

THE
COMMONWEAL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF SOCIALIST SOCIETIES
ISSUE 7: MAY 2025



Editorial

The Old World is Dying and the New World

Struggles to be Born; Now is the Time of Monsters. 2

Reports

Wellington Socialist Society 10

Canterbury Socialist Society 13

Otago Socialist Society. 15

Strike Report: Christchurch Wastewater Plant . . 18

Political Infrastructure 19

PhD Research—Appeal for Assistance. 23

A Further Dispatch from Exile. 24

Zdravka Bušić and the long shadow of the Ustaše. . 30

‘The Devil Never Let Him Rest’ 35

Our History

When politics and sport did mix: Garth Carsley

Ballantyne and Comrades FC 40

Christchurch Socialism, Labour and the First

World War 44

Reviews

To Free the World: Harry Holland

and the rise of the labour movement in

Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific 52

Published by the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies

Editor Martin Crick

Designer Nick Robinson

Cover William Morris—Cray (1884)

EDITORIAL

MARTIN CRICK

*The old world is dying and the
new world struggles to be born;
now is the time of monsters
(Antonio Gramsci 1929)¹*

Gramsci wrote these words in the third year of his imprisonment by Benito Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy, and as the Wall Street Crash of that year led to the great depression which facilitated the rise to power of Hitler's Nazi regime in Germany. As Donald Trump upends both the domestic and the international order, as Erdogan in Turkey, Orban in Hungary, and Modi in India further erode democracy in their countries, as Netanyahu continues his campaign of genocide in Gaza, and as the far right continues to gain votes throughout Europe, have we entered another age of monsters?

There is little doubt that they and the European fascists of the 1930s all spring from different branches of the same populist nationalist tree. The word 'fascist' is increasingly bandied about both by opponents of these regimes and by the regimes themselves to describe their opposition. Is Donald Trump a fascist?

He is undoubtedly a demagogue, undeniably a racist. Like the fascists of the 30s he appeals directly to the masses, especially those suffering from economic hardship, the disenfranchised and the disillusioned, whilst at the same time surrounding himself with billionaire

oligarchs. He stirs up fear and hatred by demonising (and deporting) illegal (and some legal) immigrants, and identifying certain sections of society as the 'enemy within'. He promises law and order, whilst contemptuous of legality. He is vindictive and aims to destroy any personal, institutional or media opposition to his rule. The fascist playbook invariably includes attacks on the judiciary and the rule of law, witness his rant against federal judge James Boasberg, that 'radical left lunatic of a judge', and his willingness to use executive orders against law firms that were involved in the attempts to impeach him or in any of the law suits against him, removing their security clearances, barring them from any work for federal offices etc. Celebrating his second election win Trump claimed to have 'saved free speech in America.' Yet there has been a dramatic, across-the-board clampdown on freedom of expression. One of his first executive orders was to bar from entry to the USA anyone with 'hostile attitudes towards US citizens, culture, government, institutions or founding principles.' Trump is criminalising dissent, most obviously in the case of pro-Palestinian protestors, but also barring people from entering the USA if they have at any time criticised him, from professors to musicians. The FBI is authorised to trawl through people's social media accounts for evidence of such. Fascists fear the power of the arts, and whilst we have yet to see any book burnings, we do see books

1 A popularised loose translation. The original read "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

being removed from library shelves if they challenge his world view, a lens which is demonstrably 'straight white male'. His removal of the board of the Kennedy Arts Centre, and his description of previous recipients of the Centre's honours as 'radical left', is another example of this.

The result of this frenzied assault on the liberties and rights of Americans is the creation of a 'climate of fear', leading to self-censorship as newspapers, universities, local government authorities, and businesses fall over themselves to ensure that nothing they say or do can be interpreted as critical of Trump or his government. Republicans in the Congress and the Senate, with a few honourable exceptions, are unwilling to oppose the MAGA cult which has grown up around Trump, whilst Democrats are seemingly similarly cowed. Thus, the main striking difference between the Trump administration and the fascists of the 1930s, that it is less militarised and less violent, can be explained by the sinister truth that it has no need to be. There can be little doubt that Trump's core beliefs and modus operandi mirror precisely those of the fascist leaders, and his threat to seek a third term in office, and even to cancel the mid-term elections, in defiance of the constitution, cannot be dismissed lightly.

Before looking at how developments in the USA should give us pause for thought here, a brief mention of Trump's tariff war. This has confused the economic and political commentariat as much as it has the mass of ordinary people. Is it a clearly thought-out economic policy or just Trump once again acting like a loose cannon? The oligarch friends expecting tax cuts and even further advancement of free trade were clearly taken by surprise. Is this the end of neoliberalism and the beginnings of a new global order? (See, for example, the *Jacobin* Newsletter 3 April,

Trump's Protectionist Turn is a Death Blow for Neoliberalism). Why is Trump pursuing a trade policy that undermines the interests of US capital? The strategy isn't about growing the US economy, as he claims, it is about power, about re-asserting US hegemony in the world system, which he sees as under threat, particularly from China. It is an economic war, the weaponising of the US economy to force other nations to heel or be locked out. US leaders' claims to support 'free markets' and 'free trade' have always been hollow, hiding a system of 'imperial' dominance. Trump wants control over the flow of capital and the behaviour of rival states, and he will use coercion and fear to achieve that. The so-called 'rules-based international order' was always used to serve US capital, not working people, and it is working people who will suffer from this trade war. What will be interesting will be the response of other nations. Will they come to heel, go cap-in-hand to Trump begging for preferential treatment, or will they seek to forge new alliances outside the US orbit? Contrary to Trump's aim China may well benefit if they do.

How will New Zealand react? We are already seeing a divide within the coalition, as Winston Peters complains of being left uninformed about Luxon's plans to consult with a number of world leaders and his promise of a firm response to Trump. Peters urges caution. But what about a radically new direction? What about New Zealand's leaders thinking outside the box, looking at what we can do 'in-house'? We have more than adequate supplies of energy and of food. What can we manufacture here without relying on imports? What once flourishing industries can be revived, serving needs rather than wants? 'Socialism in one country' anyone? The other big issue, highlighted by Trump's appalling televised interview



**PORTRAIT OF
ANTONIO GRAMSCI
AROUND 30 IN THE
EARLY 1920S**

with President Zelensky, is the US threat to withdraw from NATO and its other international commitments, particularly aid. Countries are now scrambling to increase their defence budgets, and here a government that says it cannot find more money for health, education, housing, welfare, has magicked \$12 billion for defence. Is pursuing membership of the AUKUS alliance really a good idea given

current US unreliability? Does China, our major trading partner, really offer a credible threat to New Zealand? The real problem today is the USA, with its threats to annex Greenland, Canada and the Panama Canal, with its support for the genocide in Gaza, its attacks on Yemen, and its policy towards Iran. A much more sensible approach would be a non-aligned, independent foreign policy, supporting our Pacific neighbours, protecting our fisheries, and showing moral leadership.

And with those few thoughts back to the more pressing issues facing socialists here in Aotearoa.

We should not imagine that New Zealand is immune from the trends that have led to Trumpism in the USA. Four decades of neoliberal policy have made it a paradise for the rich and a nightmare for the poor. One in five children live in poverty; we have one of the highest rates of homelessness in the developed world; the 31 richest individuals here pay less than half the tax of an ordinary worker; 70% of New Zealand's wealth is held by 20% of the population; we spend only one-third of the OECD average on primary health care.

Two recent reports emphasise the rapidly deteriorating social cohesion which is a result of this. The Helen Clark Foundation's report *Social Cohesion in New Zealand* (April 2025) found that one-third of its respondents said that a 'strong leader' able to govern without having to bother with elections or parliament would be a good way to govern New Zealand, with 48% of men under 44 supporting this. 52% said that the government can never or only sometimes be trusted, with this response even higher from Māori, Pasifika and lower income respondents. Only 32% were satisfied with the current economic situation. As Bryce Edwards suggests, 'New Zealand

is in the throes of a trust crisis.’ The 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer report *Trust and the Crisis of Grievance* demonstrates this even more starkly than the Clark Foundation report. It portrays an increasing dissatisfaction with the status quo and the role played by the rich in politics and society. 67% of its respondents had moderate to high levels of grievance against institutions. There is a pervasive belief that the system is rigged in favour of an elite few, and despair at the prospects for future generations. A widening chasm of economic and social inequality strips away people’s dignity and their ability to connect with their communities and wider society. The dissatisfaction was amply demonstrated in the anti-lock-down/anti-vaccination protests on the parliament grounds in February 2022, whilst the low turnout at the 2023 election demonstrated that many are tuning out of the political process altogether.

The current policies and pronouncements of the coalition government partners further highlight the widening divisions in New Zealand society, the most obvious example being the Treaty Principles Bill. Whilst that has now been voted down David Seymour has vowed to bring it back, and commentators of all shades of political opinion agree that the issue will not go away. Indeed, the government has already identified 28 laws where it will scrap or alter references to the Treaty of Waitangi. Seymour undoubtedly achieved his aim of cementing his political base whilst appealing to others who did not vote ACT last time round. The Treaty Principles Bill, however, was in many ways a smokescreen hiding another missile from ACT, agreed to by Christopher Luxon during the coalition negotiations, the Regulatory Standards Bill. This Bill is straight out of the Atlas Network playbook, seeking to elevate individual rights

and private property above collective rights and the environment, and all other considerations in law-making. If it passes it will be the real win for the neoliberal right, allowing corporations to stop any environmental or taxation policy they don’t like. Seymour is the Minister for Regulatory Responsibility, and if the Bill is passed then he will be backed by a board appointed by him, which would effectively bypass the courts. It should more accurately be termed the (De) Regulatory Bill, and taken together with the Fast Track legislation, and the overuse of Urgency in parliament, seeks to curtail democratic scrutiny of government to an alarming extent.

Valerie Morse, writing for *Feijoa Dispatch* on 6th April, argues that whilst Trump’s attacks on the rule of law are explicit there is a difference only in degree between Aotearoa and the USA. New Zealand First and ACT, she suggests, are operating from the same playbook. They aim to:

Undermine public goods including environmental, economic and social justice—Seymour justified the Treaty Principles Bill as necessary because ‘activist judges and bureaucrats had twisted the meaning of the Treaty of Waitangi to give different groups of people different rights.’ His proposed re-write of course would have given free rein to ecological vandalism, colonial land theft and foreign asset sales.

Undermine human rights—by appointing highly partisan and unqualified people to courts and tribunals—The replacement of half the members of the Waitangi Tribunal is an egregious example, but then there is the appointment of Stephen Rainbow, a vocal supporter of Israel, as Chief Human Rights Commissioner, and Melissa Derby as Race Relations Commissioner. Both have

**‘NEW ZEALAND IS
IN THE THROES OF
A TRUST CRISIS’**

**‘A DUAL STATE,
WITH “ONE
LAW FOR THE
FAVoured, ONE
FOR THOSE
CONSIDERED
ENEMIES.”’**

a history of anti-trans views. The interview panel specifically noted that Rainbow’s appointment was ‘not recommended’, and since his appointment he has publicly expressed anti-Muslim views.

Concentrate powers in the executive—thus both Shane Jones and David Seymour have attacked decisions of the courts and judges when they are unfavourable to their interests. Jones described one judge as a ‘communist’, and some judicial decisions as demonstrating signs of ‘totalitarianism’.

Reduce the power of the courts—one simple way of reducing the power of the courts is to make it more difficult for cases to be heard, and the government is increasingly denying or restricting access to legal funding particularly for claims involving Te Tiriti, environmental, economic or social justice.

Reduce transparency and accountability—the unprecedented use of Urgency in parliament. In the government’s first 400 days in power it was used to process 133 stages of 51 unique Bills, without the select committee process, and thus the opportunity to review the proposed legislation.

Benefit the wealthy—Bryce Edwards has referred to ACT as ‘a confederation of lobbyists led by professional politicians’, but the description could equally be applied to the other coalition partners. In spite of the fact that New Zealand has the laxest rules in the West about how vested interests can operate through professional lobbyists, the government has frozen the review of lobbying. I have written in previous issues about the tobacco industry and the mining industry, but to them we can now add the Dairy Industry. ACT MP Andrew Hoggard, former Federated Farmers President, is now Minister for Food Safety. A conflict of interest? His sister, Kimberly Crewther, is a lobbyist for the Dairy Council Association of

New Zealand. A conflict of interest? Details of ‘How multinational dairy companies convinced ministers to back away from new rules for baby formula’ can be found in a report by Anusha Bradley for *Radio New Zealand* (online 4 April), whilst Bryce Edwards explored the role of Crewther in an *Integrity Institute* briefing the previous day. Shane Jones is open about his intention to ‘Build, Baby, Build’, and ‘Drill, Baby, Drill’, and the Fast Track legislation will make it much easier for companies to get consents to do that.

Morse describes a *Dual State*, with ‘one law for the favoured, one for those considered enemies.’ And then we have the more open and direct attacks on, the demonisation of, those considered enemies. Here New Zealand First seem to have taken on the role of attack dog. Winston Peters has declared a ‘war on woke’. He described pro-Palestinian protestors during his State of the Nation address in Christchurch as ‘woke, extreme left, fascists’, and singled out one in particular as a ‘ginger nut’. He mounted particularly abhorrent personal attacks on new Green MP Benjamin Doyle. The demonisation of Doyle was started by businessman Rhys Williams, a former member of New Zealand First, and organiser of an anti-transgender conference in Wellington last year, with speakers from New Zealand First and Destiny Church amongst others. His X account is followed by Shane Jones, Tanya Unkovich and other party luminaries. Tamatha Paul’s comments about the police were taken completely out of context, she was totally misrepresented, and used to portray the Green Party as anti-police. And then we have the billboard posters, an orchestrated attack on the Green Party, linked to various far-right actors. It was funded by the Sensible Sentencing Trust, who hired the Campaign Group to mount the assault.

The Campaign Group is the brainchild of Jordan Williams of the right-wing Taxpayers Union. Its general manager is Ani O'Brien, who is on the council of the Free Speech Union, generally regarded as a Zionist front organisation. As well as driving the smear campaign against Doyle she has also attacked Chloe Swarbrick as 'antisemitic'. Peters is certainly creating the climate within which it is considered acceptable to promote such views. Shane Jones follows his party leader with an assault on 'genderism, climatism, wokeism', singling out the 'luxury beliefs' of the Green Party whilst proclaiming the 'rights of garden variety, God-fearing Kiwis.' Inside Parliament both Peters and Nicola Willis have accused Chloe Swarbrick of 'Marxism' for even daring to suggest that neo-liberalism has failed. She is attacked outside Parliament too. Andrea Vance in *The Post* has accused her of 'outlandish left-wing views' and 'ignoring basic economic principles' for her plans to renationalise the railways and partly privatised energy companies. The Green Party, Jones charges, is leading New Zealand to 'economic armageddon', whilst he attacks the 'ethnic warping' of our democracy. And of course, the party slogan is 'Make New Zealand First Again', an obvious nod to MAGA land. As Martyn Bradbury writes: 'I don't think the vast majority of Kiwis have any comprehension just how far right the government actually is.' (*Daily Blog*, 14 April 2025) New Zealand First and ACT aim to push politics further and further to the right, peddling toxic forms of nationalism, racism and bigotry, to provide scapegoats for those increasingly angry about mounting inequality and poverty and to distract attention from the government's austerity measures and its attacks on democracy.

Chris Trotter suggests the

government is aiming for five big shifts in policy: from public to private investment and delivery; from an emergent bi-cultural back to a colonial nation; from universal to user charges; from regulated to market-use resources, and from limits on, to incentives for, private investment returns. It may seem obvious to say it but there is no effective left-wing opposition in New Zealand to counter that right now. The Labour Party conference in Christchurch last December was lacklustre; after the disastrous result of the last election, one might have expected an energetic and reforming party, offering fresh new policies, but no! Hipkins was more concerned with cementing his own position as leader than winning back any of Labour's lost voters. He, and the party, have lost touch with the poor and the working class. In a speech to the Auckland Chamber of Commerce Chris Hipkins stressed the continuities in National and Labour's policies. Whilst saying that he opposes any privatisation of public services he has promised that Labour would honour any public-private partnerships signed up to by the coalition, despite the overwhelming evidence that they do not work. The fate of the Health Service in the UK provides convincing evidence of this. Hipkins has adopted the 'small target strategy' of Keir Starmer's Labour Party in the UK before the last general election, giving one's opponents nothing to aim at, offering no bold or detailed policies to reinvigorate and convince the angry, frustrated and disillusioned electorate.

