



# A WORLD TO WIN A HELL TO LOSE

The Industrial Workers Of The World In  
Early Twentieth Century New Zealand

# **A World to Win, a Hell to Lose**

*The Industrial Workers of the World*

*In Early Twentieth Century New Zealand*

Every rebel who throws themselves whole-heartedly into the movement for their own  
and fellow-slaves' emancipation is a nail in the coffin of Capitalism

*Industrial Unionist, 1 October 1913*

# The Industrial Unionist

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## How You Are Diddled

Take a handful of golden sovereigns,

Melt 'em down to a solid square;

Of bullion gold take a the same size

(If you have such stuff anywhere!)

Each lump is of equal value,

That is, labour-time, congealed;

And each might exchange for so many coats

As the “dismal science” has revealed.

Or boots would do, or potatoes;

So long as they took as much time

To produce by human labour power

In a workshop, or garden, or mine.

Human labour determines the value

Of all things sold or exchanged,

But the Boss gets three-fourths of the product

As things are at present arranged.

You get the rest in wages;

One fourth - just enough to live

(And “produce” more slaves for him to exploit)

And the reason, put simply is -

Take a concrete illustration:

You make, say, four tables a day.

Each one will sell at ten shillings,

But all that you get for the day

Is ten shillings - which equals ONE table.

The boss gets the other THREE.

He pays you in gold, the value of one -

His “brains” made the others - see?

But the boss is pretty cunning,

And pays men to write of his brains (?)

And gives them one table (or its equal in gold)

And still has TWO left for his gains.

Knock a little off that for timber,

Expenses, etc., and rent,

And you get at the “rate of profit,”

Which to swell his account is sent.

But he pays men to keep you well muddled,

And you think “cause he gives you jobs”

He’s a damn good bloke, while the truth of it is

It’s you that he slyly robs.

So you see you’re not robbed in Parliament;

Then why talk of “unity” there?

Nor is it the man at the corner store

Who lays the cunning snare.

No, it’s right at the point of production -

In workshops, field and mine

Where the toiler is welched of his work-product -

At about three-to-one every time.

So organise in the workshop,

Direct Action without a doubt

Is Labour's best method. Get after the Boss,

And we'll soon have him counted out.

*Anonymous poem from the Industrial Unionist, the newspaper of the Industrial Workers of the World in New Zealand, 1 September 1913*



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## Preface

The Industrial Workers of the World in New Zealand (IWW) were directed by the actions of some strong characters, and the same names crop up repeatedly. Some, like Tom Barker, would go on to lead eventful lives elsewhere. This book, though, is not merely the story of these characters; the IWW were not about personalities or strong leaders. They were interested in the working class creating change for themselves. The IWW existed to offer education and support—the point of their leadership was to create more leaders not followers.

So this book is dedicated not to those whose names have been left behind in records, newspapers, conference reports, and minutes of meetings. Instead, it is for those many thousands of people who bought and read the IWW newspaper, the *Industrial Unionist*, and whose names have long since disappeared into history; to those faceless individuals in the huge crowds that gathered outside of Mount Eden to sing songs in support of imprisoned strikers; that marched en masse behind the coffin of Frederick Evans, the striking miner killed by a police baton; and to all those who went on strike and regularly demonstrated during the Great Strike of 1913.

## Introduction

In June 1905, in Chicago, Illinois, approximately two hundred socialists, anarchists, and radical trade unionists gathered from all over the United States. This meeting was the founding of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Bill Haywood, leader of the US Western Federation of Miners gave the opening address to the meeting and announced:

This is the Continental Congress of the working-class. We are here to confederate the workers of this country into a working-class movement that shall have for its purpose the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism...The aims and objects of this organisation shall be to put the working-class in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution, without regard to the capitalist masters.

Disillusioned with the existing trade union structures, the IWW aimed to organise all workers in all industries into "One Big Union," absent of division by gender, ethnicity, or occupation. They rejected political action; instead they embraced direct action. They looked forward to the day when the workers of the world would expropriate the means of production by way of a general strike.

Over the next decade as the organisation grew substantially in strength and numbers, the US capitalist class trembled in fear at the revolutionary ideas and actions of the IWW. At the same time, migrant workers spread IWW ideas around the globe. New Zealand was one of the countries where the IWW philosophy of revolutionary industrial unionism gained a foothold.

The labour history of New Zealand in the early twentieth century has been fairly extensively covered, notably in Erik Olssen's *Red Feds* and in *Revolution*, a collection of essays edited by Melanie Nolan that examines a series of strikes that rocked the country in 1913. Jared Davidson's biography of the New Zealand anarchist Philip Josephs, *Sewing Freedom*, also covers some of the same time period. However, apart from Mark Derby's chapter in *Revolution* that focuses upon the influence of New Zealander, William E. Trautmann, the first general secretary of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the United States, works by Francis Shor, Davidson's *Remains To be Seen* and Peter Steiner's *Industrial Unionism*, the ideas and

influence of the IWW in New Zealand have received scant attention, except as a part of wider events, or in coverage of leading individuals in the movement.

Historians were aware of the IWW, and their influence is occasionally acknowledged, but until now there has been no in-depth analysis of the reach of their ideas. Erik Olssen writes, “it is clear that the IWW became much more powerful in 1911-13 than historians have [previously] realised.” An iconic photo of the early New Zealand labour movement demonstrates that the ideas of the IWW circulated among workers. In the picture, workers carry a banner that bears the slogan, ‘If blood be the price of your cursed wealth, Good God, we have paid in full.’ The quote is from a poem entitled “*We have fed you all for a thousand years*”, that was widely distributed by the IWW and written by an anonymous worker. It first appeared in the US *Industrial Union Bulletin* on 18 April 1908 and was reprinted many times:

We have fed you all, for a thousand years

And you hail us still unfed,

Though there's never a dollar of all your wealth

But marks the worker's dead.

We have yielded our best to give you rest

And you lie on crimson wool.

Then if blood be the price of all your wealth,

Good God! We have paid it in full.

There is never a mine blown skyward now

But we're buried alive for you.

There's never a wreck drifts shoreward now

But we are its ghastly crew.

Go reckon our dead by the forges red

And the factories where we spin.

If blood be the price of your cursed wealth

Good God! We have paid it in.

We have fed you all for a thousand years—

For that was our doom you know,

From the days when you chained us in your fields

To the strike of a week ago

You have taken our lives, and our babies and wives

And we're told it's your legal share;

But if blood be the price of your lawful wealth

Good God! We have bought it fair.



***A group of protesters marching in Auckland during the 1913 Waterfront Strike. The banners has the quote "If blood be the price of your cursed wealth, good God we have bought it fair," taken from a popular IWW poem.***

Little has been written about how those New Zealanders who were supportive of the IWW differed in their ambitions and their ideas of trade unionism to others in the labour movement, or how they adopted unique methods such as a non-hierarchical form of organisation designed to empower and raise the consciousness of the working class through participation and direct action. Francis Shor briefly touches on the subject, writing about how, 'revolutionary syndicalism promoted a proletarian public sphere... in competition with bourgeois and respectable plebeian norms,' although he gives few details on how mainstream norms were challenged.

By making use of the existing literature and original sources including the IWW's own newspaper, the *Industrial Unionist*, and other contemporary journals, this book is an attempt to examine the contribution of the IWW in New Zealand more thoroughly. Published works, including books, pamphlets, newspapers, and journals, including the *Maoriland Worker*, the

paper of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, were all key sources of information.

Background about the organisation of the IWW, their ideological approach, the tactics they advocated and employed, how they communicated with the public and their members, and the impact they had on working class communities were all questions for this book.

The lack of surviving evidence has been one major difficulty in this research. The IWW were primarily an oral movement; members were more interested in participation than record keeping. The IWW certainly advocated, and may have adopted, illegal methods. As a result they attracted the negative attention of the media and police. They may have limited record keeping in an attempt not to produce evidence that could later be held against them. This could have been a factor contributing to the relatively small amount of primary source material that remains.

It is possible, however, to build a picture of the IWW's activities, albeit incomplete.

Chapter one dispels the notion that New Zealand at the turn of the twentieth century was an egalitarian workers paradise absent the class hatred that was apparent in most of the industrial world. Contrary to widespread perceptions, a class system imported from Britain was clearly in evidence, and there was grave inequality. This factor, along with a migrant workforce spreading ideas from the US, brought about the emergence of the IWW in New Zealand.

The second chapter examines the opposition faced by the IWW from the existing craft unions. The influence of the IWW grew as a result dissatisfaction with those existing unions and with the arbitration system along with a change in the cultural perspective of workers during this period.

Chapter three describes the rise of the IWW-influenced New Zealand Federation of Labor (NZFL) including the adoption of the IWW's anti-capitalist preamble. The integration of IWW ideas was not seamless, however. The IWW struggled with the more moderate tendency of the leadership of over questions of organisation and the power of the membership.

Chapter four looks at the radicalisation of Waihi, a small mining town in the Coromandel, and the subsequent strike there in 1912. The chapter examines the causes and consequences of the strike including the role of the NZFL and the IWW's criticisms.

Chapter five looks at further differences between the IWW and the NZFL over the uses of parliamentary action and direct action. The IWW took direct action very seriously; they had

ideas and theories relating to its use. Their calls for sabotage gave ammunition to a hostile press, and the IWW gained a reputation as a threat to respectable society.

Chapter six marks out the final breaks with the NZFL and the Unity conferences. It looks at how the IWW went on to build, or attempted to build, links with other groups of workers, including women and Māori, and how they developed a remarkable series of articles written in the Māori language, the first for any labour organisation.

Chapter seven discusses how the IWW used different channels to communicate their message. Their “mental sticks of dynamite” included their own newspaper, street meetings, pamphlets, stickers, and posters. They also used music to embed revolutionary ideas. They used their communications to encourage the workers to educate themselves and challenge the existing bourgeois values of the day.

Chapter eight discusses the series of strikes towards the end of 1913 that rocked New Zealand. These strikes subsequently became known collectively as the Great Strike. Though the IWW had no formal role in running any of the strikes, their presence was felt. They increased publication of their paper, *the Industrial Unionist*, selling thousands of copies. They offered solidarity and advice to the striking workers and exposed lies in the mainstream press.

Chapter 9 is an examination of the demise of the IWW. The defeat of workers in the Great Strike was a serious blow to all organised labour. The start of the First World War further gave the NZ state extensive powers to repress dissent. The IWW was painted as a subversive threat by the mainstream media. The organisation did not have the capacity to survive the repressive wave, but pockets of organising continued.

Finally, in chapter ten, the success and the legacy of the IWW are explored. There are many ways to judge the success of an organisation; some of them are more or less relevant to a revolutionary group that seeks profound social change. The book ends with a summing up of their legacy of global solidarity and a reminder that the work of the IWW in New Zealand in striving for a better world can be an inspiration for action today.

Like all good propagandists, the IWW used media to get their message across. It is reasonable to assume that their writings reflect their particular biases. I have accepted this and view their writings as one side of an argument. I have presented the facts as they presented them, as this



conveys the message that they wanted to communicate. Where they have discussed notable events I have been able to check this with other contemporary newspaper reports or accounts with the awareness that they, too, are likely to have their own subjective slant on reporting of matters, in terms of readership, ownership, and sponsorship. Similarly, as an anarchist and historian, I come with my own set of biases and opinions both about history and contemporary reality. There is no objective history. Those who confuse history with truth would be wise to remember historian Howard Zinn's comment: "The history of any country, presented as a history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest between conquerors and conquered, between masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex. And in such a world of conflict, a world of victims and executioners, it is the job of thinking people not to be on the side of the executioners."

The story of the IWW in New Zealand is one that deserves to be told and adds to the perspective of New Zealand's radical history to help create a better future.

Every rebel who throws themselves whole-heartedly into the movement for their own  
and fellow-slaves' emancipation is a nail in the coffin of Capitalism

*Industrial Unionist, 1 October 1913*

## The Beginnings of the New Zealand Industrial Workers of the World

In the early years of the twentieth century, many New Zealand workers began to display a growing dissatisfaction with their conditions. This discontent was fuelling, and being fuelled by, the rhetoric of revolutionary politics. It was a turbulent time in New Zealand's industries, one that, for a while, threatened to change the face of New Zealand forever. It was in this environment that the New Zealand International Workers of the World (IWW) came into existence.

During the 1890s and 1900s, New Zealand was frequently presented as a progressive nation in terms of social equality and peaceful industrial relations. A leading figure of New Zealand's early socialist movement, William Ranstead, proclaimed in 1900 that:

*Here there is no aristocracy, no snobbery. There are no very rich people and no poor. I've not met a beggar ... or seen one destitute person. There are no slums here, no miserable starving women and no suffering children. Here no sober, industrious man need lack any of the comforts of life.*

Visiting French writer Andre Siegfried wrote in 1904 that he had found very little evidence of class-consciousness among the workers of New Zealand. In his work *The Democracy of New Zealand*, he wrote that the New Zealand worker, unlike their European counterpart, '... was hardly conscious of any class hatred, was not revolutionary, and was only vaguely socialistic.' He added that they 'have an innate admiration for money, and for the man who lives in a grand style.' The New Zealand worker's ambition, he claimed was limited to being like the middle-class and imitating those who were more fortunate in terms of finance and family.

### **A land without strikes?**

Feeding the notion that New Zealand was some kind of paradise was the fact that the governing Liberal Party had introduced a succession of progressive laws, such as female suffrage (1893) state-instituted compulsory conciliation and arbitration (1894), and an old age pension (1898). These laws, combined with a perception of egalitarian attitudes across most strata of New Zealand society, led to the image of the country as an equal and fair society that attracted considerable foreign interest. The American consul, J.D. Connolly, in an 1893 address in Auckland was moved to say, 'the fierce searchlight of the civilised world is turned full upon you.'

Many observers came to see what they could learn from this utopia in the southern seas. Among these visitors were the British socialist reformers Sidney and Beatrice Webb, French commentator Albert Metin, and the American progressive political analyst Henry Demarest Lloyd who in 1910 wrote a work entitled *A Land Without Strikes* about his experience of New Zealand.

