inquiry) and at one stage in 1996 NZ First somehow won some of the Māori electorates (not likely these days).

In this early 1990s period the Alliance did very well. It outpolled Labour in by-elections in Tamaki, the King Country and Selwyn, none of which were left leaning electorates. The Alliance actually seemed to do better in the provincial centres. The Pasifika vote stayed largely with Labour if I recall correctly, despite all the damage free market policies had wreaked on urban working-class communities. In the 1993 election, the Alliance hit its high point. Still only gaining two MPs, it nonetheless had built a large active membership. Dunedin North had one of the biggest and most left-wing Alliance branches, whose membership included latter day Socialist Society members such as Quentin Findlay and Chris Ford, as well as the late Professor Jim Flynn, and many others who have had an impact in one way or another over the years. At this point I understood the plan was to replace the Labour Party, by then regrouping under the centrist leadership of Helen Clark. The hard right-wing faction of Labour, including Douglas and Prebble, had broken off into ACT, but at this point they had little support, as the National Party was basically doing their job for them.

The big push in 1993 was for the referendum on the electoral system. The driving forces behind the right-wing shift in New Zealand society—aggressively ideological capitalists and private sector management—threw everything into opposing MMP, and so did the two main parties. Ironically, they needn't have worried too much. The right-wing economic ideology was already baked in and, with a few minor tweaks, we are still living under it today. However, MMP got across the line, and the electoral game was changed for the Alliance.

The next 'third period' therefore was this post MMP era which saw the Alliance in Government by 1999. The 1996 election saw one big plus—a large group of MPs were elected on the list. But the overall Alliance vote was dropping as the Labour Party reasserted itself. Around this time I was working for unions. I recall

'HE CAME OUT TO ADDRESS THE CROWD AND SOME MISGUIDED INDIVIDUAL THREW AN EGG AT HIM. I BOUGHT A COPY OF THE PEOPLES VOICE. IT WAS AN EXCITING EVENING'

the loathing the Labour and Alliance factions had for each other, and I occasionally got a spray myself. I have a rather long memory and this colours my view on the Labour Party right up to today. There is an amazing sense of entitlement and aggressive patch protection that exists in its ranks. But at the top level, practical considerations overcame any personal differences. In these conditions, it was obvious a united front of Labour and Alliance was the only way to get the numbers to remove National (that was how it was sold anyway.) In 1999, I came back early from my OE to help with the campaign. The united strategy was successful in that National was thrown out. But it was a disaster for the Alliance in the long term.

As the junior coalition partner, the Alliance was trapped in a supporting role. The Alliance was always made up of people who had strong principles and beliefs. Sometimes this shaded off into eccentricity. But you never questioned their sincerity. Party members saw themselves as directing their MPs as representatives of the party. Jim on the other hand saw the role of members as to campaign in elections and leave the politics to him (this may be a little simplistic but not too remote from the truth.)

In 2001 things came to a head and there was a cataclysmic split. The ostensible reason was New Zealand's involvement in supporting the war in Afghanistan. Anderton's line was the Alliance was in a coalition Government and bound by collective cabinet responsibility. Much of the party membership disagreed. They hadn't come this far to provide cover for the Labour Party and its compromised establishment politics. This was the flash point for building tensions in the Alliance over the direction and processes of the party. Jim Anderton had grown increasingly domineering in his leadership and had bluntly put down those who saw the Alliance being submerged into the Labour Government. At the same time there were machinations and factions within the Parliamentary staff and senior leadership (members such as myself were largely on the outside of the intrigue.)

The resulting split saw a very confused division. I recall attending a membership meeting in Wellington where I was living at the time which literally melted down when MP Sandra Lee and Party President Matt McCarten were at the top table swearing at each other. It was an absolutely terrible experience. After the split, the Alliance leadership passed to Laila Harre. However, she did not manage to get across the line in her West Auckland electorate in the 2002 election, and the Alliance party vote collapsed. Anderton remained in Parliament and created a new vehicle, the Progressive Party. It survived for a while but had very little reason for existence as it was operating as a clip on to the Labour Party. The Progressives vanished a few years later and their members were absorbed into the Labour Party.

The above is just a potted history with some personal insights. In my next instalment, I would like to discuss the 'fourth act' of the Alliance tragedy—life after Parliament—and reflect on some of the weird dead ends the left have wandered down over the years. I will also be touching on two important questions. What can socialists learn from the Alliance? Is it possible to rebuild a similar party, or even desirable?

DISPATCHES FROM EXILE.

HAYDN TAYLOR

'The Left is dead!—Long Live the Left'

The Socialist Workers' Party (UK) and Marxism—A Festival of Ideas 2023

'The history of socialism is a constellation of defeats that nourished it for almost two centuries. Instead of destroying its ideas and aspirations, these traumatic, tragic, often bloody defeats consolidated and legitimated them... In other words, we cannot escape our defeat, or describe or analyze it from outside. Left-wing melancholy is what remains after the shipwreck; its spirit shapes the writings of many of its "survivors," drafted from their lifeboats after the storm.' (Enzo Traverso)

Acknowledging the passing of an era or a political ideology is a means of paying homage to the legacy that has been consigned to history. By properly mourning what has been lost, societies can transcend nostalgia and illusions, forging a path toward a future unburdened by the constraints of the past. This perspective suggests that a generation's wellspring of inspiration should not be rooted in the past but rather derived from the yet-unwritten pages of the future.

In 2013, Chris Cutrone, a member of the Platypus Affiliated Society, boldly declared in the foundational document of his post-Trotskyist organization, 'The Left is dead! — Long live the Left!' This declaration was made with the intention of breathing new life into the possibilities of the Left. Nevertheless, what proved controversial about this assertion was the apparent detachment of certain segments of the Left from the reality of its decline or their lingering attachment to the lost horizons of 20th-century socialism. They appeared incapable of processing and sublimating the past into a contemporary worldview. This essay will offer a brief history of the Socialist Workers Party (UK) before examining its annual showpiece *Marxism Festival* in order to illustrate that point.

An Owl Flying Backwards: The Rise (and Fall?) of the SWP

Speak one more time
About the joy of hoping for joy
So that at least some will ask:
What was that?
When will it come
again? (Erich Fried)

This article does not seek to delve into the intricate complexities of left-wing sectarianism, particularly the nuanced historical trajectory of 20th-century Trotskyism. Nevertheless, a brief exploration of the origins of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) may provide the reader with insights into the nature and purpose of the *Marxism Festival*.

The seeds from which the SWP grew are to be found with a young Trotskyist figure from the 1950s in the United Kingdom, Tony Cliff. Tony, born Yigael Glückstein in 1917, was a Palestinian Jewish migrant who moved to the United Kingdom in his early thirties. While still residing in the holy land World War II played a formative moment in Cliff's activist sensibilities, as he cut his teeth on organising against the recruitment of Jews to help in the British war effort against Germany, earning himself a prison sentence enforced by the British for the duration of the war.

Upon his release from prison Cliff moved to Tel Aviv. However, he decided that living in the official state of Israel, formed by a British decree, was going to be untenable for him and his family, so in 1947 he and his wife emigrated to the United Kingdom. Almost immediately upon their arrival Cliff became a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), the official British affiliate of the Trotskyist Fourth International, which argued that Stalinist Russia was a degenerated workers' state. During his time in the RCP Tony Cliff began formulating an unconventional analysis of the Soviet Union. He posited that, under Stalin's leadership, the Bolshevik Party had effectively transformed the USSR into a bureaucratic state capitalist entity. This view contended that the state bureaucrats responsible for managing the apparatus of government had, in essence, assumed the role of a ruling capitalist class. As Cliff's ideas gained traction a select group of comrades within the RCP coalesced around him to initiate a research initiative known as the Socialist Review Group. Within Trotskyist groups determining the true character of the Soviet Union's project held paramount importance, as it ultimately defined their organisational identity. This question, however, carried little practical relevance to their revolutionary activities but remained a point of doctrinal insistence. For Trotskyists in the Anglo-American sphere, the question revolved around whether the Soviet Union was a state capitalist regime, a bureaucratic collectivist state, or a degenerated workers' state. Following an acrimonious dispute within the RCP, primarily centred around the Korean War and the alignment of Western socialists, Cliff and his cohort were expelled from the organisation. Notably, Cliff's response to this altercation famously yielded the slogan 'Neither Washington nor Moscow'.

Subsequently, the members of the Socialist Review Group reconvened in 1961 to establish the International Socialists (IS). Although originally flirting with Rosa Luxemburg's notion that revolutionary organisations should be built from below, by 1968 IS had adopted the Leninist practice of democratic

centralism as its guiding principle, the party as revolutionary vanguard. Given its small size, the IS initially employed entryism within the Labour Party as its primary tactic, aiming to recruit young Labour Party activists into its ranks and propagate its ideals within the trade union movement. It abandoned this tactic in 1965, and was then heavily involved in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and the student protest movement. The membership grew to around 1000. Rising industrial discontent led to a 'turn to industry', and between 1970 and 1974 the IS focused its efforts on the trade union movement, setting up a number of rank-and-file organisations and factory branches. They attracted a significant number of manual workers and saw membership exceed 3000. The return of Harold Wilson's Labour government and the signing of a social contract with the union movement saw militancy decline and the rank-and-file organisations collapse. In response the IS renamed itself the Socialist Workers Party in 1977 and contested a number of parliamentary by-elections, with exceedingly poor results.