So, *What Is To Be Done?*, we asked the New Zealand Left in our special issue of *Commonweal*? In an interesting exchange of ideas on *System Change Aotearoa*'s website Justine Sachs argued that socialists should join the Labour Party and engage in mass politics, whilst Elliot Crossan responded that the Party's

**'I DON'T THINK
THE VAST
MAJORITY OF
KIWIS HAVE ANY
COMPREHENSION
JUST HOW FAR
RIGHT THE
GOVERNMENT
ACTUALLY IS.'**

FIGHT BACK MARANGA AKE TOGETHER

THE COUNCIL OF
TRADE UNIONS'
FIGHT BACK
TOGETHER/
MARANGA AKE
CAMPAIGN WILL
HOST RALLIES ON
MAY DAY 2025

rules made it impossible for socialists to operate within the party and successfully install a left-wing leadership. (29 and 30 March 2025) There is no left-wing faction in the Labour caucus, and the fate of Jeremy Corbyn, who did have 20-40 committed left-wing MPs to support him, demonstrated that even that was insufficient to achieve success. Crossan argues that MMP gives a left alternative a greater chance of success than any entryist policy. So, what should we members of the New Zealand Federation do?

'Educate, Agitate, Organise'. After 6 years of educational work we have achieved modest growth, but surely it is time to move to the next phase also? You will see in the Canterbury Society's branch report that our comrade Tom Roud is planning to stand in the coming

council elections in Christchurch. There are undoubtedly members who are not in favour of electoral politics. We know that socialism will never come about merely by voting for it. So why engage? Good ideas don't emerge from nothing. The Victorian Socialists have shown that by engaging in electoral campaigns socialism can be dragged from the margins of political life and into the daily and weekly discussions of thousands. They help to build socialist political forces, normalise socialist campaigning. The Victorian Socialists are an electoral front, combining both revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries, people engaging with socialist politics for the first time, people sick of Labour sell-outs and establishment corruption, the disillusioned I mentioned earlier, those who might otherwise turn right. Our forces

are too small to insist on ideological purity, we ourselves are a broad church. So, I appeal to members in Canterbury to turn out and support Tom's campaign, help with leafletting, door-knocking, in whatever way you can, start to build a socialist alternative. Members of the Society have also been present on the picket line this week, supporting workers in struggle, a duty for any socialist, an opportunity to show solidarity, become recognised, and present arguments for socialism. Let us all turn out on May Day to support the *Fight Back Maranga Ake for Health* Campaign.

One of our aims in launching *Commonweal* was to promote debate and discussion, and elsewhere in this issue we have two articles, by Tyler West and Hayden Taylor, which have been prompted by that special issue. Byron Clark writes on NZ First MP Tanya Unkovich's links with the Croatian far right. This issue is published shortly after ANZAC Day, so as a counter-balance to

the carefully scripted patriotic romanticism of that day I tell the story of those brave enough to oppose the war in Christchurch. Another conscientious objector was Garth Carsley Ballantyne in Auckland, and Craig Stephen includes his story in his history of Comrades FC, the first article with a sporting theme to appear in *Commonweal*. And finally, Quentin Findlay reviews a recent biography of firebrand socialist Harry Holland, a Labour leader radically different to any of those who have followed him. My thanks to all contributors and, as always, an appeal for contributions to future issues. I leave you with the following profoundly depressing words from W B Yeats, written just after the First World War, very apt for the current situation, but followed by the inspirational Percy Bysshe Shelley, written shortly after the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, a call to arms for the current generation of socialists:

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold,
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned,
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

(W B Yeats, *The Second Coming*, 1919)

*Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number—
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
Ye are many they are few.*

(P.B Shelley, *Masque of Anarchy*, 1819)

REPORTS

ANGUS CROWE

Wellington Socialist Society

National Conference Recap

The second National Conference of the New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies was held on the Saturday and Sunday of Labour Weekend 2024 in Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

Close to 100 attendees registered for the conference, which was held across a number of venues in the central Wellington suburb of Te Aro. The main hub was the Wellington Socialist Society's homebase Bedlam & Squalor. Evening keynote events were held at Thistle Hall, and Wellington Trades Hall served as a second venue for the parallel sessions of the main proceedings.

Speakers were asked to engage with the conference theme of 'the dual crisis in Aotearoa'. At the opening of the conference Wellington Socialist Society member Tom Smith elaborated on the theme, explaining how at various periods in Aotearoa's history crises have broken out in both the capitalist and colonial foundations of the country, giving rise to periods of rupture and interregnum, before a new political-economic paradigm emerged. The 1890s, 1930s, and 1980s were all such periods. Clearly, given the long economic and social malaise following the Global Financial Crisis, the shock

of the COVID-19 pandemic, attacks on Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the rise of both left and right-wing populism, and talk of some sort of 'post-neoliberal' phase of capitalism in other parts of the globe, the moment appears ripe to open discussion about how the dual crisis is manifesting itself again today.

This theme was taken up enthusiastically by speakers and attendees alike in more than a dozen talks, panels, and other events over the weekend. Talks covered unionism, the anti-globalisation movement, imperialism, the crisis in tertiary education and more.

The keynotes were a particular highlight. On the Saturday evening a panel on 'Te tiriti and the struggle for socialism' brought together experienced Tino Rangatiratanga activists Catherine Love (Te Ātiawa, Taranaki, Ngāti Ruanui, Ngā Ruahinerangi), Kassie Hartendorp (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa), and Dougal McNeill. Ably moderated by Wellington City Councillor Nikau Wi Neera (Ngāti Toarangatira, Kāi Tahu), the panellists discussed questions ranging from the current coalition government's attacks on Māori, the evolution of the struggle for Tino Rangatiratanga, whether the real motivation for ACT's Treaty Principles Bill is to remove barriers to further privatisation and deregulation, and the compatibility of the Pākehā concept of socialism and Te Ao Māori.

On the Sunday evening Pablo Abufom, a fourth-generation Palestinian living in Chile who has been involved in the struggle against neoliberalism in Chile for nearly 20 years, spoke to



‘Resisting neoliberalism in Latin America: The 2019 Chilean revolt and the struggle for constitutional reform’. Pablo briefly outlined the historical background to struggles against neoliberalism in post-dictatorship Chile—of which the student movements of the 2000s and new social movements and demands from civil society (particularly feminist demands) were of note—before giving an account of the events and eventual failure of the movement for constitutional reform. He reminded us that neoliberalism is not so much a ‘perverse plan’ implemented by a sadistic ruling class, but more a strategy designed to ‘keep the loop of accumulation going’. This does not mean the consequences are any less severe, indeed he spent some time discussing the crisis of subjectivity in neoliberalism as working-class communities have disintegrated.

If anything, he was saying that the only way out is through—there is no going back to the ‘golden age’ of capitalism, and a society in transformation will require a transformed form of struggle itself. Although he and others ultimately failed in Chile, we can all learn to ‘fail better’ next time by thinking through the contours of what neoliberalism actually is.

Overall, the conference was a great success, and we’d like to thank all those who helped, spoke, and attended for their effort and engagement. Special thanks must go to the conference organising committee, as well as members of the wider Federation who pitched in to moderate, do registrations and other admin, and help with setting up and packing down. It was a collective effort and therefore the success is shared.

**MEMBERS OF THE
NZ FEDERATION
OF SOCIALIST
SOCIETIES AT THE
2024 NATIONAL
CONFERENCE**
*CANTERBURY SOCIALIST
SOCIETY*



Other events and happenings

**TOM ROUD AND
VIJAY PRASHAD AT
THE 2024 NATIONAL
CONFERENCE**

*CANTERBURY SOCIALIST
SOCIETY*

After a short break over November, we held one final event for 2024 in December.

Historian Mark Darby presented the talk 'Some things are worth fighting for' based on his recent book about Central Otago-born war surgeon and socialist Doug Jolly. While Mark delivered an extremely interesting talk, we learnt that mid-December maybe isn't the best time to hold an event, or at least a talk of this type, as the turn out was a bit short of what we would usually get. We'd certainly be keen to host Mark again in future to speak about a different subject. Mark is quite a prolific historian whose books cover topics from the New Zealanders in Spain during the Civil War to the life of Rua Kenana, and his work is

well worth checking out.

In February we had VUW philosophy lecturer Jesse Spafford talk to us about 'Social Anarchism and the Rejection of Private Property'. Spafford sought to invert the anti-state arguments of libertarian thinkers, turning them on their head to argue that both states and property owners lack adequate moral justification for the coercion they employ. We'd discussed a few times that we hadn't had any talks focused specifically on anarchist theory or history, so it was good to have Jesse remedy this at last.

And in March we welcomed Martin Crick back for the first time since our inaugural event in 2021 to speak about James Connolly, Irish nationalism, and socialism in the talk 'They'll never understand why I'm here'. Martin delivered an engaging precis of Connolly's life and his conception of struggle for Irish national

independence from Britain, and the struggle for socialism—and why they were fundamentally interrelated—all accompanied by some fantastic Irish tunes.

Thank you as well to Hayden who continues to organise online seminars on a range of topics for us all. It was great to have Jason Netek present his talk ‘For What We Will—A Brief History of American Socialism’ recently and to keep that connection with Jason up after he had Sionainn, Hayden, and myself on his

podcast *The Regrettable Century* last year to talk about the Fed project.

Finally, thank you once again to all members who responded to the call for pictures from Palestinian Solidarity demonstrations. Our member who was in the Westbank is, as I write this, travelling back to Aotearoa, but they expressed their gratitude to all of you. We hope to arrange to have them share their experiences with us in some form in the near future.

TOM ROUD

Canterbury Socialist Society

Activity for the Canterbury Socialist Society has been steady since the last edition of *The Commonweal*. The busiest period was, without a doubt, supporting the Wellington Socialist Society with the delivery of the second conference of the Federation of Socialist Societies. We were very pleased to be involved, and delighted that the conference went so well.

Our activities locally have continued as usual, with monthly educational and social events. We were grateful to have John Kerr step in at relatively short notice to give our Fred Evans Memorial Lecture in November, covering the Great Strike of 1913. Another excellent Christmas Quiz from Sionainn Byrnes rounded out 2024 for us. This year started smoothly, too, with a panel with elected councillors from the left of local government. February was an opportunity to welcome Martin Crick back after his many months overseas, revisiting William Morris with a particular focus on *News from Nowhere*. For

our March event we were lucky enough to host Nancy McShane from the Public Service Association in a conversation with Sionainn about gender pay equity—our way of marking International Women’s Day. Finally, to coincide with ANZAC Day in April, Byron Clark presented on far-right mythology regarding the First World War. One further event of note: we invited other left-wing organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand to contribute to a special edition of *Commonweal*, where we explored *What Is To Be Done*, a reference of course to Lenin’s famous pamphlet of 1902. A number did, some said they were unable to do so, and others failed to respond at all, which perhaps summarises the current state of the left here. This was published on 30 March and went out to all members.

We have had churn in the CSS Executive Committee over the past few months, too, with myself and Kyle Turnbull stepping down. The remaining members of the committee have been busy arranging our events for the next few months, and have welcomed back Courtney Fraser from her sojourn in Auckland. Courtney will be co-opted back onto the committee for the period leading up to the AGM in September.



I expect this will be the last branch report I write for the Society for some time. I've sat in this role for some seven years now, and have been proud to see the Society grow from a dozen friends having a beer in the pub to a national organisation with three active regional affiliates and around 200 members in total. The opportunity to hand over much of the running of the society to a new set of people is positive. I look forward to my semi-retirement and a more advisory/background role moving forward.

There are still a few loose ends to tie up: completing the layout of *Value, Price, and Profit* for membership packs and getting those books printed, completing and printing the full *Membership Booklet* for the Canterbury Socialist Society, and initiating an archiving project of physical ephemera for the last seven years of work.

Moreover, the remaining Executive Committee is keen for any and all assistance with keeping the Society thriving.

All members should feel welcome to contribute and engage in contributing to the life of the Society.

Finally, I will take this opportunity to make an announcement of sorts to members of the Federation, alongside any readers of *The Commonweal*. I am pleased to let you all know that I am standing for local government this year, with a campaign launch scheduled for the 4th of July. The content of the campaign will be robust social democratic/democratic socialist positions as were present in New Labour and the Alliance, though updated and adjusted for a local government setting in 2025. Running a left-wing campaign for City Council will be an enormous challenge, so this is a call for anyone reading who would like to be involved to contact me at tomforccc@gmail.com. There is a great deal to be done, and any help will be welcome.

ACROSS: NEWEST
MEMBER OF THE
FEDERATION
OF SOCIALIST
SOCIETIES,
ELEANOR HOPE
BYRNES

JASON GRAY

Otago Socialist Society

In the period since our last branch report, OSS finances have remained favourable and we were in the happy position of being able to offer subsidies to OSS members attending the NZFSS Conference in Wellington as well as fund the usual succession of events on our annual calendar. Membership has grown, which is a reassuring sign that we are meeting expectations and providing something useful to those who sign up.

Last September OSS put on a movie

fundraiser for our Dunedin *Justice for Palestine* allies. The film screened was *The Time That Remains*, a semi-biographical drama film written and directed by Palestinian director Elia Suleiman, covering events in Palestine from 1948 onwards. This successful event raised nearly \$700, which was directed to families in need in Gaza. OSS remains a staunch supporter of Dunedin *Justice for Palestine*. Indeed, in March this year, OSS members were quick to come out in support of an emergency protest convened in the Octagon in response to Israel breaking the ceasefire in Gaza on March 18th. Amidst the speeches, OSS member Tyler West spoke passionately about the proud history of the NZ working class demonstrating solidarity with the victims of the many imperialist

excursions over preceding decades—a pertinent and timely reminder for us all.

That solidarity can be expressed in surprising ways, as witnessed at one of the regular OSS pub socials (held on the day of the 35,000 strong Dunedin Hospital march as it happens) when a member of the public approached the group, enquired if we were ‘communists’, and spontaneously donated \$20 to the Society!

The CTU organised *Fight Back Together Maranga Ake* national hui took place in the lead up to Labour Weekend. The Dunedin gathering at the Octagon was expertly MC’d by Unions Otago convener and OSS comrade Andrew Tait. This was the first major CTU organised event for quite some time, and drew a large crowd of 400 CTU-affiliated union members, easily filling the upper Octagon. Sadly, not all unions utilised Section 26 of the Employment Relations Act 2000 to allow members to attend this stop work meeting, otherwise numbers would have been even greater. All 5 CTU remits, demands for better pay & working conditions, investment in public services, honouring Te Tiriti and ceasing attacks on Maori, reducing inequality and addressing issues raised by accelerating climate chaos & technological advances, were passed unanimously and resoundingly.

Local E Tū organiser and OSS member Thomas O’Neill was involved in local planning meetings for *Maranga Ake*. In speaking to an OSS organising committee meeting during the leadup, Thomas called attention to recent plant closures including the Alliance Group Smithfield Meatworks in Timaru (600 workers affected), farmers’ cooperative Ravensdown Fertiliser works in Ravensbourne, Dunedin (30 workers affected), and the Asia Pulp and Paper owned Cottonsoft production plant in

South Dunedin (26 workers affected). In recognition of the former, OSS & local Araiteuru Marae members Miranda Buhler and Andrew Tait, in solidarity with the Te Aitakihi Marae of Timaru, put on a very successful Quiz night fundraiser for those who lost their jobs with the Smithfield Freezing Works closure, on the evening of the CTU Maranga Ake hui. This very successful fundraiser included sponsorship for prizes from the OSS (among others) and given the timing drew an excellent response from a wide range of union members.

The OSS organised Halloween lecture ‘Of Parasites & Plagues’ given by Chris Lam was well attended, with the venue—YOURS Cafe—once again proving gracious and capable hosts. The talk was an exploration of the dystopian worlds of *Inside* and *Pathologic 2*, simulations of a society in crisis. Very topical in a world experiencing significant change and upheaval. Engaging post-talk drinks and conversation ensued and we are grateful to Chris for their mahi.

The NZ Federation of Socialist Societies National conference local branch attendee Tyler West gave a glowing report of his experience and was extremely complimentary of our comrades ‘up north’ who put on a professional and well-run conference featuring so much of interest. The OSS extended heartfelt thanks to Tyler for representing us so well at the National Conference and a concerted effort will be made to encourage more Otago branch members to attend next year.