### **A class society**

It may be that New Zealand enjoyed greater equality than other countries, and the slums and poverty that existed in the large cities of the United Kingdom were not so readily apparent in New Zealand. However, the country was described as the “Britain of the South” in terms of its class system by British socialist Tom Mann, who visited New Zealand in 1906. He remarked that the differences between the rich and the working class could be easily seen and were alive and well. He painted a grim picture of what he had observed during the shooting season:

*only the haw-haw Johnnie, who can afford the licence is allowed to shoot imported game which is fattened on the toil of the well-taxed farmer, [all] smacking very much of the tyranny of the privilege in the old country.*

The awareness of a class system was heightened and remarked upon more frequently in the following decade. Despite the claim that New Zealand was a land without strikes, the country was not unscathed by the international wave of worker militancy that spread throughout much of the world in the first two decades of the twentieth century. At this time, New Zealand had an unprecedented upsurge in trade unionism, working-class radicalism and dissatisfaction with the arbitration act, especially from the larger semi-skilled unions such as the miners and seamen. Things had changed so much, so fast, that by 1919 the MP William Downie Stewart was moved to remark how the terms ‘*class instinct, class-consciousness, class conflict, and the class war*’ had all become common parlance in New Zealand. Similarly, fifteen years later, Andre Siegfried returned to New Zealand and asked Downie Stewart for an explanation for the major change he found in worker militancy. ‘*He was anxious to know where these revolutionaries’ ideas had come from, who had imported them, and how far they had taken hold.*’

In the twelve years immediately following the passage of the arbitration act in 1894, there were no recorded strikes in New Zealand. That run was not broken until 1906 when the Auckland tramway workers took industrial action. This strike was notable because it sent a message to

the labour movement of New Zealand that it was possible to strike successfully. By 1910, New Zealand was the third most unionised country in the world per capita, behind only Australia and Great Britain. This degree of organisation allowed unions to unleash a wave of strikes, reflecting their newly found militancy. Over the next few years strike action was to become increasingly common. By the end of March 1913, there had been a total of 98 strikes in previously strike-free New Zealand.

### **Is class relevant?**

Some historians have cast doubt about whether class is relevant in a discussion of New Zealand's past, and whether the rise in strikes reflected an increase in class-consciousness. New Zealand historian W.H. Oliver writes that while the rhetoric of class has not been absent from New Zealand it is inappropriate and irrelevant for New Zealand. He questions whether '*we have or have had a bourgeoisie and a proletariat, and a struggle between the two.*' Historian Erik Olssen sees the social divide differently: '*two social systems existed, one in urban and the other in rural New Zealand.*' Historian Melanie Nolan posits that '*...class was, perhaps, at most, pertinent to city life, a subculture but not a norm.*' New Zealand was, and is, however, a capitalist society, and this means that society can be viewed as divided into the owning class and the working class. In terms of class, it is not a person's occupation, status, attitude, or income that matters, but their position in relation to the capitalist mode of production. Capitalists own the means of production and employ the labour, while workers own nothing except their labour, which they must sell in order to survive.

For those unionists influenced by the IWW, this division was the very essence of society. The IWW preamble succinctly summed up this ideological position of the organisation in just a few paragraphs.

*The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.*

*Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organise as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system.*

*We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.*

*These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organisation formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.*

*Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."*

*It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organised, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organising industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.*

# THE NEW UNIONISM

HAVE YOU READ THIS?

INDUSTRY  
FACTORY

## I. W. W. Preamble

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace as long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.

We find that the centering of the management of industry into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions of the employing class is pitted the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one locality, or in all industrial centers, shall work whatever a strike is declared, or in any other department, thereby thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the every-day struggle with the capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organized solidarity we are forging the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.



The I.W.W. Preamble as it appeared on the front page of the Industrial Unionist, March 1913. The sun rising in the background was a common symbol in IWW artwork, signifying the dawning of a new era.

To New Zealand's IWW supporters, the evidence of a class divide was clear. Workers could see it with their own eyes, every day of their lives—at work, on the street, and at home when the landlord came to collect rent. One contributor to the IWW's newspaper, the *Industrial Unionist*, using the name 'C.B.', related an account of a typical unemployed worker's daily quest for a job. They see '*motorcars rushing past towards the aristocratic part of town, and reclining in them are well-dressed women, and portly, comfortable looking men.*' The worker goes on to say, '*There must be something wrong somewhere. I'm willing to work and cannot get it so I'm down and out, but these rich folk never work and they never go short...why should they have it all and me none.*'

The IWWs view of New Zealand's rich was clearly painted in another article, signed by 'A. Rebel.' They were described as '*battered and fattened upon the fruits of other men's labour...drunk with riotous living and wasteful, useless lives.*' The writer added:

*There is nothing too vile and mean and sordid for the bourgeois of New Zealand. Their god is surplus value; their ambition, to live without working.*

Certainly, there were some very wealthy people in New Zealand at the time. A study by American economist James Le Rossignol and co-authored by New Zealander William Downie Stewart showed that in the opening decade of the twentieth century, a number of wealthy people had died leaving large sums of money behind. Businessman Jacob Josephs, Archdeacon William Williams, and the Hon. W.W. Johnston had all left sums ranging between £300,000 and £500,000 when they died. The same authors calculated that between 1903 and 1904 half of one per cent of the New Zealand population owned 33 per cent of its wealth.

The solidarity displayed between different workers, both in urban and rural areas, during the industrial conflicts of the first two decades of the 1900s is suggestive of a common class feeling among workers. They developed an identity no longer divided by trade; instead, there was a commonly held self-identification based on the need to sell their labour in order to survive. The term "class" itself became a rallying cry, and this was reflected in the emergence and growth of popular, radical working-class organisations such as the IWW. Many workers' consciousness of class changed and a new resolve to fight for better conditions emerged. Capitalists were aware of the growing emergence of class consciousness among workers. In 1913, the general



manager of Union Steam Ship Company said the Great Strike was not *“for wages so much as an incipient class war.”*

### **Ideas on the move**

It was perhaps inevitable that the IWW’s radical ideas would eventually land on New Zealand shores, as there were thousands of immigrant workers in New Zealand. Between 1900 and 1913 over 115,000 people entered New Zealand, and an unknown number travelled freely between countries. This migratory movement of labour brought influences to New Zealand that reflected the contemporaneous international increase in socialist activity. In parts of Europe, South America, the United States, Canada and South Africa, as well as Australia and New Zealand, the revolutionary doctrines of socialism and industrial unionism were proving increasingly attractive to a growing number of people. Italy, Argentina, Ireland, and Australia were all affected to some extent by general strikes and large-scale social unrest, while troops were deployed on the streets of Britain in response to waves of industrial unrest. The growth in the ideas was accompanied by a rise in votes for socialist parties across Europe. In the US, the Socialist Party’s 1912 presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs polled almost one million votes, equal to 6 per cent of the total vote, standing on an anti-capitalist platform calling for the collectivisation of the means of production and distribution.

The memoirs of New Zealand political activists during this period record this exchange of people and ideas. The New Zealand socialist John A. Lee called New Zealand, *“one of the earth’s political crossroads,”* with orators on their way to Australia and San Francisco stepping off ships and *“onto the soap-box.”* Australian “Wobbly,” an alternative title for a member of the IWW, Bill Beattie remarked in his memoirs how “IWW members were the most travelled section of the working-class.” Tom Barker, who was to be a leading light in the Auckland IWW, noted that the general source of socialistic ideas tended to come from the US rather than Britain:

*There was always a constant flow of people from the West Coast North American ports to New Zealand, some of them going to Australia, sometimes stopping over, and there was a bigger flow of education and that kind of thing from the Pacific than there was from Britain.*

## The NZSP and IWW ideas

Initially, the organisation most influential in spreading the tenets of the IWW within New Zealand was the New Zealand Socialist Party (NZSP). The party was a broad church, and represented most shades of socialist thought from Marxists, Fabians and parliamentary socialists, to syndicalists and anarchists, although its prime objective was the ending of capitalism and the establishment in New Zealand of a co-operative society founded on the common ownership of the means of production. The first branch was set up in Wellington in July 1901, with other branches forming soon after in Auckland and Christchurch. At first, its popularity and influence on the New Zealand labour movement was limited, and it was considered little more than a debating society. However by 1906, the influence of the party began to grow as their journal, *Commonweal*, changed its tone and began to increasingly present the ideology of the revolutionary industrialism of the IWW among its pages. At the same time worker dissatisfaction with the Liberal Party increased, and many of them left to join the NZSP.

The influence of the NZSP received a further boost in 1907 with the arrival in Auckland of Harry M. Fitzgerald, who has been described as a “*key figure in transforming New Zealand socialism.*” Fitzgerald was not an imposing person, and he wore heavy spectacles, but he possessed a powerful “*voice that rang like a church-bell.*” In Canada, he was renowned as a skilful orator advocating revolutionary socialism and industrial unionism. He was described as “a platform general with no equal.” He regaled audiences with anti-capitalist stories of his own creation, such as a *Descent to Hades*. In this story, a recently deceased Fitzgerald is refused entry to heaven after enquiring of St. Peter as to the whereabouts of Karl Marx. It appears that St. Peter is struggling to quell a socialist uprising at the time. So the orator heads to hell and discovers a socialist utopia, “*where the labourer receives the full fruits of his toil, and daily appearing inventions are reducing the period of actual graft to a minimum... [and] there is no government... [nor] person who accumulates wealth.*” When Fitzgerald asks the devil where the capitalists are, he is told that they get “*sent up above.*” The Truth newspaper reported that the crowd at the Wellington His Majesty’s Theatre, who seemed to enjoy the tale enormously, met this quip with much laughter.



***Group photo taken at the 2nd New Zealand Conference of Socialists, held in Wellington, 1909.  
H.M. Fitzgerald is sitting on the floor on the right.***

In an age where public meetings were a source of entertainment as well as enlightenment, such a gifted speaker was highly valued. Fitzgerald not only delivered speeches and lectures; he busied himself running a series of economics classes and helped to form a Socialist choir. His enthusiasm generated so much revolutionary zeal among working people that by the time the NZSP held its first national conference in April 1908, where it formally adopted the preamble of the IWW, the organisation had grown to a membership of 3000 people. While on a visit to New Zealand, the noted British-born socialist and trade unionist Tom Mann remarked that NZSP branches were being set up at such a rapid rate that it would soon lead the Australian socialist party in “*numbers of branches and aggregate membership.*” The party had branches in Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington and numerous others in smaller towns including Waihi and Gisborne by this stage. All had their own rooms, ran bookshops, organised weekly lectures and

street meetings and, in competition with the churches, held Sunday schools for children where socialism was taught.

**NEW ZEALAND SOCIALIST PARTY.  
WELLINGTON BRANCH.**  
**H.** M. FITZGERALD, Socialist Lec-  
turer and Author of a "Trip to  
Hades," will deliver an Oration, 27th  
December, 8 o'clock, in His Majesty's  
Theatre, entitled "The Loss of a Life."  
Music, Questions, and Discussion.  
T. A. EAGLE, Acting-Secretary.

*An advertisement for an oration by H.M. Fitzgerald. "Music, Questions, and Discussion" gives an idea of the entertaining nature of these events*

### **The IWW is born**

It was after a NZSP meeting that the first IWW branch in New Zealand was formed. In response to Fitzgerald's rousing lecture to the Wellington branch on 29 December 1907, over 70 people responded to an invitation to form a branch of the IWW. The following week the *Commonweal* reported that an IWW branch was launched in Wellington with nearly 100 members. To belong to the branch an individual simply had to endorse two sentences, namely: "*The working class and the employing class have nothing in common,*" and "*Labour is entitled to all it produces.*"



*Advertisement for the first meeting of the IWW in Wellington*

Following the inaugural meeting, the first elected officers were Mr. T. Park as secretary, Mr. Eagle as treasurer and J. Dowdall, W. Reid, J. Larler, J. Jones, M.J. Conchie, T. Luke and P. Glyn as committee members. Although all of these people were members of the NZSP, they stipulated at their first branch meeting that no organiser of the IWW could be an organiser of any political party or use the IWW platform to endorse any political party. They also decided that no member of the IWW could be an officer in any other trade union.

The local decision not to allow the use of the organisation as a platform to publicise political parties touched on an ongoing global debate in socialist circles: whether to seek change through parliament or outside of it.

A second New Zealand branch of the IWW emerged in Christchurch as a direct result of the argument between the two strategies. Members of the literature committee of the local branch of the NZSP spent all of their funds on literature in protest against being asked to hand it over to the branch committee to fund the party during the upcoming election. The literature committee felt that entering elections was a futile act and maintained that the money was better spent on education resources. They promptly left the NZSP and formed the Christchurch IWW local.

## I.W.W. CLUBS

Dear Comrade,—In this week's issue *Fellow-worker* Sweeney advocates the formation of I.W.W. Clubs in the four centres. I have to inform him that in Christchurch we formed a club nine months ago, and have since changed it to a recruiting union of the I.W.W. We have adopted the preamble and as far as possible the constitution of the I.W.W. of America (V. St. John, secretary), and are carrying on a propaganda for Industrial Unionism. We have just decided to supply *THE WORKER* with matter on Revolutionary Unionism, and the first instalment will be sent along shortly. Workers requiring the latest pamphlets on Industrial Unionism may obtain them from me. I think *Fellow-worker* Sweeney's idea is a good one and would be pleased to supply a copy of our preamble and constitution to anyone interested.—Yours in revolt,

SYD. KINGSFORD.

107 Riccarton road, Christchurch.

*Maoriland Worker 23/6/11*

This Christchurch branch proved to be a short-lived affair when they eventually voted to become a recruiting body for the New Zealand Federation of Labor (NZFL) which was seen as having potential as a revolutionary union along IWW lines.

The NZFL was created with the stated ambition of uniting the different craft unions together into "One Big Union" and coordinating action between them. This was the central idea behind the

IWW. There was a strong belief in this union among New Zealand's radicals. W.A. Griffiths, acting secretary and treasurer of the IWW Christchurch branch, wrote to the *Maoriland Worker* in August 1911 to say that they were full of hope and determination to carry on the class war, and that, '*we are in the proud position of being the real live branch of the Federation in this city.*'

A third IWW local was set up a couple of years later in Auckland. This would be the most influential of the IWW branches in New Zealand. The prime mover behind this local was John Benjamin King. He was a great orator and revolutionary industrialist like his Canadian compatriot before him, Harry Fitzgerald, but unlike Fitzgerald, he advocated direct action over parliamentary action.

King had left Vancouver with two other Wobblies, James Sullivan and Mr Childs. On the trip to New Zealand, they met up with Englishmen Alec Holdsworth and Charlie Blackburn, who were convinced by King of the veracity of the IWW philosophy. Upon arrival, all became IWW activists in New Zealand. Also influential in this group was the then secretary of the NZSP in Auckland, Tom Barker.