Jim Higgins, a prominent British Trotskyist, later wrote that 'The party that was formed in 1977 was not predicated on great upheavals and political differentiation; it was less capable of mounting its own initiatives in the workers' movement than it had been three years before. Its founding was for purely internal reasons, to give the members a sense of progress, the better to conceal the fact that there had actually been a retreat.' For Higgins, the forming of the SWP was essentially based upon fuelling the delusion of its members and keeping up a sense of meaning and purpose. Higgins goes on to describe, better than I can, a concept that can be named 'the primitive accumulation of cadres' where for organisations like the SWP, 'the only measure of revolutionary advance is the membership figures.'

It must be noted here that this phenomenon of taking major defeats as successes is not unfamiliar to Anglo-American Trotskyism, but rather a seemingly natural law. Instead of recognising defeat and dissolving completely their organisations, say, as Marx did with the Communist League in 1852, Trotskyist organisations in the 20th century preferred to keep their detachments on life support despite their vegetative state, or if not split and recreate the same type of organisation but with even more grandiose claims and goals. Troublingly, this tendency persists within the contemporary landscape of what we still refer to as the socialist left. Here in our backyard, we have an overgrown garden of leftism that no groundskeeper is willing to touch. Those who dare enter the backyard only do so to lop branches off these older, apparently wiser trees, in the hope of grafting them to their own.

For much of the subsequent period the SWP has had a dual strategy of functioning as a propagandist organisation, focusing on Marxist theory, and organising or operating within a number of front organisations. In the late 1970s it achieved significant successes with the *Anti-Nazi League* and *Rock Against Racism*, both formed to combat the rise of the fascist National Front. In the aftermath of 9/11 it was instrumental in founding the *Stop the War Coalition,* and was a key organiser of the massive anti-war demonstration in London on 15 February 2003, which attracted between 750,000 (official figure) and two million supporters (STWC figure). Thereafter it entered George Galloway's Respect Party, the Scottish Socialist Party, and the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition, and organised the *Right to Work* Movement

'BEING THE MAN THAT I AM, I COULDN'T HOLD BACK MY FEDERATION CHAUVINISM AND GOT GABBING ABOUT HOW REASONABLE THE NZ FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES WAS GIVEN THE STATE OF THE LEFT IN AOTEAROA'

MARXISM FESTIVAL 2023 AT SOAS UNIVERSITY, LONDON

SUPPLIED

in 2009. It was heavily criticised by others on the left for attempting to control these organisations. Jim Higgins, once again, provides insight, describing the Party as akin to a gatecrasher, sneering at the hosts but 'nicking' any thing that is not screwed down. Any party focusing on Marxist theory is likely to experience divisions and splits, and the activities described above provoked several more, but a more serious blow to the SWP came in 2013-14. The Party Central Committee held internal disciplinary hearings to deal with accusations of rape against a former National Secretary, and concluded that there was no case to answer. The way the matter was dealt with provoked outrage and the Party shed over 700 members as a result, including several long standing and senior members.

One thing that we can say about the SWP is that it has demonstrated both durability and longevity. It has survived Thatcherism and the advent of neoliberalism; it has survived numerous splits within its own ranks; it has survived the castration of the trade union movement and the decline of industrial militancy; it acclaimed the downfall of the Soviet Union as evidence to support its theory of state capitalism. Its banners are still present on every demonstration and protest. How has the Party survived a high attrition rate? Where does it recruit new members? One answer is from among young student activists who have only just begin their political development, which brings us to the SWP's annual Marxism Festival.

I Hear Buzzing, and I think Death: Marxism Festival 2023.

'Man was, and is, too shallow and cowardly to endure the fact of the mortality of everything living. He wraps it up in rose-coloured progress-optimism, he heaps upon it the flowers of literature, he crawls behind the shelter of ideals so as not to see anything.' (Oswald Spangler)

We are packed into a Quaker Meeting Hall in the middle of London for the opening 'rally'. But, unlike a typical Quaker meeting (austere, sombre, confessional), the atmosphere is one of purpose, colour, and grandiosity. Whooping ovations and collective gaieties interrupt sermons from the panel. The hall is dotted with a young and eager cadre in pink tee shirts ready to impress the veterans with their discipline and dogmatism. They are the SWP's fresh meat who, unknowingly, have served themselves up to be fed into the meatgrinder of Trotskyist activism.

One by one the SWP hosts take the microphone. We are told that, despite the multiplicity of crises facing civil society, times are adequate for the worker's movement to respond to and build from. Workers in public services like transport, education and health are engaged in rolling strikes against an extremely hostile Tory government, rioters in Paris are burning cars and barricading streets, while everyday people across the developed world are coming out in droves to protest the idleness of governments in their attempt to rapidly transition the productive base of society to become less reliant on fossil fuels. Covid, corruption and calamity are the order of the day. The police are racist, the Tories are incompetent, and capitalism sucks. But, not to worry, the working class is back and Marxism is more popular than it has been in generations. After all, this is supposedly the biggest Marxism Festival in years. I am told that the organisers have not seen a turnout this large since the height of the post-Occupy and anti-austerity movements. Some had estimated nearly four thousand tickets were sold. However, much like the last apparent watershed moment for the left, this buzzing of activity should be taken as a sign, not of advancement or a forward march of left relevance, but, rather, an indicator of an imminent decline. A death throe if you will.

The event is described as a 'festival of ideas' yet the use of the plural here is quite superficial as there is only one true idea or question that acts as the quilting point for the entire event. 'Would you like to join the SWP?' They are not shy

about this either. Settling in for a long weekend, the SWP booked out the blocks and quads of the SOAS University in the heart of London, only a block away from the British Museum. In the main quad a fleet of trestle tables are anchored, shifting under the weight of classic and contemporary socialist literature. Surrounding the books for sale are copies of the *Socialist Worker* newspaper and, of course, badges. Lots of them. Framing the quad are stalls representing all the branches of the SWP in attendance at the festival. Most of these are from the greater London area while some hail from as far north as Birmingham and Manchester. The remnants of the old labour movement are also here in attendance, 'the warriors of the working-day', with their buckets and paywave machines collecting donations. Alongside them are the youthful pods of students grinning like Cheshire cats and decorating themselves with innumerable badges and revolutionary threads. When you walk into the halls to have your tickets checked, you are assaulted by a blizzard of SWP pamphlets and leaflets advising people how best their money should be transferred to the coffers of the Party for membership dues. A bemused look strikes the faces of the cadre when you politely decline their offer.

While ideas are certainly advertised on the tin, the contents of said tin are stale. Despite the level of sophistication that went into the organisation of the event, ultimately what I left with was a sour taste in the mouth. Why? The *Marxism Festival of Ideas* is simply a recruitment drive and an attempt at trying to reform the public image of the Party in the wake of major sexual assault scandals that rocked the SWP in 2013 which saw 700+ members abandon the party.

Over the three days, the attendees are offered a smorgasbord of SWP theoreticians who speak on exotic leftist topics such as 'Progress or catastrophe? Lukács, Benjamin & German anti-fascist Marxism' and 'Beyond the binary: Marxism, sex and gender', or the more humdrum cliche leftist topics that re-iterate the legacy of 20th-century socialism. Lectures with titles such as, 'Is there anything radical about Stalinism?' or 'Cuba: has it ever been socialist?'.

One thing you cannot fault the SWP on is that when it comes to heavy hitters of the academic and activist left the organisation is certainly well-connected. Jeremy Corbyn, Hannah Lowe, Yanis Varoufakis, Judith Orr and many other big names from the left grace the lineup of lectures at Marxism 2023. Noam Chomsky even beamed in from his home in New York to a crowd of enchanted disciples who basked in his digital presence as if a prophet had risen from the dead, and Noam certainly looked the part. But to be fair there were also workers on strike at Amazon, Chris Small a US Labor Union organiser, climate activists, and the admirable Ken Loach and others thinking about how socialists might organise post-Corbyn.

There is a marquee in the courtyard where local artists play for a transient crowd who come and go as they please between their preferred lectures or sit and chill while they feast on a variety of tasty Asian and Central American food truck treats. Furthermore each night, at a local pub, there are gigs put on for the more keenly engaged attendees and a further chance for the party cadres to ask the real question the whole event is predicated upon to an unassuming quarry. After the first day, at a joint close by, Mully's Bar, I decided to go enjoy a watery English lager and listen to a jazz band the SWP organised to play. I found myself conversing with a young couple, from Australia and

HAYDEN TAYLOR AT THE WILLIAM MORRIS PUB IN MERTON ABBEY MILLS, LONDON
SUPPLIED

England respectively. Being the man that I am, I couldn't hold back my Federation chauvinism and got gabbing about how reasonable the NZ Federation of Socialist Societies was given the state of the Left in Aotearoa. We shared our pessimisms and optimisms about the contemporary situations in each of our home countries. Everything was going swimmingly. We shared ironic quips, we bopped our heads to the sounds of the Soweto Kinch trio's fusion of jazz and hip hop, brought each other rounds of the aforementioned watery English lager, and had a classic intra-anglo cultural exchange. As the night went on and things began to wind down, the irresistible Trotskyist urge finally overcame them both, and as I was shifting my body language to indicate my imminent departure, the Australian turned to me and said, 'Hey, you should join the Islington chapter of the SWP! Slightly deflated from this, having had the same invitation posed throughout the day, I replied, 'I'll think about it', and left.