We had our own local branch AGM in November, which saw a minor refresh of our organising committee and some new members join. Held in the Dunedin South Labour Rooms, the first part of the meeting was made open to non-members, with an offer to join the Society ‘on the

spot'. For this open part, current OSS members gave three-minute talks on 'Why I am a Socialist', followed by a Q&A discussion session. After a break for pizza and refreshments the more formal AGM took place as a members only session. In conjunction with the usual electronic channels of communication, an extensive poster run throughout North and South Dunedin was employed to advertise the AGM. The use of a venue in South Dunedin was to try and reach as wide an audience as possible, and we concluded this was an effective strategy. A debrief session afterwards at the nearby Rope & Twine pub helped cement the goodwill and comradeship created by the meeting.

Tyler West's Otago Access Radio show *Left from Nowhere* continues to go from strength to strength. As mentioned in previous branch reports, the primary objective of this interview-style show is the promotion of working class and socialist intellectual engagement with both the esoteric aspects of socialism and more bread and butter politics. Naturally, several OSS members have featured amongst a number of guests from the wider Dunedin left community. Tyler will be receiving training for conducting long distance interviews over Zoom or similar technologies. The show continues to be well supported by both a loyal audience and by station management, and of course OSS is more than happy to continue its sponsorship.

The biggest event thus far for 2025 has been our West Harbour Working Class History tour. Based on the previously successful central city tour last year, this exploration of working-class history in the greater Dunedin environs took participants from the University, Forsyth Barr Stadium and Logan Park out to Port Chalmers and eventually culminated in a barbecue picnic style social at

Aramoana, located near the entrance to Otago Harbour. Topics covered included the University Clocktower occupation, prison labour construction, the South Seas Exhibition/Lake Logan reclamation, the Dunedin Stadium folly, Ravensdown Western Sahara rock phosphate plunder and the shutdown of its operations, Ralph Hotere's protest art and battle with Port Otago, 1890 and 1951 maritime industrial action, the effects of European settlement on indigenous populations, and the Save Aramoana campaign of the 70's.

This tour was well received and the logistical challenge of conveying folk around points of interest spread along approximately 20km was successfully negotiated! The weather thankfully co-operated and schedules were adhered to. The hiring of a van made things easier, although it was noted that the 'walk and talk' element of last year's central city tour was missed. The West family crib at Aramoana was kindly made available for the end of tour barbecue, with kai and inu all organised beforehand, making for a pleasant outing for all concerned.

Additionally, separate Otago Peninsula, Port Chalmers and South Otago tours have been mooted for future events—stay tuned as we continue to develop this popular and successful formula! Also on the radar for the Otago Branch, we have an upcoming presentation on the *German Peasants War* by Gareth McMullen, another putative quiz night, and a panel discussion on the state of the union movement in New Zealand. All in all, the OSS remains in good heart, and in the spirit of the recent special edition of *Commonweal* intends to reach out to other socialist aligned entities in Dunedin and continue to build momentum.



Strike Report: Christchurch Wastewater Plant

Unionised essential workers at the wastewater treatment plant in Bromley, Christchurch, recently concluded a five-day strike in efforts to fight off an attack on their collective agreement. The industrial action was sparked by the Christchurch City Council's attempts to remove a long-standing provision in their agreement that guarantees treatment plant workers remuneration increases in line with other unionised workers at the Council. E Tū union delegate Willie Nicholas said that 'We want the council to honour the terms and conditions of the current agreement. The provision has been there for five years, and the members are willing to fight for it.'

E Tū members from the plant's water sampling and maintenance teams picketed the entry road to the plant for five days straight. Their action met with support from the local community, members of NZNO and the RMTU, community board members, ECan councillor Greg Byrnes, and the Canterbury Socialist Society.

Talks with the Council are due to resume following the strike and the workers are hopeful that their actions have prompted the Council to reconsider its position, withdraw their intention to remove the provision, and offer them a fair deal.

TYLER WEST

Political Infrastructure

In a few issues of *The Commonwealth* the concept of political infrastructure has emerged as a common theme for reflection. In issue #3 Tom Roud addressed the matter directly with his essay *Class Independence, Socialism, and Electoral Politics*, outlining some of the basic concepts of political organisation while making an argument about whether and why to intervene in formal electoral politics. In issue #4 Michael McClelland wrote an intriguing response to Roud's essay, *Before and After the 'Pre-Political'*, which delves into what exactly the political is on which a foundation can be made for how such organisation might be attempted. In the same issue Nikau Wi Neera considered the problems of liberal democratic institutions in the face of significant threats to social civilisation. Two historical reflections by our editor Martin Crick, *The New Zealand Socialist Party First Annual Conference* and *Socialist Sunday Schools*, touched on the utility of certain basic forms of socialist political organisation. Victor Billot contributed a two-part reflection on the Alliance over issues #4 and #5, *The Alliance—a political tragedy*, which gave us an insight into social-democratic electoral politics and coalition maintenance to read in the context of Roud's earlier piece. Joe Hendren gave us much to think about through the biographical article *Bruce Jesson: Socialist, Nationalist, and Republican (1944–1999)*, which delves into independent left-wing publishing and the role of intellectuals. Lastly, the theme re-emerged once more in issue #6

in the form of Paul Maunder's *A response to the general theme of purpose* and Andrew Tait's *The Victorian Socialists*.

This is all to say that the topic of political infrastructure has, whether identified as such or not, been on the minds of some of our members. While a lot of ink has been spilled over more than two centuries in trying to understand how political organisations function, I think it would be useful to lay out what it is I mean by the term in brief. 'Political Infrastructure' here refers to the nuts-and-bolts assessment of what a particular organisation or movement (referred to generally as a 'formation') is capable of doing. This 'capacity' can be broken down, roughly speaking, into four categories:

- Concerning the formation's *raison d'être* and the social base being drawn upon.
- Concerning the formation's structure and people immediately available.
- Concerning the available resources which could be mobilised.
- Concerning the ability for the formation to accommodate to changing circumstances.

While other considerations are important to the analysis, collectively these categories can be used to assess the capacity of a formation. I'll give a quick explanation of these categories from here.

The first among these categories gives us an idea of how to apply the latter categories in our analysis. This is both a structural assessment of what the formation is and a political assessment of what is driving the formation; what a formation is trying to do, and who is trying to do it, give us a framework for understanding why a formation exists at all. When a concrete *raison d'être* can be pinpointed, regardless of whether this is for the establishment of a specific policy or to articulate a broader

'THE GENERATION WHICH CAME TO POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS ON THE SOCIALIST LEFT BETWEEN THE LATE-2000S AND THE EARLY-2020S HAVE GROWN UP IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ESTABLISHED SOCIALIST LEFT WITH ITS HEAD BARELY ABOVE THE WATER'

grievance or politics, we can then proceed to assess how a formation could go about doing so. If we understand who is being drawn upon to do this, if they exist in a specific geographic location or whether

are a large number of motivated and active people available then the more formal organisation might be considered a political party or mass organisation outright, while a large but looser formation with



there is a defined class or cultural character, then we can strengthen our assessment of what that formation is trying to do but also how it might do it.

The second category concerns structure and size. Is this formation a membership organisation with dues and a constitution, or is it a more informal affair with a loose network of mutually interested activists pursuing similar activity? Size also comes in here. If there

similar support might be considered a social movement unto itself. In small circumstances we might be discussing the difference between a society like our own or a collective without formal structure. These two vectors give us a framework for understanding the type of formation in question, where the previous category might be said to give us an insight into its 'nature', for want of a better word.

The third is arguably the most

nuts-and-bolts category, as it deals with the simple matter of resources in direct terms (although it too has a more conceptual element). What kind of finances are available, what kind of physical materials

and experience available among the people who can contribute to the cause. Are there veteran activists whose experience can be drawn upon, and what skills do the activists at hand have? Between these



(from paper printing to placard making) are on hand, how much and what kind of labour can the active support base contribute, what physical spaces are available to coordinate these efforts? These questions are constant ones for any kind of social organisation, whether immediately considered to be 'political' or not, but they are only sometimes considered in any kind of systematic way. The more conceptual part of this category concerns the skills

vectors an assessment can be made as to what advantages or pressing needs exist for conducting the most basic to the most advanced organising. Combined with the prior categories, a more complex analysis can be made which combines both the aspirations and structure of a formation with the on-the-ground realities of its functionality.

The last category, and perhaps the most pressing for the Federation currently,

**NEW ZEALAND
FEDERATION OF
LABOUR RALLY**
C. 1938

is the ability for the formation in question to accommodate to changing circumstances. This is arguably the broadest of the four, as it encompasses both changes internal to the formation and changes in external conditions (as well as the interaction between the two). Possibly the most important of the internal factors is what might be called 'scalability', which is to say the ability of the formation to scale its activities up or down to match the enthusiasm, available labour time, membership, and resources at hand.

A decline in membership, available labour time, or resources may necessitate a reduction in activity to what is manageable. Meanwhile, if membership or available resources begin to grow beyond the immediate administrative capacity to manage within the structure of the formation in question this may necessitate changes to accommodate the new circumstances.

External changes will occur over time in the form of sudden or gradual shifts in the political, economic, or social climate as well. This in turn necessitates a change in thinking, structure, or orientation to accommodate. This could mean a change in political strategy to accommodate both the general political climate, such as a change in government, or it could mean the more subtle rise or decline in social struggle within a relevant social or labour movement. However, it might also mean procedural or organisational changes, such as the alteration of a formation's financial structure, to accommodate changing economic, social, or legal conditions. Often these kinds of changes are interrelated, with both external and internal changes existing in a shared context.

Combining these four categories into a single cohesive analysis gives us broader insights than their individual

considerations. While not something that might be immediately material, it can give an idea as to what might be termed the 'dynamism' of a formation. That is, not only the individual factors which impact how a formation works (or doesn't), but a broader understanding of the potential longevity, durability in periods of difficult circumstances or outright crisis, and nimbleness in periods of flux or change for the formation.

With this schema for the analysis of a formation in mind, we might ask why it has been in the back of the minds of our fellow members in the pages of our own *Commonweal*. If I might suggest as much, I think that this concept—formalised or not, conscious or not—has been bumping around in the brains of many on the socialist left in this country for a decade or so, the founders and many later members of our own Federation included. To be blunt, we have been on the losing end for decades. The generation which came to political consciousness on the socialist left between the late-2000s and the early-2020s have grown up in the context of an established socialist left with its head barely above the water.

Yet, in our varied responses to that situation, we seem to have a broad agreement as to what must be done—put socialism firmly back on the table as a serious and viable political project. One of the many things we need is the analytical tools to assess where we have come from, where we are, and where we are heading. To properly consider what a particular formation is, what it is trying to do, whether it is worth doing, and how it might do it. One of the tasks is to be able to undertake that very assessment on ourselves, and on the world in which we operate.

PhD Research—Appeal for Assistance

Barnaby Watts is embarking upon research for a doctoral thesis on class struggle in Aotearoa in the twenty first century. Based at the University of Otago, his thesis will be supervised by Brian Roper (*Prosperity for All? Economic, Social and Political Change in New Zealand Since 1935*). Influences include Toby Boraman's *Myth of Passivity*. Toby is at present working on a new book *Knocking Off: A History of Strikes in Aotearoa New Zealand* from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, which is likely to relate closely to Barnaby's area of study. Despite the dominance of bourgeois individualism in academia, all cultural and intellectual work is at heart co-operative. This ideological work is essential for any attempt to create working class hegemony. *Commonweal* readers are invited to help out.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, like everywhere else, we are living in a prolonged period of working-class defeat and a low ebb in class struggle. We are approaching 41 years since the fourth Labour government was elected and this month marks the 34th anniversary of the Employment Contracts Act. How can we explain the extraordinary durability of the neoliberal project? Union-busting, tax cuts for the rich, corporatisation and privatisation, and all the other pillars of the neoliberal regime first introduced in 1984 seem to have made the dominance of the capitalist class and its functionaries more assured than ever. But appearances can be deceiving – is this defeat as total as scholars and commentators tend to assume? What forms of resistance have taken place over the last 25 years that might contradict this tale?

Starting points for answering these questions are numerous – just last year we saw the largest single protest in this country's history. Nevertheless, if we accept that a particularly harsh form of neoliberal capitalism has been dominant for four decades, how do we make sense of this in a country where the working class are a majority? Is it because of trade union officials selling out their members? Is it because a focus on class has been displaced by a petit-bourgeois form of identity politics? Is it because strikes are mostly illegal? Hegemony? Or something else entirely?

If we do read it as a long defeat, then it is a pretty bleak picture compared to previous defeats the workers' movement in Aotearoa New Zealand has suffered. Less than two decades separated the smashing of the Waterside Workers Union in 1951 from the dramatic upsurge in struggle provoked by the Arbitration Court's nil general wage order in 1968. The Red Feds' great strike was beaten in 1913 but militant workers soon regained control of their unions and continued to strike, even when registered for arbitration.

And finally, but really this is more of a first, how do we define class? How do the struggles of the oppressed more generally, and the 'new social movements' fit into the typical Marxist idea of class struggle? These questions are not new, but asking them again and again can (hopefully) only stand to strengthen our analysis.

If you have any thoughts about any of the above please get in touch with me, Barnaby.watts@postgrad.otago.ac.nz

HAYDEN TAYLOR

A Further Dispatch from Exile

In this dispatch from exile, I initially intended to analyse the British Left's struggles to orient itself under its first Labour government since 2010, a year symbolically demarcated by cinematic releases such as *How to Train Your Dragon* and *Extraordinary Measures*. Yet procrastination prevailed, as it often does with such projects. Compounding this delay were two constraints: the psychological toll of revisiting polemics from groups like the Revolutionary Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Communist Party of Britain, and the Spartacists; and the temporal demands of engaging such material with due rigour.

Consequently, I have altered my approach. Regarding the British Left's condition, while extraordinary measures have been taken, I regret to report that the dragon of the capitalist state remains defiantly untamed. Rather than offering a comprehensive survey, and unable to reconcile myself with submitting nothing to our editor, I shall instead proffer a reflection on Paul Maunder's response in the last edition of *Commonweal* to this publication's inquiry into collective purpose.

Paul, I appreciate your contribution, which exemplifies *Commonweal's* core function as an open forum for members

to articulate reflections irrespective of ideological or geographic situatedness. Complementary to this is fostering dialogue within the organisation. While I diverge from certain conceptualisations in your reflections, particularly your framing of dialectics and united front strategy, I wish to focus on your probing of the Federation's purpose and its affiliates. Your reflections gesture toward a critical interrogation of the organisation's institutional practice. I aim to defend the organisation while also offering criticisms of other organisational contributions in *Commonweal's What is to be Done* special edition.

Throughout my tenure in the Federation I have had a few recurring themes of critique on the contemporary left. That of mutual aid, which prioritises survivalism over strategy; interrogating socialist organising that degenerates into cultural symbolism divorced from cultivating working-class power; the tendencies within the radical left to engage in what I term barratry socialism¹, opportunistically co-opting progressive movements to steer them toward ideologically convenient terrain. Yourself, Paul, also alluded to this very problem and lived experience on the left in your reflection. Some call this tailism, but that term's 20th-century revisions risk confusion.

The socialist left's subcultural dimensions raise the perennial question: *What is to be done?* Confronting disillusionment, we reaffirm that transcending alienation demands building authentic community. Yet if 'community' reduces to mutual aid and self-selected affinity, does this not reproduce subcultural limitations? How might communism evolve

'I REGRET TO REPORT THAT THE DRAGON OF THE CAPITALIST STATE REMAINS DEFIANTLY UNTAMED.'

1 Barratry socialism (a term I employ critically) denotes socialist currents that opportunistically co-opt progressive movements (e.g., anti-racism, LGBTQ+ rights), steering them toward ideologically expedient ends. The term barratry comes from the practice of lawyers chasing emergency vehicles to accidents and attempting to find clients to represent.

from abstract solidarity to lived practice? What conceptual shifts are needed to reimagine community inclusively, encompassing workers, neighbours, families, and even ideological adversaries (who may also very well be within the working class)? Crucially, who bears responsibility for building emancipatory organisations that balance open engagement with strategic discipline?

Tom Roud's contribution to *Commonweal*'s special edition, *What is to be done?*, offers clarity on where we stand as an organisation:

For the Federation this follows two streams. The first is having a limited purpose. The Federation is, by some factor, larger than any other explicitly socialist organisation in the country, yet it does not claim to be The Party, or pre-party. In fact, being the largest group is more a symptom of socialist marginalisation than extraordinary success—our membership may be hypothetically unlimited, but the socialist left needs actual membership organisations in the tens (if not hundreds) of thousands nationally.