The Auckland IWW was headquartered in the same building as the Auckland branch of the NZSP on Wellesley Street. It had an initial membership of 25 people, which was enough for it to meet IWW rules, get formal recognition by IWW headquarters in the USA and be awarded its charter as Local 175. The Auckland local also launched its own monthly newspaper, the *Industrial Unionist*, on 1 February 1913. Unlike the Christchurch branch, the Auckland local eventually turned its back on the NZFL as they grew disillusioned with it when it moved away from its initial enthusiasm for revolutionary industrial unionism.

The beginning of the IWW occurred during a time of both local and global industrial unrest and union organising. Despite the imagery of a country without class divisions or disputes, New Zealand was a highly stratified country with pervasive poverty and considerable wealth. In this environment, IWW ideas were welcomed by many, and opposed by some. The ideas gained a foothold through the NZSP and eventually local branches formed. Rising dissatisfaction among many workers and the flow of ideas from around the world quickly increased the IWW's influence on organised labour in a short time.

Get sense! Get Wise! And organise for the abolition of blood-suckers and parasites of all descriptions, and most important of all, the infernal system that produces them

*Industrial Unionist, 8 November 1913*



## Chapter 2: The rise of the influence of the IWW in New Zealand

The initial enthusiasm for the doctrine of revolutionary industrial unionism introduced by IWW supporters to New Zealand was not without opposition. Capitalists, politicians, and the mainstream press were not the only antagonists; the existing body representing the craft unions, the Trades and Labour Council (TLC), declared that *“the American system of warfare was not suitable in a country where the working man’s vote was of the same value as that of the managing director of the Waihi mines.”*

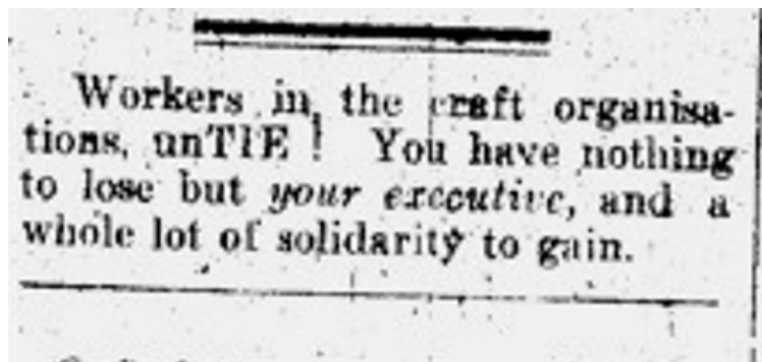
The animosity was mutual. In the view of the IWW, it was not just capitalists holding back workers’ aspirations. Through the pages of the *Industrial Unionist* they pointed out that the existing trade unions aimed no higher than asking for *“a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work,”* and often worked hand-in-hand with employers. Following the passage of the arbitration act employers and the unions usually agreed, without much debate, on what constituted a fair wage and working conditions. Unions believed that employees should work harmoniously with their employers. By contrast, the IWW insisted that if progress was to be made in improving working conditions, it was essential that unions organised along class lines, not according to trade and craft. They should also be organised with the intent of not just protecting and improving conditions today but also *“to abolish wage slavery tomorrow.”*

In a work entitled, *Why Strikes Are Lost and How To Win*, the New Zealand-born general secretary of the IWW in the US, William Trautmann, expanded on the problem with the existing trade unions. In the past, he said, the tool used to do the job determined the craft. But as tools were replaced by large machinery the distinction changed to reflect the job done by the worker. In the building of a machine, there would be separate unions representing pattern-makers, moulders, foundry workers, machinists, and metal polishers. This model was the same across almost every industry. Each separate union jealously guards its own interests, even if this was to the detriment of other groups of workers. The result was that no unified action was possible when fighting an employer, and it made it easier for an employer to dictate terms to workers. Solidarity, Trautmann suggested, was the key to success for the simple reason that the workers far outnumbered the capitalists. If they worked together they could not be defeated.

In the paper of the Auckland branch of the NZSP, the *Social Democrat*, a strong advocate of the doctrine of IWW revolutionary industrial unionism, Harry Scott Bennett wrote:

*Craft unionism grants a license to its members to scab. Industrial Unionism declares in language unmistakable that an "injury to one is an injury to all." Craft Unionism believes it can see a harmonious relationship existing between the leech and its victim. Industrial Unionism is out to abolish the condition that makes leeches possible. Craft Unionism cries Peace!...Industrial Unionism cries Fight!*

Existing craft unions were threatened by the new militancy of the emerging industrial unionists. They believed that the new radical approach imperilled the law *"that has greatly improved the position of many of our workers."* Their attitude can be summed up by TLC representative Jim Young, who said that his organisation, *"considered arbitration the only civilized method of conducting industrial strife."* The TLC told French observer F Challaye that arbitration was *"part of our religion"* and that New Zealand's trade unionists rejected the *"old and barbarous system of strikes."*



***The IWWs stance was summed up in their first issue of the Industrial Union, "Workers in the craft organisations, unTIE! You have nothing to lose but your executive, and a whole lot of solidarity to gain"***

The key to New Zealand's global reputation as a workers' paradise and a land without strikes was the world-first Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. It was introduced in 1894 by the Liberal Minister of Labour, William Pember Reeves, who viewed strike action as enormously wasteful not just for employers but for workers and the nation as a whole. The act required employers and registered unions to discuss disputes at district boards of conciliation. If this failed to produce an agreement, then the dispute would be submitted to the national court of

arbitration whose decisions were legally enforceable. The act generated considerable global interest. In the first 11 years of its operation, there were no strikes, and workers' wages and conditions seemingly improved. However, in the eyes of the more radical members of the working class in New Zealand, the arbitration system came to be seen as a failure that damaged their interests.

In an attack on the system, Harry Scott Bennett said workers should:

*Pull shoulder to shoulder against arbitration. Defy the courts on all occasions; throw aside the legal machinery that is binding the workers down as they are bound in older countries. For better is the "old-time strike" with all its misery and distress, than to throw yourself on the mercies of a class-biased court.*

Latvian-born anarchist Philip Josephs, who had arrived in New Zealand in 1904, added to the criticism. He wrote in the *Commonweal* that after the arbitration court was set up:

*The exploiter and the exploited meet and mutually arrange the amount of exploitation which satisfied the rapaciousness of the former, and to which the latter will submit and still manage to exist and propagate his species!*

The mainstream media was appalled by the attacks on the arbitration act. In the *Maoriland Worker*, the paper of the NZFL, Ted Howard, a regular contributor often writing under the name *The Vag* and a prominent figure in radical trade union circles, wrote how the mainstream media criticised "these ignorant men daring to attack an act which had been quoted all over the world as a blessing to the working class." One of the leaders of the NZFL, Pat Hickey, reminiscing a decade later in the *Maoriland Worker*, wrote that to criticise the arbitration system was "like a good Mohammedan doubting the existence of the Prophet's whiskers."

Not all observers spoke fondly of the arbitration act. One critic was Ramsey MacDonald, the British Labour leader, who after a visit to New Zealand in 1906, remarked that:

*A Trade Union in New Zealand exists mainly to get an award out of the Arbitration Court...they cannot strike, it is no good their grumbling; they simply pay their dues into the union funds because they are legally bound to do it, and they take little interest in trade unionism as an industrial and political factor.*

The IWW concurred with his view: the act encouraged docility among workers and fostered dependence on officials.

The fact that the TLC was still comfortable with the system of arbitration suggests that they were out of touch with their members. Contemporary observers G. G. Hancox and Dr. J. Hight of Canterbury College put forward a number of reasons why there was an increase in the number of strikes in New Zealand: employers increased attempts to control workers in their workplaces; the growing difference between workers' wages and their expectations; and the influence of radical ideas. Perhaps the most significant factor they highlighted was the growing feeling that the Liberal Party and the arbitration court could no longer be trusted to look after workers' interests. A new generation of workers had little memory of the failures of strike action in the last century, nor reason to feel grateful to a Liberal government that had passed worker-friendly laws. John A. Miller, who was the president of the Maritime Council during the 1890 strike and Minister of Labour between 1908 and 1911, remarked that in terms of labour relations, "*a new generation seems to have arisen.*" The 1911 census shows that approximately a quarter of coal miners and labourers were aged 25 or under.

Irrespective of the specific advantages and disadvantages of the arbitration system, it failed to keep workers fairly reimbursed for their labour. By the end of the first decade of the 1900s, almost every union had a grievance concerning wage rates. In 1909, a visiting American, Colonel Weinstock, noted his surprise that the advance in wages had not been greater considering the worldwide increase in wages. Although prosperity had increased, wage increases had not kept up with the cost of living throughout the decade. Moreover, the difference accelerated in the first couple of years of the second decade.

Pat Hickey, in an address to a NZFL conference in 1910, pointed out that since the passing of the arbitration act, wages had increased by 17.5 per cent, while the cost of living had increased by 19 per cent. Meanwhile, employers' profits had increased by over 180 per cent. This was proof that the arbitration court was no friend to workers. It consistently ruled that high profits were no justification for an increase in wages, stating outright that it did not view its role as setting wages on a profit-sharing basis. Rather, it was sympathetic to employers who claimed they could not afford wage increases.

The liberal reformer Edward Treager noted as early as 1904 that the advantages bestowed by the progressive legislation of the Liberal Party were gradually being nullified by the economic situation. A commission established by the Liberal government in 1911 to investigate the cost of living found that although it appeared overall wages had kept up with the increase in prices since 1890, the effect across different classes was not the same. From 1900 to 1911 the cost of cooking fuel, gas for lighting, and food rose by at least 5 per cent, while housing costs rose by 10 per cent and clothing by 34 per cent. This affected the poorest communities most, as they spent a greater proportion of their wages on these goods. Yet the wages of the lowest-paid unskilled workers had remained almost stable since 1902. Adding to the problem, New Zealand faced a poor economic situation by the end of that first decade of the 1900s: exports were declining; there was a fear of the country going into depression, and unemployment rose to a record high of over 10,000 after a decade of decline.

Under these circumstances, it was difficult for workers to increase consumption to meet rising standards of living. The population had come to expect, and likewise, it was expected of them, to have better quality clothing, housing, and food. The shops offered better and more modern goods. Union secretaries told the cost of living commission that sewing machines and bicycles had become essential items, and the working class in urban centres expected to be able to have money to pay for entertainment. Modern standards regarding the quality of housing had also changed and were scrutinised by the commission. They noted that new facilities, such as good drainage, lighting, and indoor baths, had come to be seen as essential for a normal standard of living. Despite this, the arbitration court was making settlements based on the living conditions from the years around 1900.

The culture and aspirations of New Zealand's workers were beginning to change in other ways. This proved instrumental in the desire to question the status quo and made new revolutionary ideas attractive. Wellington and Auckland both grew rapidly between 1900 and 1910; they were the major centres of immigrant arrivals. Both city centres had what were in effect boarding-house districts that were relatively isolated from other workers' houses. These areas, historian Erik Olssen argues, developed their own culture; they had integrated networks of meeting halls, socialist clubs, radical newspapers and bookshops. The radicals defended the way of life of these inner-city dwellers and vigorously rebuffed critics such as the church and 'wowers' (a common Australasian slang for alcohol prohibitionists and other perceived killjoys). These

attacks only added to the sense of injustice among the radicalised of the inner city, further fostering a sense of togetherness.

With newly gained literacy, workers read books and journals that described and discussed the conditions of the working class. This solidified a sense of identity and interests that were different from the ruling class. Cinema was also crucial in helping to forge this identity. It was a distinctly working-class entertainment—the more well-to-do were put off because theatres were often poorly ventilated and uncomfortable. The crowd would noisily interact with the film being shown, and spitting was not uncommon.

Henry Hayward opened the first fixed cinema in 1908 in Auckland's Royal Albert Hall. By 1913 New Zealand had 165 theatres, and attendance had become as much part of the working-class life for many as "*wearing a hat or drinking tea.*" Hayward was a socialist, and he showed films illustrating the struggle of ordinary working people and the degradation brought by poverty. Robert Way, the founder of the Auckland branch of the Socialist Party, imported all the films based upon the novels of Émile Zola, which depicted a world common to the working class. These films and others, such as *A Thief by Necessity*, which portrayed theft as morally valid, were regularly shown and reflected issues important to the audience. Rebel stories, like those about Australian Ned Kelly and the Eureka Stockade, were also popular. Early forerunners of documentary films showed ordinary workers at their jobs. All of this helped to give workers a new sense of respect for their lives and the work they did.

**HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE.**  
 Lessees ..... Linley and Donovan.  
**TO-NIGHT! TO-NIGHT!**  
**THE ROYAL PICTURES.**  
 Our New Programme a Thriller.  
 Received Last Night by Delighted  
 Thousands.  
**A CORNER IN WHEAT.**  
**A CORNER IN WHEAT.**  
**THE PONY EXPRESS. THE TEST. THE PONY EXPRESS.**  
 John Bull's Foolish Hospitality.  
 Railway Construction in Canada.  
**THE PAGODAS OF RANGOON.**  
**THE MARRIAGE OF COCO.**  
 And Many Others.  
 1s. **OUR PRICES.** 6d.  
 Plan Abel's. Booking fee 6d.  
**MATINEE SATURDAY.**

A cinema advertisement for His Majesty's Theatre, 1910. The film advertised "A Corner in Wheat" was an example of a *film with sympathetic to the working class*. In it a tycoon decides to corner the market in wheat, doubling the price of bread, and forcing the grain's producers into further poverty.

This cultural change meant workers expected more both in the workplace and outside of it. It was a significant factor in the rising levels of strife. Discontent with the arbitration system was merely a reflection of the growing discontent with wider society among many in the working class. Some historians argue that the dissatisfaction was due to the appearance of a number of strong capable leaders at this time. While it is true that people like miners' leaders Pat Hickey and Robert Semple, and the Canadians, Fitzgerald and King, brought a vibrancy and resoluteness to the labour movement at the time, it was not simply a case of the "industrial bogeyman descending from their mist-shrouded, windswept, pit fortresses to take control of the labour movement for their own revolutionary purposes."

Arguing that there was a vanguard that took advantage of and skilfully manipulated the growing discontent among workers takes no account of the fact that, on many occasions over the next few years, events were created by the workers themselves. Leaders were in reality often attempting to catch up and struggled to control the rank and file.