It's not that they are dishonest about this fact. It's more the way the party cadre goes about what they do. It's reminiscent of that uncomfortable feeling one gets when browsing in a store where you have little intention of buying any of the wares or widgets on offer yet some preppy and relentless member of staff will not leave you alone and will tell you how great everything looks on you. Marxism might look good on you, too. This is also the problem. The Party is sold to you as if it is a fashionable ware.

By day two I entered the grounds of SOAS slightly more weary and deeply hungover so my patience was fraying early on in the piece. I attended a handful of lectures that day and stayed around to see the man, the myth, the legend, Jeremy

‘THE EVENT ORGANISERS SEEMINGLY WANTED COMRADE JEZZA NOT TO ADDRESS AND REFLECT ON HIS CATASTROPHIC PARLIAMENTARY FAILURE BUT, RATHER, KEEP ALIVE SOME SORT OF OPTIMISM FOR THE SAKE OF *THE MOVEMENT*’

Corbyn, speak to a crowded courtyard of young and old. He’d been asked to discuss his three books that changed the world. There were cheers as he arrived and he looked merry. A reverential hush comes over the crowd. It doesn’t matter what he’s going to say. It’s him that’s saying it. But there’s an immediate air of disappointment as he starts boring away about *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States*. By the time he’s on his visit to the Texas agricultural museum, and certainly by the time he starts reading from the book, even this captive audience begins to trickle away. The event organisers seemingly wanted comrade Jezza not to address and reflect on his catastrophic parliamentary failure but, rather, keep alive some sort of optimism for the sake of ‘the movement’. Hearing Corbyn wax lyrical on his favourite books rather than engage in any sort of critical reflection of his parliamentary defeat, to me, came across as an active attempt at whitewashing what had just happened. This is something the SWP’s founder Tony Cliff was a master at.

Nevertheless, the day goes on and the lectures keep rolling. I attended one on the relevance of Trotskyism today, suffice it to say, it appears very little. The lecturer, a former teacher, now union organiser, pontificated on how big Trotsky’s seminal work *History of the Russian Revolution* is and how long it took her to read it and then gave us a detailed reveal into how terrible working life is as a teacher in this Tory run United Kingdom. Last, but certainly not least, we were reminded that what the left needs is an organised and independent working-class party, so we should all join the SWP. I’d had enough of lecturers and leaflets that day so I went home to be a normal person and watch the football over a couple of pints and a bowl of chips.

On the final day, I left my attendance to the very last few lectures, and the final one of the day I attended was a book release for the SWP’s track coach, Alex Callinicos. *The New Age of Catastrophe* was his self-described magnum opus. In short, he argues that the immiseration of the working and middle classes might be a good thing for revolutionaries like himself and the SWP because it will pull people away from the centre and open up the space for a new movement to emerge. A book that I have no doubt reads exactly like any annual report that the Fourth International produced in the 1950s. Capitalism is entering its final crisis, fascism is just around the corner if not already in power but just in the garb of liberal conservativism, really existing socialism isn’t really socialism, and we need an independent workers party. By this point, I was incensed by the whole affair and promptly left at the end of Alex’s lecture. I once heard a tale, which to date I am unable to source the origins of, where in the later years of his life, Max Weber attended a local SPD meeting and upon leaving the gathering he had remarked to a colleague ‘These people frighten nobody.’ Whether this is true or not, this is exactly how I felt after attending *Marxism 2023*.

Reflections

If we examine *Marxism 2023* and its popularity as a symptom of the left decay, it becomes apparent that it mirrors a profound deterioration in the legitimacy of Liberalism itself and in times of such delegitimation people do tend to start looking outside of the mainstream offerings of the traditional established parties for alternatives. The problem here for the left though is that progressives and many elements of the left alike are adept at blackmailing radicals into a popular front

strategy to stop the imminent imaginary threat of fascism. Ever since the 80s, for progressives, every election has been the most important in a generation and they have used radicals to do their dirty work for them. When the moment becomes ripe for radicals to break with progressivism, they blackmail themselves into leaving the fruit to rot on the vine. Despite the hostility the SWP has towards Jeremy Corbyn's successor in the Labor Party, Sir Keir Starmer, when the election comes in 2025, the derangement of fringe elements of the right will become too much to bear for radicals and they will find themselves holding their nose and voting for Labor to defeat the Tories. This happened with Biden in 2020 and is currently occurring with Labour in Aotearoa.

In the words of Anton Jager, our age is best described as an era of 'hyperpolitics', where politics once again asserts itself ubiquitously, extending its influence from the streets to our daily lives. However, what sets this era apart is that this political resurgence does not predominantly flow through traditional political parties or established associative structures that have historically driven change. Instead, it manifests as a diffuse, sometimes disjointed, yet frequently impassioned outpouring of political engagement and activism. This phenomenon spans movements as diverse as the gilets-jaunes in France, the global Black Lives Matter protests, and the tumultuous Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom.

This age grapples persistently with the questions of state failure and democratic deficits. These concerns are repeatedly posed but seldom find resolution. Despite the fervour that may characterize its leadership, Marxism 2023 appears to lack the necessary breadth and depth to serve as a vehicle for revolutionary socialism. Its outreach remains confined, unable to bridge the gaps among disparate segments of society. Moreover, the symbols associated with the movement, including the clenched fist and the evocation of the Internationale, carry connotations of retrospection rather than anticipation, reflecting a stance that tends to dwell on the past rather than forward-looking progress.

With this in mind, let us end on a quote from Marx himself. In the second edition of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* he writes:

> *The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. The former revolutions required recollections of past world history in order to smother their own content. The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content—here the content goes beyond the phrase.*

With that, lets us aspire to create content that goes beyond our phrases.

OUR HISTORY

MARTIN CRICK

The New Zealand Party First Annual Conference 1908

The New Zealand Socialist Party held its first annual conference in Wellington on Easter Monday 1908, almost 7 years after its foundation. That hiatus mirrors almost exactly the trajectory of the NZFSS. For much of that period it had only three functioning branches, Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch, with Wellington by far the most active. These branches were largely autonomous. Again, we see distinct similarities between the NZSP in its early years and the Federation. A further point of convergence lies in the fact that the Wellington branch launched a journal, *Commonweal*, in February 1903. In its first iteration this lasted until September 1904.

However, between 1906 and 1908 the NZSP experienced a rapid growth in membership. This was partly due to increasing trade union disillusion with the conciliation and arbitration system. The Auckland tram workers' strike in November 1906 was the first in New Zealand for 12 years. As it was the only political party hostile to the Arbitration Act the Socialist Party began to attract more militant trade unionists. New branches in the West Coast mining towns were inspired by the arrival of a workers with a background in North American or Australian industrial unionism, men like Pat Hickey and Paddy Webb. Meanwhile in Wellington the arrival in 1906 of Canadian H M Fitzgerald, a proponent of De Leonite industrial unionism, stimulated the movement there. He embarked on a tour of the West Coast which led to an explosion in the number of branches. *Commonweal* was restarted in September 1906, but now with a national focus. The Blackball Strike in 1908, initially over the issue of 'crib time', led to the sacking of Hickey and 6 others, all socialists, and further encouraged the movement.

The Party encompassed a range of views: ethical socialism, Marxism, anarchism. It was also divided over tactics, with many of the mining branches arguing for a focus on revolutionary unionism, building the one big union, a general strike to overthrow the capitalist system, whereas others supported participating in the political process and electing socialists into parliament. De Leonites advocated a dual strategy. Consequently, the party lacked a clear focus, and the time seemed ripe therefore for the Party to hold its first national conference to debate these issues. Again, the similarities between the NZSP and the NZFSS are apparent. We too embrace a range of theoretical and strategic viewpoints, we too are debating 'the way forward'.

Much to the organisers' surprise 33 delegates registered, claiming to represent 3,000 members. This of course we cannot match, operating in an entirely different

Muir and Mackinlay, photo.
GROUP TAKEN OF THE FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIALIST PARTY, WELLINGTON.
33 delegates, representing 3,000 socialists throughout the Dominion. Tom Mann seated in centre.

context, where trade unions have been in retreat since the 1980s. Yes, there has been a surge of industrial action recently, but that has been largely amongst public sector workers, with little or no evidence of political underpinning. Nonetheless the discussions in 1908 around organising and strategy, and particularly the debate over the value of political action, standing socialist candidates in elections, is very pertinent to us, and the keynote speaker at our conference, Daniel Lopez from the Victorian Socialist Party, will surely help to focus our thoughts.