Tom would no doubt affirm that the working class must build its own independent power within capitalist politics, even if the goal is to ultimately sublate bourgeois society. However, our organisation doesn't pretend to be creating 'the revolutionary party' in the traditional sense. The Canterbury Socialist Society—our founding affiliate—arose out of disillusionment with rigid vanguardist organisations. These groups had become ineffective due to their dogmatic ideologies, their

narrow focus on constant activism, and their embrace of identity politics as both a theoretical framework and a primary mode of organising.

While we neither position ourselves as the party nor its architects, we acknowledge our historical juncture: a pre-political moment demanding prefigurative structures to foster class consciousness. Simply put, our immediate task is to build civic organisations. This does not yet constitute dual power, nor align with formal party structures, but confronts our hollowed-out societal terrain. Before addressing tasks bequeathed by tradition, foundations must be rebuilt *ab initio*. I'd invoke the Second International's SPD project not as a model but as an aspirational horizon. Its educational and cultural apparatuses (libraries, societies, clubs) incubated socialist consciousness, though, crucially, it operated within an existing socialist movement. They weren't in a pre-political moment as we are. Indeed the international socialist movement defined politics in many of the developed capitalist economies at the end of the 19th century. We've utterly regressed from this historical high point of Socialism. For us today, as Michael McClelland of the Platypus Affiliated Society notes in his contribution to the special edition, 'Our [PAS] starting point is the recognition that no mass working-class movement for socialism exists today, and that, consequently, any discussion of building a party in its absence amounts to a moot point.'

How can one not agree with this sentiment? Where are the masses the left speak of? What even is socialist politics? What if we held a general strike and nobody came?

**'WHERE ARE THE
MASSES THE
LEFT SPEAK
OF? WHAT EVEN
IS SOCIALIST
POLITICS?
WHAT IF WE
HELD A GENERAL
STRIKE AND
NOBODY CAME?'**

The Paradox of Mass Organisation

THE VERY
NOTION OF
MASS POLITICAL
ORGANISATION
APPEARS
PARADOXICAL IN
AN ERA DEFINED
BY SOCIAL
FRAGMENTATION
AND EXISTENTIAL
ALIENATION

The very notion of mass political organisation appears paradoxical in an era defined by social fragmentation and existential alienation—a condition Mark Fisher diagnosed as the ‘slow cancellation of the future’, his own poignant articulation of the neoliberal stasis that François Fukuyama once heralded as the ‘End of History’. If the 20th century was marked by grand ideological struggles and durable collectives—trade unions, revolutionary parties, grassroots movements—the digital age has instead produced a crisis of sustained collective agency. Not only is long-term mobilisation increasingly difficult to conceive, but the very capacity of individuals to commit to, organise, and maintain structured opposition has deteriorated under the corrosive pressures of late capitalism. Digital-era activism, epitomised by the fleeting spectacle of Facebook strike events—swiftly assembled, only to dissolve into algorithmic oblivion—exemplifies this decay. These forms of engagement, mediated through platforms engineered for compulsive consumption rather than sustained solidarity, render political action a depoliticised spectacle. What emerges is a hollowed-out simulacrum of revolution, stripped of the embodied social fabric that once gave collective struggle its transformative power.

This performative activism, reduced to shareable gestures and viral slogans, operates within a political economy that thrives on attention rather than action, on visibility rather than structural change. The algorithmic architecture of social media platforms ensures that dissent is absorbed, repackaged, and neutralised—rendering even the most radical demands compatible with the logic

of late capitalism. Fisher’s ‘slow cancellation of the future’ thus manifests not only in the erosion of long-term political vision but in the dilapidation of organisational capacity itself. The atrophy of unions, the disintegration of party discipline, and the inability to coordinate beyond ephemeral hashtag campaigns reflect a social landscape where collective endurance has been supplanted by hyper-individualised, dopamine-driven engagement. Without durable institutions, physical assembly, or a material praxis that extends beyond the screen, the revolutionary impulse dissipates into what Byung-Chul Han might call ‘the burnout society’—a landscape of exhausted, isolated individuals, perpetually distracted and incapable of the sustained focus required to build counterpower.

Here, the crisis of mass politics reveals its deepest irony: in an age of unprecedented connectivity we are less able to organise, less able to commit, and less able to conceive of a future beyond the next algorithmic feed. The slow cancellation of the future is, at its core, the slow cancellation of collective will. Taking a look back at the revolutionary movements of the 18th century, we encounter a distinct contrast between the analogue and digital ages in how collective tasks were conceptualised—and in the capacity to achieve them.

The organic networks that led the American Revolution, such as the Sons of Liberty, Committees of Correspondence, and Daughters of Liberty, were instrumental in mobilising resistance through direct action and strategic communication. The Sons of Liberty, a decentralised group formed in the 1760s, employed tactics ranging from public spectacles like the Boston Tea Party to covert operations targeting British tax policies. Their adaptability allowed local chapters to

act autonomously while unifying under the rallying cry of 'no taxation without representation', spread via pamphlets and broadsides. Complementing their efforts, the Committees of Correspondence, initiated by Samuel Adams, created an intercolonial communication network that facilitated the exchange of ideas and coordinated collective responses to British measures, such as the Coercive Acts. Meanwhile, the Daughters of Liberty subverted economic dependence on Britain by organising boycotts and spinning bees, transforming domestic activities into political statements. These networks not only sustained resistance but also laid the foundation for colonial unity, culminating in the Continental Congress and a shared revolutionary identity.

In contrast, pre-revolutionary France relied on intellectual and social networks like salons, cafés, and Freemason's lodges to ferment Enlightenment ideals into actionable dissent. Parisian salons hosted by figures such as Madame Geoffrin provided spaces where philosophers, aristocrats, and bourgeois thinkers debated concepts like popular sovereignty, bridging class divides and fostering critiques of absolutism. Cafés like Le Procope and public spaces such as the Palais-Royal gardens became hubs for radical discourse, where pamphlets were disseminated and insurrections like the Storming of the Bastille were planned.

These movements thrived on unmediated cohesion: face-to-face debates, clandestine meetings, and material defiance. Their success lay in integrating ideology with lived bonds, a 'social' eroded by today's technologies. Revolutions were rooted in physical spaces (taverns, workshops) where trust was cultivated organically, forging durable solidarity. Today, algorithmic platforms commodify attention, fracturing solidarity. Social



'THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW PHILOSOPHY, OUR CRADLE WAS A CAFÉ'

CIRCA 1779,

© BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.CAZIN.NET

media reduces engagement to hashtags and event pages, enshrining passivity and prefiguring surveillance. Revolution becomes consumable narrative, not participatory praxis.

Rebuilding the Social

Our work cannot begin with transient spectacle but must emerge from interstitial daily spaces: mutual-aid networks, reading groups, sports clubs. These prefigurative institutions, akin to medieval monasteries preserving knowledge amid feudal collapse, become laboratories for practising democracy. By recentring politics on micro-scale practices, we lay the groundwork for Gramsci's 'war of position', contesting hegemony through cultural and social institutions. Rebuilding the 'social' through unmediated encounters cultivates resilience to reimagine revolution. The New Zealand Federation of Socialist Societies exemplifies this, cultivating unmediated civility through dialogue and communal care. Such efforts, while insufficient alone, reconstitute neoliberalism's eroded fabric, fostering mutuality and collective agency. Yet these spaces must transcend minoritarian status, articulating with broader movements to transform solidarity into mass power.

Continuity and Critique

A critical analysis of the contributions featured in the *Commonweal's* special edition reveals a striking continuity with historical patterns of socialist thought over the past seven decades. Traditional sects such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT), alongside the perspectives advanced by contributors like Elliot and Emmy, largely reiterate longstanding theoretical frameworks concerning revolutionary organisation. Emmy's assertion that 'the electoral process is not capable of ending [capitalist] dictatorship,

and the rich will not consent to a vote for them to cease being rich. We are in a situation which can only be smashed, and living in a society which is unusually bad at smashing things' exemplifies this tendency. Such rhetoric echoes the polemical language of 20th-century Leninist and Maoist sects, albeit without engaging the nuanced historical debates surrounding electoralism. Notably, Lenin's own position treated electoral participation as a contingent tactical instrument rather than an absolute strategic imperative—a distinction that fuelled extensive theoretical exchanges among figures such as Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Kautsky, though revisiting these debates exceeds the scope of this analysis.

Elliot's contribution, as well as those of the ISO and IBT, similarly align with historical precedents. These groups assert that mounting antipathy toward capitalism, coupled with the presence of nascent social movements within New Zealand's social terrain, presents opportunities to channel discontent toward radicalisation. Elliot emphasises the existential urgency of constructing a revolutionary working-class party amid escalating climate collapse and asymmetrical class warfare, framing this project as an imperative to 'infiltrate' and ideologically reorient progressive movements. The ISO and IBT echo this logic, contending that such movements—whether rooted in labour, environmental, or anti-austerity struggles—serve as fertile ground for advancing revolutionary objectives. The admonition that failure to act risks ensuring 'History will not absolve us if we fail to bring about the end of capitalism, and instead live to witness the end of the world' underscores a deterministic outlook characteristic of revolutionary socialist rhetoric.

While their rhetoric may founder on the shores of our post neoliberal age,

'A LANDSCAPE OF EXHAUSTED, ISOLATED INDIVIDUALS, PERPETUALLY DISTRACTED AND INCAPABLE OF THE SUSTAINED FOCUS REQUIRED TO BUILD COUNTERPOWER.'

climate catastrophe, and digital alienation, the rise of a nascent fascism, they remain steadfast in their mission: to prove that the 20th century's failures can, with enough zeal, be resurrected as 21st-century farces. The material conditions evolve; the slogans do not. Such is the 'iron law of oligarchy' in action, a closed loop of self-referential piety, where the only thing being smashed is the patience of anyone still waiting for a viable socialist alternative.

Conclusion

The Federation's advocacy for *prefigurative institutional forms*—mutual-aid collectives, pedagogical circles, and civic associations—proposes a practical, if provisional, framework for navigating the crisis of collective agency in the digital age. Rather than chasing the fleeting visibility of hashtag activism or performative protests, these grassroots initiatives focus on the slow, deliberate work of societal reconstitution. They prioritise building institutions that *embody the values of the future they seek*: co-operative mutual-aid networks that redistribute resources directly, pedagogical circles where critical consciousness is cultivated through dialogue, and civic associations that model participatory democracy at the local level.

This approach echoes historical precedents where marginalised groups forged power through *interstitial organising*—that is, creating structures within the cracks of dominant systems. For instance, the SPD's (Social Democratic Party of Germany) *Bildung* infrastructure in the late 19th century combined workers' education programmes with cultural clubs, embedding socialist ideals in daily life long before electoral victories. Similarly, clandestine networks

in pre-revolutionary eras—like the Committees of Correspondence during the American Revolution or underground reading groups in Tsarist Russia—incubated dissent not through grand gestures, but through patient, collective labour: disseminating radical texts, fostering solidarity, and rehearsing self-governance.

The Federation's model rejects the 'performative theatrics' of spectacle-driven politics, which often reduce activism to symbolic gestures divorced from material change. Instead, it revives the ethos of *deliberative praxis*: mutual-aid collectives, for example, not only address immediate needs (food distribution, housing support) but also prefigure a society rooted in reciprocity rather than profit. And as a pedagogical circle, meanwhile, we attempt to reject the algorithmic echo chamber by reviving face-to-face dialogue, where disagreement and nuance can coexist. These forms of organising are not glamorous, nor do they trend on social media. Yet, like the SPD's cultural associations or the Daughters of Liberty's spinningbees, they cultivate the *habits* of solidarity—trust, accountability, shared purpose—that sustain movements beyond momentary upheavals. The foundations are there for us to play a more concrete role in the building or revival of a revolutionary tradition. In this sense, the Federation's project is both radical and deeply pragmatic: it recognises that revolutions are not televised (or tweeted) but built incrementally, through the quiet work of planting institutions that can outlast the present's corrosive logic.

'BY RECENTRING POLITICS ON MICRO-SCALE PRACTICES, WE LAY THE GROUND-WORK FOR GRAMSCI'S 'WAR OF POSITION', CONTESTING HEGEMONY THROUGH CULTURAL AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS.'

BYRON CLARK

Zdravka Bušić and the long shadow of the Ustaše

This past September New Zealand's deputy Prime Minister met with Zdravka Bušić, a member of the Croatian Parliament and Chair of the Parliamentary Committee for Croatians Abroad. She was in New Zealand for the Australia and New Zealand Croatian Women in Leadership Conference, where NZ First MP Tanya Unkovich also spoke. Unkovich, of Croatian descent, stood for NZ First in the Epsom electorate in 2023, coming 6th with 573 votes. However, she was elected to parliament as the 8th candidate on the party list. She told reporters that God had inspired her to enter politics. During the campaign she faced criticism for participating in a Nuremberg trials Telegram group that likened COVID-19 vaccines to Nazi war crimes. She also emerged as an opponent of LGBT and transgender rights. On *Facebook*, Unkovich posted 'Today it was a privilege to accompany Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters as we welcomed Croatian MP Zdravka Bušić and H.E Betty Pavelich, Croatian Ambassador to Australia and New Zealand.' Bušić first became an MP in newly independent Croatia following the breakup of Yugoslavia. She represents the centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ).

Her background, however, is more extreme. In the 1970s Bušić became involved with the Croatian National Resistance (HNO), also known as Otpor.

Otpor was founded by General Vjekoslav Maks Luburić, a military commander known as the warden of the Jasenovac extermination camp during World War II. Croatian historian Ivo Goldstein estimates that 90,000 to 100,000 people died at Jasenovac, the largest concentration camp complex not operated by the Nazi regime.

After the defeat of the fascist Ustaše by the Yugoslav Partisans led by Josip Tito, who would become prime minister and later president of post-war Yugoslavia, many sympathisers of the regime fled into the diaspora communities of Western Europe, North America and Australia. In Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 70s, Croatia (along with Bosnia and Herzegovina) underwent unprecedented economic transformations that resulted in citizens, especially in urban areas, enjoying standards of living comparable to much of Western Europe. It was in the diaspora where Croatia came to be seen as a nation oppressed by Yugoslav socialism. In his 2003 book *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism and the Balkan Wars*, Paul Hockenos writes:

Only among the diaspora rightists, obsessed with historical conflicts and isolated from the reality of contemporary Yugoslavia, could such symbolic matters serve to justify armed rebellion. Whatever the radical Croat ex-émigrés may claim, theirs was never a popular movement enjoying even moderate support either in Croatia or among the diaspora. Although in hindsight the former émigrés contrive to give their struggle a democratic veneer, it

was, in fact, deeply undemocratic, nationally exclusive, and profoundly authoritarian.

In the environment of Cold War anticommunism, the fascist sympathies of Croatian nationalists were often overlooked. Émigrés in Ohio began to commemorate April 10, the date German and Italian invaders of Yugoslavia set up the Independent State of Croatia (Serbo-Croatian: Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, NDH) and put in place the Ustaše regime, as 'Croatia Day'. In 1968 Cleveland mayor Carl Stokes endorsed the day, even flying the WWII era regime flag in the city. He proclaimed 'This date marks the anniversary of the beginning of the gallant struggle of the Croatian people which, in 1941, was successful in bringing freedom after 850 years of foreign domination.' The following year Ohio Governor James Rhodes called for a 'determined fight for the reinstatement of an independent, free and democratic Croatian state, which was declared on April 10, 1941.'

The Yugoslav embassy in Washington DC voiced their objections to the State Department. The Yugoslav Consul General also wrote to mayor Stokes, reminding him that the Independent State of Croatia which existed briefly in the 40s had been aligned with Nazi Germany, and had declared war on the United States. Stokes disregarded the letter and continued to observe Croatia Day for another two years before the State Department leaned on the Cleveland City Council to show better judgement.

In the mid-1970s Nikola Majstrović, a Croatian journalist who lives and works in Sweden, was hired by Swedish national television to shoot a documentary film titled *Croats: Terrorists or Freedom fighters?* 'There was a larger community

of Croatian emigrants in Cleveland. I remember Zdravka Bušić', Majstrović told Bosnian investigative journalist Avdo Avdić for Žurnal.info. 'She and her friend put on uniforms and we went to a forest to film their military training. Then you could shoot wherever you wanted.' She photographed Bušić and another woman practising shooting handguns.

In 1976 Bušić's brother, Zvonko Bušić, along with his American wife Julie Bušić (née Schultz), hijacked a plane heading from New York to Chicago. In the cockpit Zvonko told the crew that if his orders were not followed he would detonate the explosives taped to his torso. In addition, should their demands not be met, a hidden bomb would go off in a 'highly busy location' in the United States. The explosives strapped to their bodies were fake but a real bomb, with instructions on how to defuse it, had been placed in a coin locker at Grand Central Station in Manhattan. This bomb, which Bušić alerted the police to, was meant as proof that yet another bomb existed at an undisclosed location. There was no second bomb.