Many commentators in the media, along with employers and politicians, argued that this rising discontent was alien to the New Zealand worker. They blamed foreign agitators and viewed the IWW as an alien contaminant disrupting the previously peaceful New Zealand society. Prime Minister William Massey described the 1913 dock workers' dispute in Wellington as one between *"ship-owners and a foreign association...the leaders of whom are foreign"* rather than as one between workers and bosses. The *Ashburton Guardian* saw this foreign influence in a speech by the president of the Waihi Miners' Union, W.E. Parry in which he pronounced that, *"we have no King, no flag, no God, no country."* A month later, the same paper was remarking that *"such talk may be well enough for the drunken half-witted desperadoes in the slums of Chicago or San Francisco. It is not good enough for New Zealand."* They described the IWW and the importation of its ideas as a *"strange, wild doctrine"* which having been *"hatched in despotic Russia, carried to Germany, from whence its exponents were expelled to America, was introduced from that country to New Zealand."*

There is no denying the influence that overseas visitors had on the New Zealand political scene and the labour movement. Personalities like Fitzgerald and King left their mark in New Zealand. So, too, did other immigrant workers, many of whom are today unknown or little remembered. Some of them arrived with a working knowledge of socialism and anarchism and continued to receive literature from their homelands. Immigrant Philip Josephs ran a bookshop in Wellington that stocked a wide range of socialist and anarchist books and pamphlets. Trade Unionist Tom Barker described how meetings held by a Romanian migrant, William Pierrepont Black, were influential in his path to becoming a wobbly.

It was impossible to stem the global flow of radical ideas to New Zealand. This was due in part to the openness of borders and the low cost of travel. A ticket across the Tasman cost just £2. It was not just foreigners, but New Zealanders, who embraced radical ideas and taking direct action. The Auckland local wrote that one of their street speakers was abused for being a foreigner while delivering a speech despite his obvious New Zealand accent. The accusation that the IWW was merely the work of foreign influences was just one example of the barrage of attacks on the organisation.

Dissatisfaction with the arbitration act came from changes in workers' expectations coupled with the influx of radical ideas and the development of visible working-class cultural forms at the turn of the century. These changes were met with resistance from both the right and the left. Existing



unions were threatened by challenges to their craft and trade structures. Capitalists, right-wing sectors of society and the mainstream media viewed these socialist and egalitarian ideas as dangerous. Workers, however, could see that the system did not work in their favour. As a result, the ideas of the IWW continued to grow.

Liberty for All! To Hell with Law and Authority

*Industrial Unionist, 18 November 1913*

### **Chapter 3: The Idea of 'One Big Union' Grows**

The growth of IWW ideas in New Zealand mirrored the growing antagonism towards the system of craft unionism and the use of the arbitration act to decide on conditions such as pay rises and working hours. The idea of organising beyond craft and trade divisions already had some history in New Zealand. The first attempt came in 1893 when the shearers' union changed its name to the New Zealand Workers' Union (NZWU) in an attempt to extend its appeal and gain the support of unorganised urban workers. The city branches had little to do with shearing; instead, they were gathering points for unskilled and semi-skilled workers including labourers and watersiders, who were excluded from craft unions. For a short time, the NZWU was a centre for radicalism and opposition to the existing craft-dominated trade unions.

A move away from the craft unions received fresh impetus from the introduction of the IWW ideas of class war, direct action and syndicalism (in which all workers are represented by a single federated body of unions). The first hint of an increased mood of militancy among the working class appeared in 1906 when the first strike since 1890 happened. Another strike two years later in the mining township of Blackball occurred over the length of meal breaks and the working day. This dispute left a great mark on New Zealand's labour history. It precipitated the real push to organise into a federation. Some of the most prominent trade unionists in Blackball, including Pat Hickey, had recently returned from the US, where they were influenced by the IWW. It is believed that Hickey attended the inaugural IWW conference in Chicago in 1905. In addition, IWW literature was bought and distributed among the workers on the West Coast, where it was positively received.

The 1908 dispute began when Hickey and six others were sacked after refusing to return to work after a break. Their dismissal led the rest of the miners to go on strike. The strike lasted for three months; it ended in victory and the reinstatement of the sacked miners' jobs. During the dispute, the union became the first to be fined under the arbitration act: a fine of £75 was issued (the maximum it could be fined was £100). When the men refused to pay, their possessions, consisting of three bicycles, three sewing machines, and various pieces of furniture, were seized and put up for auction. The local population, however, refused to bid on the goods at the auction. Instead of getting £75, a paltry 12s 6d was raised, after which the goods were returned to their previous owners.

During the dispute, the arbitration court began to be seen as having a class bias. Striking worker Pat Hickey said:

*An interesting incident occurred...our solicitor...referred to the 'crib' allowance of 15 minutes as being altogether short; his honour remarked with a frown that he thought 15 minutes ample time. He then glanced at the clock, noticed that the time was 12.30 and stated that the court stood adjourned for lunch till 2 p.m.*

Hickey further describes in his memoirs how this dispute led many in the miners' union to become disillusioned with the arbitration system and to decide that the remedy was for the existing unions to work together in "closer organisation." In response, the state miners' union at Runanga campaigned to create a Federation of the Coal Mines of the West Coast in June 1908. They appointed their president, Robert Semple, as the new body's organiser. The serving president of the Blackball Miners' Union, Pat Hickey, was made secretary. Both men toured New Zealand's coalfields to attract support for the federation viewing it as a step towards the creation of one big union. Once created, the new federation took its motto from the IWW in the US: the world's wealth for the world's workers.

In 1909 different unions applied to join the federation. As a result, the Federation of Miners changed its name to the New Zealand Federation of Labor (NZFL) with labor being deliberately spelt in the American manner. The move was met with great acclaim from the NZSP organ, *Commonweal*, which applauded the move towards:

*...One strong class-conscious body of working men and women, who released from the shackles and ignorant traditions of craft or sectarian unionism, will move forward in one solid phalanx against the presumption of privilege and in defence of their rights.*

The recognition that a unified federation created a stronger labour movement gathered pace during the next couple of years. At the 1910 federation conference, Hickey argued that

*Relying on the strength of their combination, and with a full recognition of class solidarity, the workers can win for themselves conditions that the arbitration court would never concede.*

Quickly nicknamed the "Red Feds" by the media following the printing of a circular in support of striking Wellington tram workers on red paper, the NZFL grew rapidly. In 1911 alone its

membership doubled from 6,724 to 13,971. By 1912 the federation had 43 affiliated unions with around 15,000 members, which represented over 20 per cent of the organised workers of New Zealand.

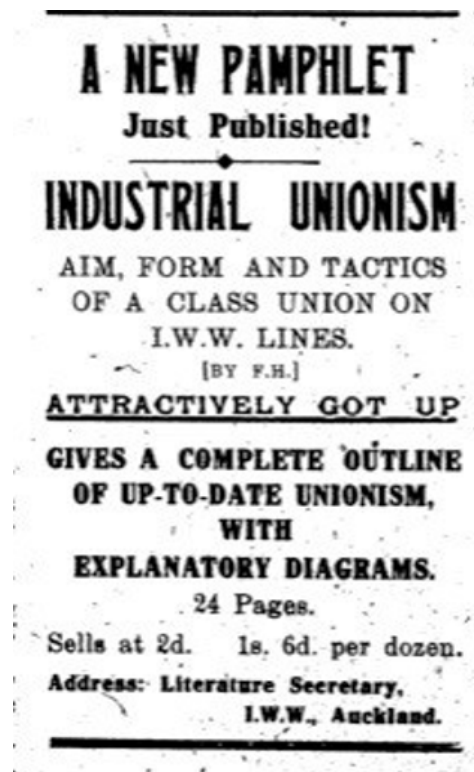
Initially, the ideas of the IWW had a great influence on the NZFL. At its 1910 conference, the NZFL adopted a number of objectives proposed by IWW supporters. These included obtaining employment for members, fraternal sympathy with the world's workers, increasing workers' wealth, and shortening the hours of labour. It also included educating for the complete abolition of the present wage system and the substitution of the common ownership of the means of production. This conference was also important in that it made a number of decisions to increase rank and file power in the organisation in keeping with IWW thinking. Conference attendees decided to hold a conference yearly. They also decided that any decision by the executive could be overturned by the membership. A decision by the executive or a petition by a 1000 members could stimulate a referendum of the whole membership. A first in the New Zealand labour movement was the decision that officers were to be voted for by the entire membership via a postal ballot. Earlier organisations had only enfranchised conference attendees or the executive to appoint officers.

However, there were some decisions at the conference that conversely suggested an autocratic streak among those on the executive. In contrast to IWW tenets, some power was taken away from the rank and file. Affiliated unions lost the right to take industrial action without prior approval from the executive, and all disputes were placed under the management of the executive. This, too, was a first in New Zealand. In a further centralisation of power, the executive was granted authority to issue instructions to affiliated unions without prior local ballots.

Nevertheless, at the 1912 NZFL conference, the IWW supporters within the federation sought to further increase their influence. They demanded that the organisation be structured along IWW lines with industrial departments being organised into one big union. Members of the New Zealand IWW ensured that each delegate at the conference had a copy of the IWW manifesto. At the conference, IWW supporters argued in favour of a strong organisation to respond to the strength of the employers who had formed a federation. The fact that capitalists formed an organisation along class lines—open only to employers—convinced the IWW of the increased necessity to respond with a class-based organisation of their own. Their arguments won many

adherents in the movement, and the conference agreed to investigate reorganising the NZFL along IWW lines. They voted Wobbly John Benjamin King onto a committee of seven to look into reorganisation.

A 1913 pamphlet published by the Auckland branch outlined the exact proposal for organising the working class into one big union. Written by New Zealand Wobbly Frank Hanlon and borrowed heavily from a pamphlet by the general secretary of the IWW in the US, Vincent St John, it described the structure of an industrial union organisation along IWW lines in New Zealand. Hanlon stressed the importance of having this framework at a minimum in place if the workers wanted to develop into one big union.



***Advertisement for the New Zealand published pamphlet Industrial Unionism based on a series of articles by Frank Hanlon that appeared in the Industrial Unionist***

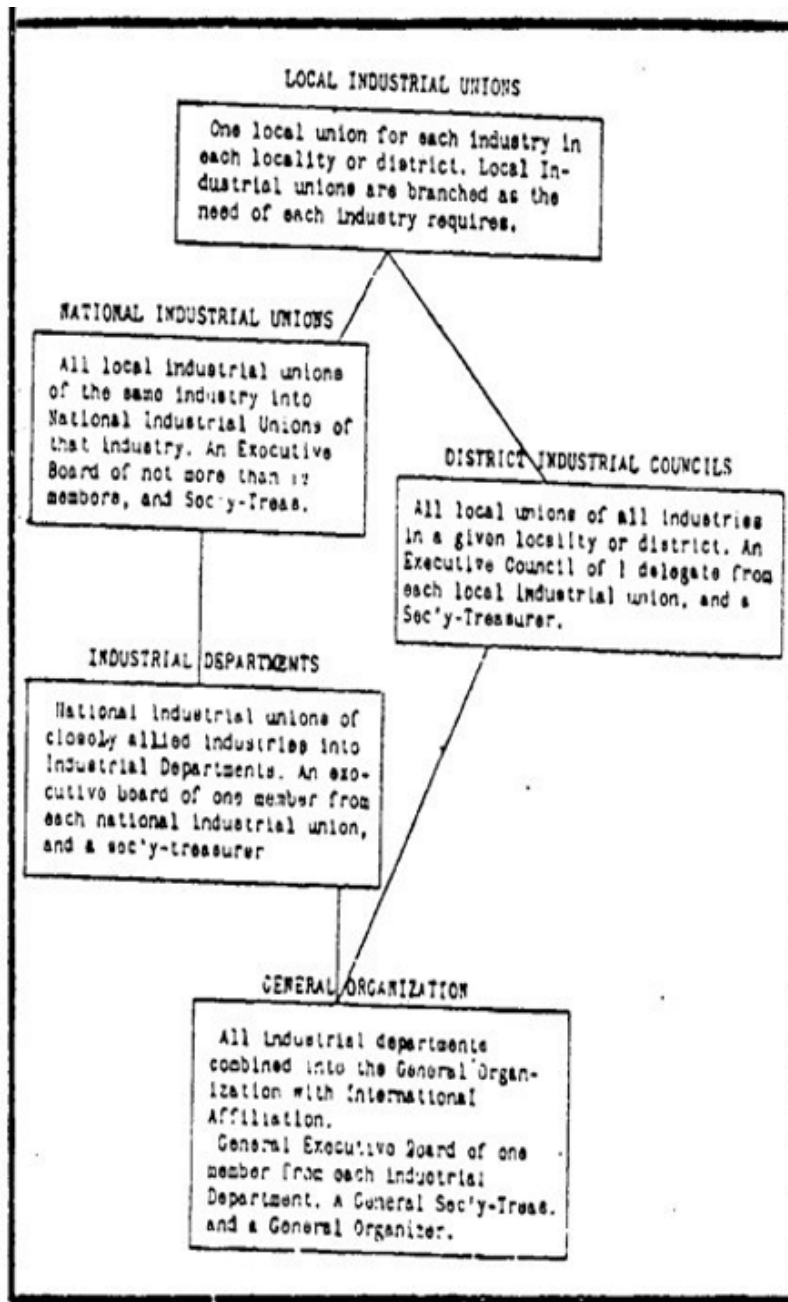
This union model consisted of six main departments reflecting the divisions of industry in New Zealand at the time: agricultural, fisheries and water products; mining; transport and

communication; manufacturing and general production; construction, and public service. Each of these departments was further subdivided into the different industries of production. For example, the construction department would consist of several industries including the building industry. All building industry workers such as painters, plumbers, scaffolders, and electricians would belong to the same union, not separate bodies representing individual crafts and trades.

The local union, made up of all the workers in one department in one district, was the basic unit of organisation. In other words, anyone in construction in one community would be in one local union. There would be another local union representing all the workers in another one of the six departments. When the workers were highly organised there would be many of these, all affiliated to the same national executive (as was the case of the miners of the West Coast of the South Island). A local union was in charge of its own affairs, elected its own officers and sent delegates to the annual, or preferably semi-annual national conference. The local also elected all district delegates, officers of the national union and international delegates. These local industrial unions combined to make a national industrial union with all officers elected by all members of that department.

For the local unions to be able to liaise with other local unions in their area, one elected representative from each union would attend the district council. This person was the district delegate. The district council was of crucial importance, as its role was to promote local solidarity and direct action, guard against over-centralisation, and, most importantly, educate the workers in revolutionary philosophy and direct action tactics. According to the IWW, the miners' strike that began in Blackball in August 1913 failed precisely because the lack of a district council meant that there was no coordinated action on the West Coast; the Blackball miners had been left without support. The IWW argued that organising locally was essential, because national executives were too slow and inflexible, even when they could be trusted to provide the necessary support.