The NZSP confirmed its national platform as 'The establishment in New Zealand of a Co-operative Commonwealth founded on the Socialisation of Land and Capital.' The evening session on the Monday however revealed the confusion as to the Party's direction. The newly elected National Executive had been instructed to draw up a manifesto stating its position on current political questions for use in the forthcoming general election. A motion from the floor argued that 'The New Zealand Socialist Party take no political action at the present juncture', one delegate suggesting that 'It was a fallacy to think that they could obtain Socialism through parliament. It was only through the industrial field that their object would be obtained.' Visiting British socialist

FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIALIST PARTY
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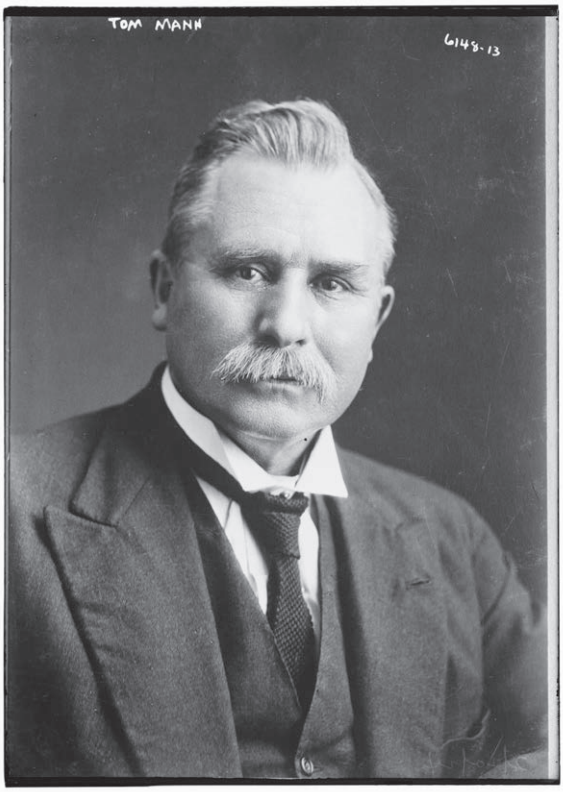


TOM MANN
GEORGE GRANTHAM BAIN COLLECTION

Tom Mann (see below), well known to the New Zealand Socialist Party, and at that time organiser for the Victorian Socialist Party, told delegates that the IWW was 'the greatest organisation of its kind in existence'. The motion was carried by a majority of two to one, and delegates adopted the preamble of the IWW. Mann also spoke of the progress of the socialist movement in Australia and it was agreed to affiliate to the Socialist Federation of Australasia, formed in June the previous year. The Party confirmed its opposition to arbitration and to militarism, and agreed that *Commonweal* should be the national organ of the Party.

Members later overturned the Conference decision on political action, and the Party stood four candidates in the general election that year. Nevertheless, the candidacies were largely propagandist, seeing elections as an opportunity for education and recruitment. What the conference had achieved was a national organisation with a central executive and branches, and a new set of rules. The following years saw increased industrial militancy and demands for an independent political labour movement. Militant miners formed the Federation of Labour (the 'Red Feds), seeing industrial action via 'one big union' as the way to achieving socialism, whilst Trade Councils focused on building a political party. The NZSP saw itself as the political arm of the Federation. Defeat at Waihi in 1912 however, led the Federation to propose unity between the two wings of the working-class movement, which saw the formation of the Social Democratic Party in July 1913, forerunner of the Labour Party (1916). Only the Wellington branch of the NZSP stayed outside the new party, eventually merging into the Communist Party in 1921. During its short history the New Zealand Socialist Party had not achieved electoral success, but its propaganda and the ideas it promoted had influenced all parts of the labour movement and arguably moved it further to the left than it might otherwise have been.

Tom Mann

Tom Mann was the best- known British trade unionist of his time, a pioneer of the socialist movement, and one of the greatest propagandists the working-class movement has ever known. He was described as a 'positive whirlwind', a 'volcanic speaker', his oratory full of 'fire, vehemence, passion, humour, drama, and

crashing excitement'. It 'stirs the brain, charms the ear, fires the imagination, and literally rushes people off their feet'. The transnational character of his politics gave him a unique span of contacts across the world. He toured Australia, New Zealand, China, South Africa, the USA, Canada, Russia, and throughout Europe . The president of the Barrier Industrial Council in New South Wales says of Mann that 'Although he spent barely a decade in New Zealand and Australia, during that time he made an indelible mark and helped to shape our modern labour movements.' When he died on 13 March 1941 red flags were hung at half-mast over many public and labour buildings in Australia. The Australian Metal Workers Union has the Tom Mann Theatre attached to its head office.

Mann was born on 15 April 1856 at Bell Green Warwickshire, just outside Coventry. He left school at nine to work in the fields, and then in coal mining aged 10 to 14. After a colliery fire he was apprenticed to a tool-making firm in Birmingham, working a 60 hour, six-day week, and often two hours of overtime with no penalty rates. In 1876 he moved to London, and in 1881 joined the Amalgamated Society of Engineers as a full member. As a toolmaker craftsman, one of those often described by Marxists as a labour aristocrat, he was one of those looking not only for self- improvement but for the betterment of the working class as a whole, which at that time had no vote, no representation on public bodies, and was living in squalid conditions in the rapidly expanding cities of Victorian Britain. He attended a different night school every day of the week except one, and developed a life-long fascination with astronomy. His prime motivation for self-education, however, was a desire for social change, and his main interest was in history and particularly the history of ideas. The study of history is given great importance by Marx, for it enables socialists to understand the evolution of societies and ideas, and in turn to validate their world view. Mann believed strongly that it is the legacy of ideas that count, that they are the motor of social change.

His criticism of the capitalist system was at first a moral one, much like one of his great influences William Morris, and he became a lay preacher for the Christian Socialist movement. Like Morris, however, he soon became a fierce critic of the organised church, and in 1884 he joined the Social-Democratic Federation, Britain's first Marxist organisation. He read the *Communist Manifesto* in 1886 and later wrote that 'I gladly accepted the name of Communist from my first reading.' This was a period of great ferment in Britain; unemployment was high and he threw himself into the unemployed struggle and the struggle for free speech in London, being present at the Bloody Sunday demonstration in November 1887. He was active in the Eight-hour League, and in 1886 he wrote a pamphlet *What a compulsory eight-hour day means to the worker*. This was a seminal moment in the thinking of the labour movement, signalling a breach between the older craft unions and those trying to organise new unions of the unskilled. Mann believed that ideas were most powerful as a weapon when allied to organisation, and that the most effective organisations were those with a clear vision. He thought that if a union's reason for existence was solely to maintain its existence as a union then it would not last. It had to have a sense of purpose, and that should be to change the basis of society, otherwise workers would remain on a perpetual treadmill of wage struggles.

'THE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE NZSP AND THE NZFSS ARE APPARENT. WE TOO EMBRACE A RANGE OF THEORETICAL AND STRATEGIC VIEWPOINTS, WE TOO ARE DEBATING *THE WAY FORWARD*'

'HE THOUGHT THAT IF A UNION'S REASON FOR EXISTENCE WAS SOLELY TO MAINTAIN ITS EXISTENCE AS A UNION THEN IT WOULD NOT LAST'

He helped organise the important 'matchgirls' strike at the Bryant and May factory in 1888, and then became a key figure in the great London Dock Strike of 1889. One of his major contributions was to secure significant funds from Australian dock workers, which proved to be the turning point in the strike. It signified a commitment to internationalism which remained with him throughout his life. After the strike Mann became president of the Dockers' Union and remained so for three years. He was secretary of the newly-formed Independent Labour Party (ILP) from 1894-1897, and stood as a parliamentary candidate for the ILP on three occasions. He was President of the International Federation of Ship, Dock and River Workers 1896-1901, and he formed the Workers Union in 1898.

Already aware of the much more advanced trade union and labour movement in Australia, Mann was now intrigued by William Ranstead's articles in the *Clarion* newspaper describing a supposed socialist utopia in New Zealand and seeking recruits for his proposed socialist community there. This led to some 200 Clarion Settlers emigrating to New Zealand in 1900. The country had been governed for some 10 years by a Lib-Lab government, the first of its kind anywhere in the world, and was viewed by many as a social laboratory, having passed a number of welfare reforms and Factory Acts. He was particularly interested in the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act, introduced in 1894 by the Minister of Labour William Pember Reeves ,and the consequent strike free country. Reeves, influenced by Fabian socialism, described himself as 'a state socialist, in the sense that I accept with joy every increase in the powers of the state.' His successor as Minister of Labour, Edward Tregear, held similar views. Initially welcomed by trade unions the Act was not without its critics. John Carruthers, a member of William Morris's Hammersmith Socialist Society and a civil engineer, in New Zealand to work on Vogel's railway system, described it as bureaucratic state capitalism; an American visitor, R H Hutchinson, saw the reforms as 'sops to the discontented to keep them quiet.