After dropping leaflets over Chicago, the hijacked plane was flown to Newfoundland where the passengers were released unharmed, then across the Atlantic where leaflets were dropped over London and Paris. The next day, as per their demands, the hijackers' manifesto was printed in all major US dailies, including the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*. This act of terrorism was not without victims however. Twenty-seven-year-old Lieutenant Brian Murray, a member of the New York Police Department's bomb squad, was killed when the bomb in Grand Central Station exploded in his face as he attempted to defuse it. Three others were injured. The Bušić couple

'SHE TOLD REPORTERS THAT GOD HAD INSPIRED HER TO ENTER POLITICS.'

'IT'S ALWAYS BEEN A TACTIC OF THE FAR RIGHT, DATING RIGHT BACK TO THE ORIGINAL CAPITAL-F FASCISTS IN ITALY: EXPLOIT PEOPLE'S FEARS OF AND DISLIKE FOR COMMUNISM—REAL OR PERCEIVED, JUSTIFIED OR NOT—AND OFFER THEMSELVES AND THEIR IDEAS AS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN PROTECT THEM.'

became a cause célèbre for Croatian nationalists. They both received life sentences for air piracy that had resulted in death, though Julie would serve only 13 years. Zvonko was released in 2008, five years before his death.

The radical nationalist groups of the diaspora would become a part of the strategy of nationalist-leaning figures in Croatia when the federation of Yugoslavia was beginning to crack. Franjo Tudjman had fought on the side of the Yugoslav Partisans in his youth, and after the war took a position in the Yugoslav People's Army, with the rank of Major General. Following his military career, he gained a doctorate in history in 1965. He would soon clash with the Tito regime. As Paul Hokenos points out:

Among the retired general's excesses in socialist Yugoslavia was the content of his historical research, which played down the crimes that Croat fascists committed during World War II, as well as the number of people killed in Croat concentration camps. Employing dubious historical methods, Tudjman's books appear as ideologically driven tracts intent on exonerating the Croat nation from World War II atrocities. In socialist Yugoslavia this was pure heresy.

In 1972 Tudjman was sentenced to two years in prison for 'subversive activities' during the Croatian Spring, which was a political conflict arising from students and intellectuals pushing for greater autonomy for Croatia in the context of Serbian hegemony within Yugoslavia. Petar Šegedin, president of the Croatian Writers' Association which

Tudjman had joined in 1970, accused the Yugoslav government of attempting the cultural assimilation of Croatia. As the movement gained momentum, Tito became unnerved. He charged the leaders with 'being open to the influence of the reactionary diaspora'.

Tito, who died in 1980, would turn out to be correct. As it became clear that Yugoslavia would not survive in its current form after Tito, nationalist factions in the Croatian communist party and in the republican intelligence services, attempted to direct the course of history. It was, according to Hokenos, 'a strategy of pure self-interest designed to protect their positions during the upcoming political upheavals.'

Former officials high in the socialist republic's interior ministry, such as Josip Manolic, claim that they organized Tudjman's visits abroad, right down to buying his plane tickets. These very officials were later among the founders and leaders of Tudjman's new party, the HDZ. There is little doubt that the secret services had their eye on events—and a hand in the process. Without at least their tacit approval, Tudjman would never have received a passport.

In June 1987 Tudjman travelled to Toronto, Canada, where he stayed with John (Zlatko) Caldarevic, a respected émigré businessman. The pair had met in Zagreb in the 1960s; Caldarevic had emigrated in 1968. 'At first I thought he was coming just for a visit, to relax', Caldarevic told Hokenos when interviewed thirteen years later. 'He started meeting with people, with extremists,



without telling me.'

Caldarevic, who describes himself as a moderate, was suddenly finding people such as Marin Sopta, North America's president of the Croatian National Resistance, in his living room. 'I advised Tudjman not to meet these people, not to go to these places', Caldarevic told Hokenos, referring to prominent nationalist figures and the friars at the Croatian Franciscans, a Catholic order who had helped Ustaše members flee the country in the 40s. The Franciscans had a community centre in Norval, twenty-five miles north of Toronto. 'I said if someone takes a picture of you beneath a Pavelić [the World War II Croatian fascist leader] photograph you'll end up in jail again.'

Tudjman gave lectures in North American cities, which were published

in pamphlets and sent internationally to other diaspora groups. Older Croats were initially sceptical of the former partisan. Hokenos recounts a meeting where a man stood up and defiantly announced that he had carried a rifle for the Ustaša. 'If I had caught you in the forest forty years ago', he assailed Tudjman, 'you'd be dead now. And if you had caught me, I'd be dead.' The hall stood still. 'But whatever the case', he continued with a nod, 'I'm behind you now.'

Tudjman told audiences of a key part of his emerging programme 'Iseljena Hrvatska, roughly translating to 'exiled Croatia' or 'expelled Croatia', implying that Croats had been forced out of their rightful homeland, and would one day return. In 1990, when Croatia held its first multiparty elections since 1938,

**ZDRAVKA
BUŠIĆ (LEFT),
TRAINING WITH
THE CROATIAN
NATIONAL
RESISTANCE,
OHIO C. 1970**
CAZIN.NET

Tudjman's HDZ came to power. Gojko Šušak, a Bosnian Croat emigre who, in Hokeno's words, had 'circulated in a seamy underground of militant ultra-nationalist splinter groups' in Canada, moved to Croatia to become 'President Tudjman's powerful right-hand man' and the Minister of Emigration, later the Deputy Minister of Defence. Julie Bušić was given positions in the Croatian Embassy in Washington, D.C., then from 1995 to 2000 served as a senior adviser to President Tudjman, her post salaried by Šušak's Ministry of Defense. Zdravka Bušić became Tudjman's personal secretary, and an HDZ parliamentarian.

Aside from these notable individuals, Croatians in the West did not 'return' in significant numbers. An estimated 3,500 did, while a greater number of people left Croatia during the same period. Mass population movements did take place in the region in the 1990s, though not voluntarily as Tudjman had forecast. War and ethnic cleansing saw 500,000 ethnic Croats from Serbia, central Bosnia, and Kosovo relocating to Croatia proper and Croat-dominated parts of Bosnia. (In 1995, Croat counter offensives against rebel Serbs also saw over 150,000 non-Croats flee Croatia).

Zdravka Bušić's terrorism adjacent past may be half a century ago, but as recently as 2023 she was giving a presentation at the European Parliament focusing on the activities of the state security of Yugoslavia, which she accused of committing heinous crimes, including jailing, torturing, and killing those perceived to be engaged in 'hostile activities against the state.' She further insisted that the 'biological descendants and ideological followers [of communists] hold a lot of power in the modern era' and that communist ideology had left a 'clear contamination' on Croatian society.

'While at face value the topic of discussion might seem reasonable', wrote journalist Una Hajdari for *Euro News*, 'what Bušić and other speakers failed to address was the fact that talking about communist crimes continues to be a dog-whistle on the far-right for ultra-nationalists and Nazi apologists promoting ideas that encourage discrimination today.'

According to Michael Colborne, a journalist and researcher at Bellingcat who has covered Croatia and the Balkans extensively, when these talking points are used by the far-right the intent is stoking fear. 'They exploit anti-communist sentiment that understandably exists not just in former communist or socialist countries, but in other places as well', Colborne told Euronews. 'It's always been a tactic of the far right, dating right back to the original capital-F Fascists in Italy: exploit people's fears of and dislike for communism—real or perceived, justified or not—and offer themselves and their ideas as the only thing that can protect them.'

Tanya Unkovich has no known connections to Croatian nationalist movements, who have not had a significant presence in New Zealand (unlike in neighbouring Australia), and she may well have been unaware of Bušić's past or present political views when meeting with her. Talk of ideological followers and 'biological descendants' of communism holding power in the modern era is, however, worryingly similar to the kind of conspiratorial rhetoric espoused by members of the so-called 'freedom movement' of which Unkovich is a part.

GARETH MCMULLEN

‘The Devil Never Let Him Rest’

Thomas Müntzer and the German Peasants’ War 500 Years on

There’s an anniversary coming up on May 15th of this year: the 500th anniversary of the defeat of Radical Reformation leader Thomas Müntzer during the German Peasants’ War. Martin Luther’s famed *Ninety-Five Theses* of 1517 catalysed what we think of now as the Protestant Reformation. However, Luther was not the only personality challenging the practices of the Catholic Church. He was preceded by the Hussites in Bohemia and the Lollard movement in England in the preceding two centuries. There was also a more radical and egalitarian current of theological and political thought in his own time, and one to which he arguably opened the door. This was the Radical Reformation, and the German Peasants’ War was its most dramatic confrontation.

Luther wrote his *Ninety-Five Theses* as an attack on indulgences: late medieval Catholic certificates which granted their recipients reduction of the time their eternal souls would spend in Purgatory, for a price proportionate to the number of days discounted. Luther did not mean to overthrow the Catholic Church’s authority, and his intentions were not initially schismatic. Nonetheless, he did not write his *Theses* in circumstances of his choosing. Eastern German nobles chafed under the

growing power of the Habsburg Dynasty, which controlled much of central Europe through the Holy Roman Empire and was a staunch defender of the authority of the Catholic Church. Behind this foreground dominated by the ‘great men of history’, the pump for social conflict had been primed between peasants and nobles, between craftspeople and rich burghers (town-dwelling proto-capitalists), and between a declining class of Germanic knights and small-holding nobles and the powerful Electors (upper aristocracy) of the Holy Roman Empire.

Luther’s criticism of indulgences found a ready audience throughout central Europe. Peasants and the natal generations of the German working class were frustrated at this theologically dubious upward transfer of wealth from the peasants, not to mention the tithes, or church taxes, which they owed to their local clerics. A supportive clique of scholars coalesced around Luther at the University of Wittenberg, and he received the protection of aristocrats like Frederick the Wise, Prince-Elector of Saxony. His grievances were proclaimed heretical in a Papal Bull from Pope Leo X, and the wedge he had driven finally became schismatic with his disputation of his ideas at the Diet of Worms.

The wind which filled Luther’s sails moved faster than he did. Luther had promoted his ideas from his base of Wittenberg; the nobility and clergy of the surrounding region of Saxony and neighbouring Thuringia were squeezing as much as they could from the peasantry through the intensification of taxes and tithes and the reintroduction of serfdom. There was a burgeoning working class in the growing industries of the urban centres and the silver mines of Saxony. Much of this economic development was driven by investment from the Fugger

family, the richest family in Europe at the time; much of the revenue gathered by the Catholic Church through indulgences went to service the Church's debts to the Fuggers.

Despite the outline of modernity taking shape in this time, the 'post-Enlightenment' reader faces a challenging imperative; we must understand that, in this time, political and religious expression were inextricable from one another. For critics of the existing order there was no concept of 'capital' as such, but the New Testament concept of *Mammon* as the personification of the material greed of the wealthy served the radicals of this era. And though the spiritual monopoly of the Church may seem alien to us today, the very same German peasants who saw their produce raided by the tithing of local monastic institutions genuinely feared the excommunication that non-compliance might bring. The power of the Church not only meant exploitation and domination in this life, but potentially eternal suffering in Hell or many lifetimes spent in Purgatory.

As agrarian exploitation and the infernal innovation of wage exploitation consumed the lives of the toiling classes of Central Europe, a hunger grew for political and spiritual rebellion which could not be sated by Luther's polemics on specific church doctrine. Luther was outflanked by a spectre of millenarian discontent we now call the Radical Reformation, and its first great luminary was Thomas Müntzer.

Müntzer was a younger contemporary of Luther and a fellow educated churchman who sought reform of ecclesiastical practices. Luther and his Wittenberg clique had opened the door for Müntzer, but Müntzer's criticism of the existing order did not stop where Luther's did. The pastoral position he held at the industrial town of Zwickau in Saxony in

1520-21 ended in acrimony with another local pastor, Johann Egranus, who was closely connected to Luther. Müntzer had aligned himself with the working-class weavers of Zwickau, and under his pastoral influence they ran rampant in acts of iconoclasm and terrorization of local clergy. On April 16th 1521 he was expelled by the Zwickau town council; on the very same day Luther arrived for his trial and disputation at the Diet of Worms.

After his expulsion, Müntzer travelled southeastern Germany before being offered another pastoral post at Allstedt in Saxony in 1523. It was here that he developed his theology and radically egalitarian politics. He developed a system of German language mass services, which allowed his congregation to sing and understand the Psalms and build their own relationship with Müntzer's subversively translated liturgy. His teachings began to challenge all political authority of both temporal lords and ecclesiastical offices. His prognostications became millenarian, looking forward to an apocalyptic battle to usher in a new world to come. The agents of this impending future were 'the Elect', the spiritually and economically impoverished who had experienced real spiritual suffering and disbelief but come out the other side with a profound connection to God. This connection brought a divine mission to emancipate themselves from the corrupted Papal Church, the Lutheran turncoats, and the lords and financiers who enjoyed their spiritual protection. He acquired the use of a printing press while at Allstedt, and he distributed his prolific pamphlets and liturgy for his German mass services. In a letter to the town council of Eisenach at the crescendo of his part in the Peasants' War, Müntzer wrote:

God has moved the whole world... to a recognition of the divine truth, and this is proved by the most zealous mood against the tyrants, as Daniel 7 says clearly: power shall be given to the common people¹.

Müntzer's radical positions predictably brought him into conflict with the local nobility and clergy, and things came to a head when the people of Allstedt refused to pay local church tithes and burned down a chapel belonging to a local nunnery. He preached to the Saxon prince Duke Johann and his son in July 1524, and he warned them of the coming battle between God's Elect on the one side and the Papal Church and its Lutheran enablers on the other side. He urged them to take the side of the commoners, fight alongside the Elect, and seek spiritual fulfilment under Müntzer's guidance.

Unsurprisingly, Müntzer's *Sermon to the Princes* did not have its desired effect. He was expelled from Allstedt in August of 1524, but his publications had spread throughout Germany and Bohemia. His name had become synonymous with the radical possibilities opened up by the ongoing Reformation, and in late 1524 it appeared that the time had come for the battle between the Elect and the forces of order. Uncoordinated peasant rebellions had been emerging throughout southwestern Germany and the Black Forest region throughout mid-1524. An opening emerged as the mercenary armies upon which the German aristocracy depended were occupied with Habsburg military adventures against the French and Ottomans. In August a dedicated if shamolic peasant army had formed at Stühlingen; the German Peasant War



had begun in earnest.

Müntzer was not the sole leader of the rebellion, but he and his comrade Heinrich Pfeiffer would take leadership locally as the rebellion spread to Saxony and Thuringia in early 1525. The peasant armies set about looting castles, convents, and monasteries and expropriating the property of wealthy burghers and the nobility. By May Müntzer and Pfeiffer led a rebel army at Frankenhausen, Thuringia, of over 8000.

The princes of Saxony and Thuringia may have been divided by their theological loyalties, but they found unity in a crisis that threatened their power. With the

THOMAS MÜNTZER
CHRISTOFFEL VAN SICHEM
C. 1489

1 Andrew Drummond, *The Dreadful History and Judgement of God on Thomas Müntzer* (Verso Books, 2024), 248.

full-throated endorsement of Martin Luther, the princes of Germany had scrambled to raise mercenary armies which could suppress the peasants' revolt. Philip, the Landgrave of Hesse, and Duke George of Saxony, both staunchly loyal to the Catholic Church, mobilized their forces to attack Müntzer's army at Frankenhausen. Although the peasant army at Frankenhausen had some firearms and artillery they were hopelessly outmatched. While casualty reports from the battle vary, the peasant death toll was in the thousands, and census records indicate that half of the male adult population of Frankenhausen was exterminated in the battle and ensuing massacres carried out by the princes' army.² Not long after the battle Müntzer and Pfeiffer were captured, tortured, and publicly executed.

The German Peasants' War carried on through the summer of 1525, but by September the fighting was over and the rebellious peasants had been thoroughly defeated. Many who had fought alongside Müntzer and escaped at Frankenhausen would form the vanguard of the Anabaptist movement, which carried on the Radical Reformation tradition and was persecuted accordingly by Lutheran and Catholic authorities alike. Yet other, less radical, Protestant tendencies would become ascendant. For example, Jean Calvin would, like Müntzer, speak of 'the Elect'. For Müntzer 'the Elect' had been a band of souls who saw the message of equality and social levelling in the Bible and, through their own spiritual suffering,

entered a covenant with God to realize a Biblical mission; Jews and Muslims could just as easily be members of Müntzer's elect as Christians.³ In contrast, Calvin's Elect were those scarce souls predestined for salvation; their status would be apparent through their frugality, productivity, and strict commitment to Calvin's interpretation of Christian Doctrine. Whereas Müntzer inspired the revolutionary egalitarians of the Radical Reformation like the Levellers of the English Civil War,⁴ Calvin's Reformation would grant a spiritual momentum to the birth of capitalism.