Hanlon borrowed the organisational chart from St John's pamphlet to illustrate the proposed structure. He made a small change, from 21 to 12, in the number of members required to form an executive board of a national union in recognition of the comparatively small size of some of New Zealand's population and industries.

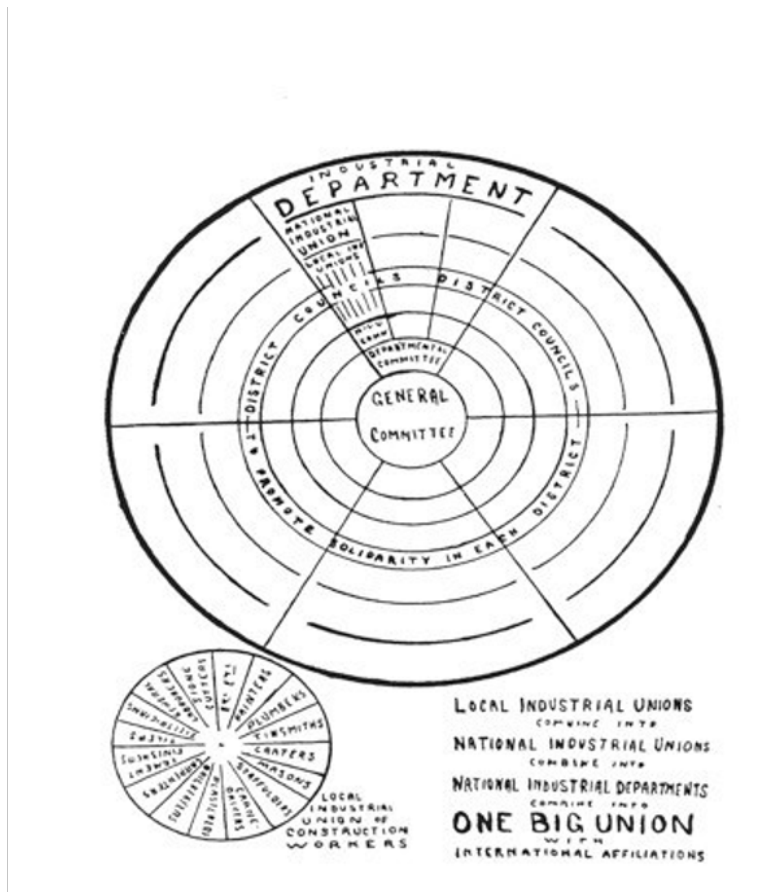


***Hanlon's Structure of the IWW***

Hanlon also provided a simplified version of the "IWW's wheel" to explain how all the different industrial departments fit together. The large circle represents the one big union, with a single industrial department written in as an example. This itself contains three national unions. These would be bound by a single departmental convention and committee, and further bound to the general committee. The District Councils are shown as a continuous circle to



represent that they cut across and represent all industries. The smaller wheel is used to represent all the occupations in a single industrial union.



***Hanlon's wheel***

Although the structure proposed by the IWW initially appeared highly centralised, Hanlon stressed that this would throw the control of the whole organisation into the hands of the membership. Frequent elections for representatives, with the ability to recall them instantly if needed, guaranteed rank and file control. There was centralised administration without centralised control.

The proper organisational structure with rank-and-file democracy was important not only for industrial struggle and the overthrow of capitalism but also to plant the seeds of a future socialist society. The IWW's ideas ensured that the new organisational and administrative structures necessary for the period after the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism would be in place. The dream of a socialist world would no longer be an abstract utopia. Instead, it would be firmly

rooted within the class struggle that preceded it. This federation of working-class people was the very blueprint for the future society—not only would capitalism be overthrown, but this democratic grassroots organisation would bring about the end of the state, too. Society would be organised around communities based on the local union.

Hanlon added that while the organisation was being built it would also be necessary to have local propaganda branches, known as “*mixed locals*,” for the dissemination of information, education, and recruitment. He appreciated that while the majority of the working class in New Zealand was aware of the class struggle, often it was “*only dimly*,” and it was a waste of valuable time and effort to deal with micro issues of industrial organisation “*when so much remains to be done*.”

The IWW rejected organisational models that relied upon strong leadership. Instead, they argued, the change to a socialist society could only be guided and brought about by the actions of ordinary working people. It was part and parcel of the whole democratic philosophy of the IWW to fight against centralised power, leadership, and those that claimed such roles for themselves. The IWW considered that a reliance on strong individuals created the danger that the movement would be tied to one charismatic leader, fostered dependence among working-class people, and would prove to be inflexible in times of struggle.

The Auckland IWW exemplified the anti-leadership philosophy during a fundraising drive for two American comrades on trial (Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti). They were asked to sell medals featuring an image of Bill Haywood, a co-founder and prominent organiser of the IWW in the US. They refused, saying that this “local has no use for hero worship.” They added that they would still raise money but without the medals. By way of contrast, the editors of the largest-selling paper of the labour movement, the *Maoriland Worker*, saw Bill Haywood as something of a hero and often reprinted his articles in the paper.

Criticism of those who wanted to be leaders also came from T.H. Marshall, the president of the Waikato Miners’ Union and an IWW supporter. Writing in the *Maoriland Worker*, he said that the New Zealand labour movement was not free of those who enjoyed being “*hoisted on the pedestal of pride to be semi-worshipped by the class he belongs to*.”

The Auckland IWW viewed the New Zealand labour movement as being cursed and hampered by those who presented themselves as leaders. They considered that these people had become

leaders because of “*brassness of neck, strength of lung, and love of power or limelight,*” not because of any superior intelligence or skill. They argued that there might have been a time when leadership was necessary, but because the working class was literate and able to think, that was no longer true. In the eyes of the IWW, the true creativity, intelligence, and passion necessary for revolution rested solely with rank-and-file workers. They considered:

*an almost unlimited amount of ability and talent is latent in the working class, but it remains undeveloped through lack of self-reliance and initiative in individuals and because of the superstition that we must have leaders, or in other words, we must let someone else do our thinking.*

Even if mistakes were made through a lack of knowledge or experience this was not considered a bad thing: “Better that the membership of an organisation should conduct a fight themselves and meet defeat.” In this way, workers gained experience and lessons in self-reliance, which helped to increase their self-confidence in battles yet to come.

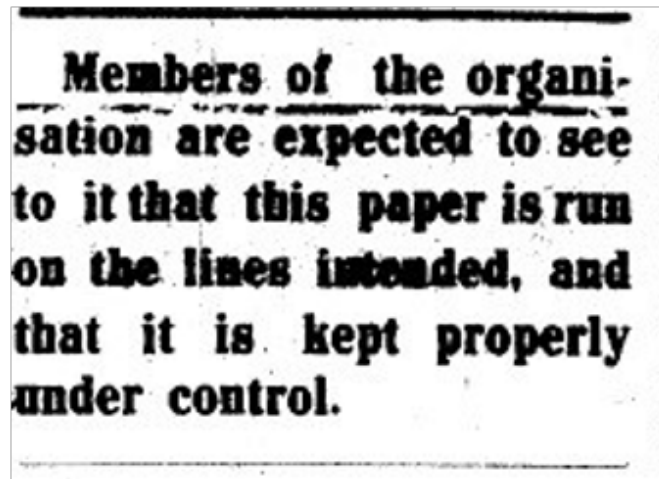
As a further safeguard to help prevent an elite leadership clique from developing, the IWW called for a reduction in officials’ salaries to a minimum. In the same *Maoriland Worker* article, Marshall argued further the IWW case against leadership:

*The host of paid officials of unions is deplorable...No official should receive a higher wage than those he serves. Higher wage means higher position; higher position means above, hence leader, autocrat. And the New Zealand wage-slave has paid and is paying dear for this.*

For the IWW, the talk of “*better pay, better men*” was dismissed as “*twaddle.*” An earnest revolutionary should not and would not work solely for monetary gain. Frequent changes of officials prevented the development of a leadership circle, with the added benefit of giving the rank-and-file workers more experience in decision-making, something that was crucial to the development of the confidence of all members. The Auckland IWW held semi-annual elections by all of its membership for its offices. They also adopted the NZSP meeting procedure where a different member chaired each meeting; this was done in order to build members’ confidence in their public speaking skills and to prevent over-reliance on familiar faces.

The IWW stressed that the executive should be an executive in administrative terms only: officers should not direct, but be directed by, the rank and file. A common criticism by the IWW

of the NZFL was that its leaders had excessive power and rewards. The publication of the NZFL accounts just prior to the 1912 conference created a storm of condemnation of the seemingly extravagant wages and expenses paid to the executive. Between September 1911 and May 1912, the organiser had apparently received a salary of £152; further expenses brought this total to £238 3s. By comparison, the *Industrial Unionist* committee prided themselves on the fact that they received no pay for their efforts on the paper. When the IWW did appoint an organiser, Tom Barker, he received little, if any pay.



**Members of the organisation are expected to see to it that this paper is run on the lines intended, and that it is kept properly under control.**

***Address to the members: In the spirit of rank and file democracy and appeal to be eternally vigilant, the following statement appeared in bold in the first few issues of the Industrial Unionist***

As another protection against those who sought to use the IWW merely as a platform for their own self-aggrandisement, the Auckland local called for “*eternal vigilance*” by the rank and file and alerted their members to be aware of individuals in the organisation who “*pose as revolutionary heroes in order to bolster their own standing.*”

In the months following the 1912 conference, the IWW’s warning about leadership having too much power seemed to come true. Despite the arguments for organising along IWW lines put forward by some leaders of the NZFL, only those who were closely aligned to the IWW were willing to put trust in the grassroots and remain true to the idea of a non-hierarchical organisation. The IWW questioned the true revolutionary commitment of the NZFL leadership. They suggested that the adoption of the IWW structure by the NZFL was simply for efficiency and that the executive lacked the full commitment to the principles of solidarity and recognition that “*an injury to one is an injury to all.*”

The NZFL executive largely insisted that all action was under their control. When a number of disputes occurred without the executive's permission, the executive simply chose not to support the workers on strike. Pat Hickey insisted that if strikers acted unconstitutionally, then they could expect no support. He even demanded that "*The executive must be obeyed.*" The IWW's *Industrial Unionist* mocked this dictatorial attitude and wondered if employers referred matters to the employers' federation executive before they "*sacked, suspended or locked out*" workers.

Despite the growing influence and strength of the IWW at the 1912 conference and the adoption of a preamble taken from the constitution of the IWW, the proposal to re-organise along IWW lines came with a caveat imposed by the NZFL executive that any re-organisation would only occur when the executive felt the time was right. This caveat demonstrated the executive's lack of genuine belief in IWW ideas and courage to relinquish power to working people. Sadly this conclusion was further proved by the dramatic events occurring at the same time as the conference in the mining town of Waihi.

Only the workers themselves can remove the curse of leadership. The future destiny of the Working Class rests with the rank and file. In their hands alone is the power to achieve victory and emancipation.

*Industrial Unionist, 1 March 1913*

## Chapter 4: The Tragedy of Waihi

The miners' strike in Waihi cast a long shadow over the 1912 New Zealand Federation of Labor (NZFL) conference. The strike began in May 1912 after the NZFL-affiliated Waihi Trade Union of Workers, to which most of the miners in the town belonged, protested the formation of a company-inspired breakaway union for engine drivers. This new union was formed because its members could *"no longer tolerate a branch of a union whose officials embrace every opportunity of insulting the Empire and its rulers, ridiculing traditional beliefs, scoffing at all religion and bleating forth anti-militarism, atheism, and revolutionary socialism..."*. At issue between the two groups was that arbitration settlements agreed to by the new union could be forced upon all other workers.

At this time, revolutionary industrial unionism and the ideas of the IWW were greatly influencing some Waihi miners and the town as a whole. In the previous year, the Maoriland Worker reported that IWW pamphlets were "finding a ready sale." Influential miner J.B. King who was a Wobbly who ran economics classes, enrolled about 30 members to an IWW group, and was elected to the local strike committee. The Dominion newspaper reported that the miners' union had developed into more than just a union: it had become a socialist organisation. *"A few years ago the Socialists were a small section...generally regarded as mere holders of eccentric views, who were never likely to cause much trouble. Gradually they grew in numbers until the community woke up to the fact that they were becoming a menace,"* the conservative newspaper lamented.

The NZSP branch in Waihi was particularly active in the town and was closely linked to the Waihi Workers' Union. The most prominent officials of the union were socialists, as were the most regular attendants at the union's meetings. Of the 19 seats on the union committee 17 were filled with affirmed socialists; the other two seats belonged to members who were avowedly sympathetic to the cause of the NZFL. Similarly, the leading figures in the NZSP were miners.

NZSP members were highly radicalised and believed firmly in the tenets of revolutionary industrial unionism and the IWW. Arguably, the ideas of the NZSP and the IWW were

indistinguishable. On occasion, members of the Auckland IWW would visit Waihi and share a platform with the local socialists to address the miners. Evidence of this affinity is contained in a report of the Socialist Party's request to use the miners' hall free of charge: it was granted because they were spreading the "*Gospel of Industrial Unionism.*"

The NZSP Waihi branch meetings were well-attended boisterous affairs. One meeting caused newspapers throughout New Zealand to express their collective horror at the disrespect shown to Archdeacon Brodie of St. Joseph's Catholic Church by NZSP members. In April 1912, R.F. Way, an organiser for the NZSP, gave a public talk denouncing the Catholic Church and religion in general. When Brodie tried to reply, the crowd drowned him out. The media was aghast that such a revered gentleman as the archdeacon had been treated with such disrespect.



During the 1912 strike the media complained frequently of IWW-style action and tactics. Boycotts of the scab engine drivers who had broken away from the union were widely applied. "Following up," a tactic that involved a crowd following scabs around town, was also used. The *Press* said anonymous threats to businessmen and journalists were made. Mr McRobie, the proprietor of the *Waihi Telegraph*, who had been consistently critical of the striking miners, received this one:

*You dirty, black, trimmed-whiskered mongrel, if you don't alter your hostile tactics toward the Waihi Miners' Union in your leading articles in your dirty, gutter-snipe rag, I inform you candidly that I have 250 plugs of gelnite, 100 detonators, and six coils of fuse, of which you shall*



*swallow some if you keep on at the rate you are going. Now, McRobie, I have warned you; so beware – I am in earnest, Signed, Only a Striker.*

McRobie never came to any harm during the Waihi dispute.