An upheaval in his personal life at this time, coupled with this curiosity and interest, decided him to visit Australasia to discover more for himself. Mann landed in Wellington on 21 January 1902, then travelled to Christchurch. In June he was appointed as national organiser for the fledgling New Zealand Socialist Party, and immediately embarked upon a three- week tour of the West Coast mining towns of the South Island. He reported setting up five new branches, although none survived his departure. What Mann found in New Zealand disappointed him. It was at best a form of state socialism a long way from anything he had envisaged, and it went hand-in-hand with high unemployment, the use of child labour, and racism towards both indigenous people and Chinese immigrants. His last public lecture was in Wellington on 14 September. Victorian state elections were due, so he decided to visit Melbourne, but then stayed on as organiser for the Victorian Labour Party. He performed the same role for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), edited *The Socialist* Newspaper, and helped to form the Socialist Party of Victoria in 1905. He was imprisoned for five weeks in Melbourne in 1906 during a Free Speech fight, and again during the Broken Hill lock-out of 1908/9, when he worked alongside Harry Holland. Banned from speaking in New South Wales, miners organised a Tom Mann Train to transport 4000 of them 30 miles outside

the state to hear him speak. His experiences in New Zealand and Australia led him to become an outspoken opponent of both arbitration and nationalisation, and moved him towards the syndicalist views of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).

Before the Broken Hill strike he returned to New Zealand, invited by the Socialist Party to its first Annual Conference, and he remained for three months. Two thousand people crammed into Wellington Opera House on the Sunday evening of the conference to hear him speak. 'To advance Socialism—that is the direct and specific object of my visit', he said, 'I am on an educational campaign'. He suggested that two years would have to be spent on educative work before the party was ready for parliamentary action. He toured both North and South Islands before leaving New Zealand on 10 July and returning to Australia, where he remained until January 1910. He was later refused permission to re-enter the country.

Mann remained a militant trade unionist and socialist for the rest of his life. Wherever there was a fight he was in demand to speak or to organise. The South Wales miners' strike 1910, the Merseyside transport strike 1911. During the first ever national coal strike in 1912 he was sentenced to six months for incitement to mutiny after a leaflet urging soldiers not to fire on striking miners was circulated outside various barracks. This legendary 'Don't Shoot' leaflet had first been published in *The Syndicalist*, of which Mann was the publisher. It was later proved that he was charged on the orders of government ministers, an indication of the threat he was seen to pose. The Dublin lock-out 1913,the South African general strike 1914; opposition to conscription during the First World War. He joined the Communist Party, was president of the National Minority Movement at the time of the general strike of 1926, served on the executive of the Red International of Labour Unions, visited China at its behest during the civil war, at some risk to himself. He supported the hunger marches of the early 1930s and, aged 76, served one month in prison in 1932 for a speech he made protesting against the Unemployment Bill. Later in the same year he served three months preventative detention to stop him visiting Belfast, after he had been deported earlier in the year after speaking at the funerals of two killed during protests against the Means Test. He became president of the Marx Memorial Library in 1933, and even attempted to enlist in the International Brigades to fight in Spain. His name was given to the first British volunteers to embark for Spain, the Tom Mann Centuria. He visited Russia for a last time in 1937, spoke at the Danish Communist Party Congress in June 1938, toured for the Swedish Communist Party in September of the same year, and continued to be a major attraction at marches, rallies and demonstrations the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. He died on 13 March 1941, aged 84. One newspaper described him as 'leading from the front, untiring, incorruptible.' Willie Gallacher, later Communist Party MP, said of him 'No task was too humble, no task was too hard, no journey too onerous or exhausting.' Jack Tanner, president of the Engineering Union, summed up his life: 'Tom Mann's service to the working class was outstanding and unsurpassed.'

REVIEWS

JOHN KERR

Spanish Civil War Tours

'Practically every building of any size had been seized by the workers and was draped with red flags or with the red and black flag of the Anarchists; every wall was scrawled with the hammer and sickle and with the initials of the revolutionary parties… There was much in it that I did not understand, in some ways I did not even like it, but I recognized it immediately as a state of affairs worth fighting for.'

George Orwell's description of Barcelona in the grip of a workers' revolution in 1936 eventually found its way into print about eighteen months after the events he described in the passage above and a year before the Spanish Civil War ended in the spring of 1939. Published under the title *Homage to Catalonia* it enjoyed little commercial success, not being widely read until the 1950s and later, in the wake of the success of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty Four*.

I have had the privilege of visiting Barcelona twice in recent years, pre and post pandemic, and the city and region of Catalonia continues to make history. In more recent times it became the focus of an attempt to secede from Spain and it has hit the headlines again as the exiled secessionists potentially became kingmakers in coalition talks after the general election in late July.

The history of the workers' revolution has largely been airbrushed from the city's fabric however. Decades of fascism suppressed the left and even when Spain emerged from the Franco years there was a wilful amnesia, coupled with the triumph of neoliberalism, that means that much of what made the revolution of 1936 has vanished.

Thankfully there are a dedicated few who are keeping that history alive. One is a British ex-pat, Nick Lloyd, who has made a life in Barcelona and runs an organisation that provides guided walking tours of the city's 'forgotten places'. Billed simply as 'Spanish Civil War Tours' punters get a four-hour immersive experience focusing on the Placa Catalunya, Las Ramblas and the Barrio Gothic. Nick and his fellow tour guides skilfully take small groups back to the events of 1936–39 and beyond that Spanish Republicans were involved in—the first Allied troops into Paris during its liberation in 1944 were Spanish anarchists for example.

The tour starts in the huge Placa Catalunya, the square where many French workers, sleeping outdoors on the first paid holidays granted them by Leon Blum's Socialist government, joined local anarchist trade unionists to defeat the Fascist putsch of July 1936. It goes on to count the bullet holes in the Telephone Exchange that came under fire during that battle and later street fighting as Stalinist communists sought to suppress

PLAÇA DEL MILICIÀ DESCONEGUT, BARCELONA (SQUARE OF THE UNKNOWN MILITIAMEN)

ADAM JONES—WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Trotskyists and Anarchists in the May Days of 1937. We visited the former lobby of the Hotel Continental (now a Levis Store...) where Orwell's wife Eileen, working in the administration of Red Aid, warned her husband to go underground as the Trotskyite militia he had joined, the POUM, had been banned. Along the way there is a plethora of other sites—the school yard where children were caught in a Fascist air raid; a plaque to Andreu Nin, POUM Secretary, as 'a victim of Stalinism'; the Anarchist CNT trade union headquarters; and a sign discovered in 2004, covered up on a church wall, of Placa del Milicia Descongut—the 'Square of the Unknown Militiaman'.

Nick and his colleagues are skilled at accommodating tourists with varying backgrounds and knowledge and weave a tale that one fellow tourist aptly described as a 'Shakespearean Tragedy of the left'. Artefacts—documents, badges, medals, photos—from the time are passed around and discussion and questions are encouraged. There is a welcome visit to a cafe run by owners sympathetic to the work being done to preserve the history of the revolution which allows for more in-depth discussion.

Should readers have the opportunity to visit Barcelona, I strongly encourage taking the time to go on one of these tours. Regardless of how much or how little you know of the war and revolution in Barcelona and beyond, you will come away knowing more.

BYRON CARR

El Cid

The blacklisted screenwriter, the Fascist dictator, Charlton Heston, and the movie they all helped make happen

El Cid is streaming on Kanopy

Fascist regimes have always relied on a kind of alternative history. Nationalism (even in its non-fascist iterations) requires storytelling. 'Nations' have to be constructed: through a shared language, a shared history, and often a shared folklore. Spain under the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco was no exception. 'The image of both the Christian Reconquest and the Conquest of the Americas was dependent upon an imagining of the past that simply never was but became accepted as truth by most Spaniards,' writes Louie Dean Valencia-García in *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History*. 'The alt-history effectively replaced history itself—and still holds a strong grip on the country's popular imagination.'

This is perhaps most obvious in the revival of the medieval knight Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, better known as *El Cid*. While *El Cid* lived in the 11th century, long before the *Reconqista* and before there was a Spain (the Iberian peninsula was at that time made up of numerous Christian kingdoms and the Islamic *taifas* that emerged following the fracturing of the Caliphate of Córdoba), he was revived as a Spanish national hero in the 1950s. In 1955, with the support of Franco, a statue of *El Cid* by the artist Juan Cristóbal was erected in Burgos. Burgos is the largest town near *El Cid*'s birthplace, and was also a stronghold for the fascist Falange movement and Franco's army during the Spanish Civil War. In the Francoist narrative, Spain's Civil War was conceptualised as a 'War of Liberation' and framed as another 'Reconquest'. While the *Reconqista* expelled Muslims and Jews, the civil war had, according to Valencia-García, expelled (or otherwise ostracised, imprisoned, murdered or exiled) those from the political left, queer people and other supposed enemies of Spain.