Müntzer was a light flickering in the dark for the toiling classes of early modern Germany, but even in death he was a frightful hobgoblin for the nascent bourgeoisie and upper aristocracy. In 1625 a play to commemorate the centenary of the German Peasants' War presented Müntzer as a cold-blooded, yellow-bellied servant of Satan and the Pope.⁵ Friedrich Engels wrote more sympathetically of Müntzer in 1850, describing him as a figure whose predominantly peasant uprising came at a time where the underdevelopment of class relations afforded it no chance of victory.⁶ East Germany's Socialist Unity Party treated Müntzer as a proto-proletarian revolutionary while downplaying the undeniable spiritual character of his thought. In 1987, shortly before its dissolution, the East German government finished a museum commemorating the Battle of Frankenhausen, featuring a panorama painting by Werner Tübke. Ironically, the construction of the

2 Andrew Drummond, *The Dreadful History and Judgment of God on Thomas Müntzer* (Verso Books, 2024), 266.

3 Andrew Drummond, *The Dreadful History and Judgment of God on Thomas Müntzer* (Verso Books, 2024), 168.

4 Ibid., 306.

5 Ibid., 318.

6 Friedrich Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany* (London, 1850), 78-79, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/peasant-war-germany.pdf>

museum involved levelling the very hill where the peasant army had made their stand with no consideration for archaeological analysis of the site.⁷

As Luther's friend and collaborator Philip Melancthon said of Müntzer in 1525, 'the devil never let him rest.'⁸ In 2017, on the quinqucentennial of the official German Reformation, representatives of the German Evangelical Church took it upon themselves to compare Müntzer to ISIS.⁹

I often feel wary of harping on about my obscure historical hobby horses, but let this article show that that rarely stops me. I don't suggest we cleave out a space in our consciousness and broaden the lineage of our socialist tradition just to remember another anniversary of another defeat of another band of hopelessly butchered martyrs. So, why should the modern socialist reader care about the German Peasants' War? What lessons can we learn from grasping across 500 years of history at a failed rebellion of peasants, miners, and craftspeople?

Müntzer lived in a time when political and theological ideas were accepted as two parts of a whole, so his ideas may seem alien to us; it may feel challenging for a modern reader, whose idea of socialism is more inflected by the (perhaps aspirational) scientific claims of Marxism, to really empathize with the Radical Reformation's militants. We must reach across the veil of modernity and the Enlightenment, but perhaps that task should be easier than it first appears, and perhaps this different way of interacting with political ideas has its value.

Millenarian or apocalyptic theology has always been prominent in the Abrahamic faiths (and the secular cultures they've shaped) during times of crisis, and today we have our own answers to medieval flagellants. The doomsday prophesying of QAnon shows that there is still potency in stories of divine conflicts between good and evil, even if these stories can utterly dissolve an individual's cognitive connection to material reality.

To be clear, I am not proposing a socialist QAnon. Neither am I proposing that, like Müntzer (in a probably fictitious but striking account), we promise that 'you need not fear their guns, for you will see that I will catch in my sleeves all the bullets that they fire at us.'¹⁰ Yet the socialist reader may know from their own experience that political ideas can take on a spiritual role in the lives of those who hold fast to them, so perhaps it's more useful to reckon honestly and learn to harness it than to deny and neglect it. We live in a time of crisis that begets hopes of millennial dispensation, messianic arrival, and salvation for this or that Elect. We are faced with conspiracy-seeking flagellants who seek to choke the waning liberal Transatlantic priest class by their own lanyards, Christian Zionist architects of a Third Temple in Jerusalem to resurrect the Christian Messiah, and the transhumanist techno-Calvinists of Silicon Valley building their Elect through IVF eugenics, 'effective altruism', and bio-hacking. Müntzer's Elect only rebelled once they had a liturgy of emancipation. If capitalism's gravediggers ever lower the casket, will they need a socialist liturgy?

7 Andrew Drummond, *The Dreadful History and Judgment of God on Thomas Müntzer* (Verso Books, 2024), 262.

8 Ibid., 180.

9 Ibid., 326.

10 Andrew Drummond, *The Dreadful History and Judgment of God on Thomas Müntzer* (Verso Books, 2024), 264.

OUR HISTORY

CRAIG STEPHEN

When politics and sport did mix: Garth Carsley Ballantyne and Comrades FC

Politics and football have never mingled here in the way they have in Europe, where Palestinian and anarchist flags fly, and rebel songs are sung at the stadiums of Celtic, Hapoel Tel Aviv, AEK Athens and St Pauli, reflecting the values of their fans. However, the former Comrades FC club might be seen as the nearest New Zealand has had to a 'political' football club.

The word *comrade* wasn't exclusive to the left when the Auckland team was formed in 1923. It originated from the German word *kamerad* which was used as an affectionate form of address among people linked by a strong common interest, be that sport, college or friendship. Nonetheless, some of those associated with the early years of the club suggest that they may well have been thinking in political terms when naming it. Its first patron was Michael Joseph Savage, former member of the New Zealand Socialist Party and Chair of the Federation of Labour, who would become New Zealand's first Labour Prime Minister. John A Lee, firebrand

left-wing Labour MP for Grey Lynn, was a vice-patron. He was a sporting man who also served for many years as the president of Auckland Rugby League. At the time of the creation of Comrades FC, Savage and Lee were good friends, comrades in arms in attempting to take the Labour Party into power for the first time. But on forming the first Labour government in 1935 the friendship soured as Lee attacked a number of Savage's policies, resulting in his expulsion from the party in 1940.

The new club was also backed by Lou Ross, the treasurer of the Painters Union and a proponent of the Socialist Sunday School which was based at the Trades Hall in Hobson Street. At a game at Victoria Park, Ross met the referee Jack Church and told him of his wish to start up a new club for the district. Church was keen and, using his role, contacted the Auckland Football Association who told him there was a gap for a team in the fifth grade. This piqued the interest of Garth Carsley Ballantyne, who would become its most fervent backer.

Ballantyne was an intriguing figure, a well-off surveyor and city planner, a hockey player who hadn't played football but nevertheless was interested enough in the game to become involved in the new club. His association with Comrades and the various subsequent permutations would last for 60 years. He was a conscientious objector during World War I, arguing that it was a war caused and governed by arms manufacturers. Ballantyne was drawn in the first ballot in 1916, but according to General Godley he could not be classed as a conscientious objector

because the question of religious or conscientious objection was never raised at his appeal tribunal. He should be seen as a 'defiant objector'.¹ (*Waipa Post*, 19 March 1918, p.1) However, it is clear from the records that it was Ballantyne's employers who appealed on his behalf, arguing that his was an essential occupation and that they had already lost all their other surveyors to the army. (*Evening Post*, 9 February 1917, p.2) The appeal was dismissed, but his subsequent refusal to obey orders and his willingness to endure considerable hardship and privation surely demonstrate that he was a man of conviction. He was sentenced to two years hard labour, which was commuted to three months if his behaviour was good. In mid-1917 the Minister of Defence, James Allen, decided that objectors who had finished serving their first sentence should be sent overseas and treated as soldiers. On 13 July the Commanding Officer at Trentham Camp, Colonel H R Potter, decided that his prison was overcrowded, and 14 conscientious objectors were sent to a troopship in Wellington Harbour, the *Waitemata*, prior to being shipped to the Western Front. The aim of the authorities was to 'convert' them, silence them, and possibly, as in the case of the most determined of them all, Archibald Baxter, kill them.

The men were forcibly undressed on deck and their heads shaved in an attempt to humiliate them and break their will. Ballantyne was manhandled and punched in the face. He wrote a letter, largely published, complaining of the ventilation of the 'clink' (prison cell) on board, its horrendous atmosphere, of the lack of exercise, and of the lack of

eating utensils.² In a prison camp near Dunkirk he was subjected to the 'three-three'—3 days on bread and water, 3 days in solitary confinement, and three 12 hour spells with his hands handcuffed behind his back. He eventually succumbed to this treatment and agreed to become a stretcher bearer on condition that he did not have to take the oath of allegiance.

On their return, the group was regarded as pariahs and because of this it is likely that his subsequent role in New Zealand football was not recognised until many decades later. He was only inducted into its Hall of Fame in 2000, 15 years after his death.

Comrades FC was initially based in Freemans Bay, acknowledged as the city's slum, a run-down working-class area with plenty of dilapidated houses and a reputation for grog dens and brothels. Its residents were predominantly workers from the British Isles alongside Dalmatians and Māori.

At the inaugural meeting Ballantyne was elected president, Ross the secretary-treasurer, and Church the team coach. The meeting was held at the Trades Hall, but subsequent club meetings were held at the Leys Institute in Ponsonby. White shirts were chosen as the team top because they were considered to be the most likely shirt that budding young players would have at home. Green ribbon was sewn on to the shirt to give them a distinctive look. Later, green would be the predominant colour of the tops.

The club first competed in 1924 with three teams playing at Victoria Park. This would soon rise to six. However, the club's administration was left in turmoil

1 'defiant objector' is a term usually applied to someone refusing military service on grounds other than that of conscience.

2 Ballantyne's detailed account of his experiences can be found in Harry Holland's book *Armageddon or Calvary: The Conscientious Objectors of New Zealand and 'The Process of their Conversion'*, The Maoriland Worker Printing and Publishing Company Limited, 1919.

when Lou Ross died in 1925 and Church left for Christchurch for what turned out to be for five years. Ballantyne largely guided the club through these formative years himself, combining it with his work as a city planner.

In October 1926 he was incensed by a *New Zealand Herald* article that reported that the club was suspected of playing over-age boys in some teams. Ballantyne shot off a terse letter to the editor in which he demanded a correction be published. 'As secretary of the Comrades Club, I wish to emphatically deny that there is any question under consideration concerning the age of any of my players', he wrote.

There was little money around in the early days, with the clubhouse on Ponsonby Road reported to be very basic. During the depression years of the 1930s it provided table tennis and snooker facilities for members to provide some relief from the hardships of the time.

Football was Ballantyne's obsession and he dedicated his time and money to the game and 'his' club. He was heavily involved with junior representative teams too, and he toured the country in his camper van promoting the sport. He often hosted whole teams at his house in Brown's Bay, and for camps at weekends and during the Christmas Holidays. With its tennis court, pavilion and bunk room it was beyond the experience and dreams of most of the young players, many of whom went on to become leaders and coaches in the sport because of Ballantyne's influence.

The club made excellent progress, and the annual meeting of March 1936 was told that the club had a membership of 150, and had entered 11 teams in various competitions the season before, winning four trophies. The financial statement showed a healthy balance. This overall

strength was reflected in the club taking out the Ritchie Cup for the performances of all a club's senior and junior teams no less than 13 times between 1933 and 1948.

A 1939 Chatham Cup match descended into farce. Comrades and YMCA played in such awful conditions that the players couldn't even see their team-mates. The sides managed to play 90 minutes at Blandford Park despite a heavy rain build-up during the game. Unusually, the tie also doubled as a league fixture so the 2-2 draw gave each side a point, but extra-time was required to decide the winner of the cup tie. By the start of the second period, conditions were atrocious due to the rain with players only able to determine the approximate location of the ball by the sound of a kick or the ball hitting the ground. At that point the referee mercifully whistled the end of the game, with 10 minutes due to be played. YMCA won the replay.

Given they began in the sixth grade of the Auckland league structure, their success in 1940 in lifting the Auckland FA senior championship is a considerable achievement. It was, the *New Zealand Herald* reported, the first time a side composed entirely of locally-born and trained players had won a senior tournament. Almost all of the team had come through the ranks of the club and the average age was 23. There was no national league at the time, nor even a regional league, so the best city teams were all contesting the Auckland league.

Comrades defended the title the following year, albeit in a weakened league. In less than two decades Comrades had achieved the remarkable feat of being the first team to win the Auckland senior league in two consecutive years. That was considerable progress from its formation in 1923 when it didn't even have formal team shirts.



By then players were enlisting in the war and the club's fortunes began to wane at the end of the conflict. Freemans Bay was also changing, with the derelict residential areas being replaced. Ironically, many people associated with the club moved to suburbs that Ballantyne had a hand in developing. They relinquished their title to Mt Albert Grammar School Old Boys in 1942 and were pipped to the title in 1943 by Metro. Both teams finished their campaign with identical records, so a decider was held, which Metro won 3-1 to gain its first victory in the competition.

The undoubted star of the side at the time was Ken Fleet, who would become a legend in Auckland football, playing for the provincial side for 14 years. Until 1948 Fleet was a Comrades player and scored most of the team's goals. He moved to Eastern Suburbs FC that same year where,

usually as captain, he would turn out in the club colours 162 times, scoring a remarkable 115 times, until his retirement in 1957. Fleet earned six New Zealand caps after signing for the Lilywhites.

One Comrades player who did earn an international call-up was Arthur Masters who came on as sub against Australia at Blandford Park, Auckland in 1948. Masters scored New Zealand's solitary goal in an 8-1 thrashing. Two years later he scored five times for Auckland against Otago. The historian Don Service recalled that Masters had 'good acceleration, was a good dribbler, and had a powerful left-foot shot'.

A club called Comrades existed in Wellington as part of the effort to boost morale during World War II. Football was largely suspended during wartime but the Wellington FA wanted competition to maintain fitness and keep up morale.

**THE COMRADES
F.C. TEAM IN 1942,
RUNNERS-UP IN
THE SENIOR 'A'
CHAMPIONSHIP**

A composite team from Diamond FC, Institute Old Boys and Swifts entered the Wellington first division. As the official club history of Wellington United (which Diamond became part of) noted, the name was likely to express community spirit. 'Though short-lived, the Comrades club was a great example of the football community coming together in times of adversity.' The Comrades club lasted for three years.

In 1952 the Auckland Comrades merged with Grey Lynn United to become Grey Lynn Comrades. The junior teams by now played in Grey Lynn and most members resided in the suburb so the decision made logistical sense. But by this time, with the onset of the Cold War, attitudes towards communism were changing. Mud sticks and whilst Comrades FC had no connection with the Communist Party of New Zealand,

the name had become synonymous with the 'Iron Curtain' countries. There was panic in Grey Lynn when the Adelphi Movie Theatre was bought by 'mysterious buyers' who showed foreign films from communist states such as Poland. The anti-communist *Freedom Needs Vigilance* movement protested outside the cinema. It was decided that the Comrades part of the name had to be dropped, to become Grey Lynn United.

Grey Lynn United became Grey Lynn Celtic in 1986, upon merging with the New Zealand Celtic Supporters Club, and wore the famous green and white hooped tops of the Glasgow Celtic side. This name was retained for only two years, as another merger took place—with the much newer Point Chevalier club—to create Western Springs AFC, which remains to this day with its base in Westmere.

MARTIN CRICK

Christchurch Socialism, Labour and the First World War

Between 1890 and 1905 a series of Liberal welfare reforms cemented a lib-lab alliance and gave New Zealand a world-wide reputation as a social laboratory, a 'Socialist Canaan' even. A central plank of this alliance was the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1894, which gave further kudos to the country as 'the land without strikes.' However, the alliance started to falter in the early years of the twentieth century: increasing

mechanisation and factory methods saw employer profits double whilst wages remained static and the cost of living rose. Immigration was also used to reduce wages. Successive Liberal governments gradually shed their progressive image, whilst the Arbitration Court increasingly favoured the employers. In 1904 the Conference of Trades and Labour Councils voted to form an independent political party, to contest both local and parliamentary elections. But there was also a growing socialist movement urging a fundamental reform of society, and during a huge strike wave between 1907 and 1911 the ideology of the Industrial Workers of the World, advocating mass organisation at the point of production, one big union, and a general strike to overthrow the capitalist state, also became influential. The debate and conflict

between the various factions led to a tortuous history, but after the defeat of the great strike of 1913 a unity conference produced both the Social-Democratic Party and the United Federation of Labour. Six Labour MPs of various persuasions were elected to parliament in 1914. By this time, for reasons I will deal with in a future article, Christchurch had become the stronghold of political labour in New Zealand.