With the commencement of the Waihi strike, J.B. King urged the NZFL to call a general strike. He outlined the importance of the dispute and its wider implications:

*According to the Constitution...an injury to one is an injury to all. Therefore the grievances of the Waihi workers are the grievances of all the members of the Federation, and they are also the grievances of the whole working class. The miners at Waihi are fighting to maintain solidarity, and their fight is in accordance with industrial unionism. They are trying to prevent a scab union being formed.*

The NZFL executive, however, was not overly supportive of the strike because they had not officially sanctioned it. Executive member Peter Fraser claimed that they only learned of the strike three days after it had started. They initially refused to issue strike pay (although this was paid from June) and prevaricated over a response to the calls for a general strike. Instead, they offered to meet with the employers for talks and proposed to send fraternal greetings to the striking miners congratulating them on their solidarity; both suggestions were passed by the conference.

Huntly miner, J.E. Duncan, who was a vocal supporter of the IWW during the 1912 conference, highlighted the concerns the IWW had with the NZFL:

*While the delegates are sitting here doing nothing, the [Waihi] men are being starved into submission. A very vital principle is at stake. It is a class fight of organised Labour against organised Capital.*

The Waihi strike proceeded without incident until September, at which time the strikers felt confident of victory. They maintained a strong belief that the NZFL would call a general strike in support of them. Moreover, the water levels in the unmanned mines had reached such heights that they could be irretrievably lost if the issue was not settled quickly.

The dispute, however, was about to escalate to the detriment of the strikers.

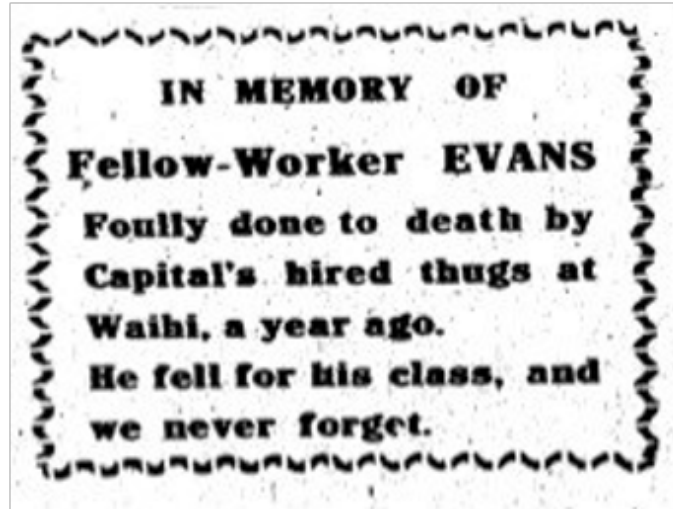
In *Paradise Reforged*, New Zealand historian James Belich says that the decision of the employers to reopen the mines using strike-breakers protected by the state escalated the strike. The state's involvement increased further after July 1912 when the Liberal government fell following a vote of "no confidence." Several Liberal MPs crossed the floor to vote with the conservative Reform Party that took power. Under the new Prime Minister, William Massey, the government wasted no time in intervening in the Waihi dispute. Ostensibly responding to a petition for help from 30 people (out of Waihi's total population of 6,500), Massey decided to appoint the commissioner of police, James Cullen, to oversee the events in Waihi. This action was taken despite the fact that the Thames district police inspector, A.H. Wright, maintained that not one act of lawlessness could be linked to the strike. Wright even went so far as to comment how the strike committee had "*assisted the police in warning the men to conduct themselves properly.*" Waihi's police sergeant Wohlmann, who had talked of the strikers' "*admirable self-respect and restraint,*" backed this up.

On 7 September Cullen led 80 officers into Waihi (this being approximately 10 per cent of the country's entire police force), and strikers began to be arrested for ridiculous infractions like whistling the "Red Flag." Over the next two months, some 82 men were prosecuted, resulting in 72 convictions and the imprisonment of 65 men in Mount Eden prison for refusing an order to keep the peace that included instructions not to picket or demonstrate. The imprisonment of the miners led to protests the length and breadth of New Zealand. In Auckland, the IWW were prominent in arranging demonstrations in support of the prisoners. Writing in the *Maoriland Worker* on 4 October 1912 under his pseudonym "Spanwire," Tom Barker related how, "every night last week demonstrations were held by the Grey Statue by members of the Socialist Party and the IWW... thousands attended, and with great cheering many proclaimed their readiness to cause the wheels to cease revolving." On the Friday night of that week IWW members Reeves, Hanlon, Murdoch, Barker, and Blackburn, along with the NZSP organiser Scott Bennett spoke to a packed trades hall in readiness for a march to Mount Eden prison the next day. In spite of heavy rain, Barker estimated that over 5000 people marched to the prison walls on the Saturday where they held speeches, sang the "'Red Flag' with great vim and gusto," and raised cheers "until the large crowd was hoarse." Their efforts were not wasted. Henry Melrose, one of the imprisoned strikers and a later contributor to the *Industrial Unionist*, wrote to his wife that hearing the cheers and the "Red Flag" sung through the walls lifted the spirits of those in jail. The next day a procession for those in prison reportedly attracted some 20,000 people to

Auckland's Queen Street, roughly 20 per cent of the city's total population. On the following Tuesday night, a meeting of workers formed a committee to handle a general stoppage if one was called.

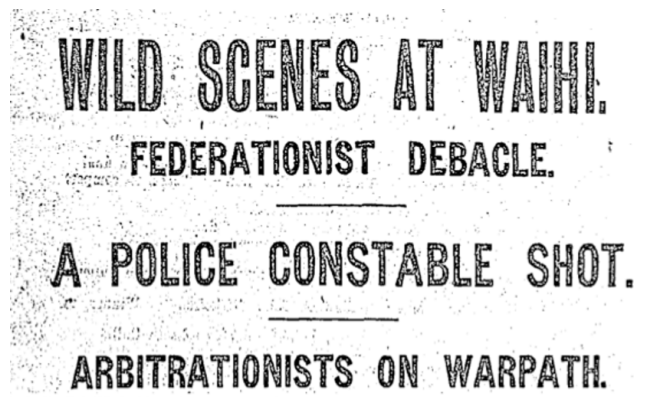
Cullen's correspondence from the time highlights how he allowed the confrontation to develop between strike-breakers (with the support of the police) and strikers. In a letter he clearly delights in re-telling how the strike-breakers "*dealt out many cut faces, bleeding noses and black eyes...It was very laughable to see the...strikers running at the end in all directions.*" According to the strikers and other evidence, some of the police, particularly the mounted men, sided openly with the strike-breakers who were doing the attacking. Some accounts even record Cullen as having attacked miner Oliver Noakes.

The violence in Waihi culminated in November with the violent death of striker Frederick George Evans. There are many versions of what happened that day, but it is clear that Evans was hit by the baton of police constable Wade when the strike-breakers attacked and forcibly entered the miners' hall. Wade received a gunshot wound during the melee. Some testified that Evans delivered the shot. Others maintained that Evans was clubbed before the shot was fired and that the shot came from a strike-breaker. Wade's injuries proved to be minor, but Evans died of his injuries in a police cell that same day. His body was taken to Auckland where a large crowd followed his remains to the premises of an undertaker. On the day of the funeral, a crowd of over 3000 people marched behind his coffin as it was transported to his burial place. Many hundreds more lined the streets to watch the procession pass. Such was the size of the procession that Wobbly Tom Barker reminisced, "*literally the whole of the working class in Auckland marched that day.* Evans was laid to rest under a tombstone inscribed, "he died for his class."



*A memoriam to Fred Evans printed in the Industrial Unionist on the first anniversary of his death*

With the promise of police protection for scab employees, the union re-opened the mine, and the strike was lost. In the aftermath, strike-breakers ran amok through the town. The miners' hall was burgled, and money and papers were removed from the safe. The same fate befell the miners' co-operative store, which had been set up to supply the striking miners with food and fuel. It lost stock worth between £300 and £400.



*How the Dominion reported the events in Waihi*

Throughout the Waihi dispute, many people were disappointed by the lack of concrete support offered by the executive of the NZFL. Despite the federation's rhetoric, the IWW were under no illusions that the tenets of industrial unionism had been truly attempted thus far. In reality, what they had was merely a federation of craft unions. They pointed out that since the May 1912 conference, when the IWW preamble was adopted and the constitution amended, there had

been numerous opportunities to put the notion of industrial solidarity into practice not only in Waihi, but also in Auckland, Timaru, and other centres. Solidarity across trades was the whole point of adopting IWW principles, they argued.

The IWW believed that the NZFL executive failed the miners because they simply collected money when it was industrial support that was primarily needed. General strikes of the industrial departments in support of Waihi were never called. This resulted in what the IWW termed “*organised scabbery*” where one group of workers remained at work while others in the same field struck. A letter from the president of the Waikato Miners Union to the then secretary of the Waihi union further demonstrated what the IWW and its supporters felt about the performance of the NZFL leadership during the Waihi dispute:

*What a mess out boosted misleaders have made of the Waihi business. The Federation? Scatteration or Scabberation would be a fit name...Personally, my hope is that the atrophy that has set in will result in the death for the Federation. It has lived to demoralise industrial unionism.*

The IWW belief in the need for local district councils with the autonomy to act apart from the executive was also reinforced. The NZFL national executive was scattered throughout the country and proved slow to act. The IWW maintained that the Waihi miners should have been in a position to make their own decisions on action, thereby able to deal with each contingency as it arose, rather than referring each vital matter to a body that required at least a week to assemble.

Despite the NZFL executive’s sluggish response, the workers practised solidarity. The leadership may have forgotten that, “*an injury to one is an injury to all,*” but the workers didn’t. Future labour leader Harry Holland came to New Zealand from Australia in the middle of the dispute and co-authored a report into the event entitled, *The Tragic Story of the Waihi Strike*. In it, he noted that the money raised for the striking miners through their unions and levies at their workplaces was a show of worker solidarity that shocked employers and the government. He wrote in quite dramatic terms:

*The Waihi strike was fought out in the East and the West and the South, as well as the North. It was the spirit of Industrial Unionism in practice and par excellence and in Excelsis.*

While the IWW congratulated the NZFL leadership for bringing workers together under one umbrella, they asked salient questions. For what purpose were they united? What was the use of unity without solidarity? After Waihi, they issued a statement saying that the existence of the IWW in New Zealand proved that the NZFL had failed as a revolutionary industrial unionist organisation.

The Waihi affair was a major event in New Zealand's labour history. The town had been heavily influenced by radical ideas, but some deeply conservative elements remained. These people formed a breakaway union that precipitated the strike. In support of the mine owners, the government mobilised a mass of police to invade the town of Waihi and terrorise the workers and community. One miner was murdered. Meanwhile, the strike illuminated differences between the IWW approach and the leadership of the NZFL. The NZFL ignored the calls for a general strike, but plenty of workers demonstrated more active solidarity. Ultimately, a schism between the IWW and the NZFL developed that could not be bridged.

Political action is not only slow; it leads nowhere save into the swamp of barrenness, disappointment, and futility. It is worse than slow; it is rotten. It is a most encouraging sign that the young generation is beginning to lose patience with it.

*Industrial Unionist, 1 November 1913*

## Chapter 5: Direct Action v Political Action

The events at Waihi soured the IWW's trust in the NZFL executive, and another schism was to further divide the two. This time it was a dispute over the correct path to achieve socialism. Was it inside Parliament or out? The IWW argued that it was outside parliament, in workplaces, where the class war was fought on a daily basis, that the struggle for a socialist world should be waged.

### The impact of the big split in the United States

In the US, a debate over the role of political action versus direct action in the revolutionary struggle resulted in a split at the fourth IWW conference held in September 1908. The split divided a majority, who rejected political action and sided with co-founders Bill Haywood and Vincent St. John, and a minority led by Daniel De Leon, another of the founders of the IWW and a member of the Socialist Labor Party of America (SLP). The preamble adopted at the 1905 conference, and subsequently adopted by the NZSP, had a clause that the working class must *"come together on the political, as well as on the industrial field."* It was this clause that De Leon identified to justify his position, notwithstanding that this position would also benefit the SLP. On the other hand, St. John and Haywood argued that entering into politics was divisive, irrelevant, and futile. It was their position that won the support of the majority of the conference. As a result, De Leon left the organisation to form his own chapter, the "Detroit IWW" that adopted the 1905 preamble. The remainder of the IWW sometimes referred to as the "Chicago IWW," revised the preamble to remove all references to political action. This ideological split had been occurring throughout revolutionary industrial organisations worldwide since the very beginning of socialism. Its echo was felt in New Zealand's labour movement in the years that followed the divisive US conference, ultimately leading the IWW to break its ties with the NZSP. It put the IWW at loggerheads with a more moderate New Zealand Federation of Labor (NZFL), one that found the political path increasingly attractive as an adjunct to industrial organising.

The wisdom of relying on political action to achieve change had often been debated in New Zealand. In 1908, at the NZSP conference, party member A. McMahon, argued against sending members to parliament, calling as evidence the cases of British socialists John Burns and Tom



Mann. As McMahon told it, Burns had entered Parliament and ended up dining with the king. McMahon claimed that he had achieved nothing for the working class. The noted trade unionist Tom Mann, on the other hand, remained outside of parliament and ended up in prison. McMahon believed that he had added thousands to the socialist ranks. McMahon contended that nothing had ever been achieved for socialism through parliament. Furthermore, he argued that taking a pro-parliamentary stance encouraged “*a most undesirable class of membership*” referring to those who viewed political parties as means for building their own careers on the backs of the workers’ struggle.

The influential American journalist, Louis Fraina, wrote in the *International Socialist Review*, a monthly American magazine that was supportive of the IWW, that the issue of political action pitted socialist against syndicalist and industrial unionist, and wasted valuable time and resources. In this spirit, the IWW constitution laid down that “*the IWW refuses all alliances, direct or indirect with existing political parties and anti-political ones,*” stressing that they were non-political, not anti-political. In their view, individual members could hold political views, but such views were irrelevant to the IWW—a side issue much like race and religion—which could prove divisive. All that mattered, they repeatedly emphasised, was the struggle in the workplace, for that was where the worker was robbed.

### **Division in the NZFL**

At the 1912 NZFL conference, the debate figured prominently. The Waihi miners submitted a motion that the NZFL not become involved in political action. J.B. King represented the IWW view: “*Workers are not robbed in parliament. They are robbed in the field, the factory, and the mill.*” The conference did vote to end any relationship with the NZSP, but they also voted narrowly to allow any local union to nominate members of the NZFL to run for election.