In 1960 the Franco regime provided financial support for the production of a blockbuster film about *El Cid*, starring Charlton Heston. In the Francoist version of history, *El Cid* is an unambiguous crusader against Islam. In the film Yusuf ibn Tashufin, the Muslim antagonist to Heston's Rodrigo, portrayed by Herbert Lom, asserts that the prophet has ordered them to rule the world and declares that to achieve that aim they will first sweep

across Spain, then Europe. It's a narrative that fits well with the far-right of the 2020s where there is a belief in a so-called 'great replacement' where Muslims will spread throughout Europe displacing the white, Christian population. In Franco's time though, the reconquest of Spain and the expulsion of the Muslim Moors was likened to his own war against the forces of 'anti-Spain', which he identified as socialism, communism, and anti-Catholicism, a less direct historical comparison. Rather than invoking a fear of Islam in the minds of early 1960s movie goers, this line as uttered by Lom was arguably a metaphor for the domino theory of Russian expansion that was so prevalent at the time[1]

The film has been described as Francoist propaganda. In the commentary track to the 2007 DVD release, historian Neal Rosendorf stresses the Francoist themes in the film. After interviewing Charlton Heston while conducting research for his book *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film,* John Aberth described him as seemingly 'blissfully unaware that he reenacted on the set of Peñiscola a Fascist leadership cult.' When Aberth outright asked Heston if the political climate of Fascist Spain inadvertently affected the film in any way, a 'genuinely puzzled' Heston responded, 'I can't think how.'

The opening narration of the *El Cid* film echoes a speech made by Franco in 1936, where he stated:

We are in a war that is resembling more and more the character of a crusade, of a great historical campaign, and of a transcendental struggle of people and civilizations. This war has chosen Spain again in history, like a battlefield of tragedy and honour, to save herself and to bring peace to a world gone mad.

Was Heston ignorant of all this? Quite possibly. During the eight months he spent working on the picture in Spain his only interaction with the Spanish populace was a 'public relations exercise' at a bullfight in Castellón de la Plana, where he paraded with the matadors atop the same white horse he rides in the movie. Franco was never invited on set, though Prince Juan Carlos was, and met with the stars. Aberth writes that 'the political message would have been unmistakable to a population only a generation removed from the Civil War. To them, the Cid was the Middle Ages' Franco, a medieval justification for the current regime.'

For American audiences though, and perhaps even the American actors, what they took from the movie was equally likely a narrative around racial equality that paralleled the contemporary civil rights movement. That may be in part due to the fact that the screenplay for this medieval costume epic, derided by many as fascist propaganda, was written by a Jewish communist.

Shortly before the filming was scheduled to begin both Heston and his co-star, the Italian actress Sophia Loren, expressed dissatisfaction with the script, with Loren threatening to abandon *El Cid* unless it was rewritten. Ben Barzman was brought in to redo the script at short notice. Barzman was one of five blacklisted screenwriters who often worked in Madrid for producer Philip Yordon. It was

1 "The Purest Knight of All": Nation, History, and Representation in "El Cid" (1960) https://www.jstor.org/stable/1225818

not uncommon for screenwriters blacklisted in the USA to work abroad, often still writing scripts for films that were made for the American market. Barzman, according to his wife Norma, adapted the script from Pierre Corneille's play *Le Cid*, which was first performed in Paris in 1636. The play contains little in the way of historically accurate material.

Ben Barzman was born in Toronto in 1911, the son of an old-time Socialist who had emigrated from Russia in 1905. He put himself through college 'standing on my feet [for] long hours' in a Portland cloak-and-suit factory. He moved to Hollywood and was approached to join the Communist Party while working on a musical revue called *Labor Pains*, a West Coast version of the Broadway musical *Pins and Needles,* created by (among others) Max Danish, long-time editor of *Justice,* the newspaper of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). The play was first performed by a cast of ILGWU members.

After the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began investigating writers in Hollywood with real or imagined links to the Communist Party the Barzmans ended up in the UK, among other expatriates now working on British film and television. When Ben was hired to rewrite *El Cid*, Norma was instructed to bring with them from London five kosher salami for Philip Yordon. She delivered them on their arrival and he immediately took to one of them with his letter opener. Ben Barzman, Sophia Loren and Basilio Franchina, who had been hired to translate the dialogue into Italian and then back into simple English for Loren, were ensconced in apartments on three different floors of the Torre de Madrid. A boy sat in the hall of Ben's apartment waiting for new script pages. Ben typed, and when a few pages accumulated the boy took one set to director Anthony Mann and another to Sophia. From this process the final script emerged.

Anthony Mann was no ideologue. 'I believe in the nobility of the human spirit. It is that for which I look in a subject I am to direct....This is what drama is. This is what pictures are all about. I don't believe in anything else', he said when describing his last epic film. But movies are always influenced by the zeitgeist, 'We tried to make it all as modern as possible so that it could be related to any society; so that people would understand', he said of *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, the epic he directed immediately after *El Cid*. Martin M Winkler, in an article titled *Mythic and Cinematic Traditions in Anthony Mann's "El Cid"*,[2] argues this also applies to the *El Cid* picture:

> *Mann's Rodrigo is both a hero from the mythical past and a child of the modern age. He is liberal and open-minded toward people of another race and culture, and he presents such an ideal image of the progressive American that a reviewer for Time magazine did not hesitate to call him a 'champion of civil rights.'*

At one point in the film Rodrigo tells a Muslim leader 'We have so much to give to each other, and to Spain.' There is perhaps some truth in this characterisation. Contrary to Francoist myth Rodrigo was no crusader, but a mercenary who fought

2 Mythic and Cinematic Traditions in Anthony Mann's "El Cid" https://www.jstor.org/stable/24780568

in the service of both Christian kings and Muslim emirs. The name '*El Cid*' is derived from the Arabic honorific al-sīd ('the lord'). *Historia Roderici* ('The History of Rodrigo'), a Latin prose life of *El Cid*, probably written in the first quarter of the twelfth century, describes Rodrigo's favour at the court of al-Mu'tamin of Zaragoza. The emir is described as being 'very fond of Rodrigo',more so even than of his own son, and as having entrusted his *taifa* to Rodrigo's care. In the *Historia*, as in the movie, *El Cid*'s enemies are not the Moors of the Iberian peninsula but the Almoravids, the Muslim dynasty whose empire stretched over the western Maghreb.

Thomas Freeman, in *Filming a Legend: Anthony Mann's El Cid* [3], describes the film as being simultaneously propaganda for Franco and as propaganda for racial equality, the result of the different goals of those involved in the collaborative enterprise of making an epic film.

Samuel Bronston, the producer of El Cid, wished to make a profit on the film and also to establish a major film studio based in Spain; both goals necessitated gaining Franco's support. Other people involved in the film—the director, the scriptwriters and probably its star—wished, for ideological reasons, to depict the Cid as a champion of racial equality and racial harmony. It was possible for these two messages to co-exist within the same film because they had crucial elements in common: they both depended on portraying the Cid as an altruistic leader who united the people of Spain, both Christian and Moor, to work together in a common cause. The difference in the interpretations was whether the cause was defending Europe from Communism or the struggle for Civil Rights.

Today, nearly half a century on from the end of Franco's regime, the town of Burgos has remained a home to far-right ideology. A group called Skinheads Burgos holds a yearly ceremony at the statue of *El Cid* to celebrate the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain. The town also hosts a weeklong festival dedicated to *El Cid*. To quote Louie Dean Valencia-García again 'the alt-history created out of the fragments of *El Cid*'s life is celebrated both popularly and by the radical right. With this simple example, we see just how a historical person has become twisted into something clearly unrecognisable to history.'

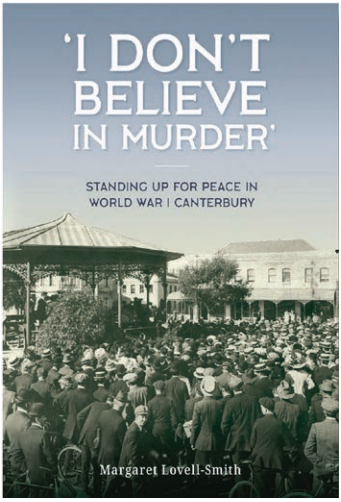
El Cid dies at the end of the film. His corpse is then strapped onto his horse by his wife and sent out to lead the battle in his last victory against the Almoravids. 'It is a marvellous scene, no question', Heston told John Aberth, 'and it was wonderful to play. Actors love death scenes.' Before Anthony Lom's Yusuf ibn Tashufin is trampled and his army forced to retreat, a cheer goes up from the forces led by the dead *El Cid*—'for God! The Cid! And Spain!' The narrator then declares 'and thus the Cid rode out of the gates of history and into legend.' Today, as when the film was made, that legend serves as something a modern political ideology can be harnessed to, like a corpse mounted on a horse and marched into battle.

'WHEN ABERTH OUTRIGHT ASKED HESTON IF THE POLITICAL CLIMATE OF FASCIST SPAIN INADVERTENTLY AFFECTED THE FILM IN ANY WAY, A 'GENUINELY PUZZLED' HESTON RESPONDED, "I CAN'T THINK HOW"'.