One thing that had united groups on the left was the campaign against the Defence Act of 1909, which introduced compulsory military training in New Zealand. Christchurch had been the centre of opposition to the Act, and leading Christchurch socialist Fred Cooke and his son Harry were amongst the large number imprisoned for their activities, Cooke for speaking publicly against the Act and Harry for refusing to register for military training. Along with all members of the Second Socialist International New Zealand socialists had campaigned against war, and as tensions in Europe rose had joined in the calls for a general strike in the event of war. And then, on 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated in Sarajevo, which sparked a chain reaction of events leading to the outbreak of World War I. Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4th August, and New Zealand immediately offered its full support.

The general view of historians is that there was overwhelming support for the war from the New Zealand public. Gwen Parsons has questioned this, suggesting that opinion was much more divided than is popularly remembered, but that dissent has been hidden because of the severity of the wartime regulations and censorship. Extensive postal censorship, for example, effectively shut down such as the National Peace Council, whilst Reg Williams was

prosecuted as the result of a letter to a relative lamenting the war. It is difficult to argue the initial enthusiastic support for the war however, and it divided the New Zealand labour movement just as it did in every other country. Pre-war oratory against war, and threats of a general strike from members of the Second International, vanished almost immediately. There was certainly a divide between the trade union/electorally focused section and the more radical socialists. Thus Hiram Hunter, Christchurch city councillor, leading trade unionist, and president of the Social-Democratic Party, changed overnight from 'my class right or wrong', to 'my country right or wrong'. Dan Sullivan, ex-president of both the Christchurch Political Labour League and the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council, and currently president of the United Federation of Labour, attended the inaugural meeting of the Christchurch Patriotic Committee, and said that he was 'sincerely desirous of seeing Great Britain and the allies victorious in the present world conflict.' Ted Howard, on the other hand, writing as 'The Vag' in the *Maoriland Worker*, had this to say: 'This Vag is ready to shed every drop of blood in Bill's (Massey's) body in defence of this country. I am prepared to advocate that we close parliament at once and that we allow every one of the members to go to the front—even Paddy Webb and Jimmy McCombs. I reckon they would look well in cocked hats and gold lace. Let Bill go, let the baronets and marionettes go. Let 'em all go. If it needs greater sacrifice than this I am prepared to sacrifice all the special constables, and even the scabs (and God knows there are plenty in this country). I am going to do the big thing; I am not going to be mean and petty. I am willing to let the army, aye the Salvation Army, go to the front

'LET BILL GO, LET THE BARONETS AND MARIO-NETTES GO. LET 'EM ALL GO. IF IT NEEDS GREATER SACRIFICE THAN THIS I AM PREPARED TO SACRIFICE ALL THE SPECIAL CONSTABLES, AND EVEN THE SCABS (AND GOD KNOWS THERE ARE PLENTY IN THIS COUNTRY)'

if they want to go.' On hearing some moderates encourage volunteering, James McCullough wrote that 'it seems incredible that leading Labour men should so forget themselves.' Morgan Williams resigned from the Methodist church, shocked at its support for the war, and became an attendee at Quaker meetings. Militants were discouraged to begin with, McCullough noting in his diary that he had 'become afraid to express my pacifist views because of their unpopularity—I feel that they are unpopular and that I am in a hopeless and helpless minority.' He ceased, he said, to express his true feelings in the diary because 'they are and have

Surprisingly, in the heat of war, a branch of the Workers Educational Association was established in Christchurch in April 1915. As stated earlier the defeat in the great strike had helped bring together the two wings of the labour movement, and to shift the focus from industrial action to politics, and thus to education. Whilst the movement was divided over the war the WEA provided neutral ground upon which all factions could come together. A look at the 17 strong provisional committee demonstrates this. Ted Howard and McCullough, opponents of the war, sat alongside Dan Sullivan and Hiram Hunter. Quaker

***COST OF LIVING
AND ANTI-
CONSCRIPTION
DEMONSTRATION,
COLOSSEUM,
CHRISTCHURCH,
SUNDAY,
18 MARCH 1917
HOCKEN COLLECTION***



been so seditious'.

The war divided not only the movement but families. Labour leaders Harry Holland and Alfred Hindmarsh both had sons at the front, Bob Semple had a brother killed in action. James McCullough's son Frank left for the USA in October 1915, unable to bear the social pressure being placed on those who did not volunteer, but another son Jim volunteered for service in 1916 and was killed in France. A third son Roy, upon being conscripted, went on the run, and eluded service for the rest of the war.

and pacifist John Howell was a member, as was Socialist Church founder Harry Atkinson, along with Christian Socialist Eveline Cunnington, and Lyttelton MP James McCombs. Affiliates in the first year included the National Peace Council and the Canterbury Women's Institute. Ted Howard explained the enthusiasm of the socialists for the venture thus: 'Our aim is utopia. The WEA in our opinion is the first and as far as we know the best means that has been offered the workers to help themselves. With knowledge we can bring about the unity of the human

race.’ Cunningham, on the other hand, wanted to convert workers to Christian Socialism. She had been appalled by a visiting Socialist speaker from Australia, ‘one prolonged roar—history mangled, truth, justice, brotherliness absolutely denied’, and longed she said, ‘for an educated speaker who will not abuse every party, and every thinker but the Labour Party’. Together with Anglican ministers Herbert Money and John Mortimer, and Reverend O’Bryan Hoare, she had been instrumental in the founding of a Church Socialist League in Christchurch in 1913.

The 6 Labour MPs elected in 1914 refused a seat in the wartime coalition and

was elected to the Hospital Board. And then something strange happened. The Christchurch SDP, the main mover James McCombs, instigated a new attempt at labour unity. Why, when it was by some margin, the strongest and most successful SDP organisation in the country, did they agree to merge into the NZLP?

Nationally the SDP was in dire financial straits; moderate trade unions had not affiliated, and in such as Dunedin there was still an affiliation to the SDP’s previous incarnation the United Labour Party, and to the Liberals. Some SDP leaders, such as Holland and Fraser, believed that the war would lead to the



**MEMBERS OF THE
NEW ZEALAND
PARLIAMENTARY
LABOUR PARTY 1922**

ALEXANDER TURNBALL
LIBRARY

became the official opposition. Of these 5 were moderates, the exception being Paddy Webb, and they did not oppose New Zealand’s participation in the war. The local body elections in 1915, were, says Gustafson, ‘conspicuous for the lack of Labour successes.’ The exception was the SDP stronghold of Christchurch. It won 6 of 16 council seats, whilst its progress in Woolston was astonishing, with 6 candidates and an SDP mayor elected. There were 3 more in Linwood, and the party also won 2 seats on the Lyttelton Harbour Board, and Elizabeth McCombs

collapse of capitalism, and were desperate for working class unity so as to seize that opportunity when it came. They hoped too to recapture the leadership of the movement from Christchurch, where the movement was already united, although perhaps too moderate for the militants. The key issue was conscription. The National Registration Bill of August 1915 was seen as the first major step towards this. When a national register was taken in August 1915 only 58% of those eligible to serve said they were willing to serve overseas, and around 35,000 men said

**'IF THE GALILEAN
CARPENTER WERE
HERE TODAY AND
PREACHED WHAT
HE PREACHED
IN JUDEA, HE
WOULD GO
THE WAY MANY
OF LABOUR'S
BEST MEN HAD
GONE—INTO JAIL.'**

they were not willing to enlist either at home or overseas. This indicated potential support for an anti-conscription party, and of course it didn't take into account women. The CWI, under the leadership of Ada Wells and Sarah Page, had continued to advocate for peace. A January 1916 Labour conference on conscription was united in its opposition. Its view was that labour was already doing more than its fair share under the voluntary system, and if servicemen were paid more and if other social groups did their bit there would be no need for conscription. It was also seen as un-British and unfair, an assault on democratic freedoms. When it became clear that conscription would be introduced labour then argued that it should be accompanied by conscription of wealth. Rising prices of food and other staples had not been accompanied by wage rises and blatant profiteering enraged both unions and socialists alike. Tim Armstrong condemned 'the food monopolists of this country' who 'have taken advantage of the war to rob the people' and made 'it harder than ever for the wives and children who have been left behind.' The CWI invited feminist and socialist Adele Pankhurst, daughter of the leading British suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst, on a speaking tour in June 1916. Even the pro-war Press had to admit that her anti-conscription meetings had attracted large audiences. Shortly after her visit a Christchurch branch of the Women's International League was founded, with Fred Cooke's wife Ida a leading member.

There were rumours too that discontented Liberals and the maverick Labour MP John Payne were planning to form a new loyalist party with the name 'Labour'. There had been a number of attempts to smear the SDP by associating it with the German party of the same name. Dan Sullivan and others therefore urged the

1916 SDP Conference to appropriate the labour name. The UFL conference reached the same conclusion and in July 1916 the second New Zealand Labour Party was formed, with a socialist objective. It was agreed that local Labour Representation Committees would be the basic organisational unit, which would allow for local differences. McCombs was elected president. Most SDP branches in Christchurch however saw no need to merge; they would co-operate in the LRCs at election time but retain their SDP identity.

When the Military Service Bill became law in August 1916 the newly formed New Zealand Labour Party was at the forefront of opposition. Semple suggested that if the government claimed conscription of wealth was legalised robbery then conscription of men was legalised murder. When the government further clamped down on dissent, declaring any opposition to the war or conscription as seditious, labour had a new issue to campaign upon, the right of minorities to organise and express themselves, freedom of speech. Harry Holland said that 'if the Galilean carpenter were here today and preached what he preached in Judea, he would go the way many of Labour's best men had gone—into jail.' During 1917 and 1918 the Labour Party became the champion of the conscientious objectors.

By the end of 1916 most of Labour's effective leaders were in prison, as the government moved to clamp down on dissent. Semple, for example, having claimed that 'conscription and liberty cannot live in one country' received 12 months hard labour. A cost of living and anti-conscription demonstration in March 1917 attracted 2500 people to the Colosseum in Christchurch, and this, plus the defeat of conscription in the two Australian referenda, encouraged

the Christchurch LRC to make repeal of the Military Service Act the main plank of their platform at the local elections of April 1917. Some 56 organisations formed the Labour Representation Committee in Christchurch, with a large contingent from the anti-militarist and women's groups, and they were able to force the issue through, bringing 'an almost evangelical zeal' to the campaign says one commentator. Such as McCullough and Howard had their misgivings. It was unprecedented to make national issues the focus in local elections, and especially such a contentious one. Yet the Labour vote actually held up well after its gains in 1915, but turn out increased from 50-70%, to administer a bad defeat. McCullough admitted in his diary that 'It looks, and I suppose we must admit that there is an endorsement of conscription', and Howard in the *Maoriland Worker* wrote that 'two-thirds...voted in favour of the government, in favour of conscription, in favour of cheap soldiers and in favour of the war.' Their disappointment is clear and understandable, but nonetheless the labour vote quite clearly demonstrated that there was a sizeable minority prepared to vote for candidates who were both anti-war and anti-conscription. Dissatisfaction with economic conditions was also rife, and elsewhere labour politicians began to pick up more votes in local by-elections, Harry Holland losing by only 420 votes in Wellington North, where Prime Minister Massey was pelted with eggs and rotten fruit.

The government was also under fire from the Second Division League, an organisation of married men and their supporters formed after they learned of their impending conscription. They demanded that all single men of the First Division go before them, and that pay, pensions and separation allowances

should be increased. As Jared Davidson has noted 'While their loyalty was never in doubt, tensions between the league's working-class membership and its middle-class leadership were rife, especially in Christchurch.' An uproarious meeting of over 1600 men and women on 28 April 1918, the day before the balloted married men were due to go into camp, wildly cheered a speaker who suggested that with luck an enemy torpedo might send Massey and Ward, then on their way to Europe, to the bottom of the ocean, and voted that no man should leave for camp until the League's demands were granted. The following day, in what one historian has described as one of the greatest episodes of civil unrest in wartime NZ, over 5000 people, mainly women with children, gathered at King Edward Barracks to prevent the mobilisation. Fights broke out, police were assaulted, and half the men were prevented from being processed. The *Press* raged at Bolsheviks disgracing Christchurch. The 2 movers of the motion were sentenced to 6 months for sedition, and Hiram Hunter, the seconder, was given 3 months. The sentences were later quashed in order to defuse the situation.

I want to finish by looking at those in Christchurch who fell foul of the state because of their wartime activities. Fred Cooke was as outspoken about the Military Service Act as he was about pre-war compulsory military training. When brought before magistrates charged with sedition, he declared that he intended 'whatever the results to criticise the Act' and was sentenced to 12 months with hard labour. Reg Williams, arrested in January 1917, said 'I have nothing to apologise for. I have spoken what I believe to be the truth. I am an internationalist, opposed to war, and I shall oppose it as long as I have a tongue in my head.' He too received 12 months, and upon release was

'I HAVE NOTHING TO APOLOGISE FOR. I HAVE SPOKEN WHAT I BELIEVE TO BE THE TRUTH. I AM AN INTERNATIONALIST, OPPOSED TO WAR, AND I SHALL OPPOSE IT AS LONG AS I HAVE A TONGUE IN MY HEAD.'

**'WAR ENABLES
PROFITEERS
TO STAND ON
VELVET WHILST
THE POOR STAND
IN QUEUES.'**

re-arrested for failing to attend a medical, having come up in the ballot for conscription. Court-martialled for refusing to put on his uniform he was sentenced to two years hard labour. Jim Thorn was imprisoned for 12 months for speaking against conscription at the end of 1916. When balloted for conscription he went on the run, evading the authorities for the rest of the war. Controversial minister James Chapple, who had joined the NZSP in 1905, left the country in 1915 for the USA because of his opposition to the war, but returned to become a Unitarian Minister in Christchurch. His services became noisy political meetings, including topics such as 'War enables profiteers to stand on velvet whilst the poor stand in queues.' He was charged with two counts of seditious utterances at Greymouth and sentenced to 12 months gaol. Tim Armstrong, ex-Waihi and Runanga miner, who had moved to Lyttelton in 1916 to work on the wharf, was an outspoken opponent of the war from the outset. 'I do not think it my duty to go and fight for a crowd of capitalistic despots who have been sucking the life's blood out of the workers in Britain, Germany, France and every other country for generations', he said. On New Year's Eve 1916 he gave an anti-conscription speech in Victoria Square. 'I feel that as far as I am concerned as the father of a family, if I did not raise my voice in opposition to this infamous piece of legislation, I would not be doing my duty to the country. I would not only be a traitor to my own country, but to my own children, who will inhabit this country after I am gone.' He received a year's imprisonment in Lyttelton gaol.

George Wears Samms had run away from home in Leeds to fight in the South African war. Like James Thorn, his experiences there made him a convinced pacifist, whilst his socialism also made

him ideologically opposed to World War. Called up in April 1918 he refused to attend his medical. In court he said that 'Wars were fought for the greed of one class and it was for this that all wars were fought. To try and kill men was not only criminal but insane.' George was sentenced to 12 months. His daughter later recalled how schoolmates labelled her 'coward' and 'Hun', whilst her teachers referred to her father as a coward. Peter Scott Ramsay, president of the Christchurch Grocers Assistants Union, and of the Christchurch Anti-Conscription League, was arrested for seditious utterances in Victoria Square and at the Socialist Hall. He allegedly said 'To hell with the Conscription Act...I have the courage of my convictions. I have been a member of the peace movement since I was fourteen and a half, and I am not going to give up the principles for which I have fought for so many years for the class to which I do not belong.' He maintained that he said, 'To hell with the consequences.' After serving 11 months he was re-arrested for failing to respond to his call up papers and went on the run, being spotted with others at Glenorchy. He was taken ill and the Military Authorities granted him leave until he recovered. Brothers John and James Roberts, both active in the Woolston branch of the Socialist Party, were two more outspoken COs. John was elected a Borough Councillor in April 1917 but had to resign after being sentenced to 18 months, having refused to submit to a medical examination. In a statement to the court he declared that as a socialist he believed that all wars were waged for economic ends, for the capture of new markets, and he had no desire to assist such ends. Furthermore, as a humanitarian 'he believed that human life was sacred.' His brother James told the court that his judging of right or

wrong was 'by a standard of morality not legality', and that there was no difference between the British brand of militarism and the Prussian. Jim Worrall ignored his call up papers and was subsequently sentenced to two years imprisonment. He was subjected to some brutality when 6 soldiers tried to forcibly dress him in his uniform. His brother William was also sentenced to two years with hard labour, and both lost their civil rights for 10 years. Ted Howard meanwhile organised a Seditious Prisoners and Conscientious Objectors' Fund to assist the families of those men imprisoned.