The ideas of political action in conjunction with union activity held sway among the majority of the NZFL leaders. An early indication of this emerged from organiser Robert Semple. In 1910 he said that the desired change “*can only be achieved by political action directed by the workers organised in industrial unions.*” A couple of years later, Pat Hickey said that while he regarded politics and political parties as spineless, and that no political party was worthwhile of the federation’s support (despite him being a member of the NZSP), the NZFL was not against taking political action. Future support of a political party could not be ruled out. In fact, the NZFL

had already put two of its leaders, Pat Hickey and Paddy Webb, forward as candidates in the 1911 elections. The leadership also advised its members to vote for the moderately reformist Labour Party in seats where there were no socialists standing. The organisation never saw working with the government as a problem and sent frequent deputations to government ministers. Indeed, writing in 1912 in the *Maoriland Worker*, Hickey emphasised the necessity of a labour political party that would be open to all, not just wage earners.

At the 1912 conference, Hickey repeated his stance; he warned of the dangers of ignoring political action. He believed that if the political field was left to the Labour Party, the NZFL would be in danger of losing all influence on New Zealand politics. At the same conference, J.B. King dismissed this argument, saying that if the workers had the power to “*take and hold the industrial field,*” then they would not need representation in parliament.

The state’s ruthless action in crushing the strike at Waihi had led many in the labour movement to conclude that political action was necessary to remove the Massey government and protect the workers’ movement against further attacks. However, to the IWW, this was the wrong conclusion to be drawn from the events at Waihi. Instead, the lesson to take, the IWW argued, was the sheer futility of lengthy strikes without proper solidarity across the branches of industry. Rather than relying on parliament, they called for an increase in direct action and carefully planned strikes.

Through the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*, the Auckland IWW consistently demonstrated little patience for politicians, political parties, and governmental processes. They repeated that supporting a political party was divisive and unnecessary. They pointed out that the bulk of their membership was against political action (but noticeably not all). They maintained that political action was futile, and the capitalist class only allowed parliament to exist because it legalised exploitation. They argued that even if government control was captured, absent a change in fundamental economic relations, the capitalists would still dominate society. They succinctly summed up their position by asking, “*Parliament is a mirror reflecting conditions outside. When your face is dirty, do you wash the mirror?*”

What also concerned the IWW about entering the political field was that it could lead the individuals and organisations involved to compromise their ideals. When those in power took actions to remain in power they were not always in the best interests of workers. One IWW

member noted how the Labor Party in New South Wales, Australia imprisoned striking workers in Lithgow and broke strikes in Sydney despite claiming to be a “*worker’s party*.”

Another argument against giving support to political parties was that it contradicted the IWW belief in self-reliance and participatory democracy. Any good done by parliamentary action was always outdone by the bad, they argued, “*fostering as it does, the ideas of leadership and the tendency of the workers to lean on someone else.*”

### **Direct action gets the goods**

Instead of wasting time trying to enter parliament, the IWW called for direct action. Belief in the power of direct action characterised the IWW more than anything else. Long debates over abstract socialist doctrines and time spent petitioning others to make changes were anathema to the IWW. Activity alone was paramount. As Justus Ebert, a prolific writer for the IWW in the US, explained:

*Workingmen on the job don’t care a whoop in hell for free love...they are not interested in why Bakunin was fired from the International by Marx.*

Instead of waiting for a parliament that might reflect their views, the IWW wanted things to happen immediately. Auckland Wobbly, Tom Barker said, “*an ounce of direct action is worth a ton of parliamentary string-pulling and trades council chin-wag.*” Importantly, even if struggles ended in defeat, workers received lessons that would give them confidence and experience that they could take into the next battle. Additionally, the IWW believed that the struggles against oppression and exploitation would open workers’ eyes to the “*sordid, bloodthirsty, brutal nature of capitalism.*” In Waihi, for example, many workers—perhaps for the first time—saw that the state was the ally of employers and was brutal in its support of them.

Direct action was not just crucial for the IWW’s ideas of worker involvement and building their experience and confidence. Being radical and choosing to act outside of parliament required the IWW to be inventive in their ideas for tactics of direct action. The IWW regarded it as essential that their methods were flexible and open to adaptation and modification by groups and individual agitators in the field. Tactics had to be responsive to the conditions of the fight as they arose. In the US, the IWW often set precedents with their tactics, which were then later adopted by other organisations. They first used the tactic of the sit-down strike at the General Electric

Company in New York in 1906, when 3,000 workers sat down on the job and stopped production to protest the dismissal of three fellow IWW members. It was these kinds of ideas that the New Zealand IWW wished to emulate. In poking fun at more moderate unionists the IWW said direct action was not “*rattling collecting tins [and] selling concert tickets.*”

Direct action involved the worker taking action at the point of production: strikes, passive resistance, sabotage, and the ultimate tool of the working class, the general strike. The IWW in the US spoke boisterously of the tactics that could be used, but in practice, they often placed emphasis on restraint and passive resistance. The notion of passive resistance (often termed passive action) appeared in IWW literature in advance of the more inflammatory language of sabotage.

### **Sabotage**

The term “sabotage” first appeared in IWW literature relatively late, in September 1909. Of all of the ideas espoused by the IWW, the New Zealand media paid by far the greatest attention to sabotage.

Tales of sabotage, real or otherwise, committed abroad in the name of the IWW were routinely printed in the pages of New Zealand’s newspapers as a warning to its readership. The *Wanganui Chronicle* advised its readers that the IWW were “*fanning the flames of discontent by resorting to sabotage, mutiny, treason, anarchy, revolution, and murder....*” It pointed to a story from the US where IWW-affiliated timber workers had allegedly killed several mill employees during a labour dispute. The paper did say that all ten of those accused of murder were acquitted, but it insinuated that this verdict was due to an intimidated jury.

The *Marlborough Express* wrote that sabotage was being encouraged, and explained that this covered everything from “*such devilish work as tampering with railway points, and ships’ compasses...to the destruction of property and frequently of human life.*” The *Thames Star* warned New Zealand of the threat it faced describing the Waihi strike as a fight between “*strikes, violence, and sabotage...against political action, the ballot box, peaceful reform, and arbitration. Terrorism, brutality, ignorance versus reason and intelligence.*” Even the Labour Party condemned the IWW for carrying out “*every act of violence, from cutting telephone wires up or throwing bombs or running a knife under the ribs of... [their] opponents.*”

In New Zealand, despite the attacks from the media, the IWW saw direct action and sabotage as legitimate and important weapons in the class struggle against the employer. The *Industrial Unionist* ran many articles extolling its virtues and explaining its methods and exhorted its readers to carry it out. The newspaper drew heavily on featured passages from Emile Pouget's classic work, *Sabotage*.

The IWW foresaw that as workers got more organised, unions would get larger and strikes longer and more expensive. They considered it essential that sabotage become a weapon to force concessions without striking and losing wages. The *Industrial Unionist* repeatedly called for the workers of New Zealand "...to start wearing wooden shoes." The expression derived from an association with French workers who, in the early days of the industrial revolution, used their wooden shoes (sabot) to damage machinery, hence the term "sabotage."

The mainstream media was only too happy to paint sabotage as destruction of property, adulteration of products and even harm to human life. To the IWW, however, there were different ways of defining sabotage. Writing in 1912, US syndicalists Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster described sabotage as a "*term used to describe all those tactics, save the boycott and the strike proper, which are used by workers to wring concessions from their employers by indicting losses on them through the stopping or slowing down of industry, turning out of poor product, etc.*" They explained that sabotage could take many forms; often two or more kinds of sabotage were used simultaneously and in conjunction with the strike. Auckland Wobbly Frank Hanlon stressed that the IWW were totally aware that nothing could be achieved through the random use of violence, and they held that "life and limb are sacred." The *Industrial Unionist* explained that sabotage didn't mean "poisoning soup, putting ground glass in bread, dynamiting buildings and the like." They stressed that it was not aimed at individual consumers but at employers' profits. Occasionally the target of sabotage was a class enemy other than an employer. The *Industrial Unionist* relayed this rumour about an unfortunate police officer in July 1913:

*A constable, who was known to have been particularly active with the baton in the Waihi Strike, found that his household effects had been delivered in two widely distant parts of N.Z. when removing recently.*

There was an existing history of using creative direct action in industrial disputes in New Zealand. The Maritime Council, which united the seamen's, wharf labourers', miners' and railwaymen's unions, had made use of a boycott in the 1890 maritime strike. They even set up their own shipping company in competition with an employer at one stage. This boycott extended beyond the coal and wood unloaded by scab labour on the ports, to the butchers and bakers who fed the scabs, the boarding houses that sheltered them and the hotels that served them drinks. The *Evening Standard* even reported that when two strike-breakers attended a skating rink in Wellington the band stopped playing and the two were forced to leave with the women present "...emphasising their contempt by gathering up their skirts to escape contamination," as they passed.

The IWW analysed actions in great depth with the understanding that sabotage "*can be made drastic in different degrees—adjusted to meet the degrees of stubbornness shown by the employer.*" In fact, they viewed the tactics of direct action and sabotage as a kind of science, and encouraged the readers of the *Industrial Unionist* to "*study sabotage.*" They echoed Pouget's advice: if sabotage was not going to be used intelligently, then it was better to put it aside.

The *Industrial Unionist* printed a full list of the methods of direct action and sabotage taken from the US IWW newspaper, *Solidarity*:

- The strike – the withdrawal of labour;
- Boycott – calling upon workers and others to withdraw patronage from the employers' commodity;
- Passive resistance strike – obeying rules and regulations to the letter while working;
- Sabotage – an act by one or more workers in the interest of all concerned, directed against the employers' profits, and not primarily against the consumer or public. For example, returning bad work for bad wages, as in Harvey, Illinois, where labourers in response to a reduction in wages of 50 cents per day, cut their shovels in half. The former wages were quickly restored;
- Misdirecting perishable or other matter;

- Temporarily rendering the means of production useless so as to prevent the scabs from working;
- “The Open Mouth,” whereby the workers eagerly and frankly volunteer information regarding the *true* quality of the goods they produce.

**Sabotage is a powerful weapon for forcing better conditions. - - Study Sabotage.**

***Sabotage is a powerful weapon for forcing better conditions – – Study Sabotage exhorted the Industrial Unionist***

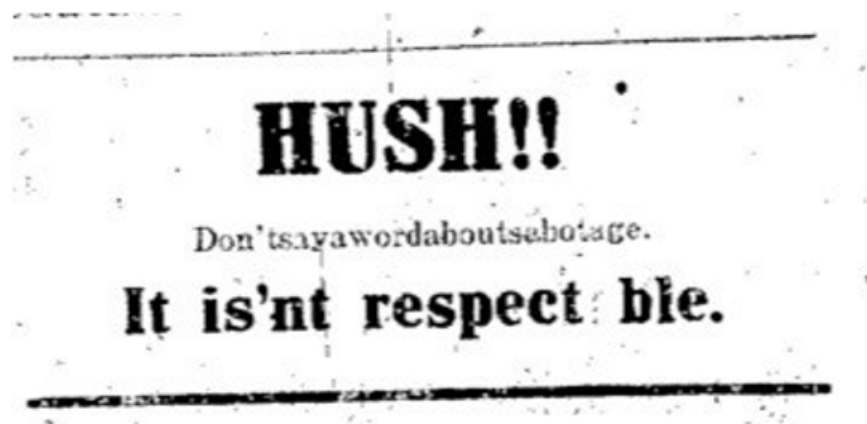
Looking for ways to put their teaching into practice, and looking for alternatives to strike action and arbitration, the IWW suggested to striking Auckland tram workers that they should look to the IWW for lessons on sabotage. They recommended adopting the tactics of the ‘passive resistance strike’ that was gaining popularity in America and Europe. In the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*, the IWW discussed its effectiveness in England. In 1905, in Newcastle, workers were victorious in a dispute despite remaining at work. They did this by following the company’s own rulebook, literally word-for-word. In short, no train was started until every passenger was safely on board and all doors were safely shut. The speed limit was scrupulously observed, even when the train was late. The result was a hopelessly disrupted service, yet no rules were broken.

Other innovative ideas of selective sabotage hinted at hitting the employer in “*the pocketbook.*” Railroad clerks were advised to misdirect the loading instructions on freight, and freight handlers were asked to put on the wrong destination tags on the cars. After all, the IWW reasoned, if workers were to be treated as if they had no brain, then why not “withdraw that brain,” and paralyse industry to force the employer to negotiate conditions favourable to the employee? There were many ways of hitting an employer with sabotage. One story reproduced in the *Industrial Unionist* involved striking orchard workers in Washington State. The employer secured a gang of workers to replace the strikers. Unbeknownst to the farmer, however, the IWW had already organised the replacement workers. The farmer saw the results when he went to inspect their work: 1000 young trees planted upside down, “*their roots waving to the breeze as mute evidence of solidarity and sabotage.*”

The most commonly called for action was the 'go-slow.' Tom Barker claims that their calls for a go-slow had been so successful that between 1908 and mid-1913, employers had complained that their employees were working 15 per cent slower. The tactic was simple. It was effective because:

*The Faster you work, the Fewer Men it takes to do the work. That means More Men Looking for Work. That means Lower Wages. Get Wise. SLOW DOWN.*

In calling for a go-slow the IWW argued they were merely following the example of the capitalist who, when business is slow, limits the supply of goods by slowing down production. Similarly, they reasoned, when unemployment is high, does it not make sense to control the supply of labour by working more slowly? They further remarked that, "*any worker who does not understand this will work himself out of a job.*"



***Sabotage...is'nt respectable*** (Industrial Unionist)

Sabotage and its link with the IWW received widespread attention in New Zealand during 1912 when the economics class run by J.B. King in Waihi became the focus of controversy. Newspaper reports and questions in parliament about King's alleged teaching of sabotage led Prime Minister Massey to promise an inquiry into King's classes. It was reported that King advised his class to work only when the employers were watching and to carry emery powder for dropping into machinery to destroy bearings. It was further alleged that he told workers to carry a chisel at all times to drop into machinery in order to damage cogwheels. He was reported as advising that a plug of dynamite was a useful adjunct to further workers'



interests. Asked to leave Waihi by the Miners' Union, and fearing for his liberty in the face of such charges, King left New Zealand for Australia, where he continued his work for the IWW.