3 Biography And History In Film, Thomas Freeman and David Smith, Palgrave Macmillan (2019)

MARTIN CRICK

'I Don't Believe in Murder': Standing Up For Peace in World War I Canterbury



Margaret Lovell-Smith

(Canterbury University Press; ISBN: 978-1-98-850336-3; $45)

The centennial commemorations of the First World War (1914-18) often seemed to border on a glorification of war, with their constant themes of heroism, sacrifice and freedom. They further entrenched the centrality of warfare in global politics, whilst the Anzac myth, the idea that a national identity was forged in the hell that was Gallipoli and in the trenches of Europe, dominated the commemorations. Exhibitions provided graphic descriptions of life in the trenches, and the bravery of those who went 'over the top'. The publication of soldiers' letters, diaries and biographies gave an insight into what they were thinking and feeling. The Home Front was exhaustively covered too, with tales of wives and mothers waiting for news of their husbands and sons, of family grief, of the privations suffered by many due to rationing. But the overall impression given was of a country united in support of the war effort.

Yet there was opposition to the war, and it was more widespread than the commemorations allowed. Voluntary recruitment dried up very quickly, and in 1916 the government was forced to introduce conscription. Hundreds of men refused to fight and nationwide 286 were imprisoned as conscientious objectors. Jared Davidson has estimated that up to 3000 men could be classed as objectors. Many more simply refused to register and avoided military service altogether, going into hiding or leaving the country. Others were imprisoned for sedition. He concludes that the total number of dissenters was nearer to 10,000. Yet The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa's exhibition *Gallipoli: The Scale of Our War* made little mention of conscription or conscientious objection,

and Canterbury Museum's *Canterbury and World War One: Lives Lost, Lives Changed* had only one small display devoted to conscientious objection.

That Canterbury Museum mentioned the anti-war movement at all was largely due to the *Voices Against War* research and education project initiated by the Christchurch Disarmament and Security Centre in 2015 to provide an antidote to the prevailing narrative. It aimed to identify and publicise the stories of those men, women and families who both before and during World War 1 opposed conscription and militarism. (http://voicesagainstwar.nz) The lead researcher on the project was Margaret Lovell-Smith, and this book is a development and extension of that project. One of its strengths is its study of local experiences and perspectives, and she demonstrates that responses to the war were influenced by both class and gender. There was no national or homogeneous view, and elsewhere in the country of course ethnicity also played a role. She draws on a huge variety of sources. Particularly fruitful were the 'Charles Mackie Papers' in the Canterbury Museum. Mackie was secretary of the National Peace Council, and his archive contains a vast amount of correspondence, printed material and ephemera relating to the campaign against the war. Newspaper reports of military board hearings and court martials give us the 'voices' of many COs, whilst Lovell-Smith was fortunate indeed to meet with many relatives of COs and be allowed to examine scrapbooks, diaries, correspondence and photographs. All of this is used to give us a rich and fascinating account of the people who made Christchurch the leading city in the peace movement, and helped to create 'radical Christchurch'.

In the first three chapters of the book Lovell-Smith explores why Christchurch and Canterbury became the epicentre of the peace movement and radical activism. She describes how New Zealand's most 'English' of cities was home to a number of idealistic and progressive groups, Christian, pacifist, socialist and humanitarian, with shared goals for the betterment of society. Whilst no women activists were imprisoned for opposing the war she emphasises the vital role that they played in the anti-war movement. Importantly, she also describes a lesser-known aspect of the movement, in that New Zealand, along with Australia, had introduced compulsory military training for boys aged 14 and over before the war, in the Defence Act of 1909. Hundreds of boys refused training, and many were imprisoned for non-payment of fines, thus becoming the first Pākehā political prisoners in New Zealand history. The title of the book, *I Don't Believe in Murder,* uses the words of Harry Cooke in 1911, the first of Canterbury's young men to be imprisoned for refusing to take part in compulsory military service. Harry was the son of Fred Cooke, prominent Christchurch trade unionist and socialist. Fred himself was imprisoned for speaking out against the Defence Act before the war and for opposing conscription during the war. The treatment of the boys in prison outraged liberal opinion in Christchurch, and certainly prepared the ground for the anti-war and anti-conscription movement which followed.

In the succeeding chapters Lovell-Smith looks at the development of the peace movement during the early years of the war, and the difficulties it faced when confronted with at best apathy and more usually hostility. Elsie Locke, a historian of the peace movement , described it as 'the conscience of society'. But as the war dragged on, as casualties mounted, it gained a more sympathetic

‘LOVELL-SMITH GIVES US BOTH AN ENTHRALLING NARRATIVE AND A VALUABLE REMINDER TO BE SUSPICIOUS OF ‘OFFICIAL’ HISTORIES AND ONES WHICH PURPORT TO PAINT A PICTURE OF A NATION AS ONE’

hearing. There was a growing awareness that the sacrifices of war were not being shared equally, with the working-classes suffering in the trenches and bearing the brunt of economic hardship at home. The introduction of conscription in 1916 led trade unions and socialists to demand the conscription of wealth too. In Chapters 5 we hear the stories of socialist objectors to the war. ‘The only place for a decent socialist…was gaol’, said John Roberts, a member of the Woolston branch of the Social Democratic Party, and recently elected Woolston Borough councillor. In Chapter 6 religious objectors have their say, and this is one of the strengths of the book—that wherever possible Lovell-Smith uses the words of the conscientious objectors themselves. Chapter 7 describes the men’s lives in prison , whilst Chapter 8 analyses the support networks for the conscientious objectors, with women particularly prominent. One leading anti-militarist said to Sarah Page that she had talked more sedition in 5 minutes than he had in his whole speech, yet he was arrested the following day whilst she went free. More than 2500 people attended a cost-of-living and anti-conscription demonstration in Christchurch on 18 March 1917, whilst 5000 gathered outside the King Edward Barracks in April 1918 to prevent newly conscripted Second Division men from leaving. The final chapter in the book looks at the legacy of the First World War peace movement. It examines what happened to the men when they were released from prison. They were deprived of their civil rights, and the stigma against them could be long-lasting, leading some to change their occupation, and even their homes. Many men and women remained active in the peace movement, and influential in new organisations which emerged after the war e.g. The No More War Movement and the Peace Pledge Union. Although several anti-war and anti-conscription advocates were elected to parliament on behalf of the Labour Party in 1919 and again in 1922 the Labour Party nationally gradually severed its links with the peace movement. The Labour government’s introduction of conscription during World War 11 bitterly disappointed many of those who had campaigned against it nearly three decades earlier, and some resigned from the Party. However, Lovell-Smith argues for a clear line of descent from the peace movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries through to the anti-nuclear peace movement which led to New Zealand becoming a nuclear-free nation in 1985. She could of course have also mentioned the anti-Vietnam War, the anti-Iraq war and other protests. In conclusion she quotes Elsie Locke, who commented on the ‘whole forest of peace activity’ that had grown ‘from seeds planted long ago’.

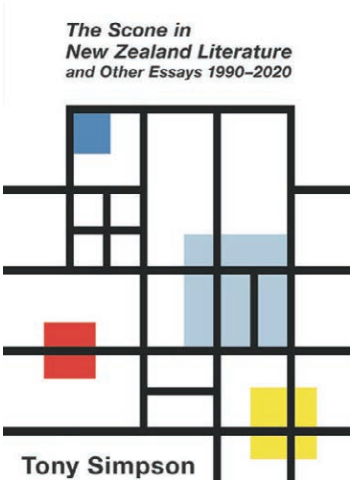
I highly recommend this book. With one or two exceptions, notably the story of Archibald Baxter, the personal stories of the New Zealanders who chose to oppose war have barely been heard. Vilified as cowards and unpatriotic there were few voices to paint a different picture. But Canterbury tennis star Anthony Wilding wrote this to his mother shortly after joining up in September 1914: ‘I verily believe that it would take a braver man to stand down than become a soldier’. He was killed less than a year later. Sarah Page, mother of a conscientious objector wrote that ‘It takes more courage to be a C.O. than a soldier. No glamour or band.’ In telling the story of these conscientious objectors, Lovell-Smith gives us both an enthralling narrative and a valuable reminder to be suspicious of ‘official’ histories and ones which purport to paint a picture of a nation as one.

QUENTIN FINDLAY

The Scone in New Zealand Literature and Other Essays 1990–2020

Tony Simpson

(Wellington; Blythswood Press, 2022)



I must admit to some bias in this review. I have admired Tony's previous work for some time. His earlier books, *The Sugarbag Years* and *The Slump* are very familiar to me and were the standard 'go to' books for my university essays, and later my PhD. I also own a rather battered copy of *Shame and Disgrace—A History of Lost Scandals*. As its title suggests, it contains several scandalous tales and activities that both time and polite society 'forgot'. It is an excellent read. Additionally, I have occasionally shared some beers with him, particularly in the old Bodega Bar in Wellington during his Alliance and Progressive party years. Tony makes for interesting and stimulating intellectual conversation. When I heard that he had a new book out that needed to be reviewed I had no hesitation in doing so.