That Labour's stand had not hurt its support in Christchurch was demonstrated in the 1919 General Election, when it elected three of the Party's eight MPs. The conscientious objectors were deprived of their civil rights for 10 years, but a number went on to become significant members of the first Labour government eg Fraser, Semple, Webb. In Christchurch, Tim Armstrong was elected MP for Christchurch East in 1922 and became Minister of Labour in the 1935 Labour government. On his death in 1942 he was succeeded by Mabel Howard, daughter of Ted. Ted Howard was elected as MP for Christchurch South in 1919 and held the seat until his death in 1939. Ted Cooke held a seat on Christchurch City Council from 1920-1930. He came to be known as 'the conscience of the labour movement.' John Roberts held a number of trade union roles after the war, and was on the Labour Party's National executive. Jim Worrall was elected a councillor in New Brighton. From 1917 until 1938 George Wears Samms was secretary of the Woolston branch of the Labour Party. James Chapple remained a Unitarian Minister, although moving to Auckland. 'As I age I move steadily to the left' he wrote, and he continued to aim, in his words, to

produce 'an uproarious community of heretics'. James Thorn spent most of the 1920s as editor of the *Maoriland Worker*, became President of the NZ Labour Party, and was elected to parliament for Thames in 1935. In 1946 he was appointed High Commissioner to Canada and sat on the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Morgan Williams became a Kaiapoi councillor, then its Labour MP from 1935-46, and finally Mayor of Kaiapoi 1948-51. Reg Williams toured the country in a small gypsy caravan after the war, then became a trapeze artist in a travelling circus. By the 1940s he was running an aquarium in Wellington, and in the early 1950s he had a mini-zoo at North beach in Christchurch, and later an aquarium in Napier. He then became associated with the William Hartree Memorial Scenic Reserve.

Postscript

In WW2 a Labour government reintroduced conscription, the self-same men who had opposed it and been jailed for opposing it during WW1. Fraser and Semple were accused of hypocrisy. Tim Armstrong opposed it in private, but his abhorrence of fascism brought him to support the government as long as there were guaranteed economic controls on the cost of living. Morgan Williams opposed it, whilst George Wear Samms resigned as president of the LRC and spoke publicly against the war and the government. John Roberts, as President of the Christchurch Peace Council, opposed conscription in WW2, and in 1949 resigned both LRC and LP national executive roles on the re-introduction of compulsory military training.

**'I DO NOT THINK
IT MY DUTY TO
GO AND FIGHT
FOR A CROWD OF
CAPITALISTIC
DESPOTS WHO
HAVE BEEN
SUCKING THE
LIFE'S BLOOD
OUT OF THE
WORKERS
IN BRITAIN,
GERMANY,
FRANCE AND
EVERY OTHER
COUNTRY FOR
GENERATIONS'**

REVIEWS

QUENTIN FINDLAY

To Free the World: Harry Holland and the rise of the labour movement in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific

James Robb

*Steele Roberts Aotearoa
Publishers, (2024)
ISBN 978-1-991153-88-3*

I am an admirer of Henry Edmund “Harry” Holland. Unlike Labour’s later leaders, Holland (and his predecessor, Alfred Hindmarsh) has been largely overlooked by historians and by the Labour Party itself. I believe he has been relegated by mainstream historians to the political backroom due to discomfort with his beliefs and political stance. The last biography, published in 1965, was lacking in several respects, and that is why I was excited to learn of a new biography about him.

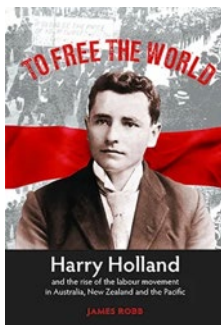
So, who was Harry Holland? In brief, he was the first leader of the New Zealand Labour Party. A committed Marxist and socialist, Holland proudly expressed his political convictions throughout his parliamentary career, which spanned from 1918 until his death in 1933. Like many of his labour contemporaries he was born in Australia and was

involved in numerous industrial disputes there. He came to New Zealand in 1912 to report on the increasing number of labour conflicts, becoming active in the *Maoriland Worker*, the Socialist Party, and the (Red) Federation of Labour.

In 1918 he became the Labour MP for Grey (on the West Coast of the South Island) through a by-election, and later succeeded Hindmarsh as Labour’s parliamentary chair following Hindmarsh’s death. Holland led the New Zealand Labour Party during a challenging period as it worked to establish itself as a credible opposition force. He grappled with the practical realities of shaping a new left-wing political movement amid the economic upheaval of the Great Depression.

Unlike his successors Harry Holland never lived to lead a Labour Government. He died in 1933 while attending the tangi of the Māori King, Te Rata Mahuta. However, during his tenure as the party’s first leader, he oversaw the growth and development of Labour into a formidable opposition force. The Labour Party would never have become the party it was in 1935 without Holland.

Unfortunately, I’ve been disappointed. This book has been difficult to review. This is simply because I found it a difficult read. Compared to other political biographies—such as Gustafson’s works on Savage, Holyoake, and Muldoon; Bassett’s books on Coates and Ward; or even Logan’s biography of Arnold Nordmeyer—this one lacked flow and failed to foster any real engagement with its subject. In those other works, the



reader is drawn into the life and character of the person at the centre of the narrative. Here, I found myself repeatedly putting the book down, only to pick it up again with reluctance—forcing myself to continue. That experience led me to revisit Pat O'Farrell's earlier biography, *Harry Holland: Militant Socialist*, for comparison.

Despite its flaws, O'Farrell's book presents a more coherent and compelling narrative than Robb's. It offers a clearer sense of who Holland was as a person. Much of the difference lies in the structure and style of Robb's writing and particularly his extremely heavy use of 'large excerpts from Holland's own writings.'

That description might, in fact, be too charitable. There is no doubt that Robb has undertaken extensive research. The book is packed with quotations from Holland's parliamentary speeches, newspaper articles, and personal correspondence. However, many of these excerpts are only marginally related to Holland and seem included primarily to provide (in some cases unnecessary) historical background. The sheer volume becomes overwhelming. Some passages stretch across multiple pages and, rather than shedding light on Holland, they often obscure him. Instead of enhancing clarity, they drown the reader in detail. Much of this material could have been condensed without sacrificing substance or disrupting the narrative flow.

At the same time, there are puzzling gaps in the biography—particularly regarding Holland's leadership of the Labour Party during the 1920s and 30s. This was a pivotal and demanding period for Holland. With the Liberal Party gradually collapsing, Labour emerged as the official Opposition. Becoming Leader of the Opposition fundamentally

challenged and changed Holland. It was one thing to hurl rhetorical grenades at the Tory government and the capitalist class; it was quite another to shape a party that could become a serious contender for government.

The British historian Robert Skidelsky observed that the failure to develop a comprehensive and coherent alternative strategy doomed the British Labour Government (and socialist parties more broadly) in the late 1920s, as they increasingly aped their Conservative opponents. It was not enough, as Skidelsky noted, to simply declare 'we are socialists' and then wait for socialism, like the cavalry in a Western, to come charging over the hill to save everyone. The Great Depression exposed the folly of that assumption.

As the economic situation deteriorated toward the end of the 1920s, Holland and much of Labour's senior leadership recognised significant gaps in the party's platform. There was a growing sense that these gaps had to be addressed, prompting extensive debate and internal tension, much of which Holland, as leader, was forced to navigate and sometimes failed to do so.

This internal friction—and the resulting clashes of personality—consumed much of Holland's time and energy. He faced several ongoing disputes with MPs and others both within and outside the party. One of the most notable was with James McCombs, the Labour MP for Lyttelton, who despised Holland and worked persistently to unseat him as leader. His efforts ultimately led the party to change its caucus rules. Their disagreements ranged across multiple issues, most notably the alcohol question (when McCombs, to Holland's delight, briefly left the caucus and had to be coaxed back by Michael Joseph Savage)

and electoral reform, during which McCombs essentially blackmailed the Labour caucus into supporting his bills. Holland was incensed.

A similar situation arose in 1919 regarding the *Maoriland Worker*, when its newly appointed editor, the syndicalist William Kraig, attempted to distance the paper from the Labour Party. Kraig's approach and comments quickly alienated Holland. The situation worsened when Kraig refused to publish party material, including Labour's platform, during the 1919 election, the party's first general election campaign. As a result, Labour was forced to rely on sympathetic coverage from papers such as the *Grey River Argus*.

A furious Holland told the 1920 NZLP conference:

...they [had] received no help from the official organ; when the great, working-class battle at the polls occurred in December last, we were without that journalistic backing which the working men were entitled to demand from the leading columns of the National official organ.

This dispute rumbled on for a considerable time. Yet, despite the seriousness of this episode, Robb's biography offers little in the way of detailed analysis of Holland's concerns or actions in response.

Robb also devotes considerable attention to the failure of the German socialist revolution and the rise of Lenin—an extended detour that feels largely irrelevant. While Holland was undoubtedly influenced by international socialist movements, these events played little direct role in the development of the New Zealand Labour Party and in Holland's

role as leader. Certainly, the Tories and their allies in the press tried to link Labour and Holland with Bolshevism to scare voters. But Holland and the party made deliberate efforts to distance themselves from such associations. From its formation in 1916, Labour was a parliamentary organisation—a fact Holland frequently emphasised in parliamentary debates (and there were many) on the topic.

However there are some bright spots in the book. Robb does very able work exploring Holland's early life and political career. The sections on the Broken Hill Strike and Holland's relationship with Australian Labour are very readable. They show clearly how Holland's past impacted and influenced his future decisions. These past experiences explain why Holland became suspicious of, and openly hostile to, members of the Australian Labour movement—particularly the Australian Labor Party, which he saw as a party of traitorous opportunists. This hostility appears to have been mutual. Unlike Savage, who was welcomed by the Australian party, Holland remained an outsider. In the mid-1920s, when he was leader of the New Zealand Labour Party, Holland visited Australia and had to physically force his way into the caucus of Australia's federal Labour party. He later remarked to Walter Nash that he would have been more welcome if he had been a dogfight promoter.

Robb explores in detail Holland's fight on behalf of native Samoans. Samoa had been taken by New Zealand troops from the Germans in the first days of World War One. New Zealand then governed it appallingly in the following years, leading to widespread oppression, harassment, and eventually civil unrest. While the administration and plight of Samoans were largely ignored by New Zealand's parliament and press, Holland

was one of the few politicians who spoke up about the injustices that were occurring there, urging Parliament to become more aware and involved in preventing a brutal and oppressive occupation.

However, again, these parts are spoiled by the excessive use of quotations, which break the flow and made the chapters and the narrative untidy and unwieldy.

Unlike his successor, the avuncular Michael Joseph (Joe) Savage, Holland was seen as doctrinaire and stern. Of course, this was not entirely true. He was not as doctrinaire as his detractors liked to present him. He felt injustice deeply, and it was this sense of injustice that drove him toward socialism and explained his more serious nature and attitude. However, this belied the various passions that spoke through his words and actions as an active reader, writer, journalist, and poet.

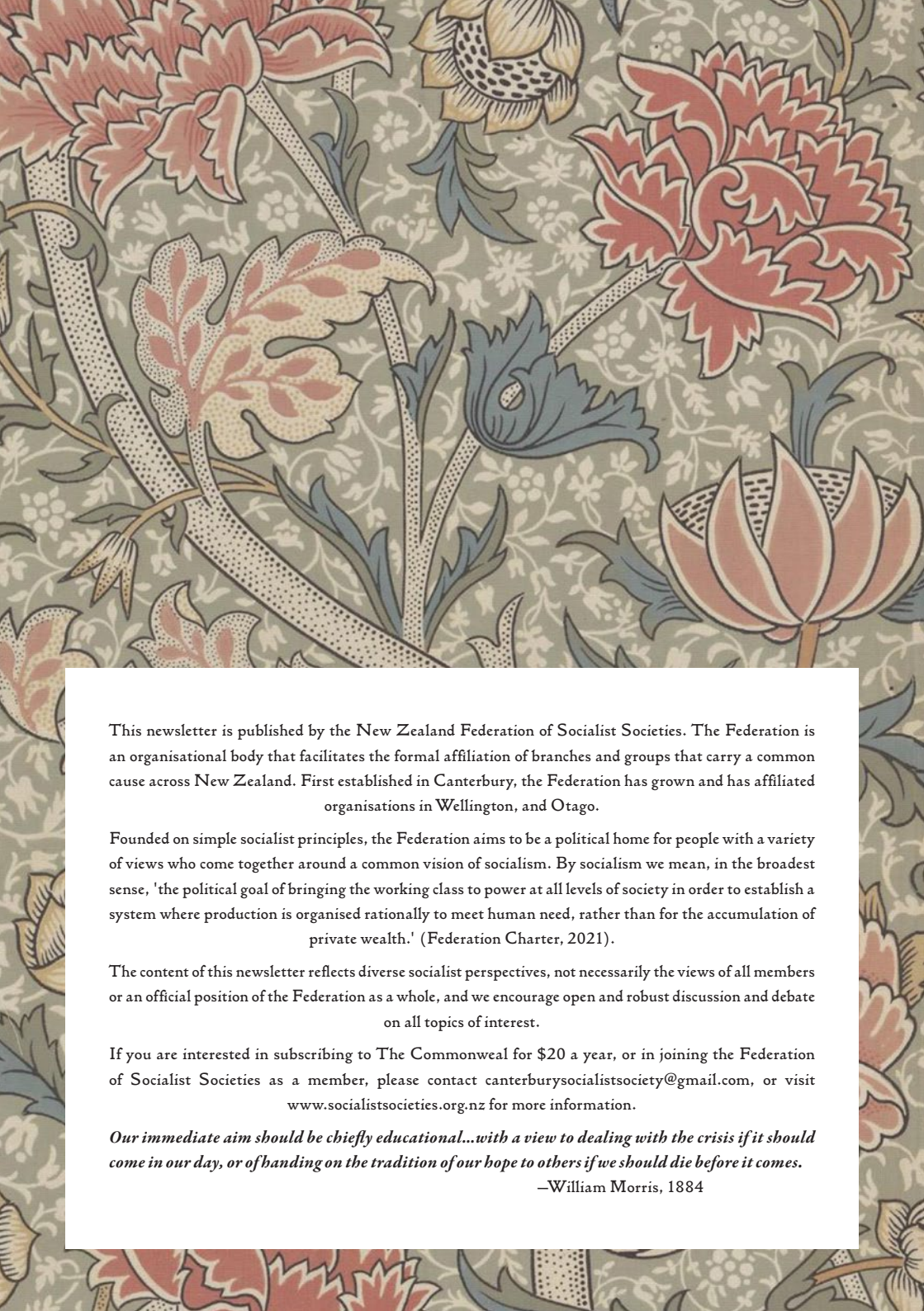
Holland was an avid reader and writer. He spent much of his meagre income (MPs were not handsomely paid at the time) on books. He read and wrote widely on a multitude of subjects. He formed a friendship with the conservative MP and Minister, William Downie Stewart, who fed Holland's lust for books and debate. Stewart would buy Holland books so that the two could debate them. It was said that at the time of his death, every room in Holland's miner's cottage had books in it.

Subsequently, his speeches could be littered with literary allusion, reflecting his prowess as a reader. In one of his early parliamentary debates on the Crime Amendment Bill in 1919, Holland compared the way criminals—and people in general—were treated by capital to the wolf dog in Jack London's book *White Fang*:

Some of you have read Jack London's works, and if so, you will remember his story of White Fang. White Fang was a wolf dog. At one particular stage of his career he was being trained to fight with another dog, and for this purpose he was isolated, put in a cage, kept in partial darkness and away from the company of other dogs and from human beings, and scantily fed. This was all done with the fixed purpose of making the dog savage—of developing whatever of the wolf was in him. We are doing that with humans today.

His work as a journalist for labour papers was full of the same intense energy. As one of his contemporaries observed, just as a painter used colours, Holland could paint a vivid picture of injustice using only words. As Robb remarks—and I agree—*The Tragic Story of the Waihi Strike*, which Holland wrote in 1913, is a classic and spellbinding account of a labour dispute.

Toward the end of the final chapter, I gave up on the book completely and just put it down. I found it uneven, and Robb's excessive excerpts only added to that feeling of dissatisfaction. In the same manner that Holland referred to *White Fang* as an illustration, a part of a soliloquy from Shakespeare came to my mind illustrating my feelings: as a biography, it is full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.



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, and Otago.

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

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

If you are interested in subscribing to The Commonweal for \$20 a year, or in joining the Federation of Socialist Societies as a member, please contact canterburysocialistsociety@gmail.com, or visit www.socialistsocieties.org.nz for more information.

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

—William Morris, 1884