Firstly, this book is not about scones, although the named food is dealt with in both a political and postmodern sense. Instead, *The Scone in New Zealand Literature* is very much a book about New Zealand's politics, history and society in the late 20th and very early 21st Centuries. It is also a book about Tony Simpson. The Scone allows us not only to see Tony Simpson, the historian, but also Tony Simpson the policy maker and political adviser, and lastly, Tony Simpson the human being.

The book's essays, many of which were originally presentations to various groups, and in some cases, policy papers (on behalf of the Alliance or Jim Anderton, as Tony was the chief policy advisor for Jim during the late 1990s and early 2000), cover an assortment of topics and themes. Although a number deal with the changing nuances of New Zealand's political and economic environment from the late 1980s and 1990s Tony Simpson, as one would expect from a person who worked for the Alliance and the PSA previously, is critical of those changes. His central thesis, that they systematically alienated both individuals and society as a collective whole, form the underlying theme of several essays.

The Scone also proved to be a bit of a memory jogger for people like me, particularly his essays on the defence force review of the late 1990s, and the 'croak and stagger' organisation that was the SIS. I do remember the political heat that

had resulted from the review of the New Zealand navy at that time. The various questions that arose as part of that review were about the ongoing role of the navy, the suitability of its fleet, and the best use of the country's naval resources in the South Pacific given ongoing security concerns.

Likewise, there was also considerable discussion about the future and operation of New Zealand's security organisations at the same time. These concerns emphasised bungled raids, overspending, and security breaches such as the leaving of brief cases containing top secret documents, cold meat pies, and (if I remember correctly) a *Playboy* magazine on reporters' fences in Wellington. Central to these questions was the role played by New Zealand's security intelligence forces internally and their relationships with external international agencies, especially those of the US. Tony's excellent essays show that despite the passing of twenty years these issues remain extremely valid and largely unresolved.

However, *The Scone* demonstrates very clearly that Tony Simpson remains very much a historian at heart. He relates that he took political studies at Canterbury University in the 1960s, as that was really the only way that you could learn about New Zealand history at the time. New Zealand history, as such, was not taught in schools or at universities and, if it was, it was glossed over. History, as I am reminded from my own High School experiences in the early 1980s, consisted mostly of English dates and events (and these tended not to be working class or popular events).

Consequently, Pākehā New Zealanders, as Tony reminds us, mostly existed in a historical and cultural bubble. Britain, and principally England, were at the centre of modern civilisation and, were surrounded by its various colonies and dominions. The exploitation of the colonies and dominions generated the goods and the wealth that the Empire existed on. This view of the world lasted for a considerable period. Even in the 1970s school atlases still showed large parts of the planet as being coloured British red.

In his note to me, Tony drew my attention to the chapter 'Dr Marx and Mr Wakefield', which deals with the introduction, impact and development of capitalism in early New Zealand by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the New Zealand Company. As Tony explains the popular conception, of Gibbon setting up the company and then bravely establishing sites in New Zealand, is largely fictitious. It is the creation of an Empire that sought to expand its presence and introduce capitalism, and it used people like Wakefield to do so. Wakefield was not opposed to his use in that regard. He was a con man, but a willing servant of the Empire.

Tony references Marx's critiques of Wakefield's dubious (and similar) scheme in Swan River in Australia. Marx pointed out that the success of the Swan River scheme rested in Wakefield's being able to adopt two strategies. The first was to become the sole owner of land, and the second was to ensure that your workers remained broke enough never to be able to buy land and thus always remain workers. This was done through the appropriation of some of the value of their work which limited their ability to abandon their roles. While this approach had failed in Swan River, it had succeeded in New Zealand. Wakefield had envisaged the New Zealand Company being the sole buyer, owner and seller of Māori land, but this role was taken over by the Government after the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. Consequently the Government, which

had the same or coincident objectives as those of the directors of the New Zealand Company, was able to dictate land ownership in the new colony. Consequently, the country was the result of a rather 'elegant rort' as Tony puts it.

However, while the principal export of the Empire was capitalism, the key component was hegemonic with the creation of a distinctly 'British' history and culture. In the essay on 'Identity and History', Tony refers to this notion of a distinctly British culture which influenced the differing perspectives of Pākehā New Zealanders in the mid Twentieth Century, as against those of Māori. In his interviews as a student and later for his books in the 1970s, he interviewed people and noted the differences of perspective. For Pākehā, the starting points were The First World War, the Depression, the Second World War etc. While Māori emphasised the same events the frame of reference was different. Additionally, Māori emphasised issues such as immigration and the effect of this on their culture and the relationship between them and Pakeha.

One can get a distinct understanding of the strength of this belief in 'Britishness' amongst Pākehā by reading the newspapers available on *Papers Past*. Pākehā referred to their unique 'Britishness' constantly and consistently. From their perspective New Zealand (not Aotearoa) was a part of the mightiest empire that the world had ever seen. It had provided stability, government, literacy, and civilisation. This belief was prevalent everywhere, from the pages of books and newspapers to magazines. It was broadcast on the newly invented wireless and it was on the news reels shown at the movies. Children were taught it at school.

The concept of 'Britain' permeated all the strata of society, including the Labour movement. Speaking in Parliament during the First World War, the chair of the parliamentary Labour Party, Alfred Hindmarsh, lined up with the Tories and the Liberals to praise British culture and society at a time when it was seen as being at risk as a result of the War;

> *"[It is…] our traditions, our language, our literature. We are fighting for Shakespeare's memory, for Milton's memory, and for other celebrated men who stood out in English history and helped to create the present for us. Everyone who reads Shakespeare must after he has read a little, become imbued with patriotism… the common feeling of the people is always higher than the feeling of individuals that compose it."*

Tony Simpson reminds us that this notion of 'Britishness' is a creation. There was no notion of a 'British' culture or identity 300 years ago. There were only the different cultures and identities of the independent nations that inhabited the group of islands that would become known as the British Isles. However, after the establishment of the Union in 1707 it was important to the new nation and to the financiers and growing industrialists that backed it, that the concept of 'Britishness' (which was really England) was created. It was this concept that drove the Empire and its settlers. The idea of Britain as the central focus point of New Zealand society remained so strong that some elderly people still referred to Britain as 'Home' when I was a child in the 1970s.

Lastly, I do want to draw out those sections of *The Scone* which present Tony Simpson as not only a social historian, but

as a person. There are several chapters that deal with the life that he experienced as a child and young adult in a remarkably different and more socially conservative New Zealand in the 1950s, 60s and 70s and which influenced his future behaviour and responses. The past, they say, is a different country and one is reminded of this in those essays dealing with Tony's experiences growing up.

I was drawn to the essays in the section 'Growing Up Queer' as a particular example of how New Zealand has changed. While there were good things about New Zealand society post war, there were a number of things that were not. Society was largely stupefyingly conservative, bland and assimilationist. In the 1950s, 60s and 70s Rugby was the principal game of 'choice', those people who lived or acted differently were asking for trouble, women were Sheilas and should be at home, while Māori were seen as brown Pākehā, who should be grateful for the civilising aspects of Pākehā/British society. Keith Holyoake, the National Prime Minister throughout the 1960s, was alleged to have told a school that the country's race relations were the best in the world. As Austin Mitchell, who was teaching Politics at Canterbury while Tony Simpson was a student, remarked in his book, *The Half Gallon Pavlova Paradise,*

> *"Don't think of New Zealand as a nation. It is an accidental collection of places whose inhabitants happen to live in much the same fashion and talk the same language; not so much as a nation as a way of life..."*

From the perspective of 2023, Prime Minister 'Rob' Muldoon was the perfect poster child of that time and attitude.

In his book, *Downfall—The Destruction of Charles Mackay*, Paul Diamond examines the circumstances of Charles Mackay, a former mayor of Whanganui. Mackay committed murder and was imprisoned for it. The motive for the crimes that MacKay committed was his fear of being openly identified as gay. In McKay's case both the cause and the outcome were scandalous, and the incidents were suppressed by polite Whanganui society and the families involved. Tony opens his essay, 'Looks Like It's Open season on Queers', detailing the murder of Charles Aberhart which happened in Christchurch in 1964. Similarly, Aberhart's 'crime' was that he was gay. Both the crime and the trial were largely overlooked by the papers and the media at the time. The reason for that suppression was because Charles Aberhart was a homosexual, and homosexuality along with other supposedly 'deviant' behaviour was seen, as this chapter reminds us, not just as a crime, but as an illness. Although the situation improved for the gay community, it was only in the 1980s that gays gained both legal protection and legal acceptance. This was twenty years after the death of Aberhart and 60 years after the incident involving MacKay.

In his own words, Tony describes this book as a bit of an 'intellectual knockabout.' It is certainly that. The various essays provide a challenge to the reader to examine their own perspectives of society from both a modern and historical perspective. Equally, he does not shy away from offering, in his own words, 'contentious' opinion, while providing overview and comment from his own broad intellectual perspective. All the essays are characterized by Tony's own intellectualism and curiosity in areas as diverse as genetic modification, post-modernism, folk tales, death in Venice, salted beef or... scones.

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.

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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