Although this story is part of New Zealand's labour movement folklore, there is some doubt of its veracity. Undoubtedly, King was a fiery speaker. He probably mentioned sabotage tactics in his speeches. But when two members of the NZFL Executive Committee, Bill Parry and Peter Fraser, were pressed for an opinion on the matter by journalists, they both remarked that "*they were greatly tickled by the 'discovery'*" of the alleged sabotage lessons. Fraser emphatically denied them, stating that if King had mentioned such things they would have only been illustrative of practices in other countries, not instructional.

Despite all the scaremongering by the media and the threatening talk of the IWW, the reality of sabotage was quite different. Tom Barker said that he knew of no occasion when anything of the sort in any industry was ever carried out. Rather, he said, it was those who had worked in the US and had seen such activity there passing on their stories. In New Zealand, these tales were essentially used by the IWW for inspiration and as a warning to potential strike-breakers and employers of what could happen.

### **Strikeology**

While they had the ultimate aim of the revolutionary transformation of society, the IWW were still active in organising, supporting and encouraging workers to better their conditions under the existing system. Despite their call for imaginative uses of direct action, they appreciated that at times it was necessary to employ a conventional strike. In the interests of working-class solidarity, the IWW always supported a strike, even if it looked lost. It was a matter of principle to give their unconditional support to workers who committed to action. Writing to Solidarity, Tom Barker said, "A workers' fight is always RIGHT, always, always, ALWAYS! Get in and win *and by every means.*"

The IWW believed that there was a value in strikes that was beyond simply winning improvements in conditions or being educational opportunities. A strike gave the workers a feeling of power and confidence and demonstrated the employer could be challenged and defeated. When a conventional strike was not feasible or wise, workers could use a one-day strike or a wildcat strike, called before the boss was prepared for it.

Even the capitalist media could see the power of strike action, despite their virulent condemnation of any such action taken by workers. The *Industrial Unionist* ironically pointed out that the *New Zealand Herald* had called for a boycott of the report of the Australian NSW Assembly proceedings after a spat with the speaker of the assembly. The *Herald* said that by not reporting the proceedings the speaker would soon be forced to apologise. The *Industrial Unionist* pointed out that even the *Herald* realised that, “*all the press has to do to gain their ends was to go on strike.*”

The IWW repeatedly argued that workers should take the same actions taken by capitalists. The IWW drew on the New Zealand dairy farmer as an example. They argued that the farmer maintained a high price for butter by only allowing a certain amount onto the New Zealand market; the rest was exported. This was no different to workers limiting the supply of labour, as was effectively the case during a strike. The IWW admitted that it was often those that scabbed who benefitted at first. They maintained, however, that if there were not enough scabs, and the workers remained solid, they would be reinstated at a higher rate of pay.

Strikes, like sabotage, were a tactic to be used wisely and sensibly. The IWW used the term “*strikeology*” to describe the careful study of the tactic. They considered that once a strike had reached an impasse, it was better to go back to work, even if seemingly beaten. This way, the organisation was still intact. The workers were still unified, ready to strike again, and able to practice sabotage on the job. This was a better tactic than to say out interminably fighting a dwindling cause, possibly losing jobs to strike-breakers. While a good organisation could manage effective victories, a better one recognised that a change of tactics could turn a temporary defeat into a lasting victory. A good example of such a victory is found in Pouget’s work. He describes how in 1889 striking Glasgow dockworkers had been forced back to work by the use of imported farm labour. In response, they adopted the skill level of the farm labourers, most of whom had not proved very adept at the work. Although the employers had declared themselves initially satisfied with the quality of the farm labourers’ work, within a few days the Dockers were awarded the pay rise that they had demanded.

During a strike staying solidly committed was essential, the IWW argued. They condemned those at Waihi, and in other disputes, who, as soon as the strike was called, left to seek work elsewhere. They argued that it was critical for workers to remain on the job and even go hungry

in order that solidarity was maintained. This fate was better than being a scab and condemned by other workers as such.

They argued that the Waihi strikers should have returned to work when the employers restarted the mines. They said lengthy strikes were wrong in the modern age. It was pointless raising money to keep the strike going because no matter how much money was raised, the capitalists would always have more.

Knowing when to return to work was important, but so was picking the moment to hold a strike. Proper timing, such as during busy periods, or when unemployment was low, could maximise the effects. The IWW pronounced that one-off events—such as the Auckland exhibition held in late 1913—were an opportunity that did not come along often and were the ideal time to call a strike. “*Just imagine,*” they wrote, “*thousands of visitors*” and “*no cars, no lights, no bread supply, silent wharves, no shops open, nothing doing.*”

## **General Strike**

Along with sabotage the other term that the media used to strike fear in the hearts of the readership was the general strike. The term was frequently misused. It was often flung at the IWW to demonstrate that they were a menace to society. There was considerable confusion over what the term actually meant. *The Social General Strike*, a pamphlet by Arnold Roller, outlined the different meanings. It was reprinted almost in its entirety in issues 12 and 14 of the *Industrial Unionist*. Roller wrote that the term general strike leads to misunderstandings “*because it is applied to different general acts.*” He wrote that it was used to designate the strike of all branches in one trade (for example, a general strike of miners) or a general strike in one city or province in demand for such things as better working conditions or wages. The social general strike was defined as the final act of a revolutionary movement, and it cannot be called until the day when all workers are organised into one big union, educated, and ready for the takeover of society. The IWW activist Bill Haywood envisioned that on that day,

*All they [the workers] have to do is to stop working and the capitalists will go bankrupt. Their hope rests in a general strike that will paralyse industry. When that day comes, control of industry will pass from the capitalists to the masses and capitalists will vanish from the face of the earth.*

To J.B. King that day would be the day that the organisation was complete, and “*the boss [has] to go to work...conditions would be rosy, everything would be lovely, and the goose would hang high.*”

The debate about the roles of parliamentary action and direct action totally divided the IWW in the United States. This split was mirrored in New Zealand, and the position of the NZFL was increasingly ambiguous. They ended their formal relationship with the NZSP, but many members maintained political memberships and ran for office. By contrast, the IWW encouraged direct action including sabotage, a tactic that garnered the organisation a great deal of negative media attention. The IWW was interested in the serious study of power at the point of production and liked to analyse actions to determine how to win. The IWW viewed the social general strike as the final tool of the working class to secure a socialist society. In 1913, many workers got a chance to put these IWW ideas to use.

Sabotage can be practised only by the most intelligent and the most skilful workers who know thoroughly the technique of their trade, as sabotage does not consist in a clumsy and stupid destruction of the instruments of production, but in a delicate and highly skilful operation that puts the machine out of commission only for a temporary period. The worker that undertakes such a task must know thoroughly—the anatomy of the machine which he is going to vivisect and, by this fact alone, puts himself above suspicion.

How can there ever be peace between Labour and Capital? There is no peace, nor is there any pause in the struggle between masters and workers. The fight is always on.

*Industrial Unionist, 1 May 1913*

## Chapter 6: Disunity and Unity

The New Zealand Federation of Labor (NZFL) and the IWW moved much further away from each other after the Waihi strike. An announcement printed in the *Maoriland Worker* foreshadowed the growing determination of the NZFL executive to distance itself from the revolutionary politics of the IWW. At the same time, it gave insight into the control they were trying to exert over the organisation:

*The executive of the New Zealand Federation of Labour intimates that it has no connection with certain alleged advocates of revolutionary tactics (professedly I.W.W.)...for which the Federation does not stand; nor is it any way responsible for the utterances and doctrines of such alleged advocates and other irresponsibles. No person is entitled to speak for the Federation unless officially authorised by the executive.*

The Waihi defeat prompted an examination of the NZFL's structure and purpose. The result would not include the IWW.

### **The Unity Conferences**

In response to the Waihi defeat, the NZFL's leaders called a conference of all unions, both affiliated and not, to figure out the best way to proceed in the face of the new government's obvious hostility to organised labour. Initially, the IWW were not invited. Organisers claimed that their address had been lost, but after some pressure from delegates, the IWW did receive an invite. In response, the IWW claimed that they did not receive the invite until the conference was nearly over and, as a result, did not attend.

Some 80 organisations with a total membership of 27,000 did attend the Unity conference in January 1913, although, only about one-third of these unions were actually affiliated to the NZFL. The conference approved proposals to create two new organisations: the United Federation of Labour (UFL) representing the unions, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), to work in the political arena. A second conference in July 1913 was called to offer the chance of those not present at the first to give their views. This second conference exceeded all expectations: 391 delegates from nearly 250 different organisations, representing over 60,000 workers attended. Again, the IWW did not attend. They were highly critical of the unity plans,

believing that they represented a compromise with moderate elements in the labour movement. An invitation to representatives of the employers' federation was extended that seemed to confirm the IWW view of the conference. They expressed disbelief that the same NZFL leaders who had swiftly condemned a similar plan proposed by the Trades and Labour Council in the eighteen months prior to the conference then joined up to such a scheme.

There was a call for criticisms of the proposals to be made, but the IWW argued that it was pointless to make them when the same people who argued in support of the proposals had just previously argued against them. They pointed out the irony that those who had been strongly against compromise with moderates, politicians, and employers were suddenly painting such compromises as the only way forward. In the IWW's own inimitable language, and borrowing a phrase from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, they wrote of the unity scheme: "*Verily it hath an ancient and fish like smell.*"

American W.T. Mills, who had been the instigator of a similar unity scheme in 1911, was later accused by Auckland Wobbly Tom Barker of serving the ruling class of New Zealand through his campaign against the Waihi miners. Such was the enmity that had once been displayed towards the man that a motion had been passed at the 1912 NZFL Conference instructing the executive to "*communicate with all...Labour Organisations throughout the world...the alleged Labour advocate W.T.Mills...[has] spread dissension and disunity in the rank of organised Labour.*"

The conference formally created the UFL with the spelling of "labor" now reverting back to the anglicised "labour." By a narrow margin, the IWW preamble was rejected. This reflected the NZFL leadership's desire to tone down their rhetoric for fear of creating disunity with their new, more moderate, partners and the wish to present a new image to the media. The IWW did not view the rejection of the preamble by the NZFL with regret; rather, they considered that an organisation that was willing to invite employers to their conference could no longer truly "*endorse a preamble which proclaims the class struggle in the first sentence.*"

Pat Hickey, who supported the unity proposals at the time, belatedly questioned this move to moderation years later:

*I have frequently asked myself whether a grave mistake was made when the two Unity conferences were called, that caused the Federation to open wider its doors to permit the enrolment of elements into the organisation that possessed neither the knowledge nor the spirit of those organisations that had been associated together for so long. It is an interesting speculation as to what would have been the end of the Federation if the Labour Movement had remained divided industrially.*

As far as the IWW was concerned, it was the final nail in the coffin of the federation as a revolutionary movement. It pronounced that despite being “*a promising organisation*” just two years ago, it had failed to bring the working class closer to emancipation. They predicted that the future of the new UFL would be one of compromise with the SDP and that such compromise would mean the death of a revolutionary movement. They warned that the movement would merely focus on reforms such as amending the arbitration act and getting rid of the Massey government. The time had come, they declared, for workers to make a choice between industrial unionism with the goal of abolishing the wage system, or a unity scheme that could only lead to piecemeal reforms.

As a result of the NZFL’s proposals, those in the Auckland IWW intensified their efforts to create a separate organisation. The IWW ideology was unique in the New Zealand labour movement of the day because it was the sole revolutionary labour organisation. Although the NZFL leadership had used revolutionary rhetoric in the past and continued to do so if it suited the audience, their lack of desire to challenge the existing structures that dealt with labour matters and their tendency for compromise were evident. Although the NZFL was admittedly hostile to the arbitration system, they were happy to get involved in the political system in other ways. They stood for elections and often worked with politicians in trying to settle labour disputes. They flatly denied any desire to bring an end to capitalism when challenged directly by the media. Ultimately, the IWW was left with no option but to turn their backs on the federation and strike out on their own with their uncompromising, revolutionary approach firmly intact.

For their part, the newly formed UFL was desperate to cut any ties with the IWW. An editorial in the *Maoriland Worker*, responding to an accusation in the *Dominion*, stressed in capitals that, “*THE U.F.L. HAS NO PREAMBLE,*” adding that, “*far from the two bodies being identical, the IWW opposed the old Federation of Labour, and has consistently opposed both the United*



*Federation of Labour and the Social Democratic Party.*” Such statements cemented the mutual animosity.

Although they had turned their backs on the NZFL, the IWW maintained and developed links with other organisations in New Zealand. They were interested in more than simply campaigning for better terms and conditions. They created an especially strong bond with the anti-conscription movement.

### **Against capitalism, against war**

Writing under his pseudonym “*Spanwire*,” Tom Barker outlined the IWW position on war using the Boer War as an example. He said that while lieutenant general Robert Baden-Powell had been declared the hero of the battle of Mafeking, the men who had actually done the fighting were:

*selling matches in the streets looking for work denied them by the patriotic British boss, and ultimately dying the death of working class patriotism in the workhouse hospital. The glory of it all! Men maimed and scarred, legless and armless, dragging out a living death in their own inhospitable country.*

The introduction of conscription in the 1909 Defence Act, which had made registration with a military board compulsory as well as introducing compulsory military training (CMT) for males between the age of 14 and 30, gave anti-militarists a cause. The IWW consistently argued that the only way to end militarism was to overthrow capitalism; they viewed agitation against war as part of the wider struggle against capitalism. It was the capitalist class that owned New Zealand and was “*taking the youth to train to fight their wars and shoot the sons of other workers in other countries.*”

At Waihi, the NZSP and the IWW took a strong stand against militarism. Both organisations had worked with the Waihi miners’ union in supporting the local anti-militarist league. The strength of the league reflected the radical attitude of many in Waihi at the time. When four “brave sons of the working-class” returned to Waihi after seven days in prison for refusing to serve in the conscript army, they were given “the finest welcome ever extended to any person or persons in Waihi.” The four, Carl Rogers, Edward Dwyer, Jack Brooks and H. Marks, were met at the train

on their release from Thames jail by representatives of the miners' union, the Australian Socialist Party, the Waihi branch of the NZSP, and the IWW. They were escorted by several hundred people to a meeting in the main street, accompanied by a band playing "The Red Flag," "Onward Friends of Freedom" and choruses of:

*Hurrah! Hurrah! No conscript oath for me*

*Hurrah! Hurrah! We'll stand up with the free*

*We'll pay no fine, we'll bide our time to jail we'll go with glee*

*And bear the brunt in the glorious fight for Freedom*

IWW members often spoke at anti-militarist demonstrations in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. The *Industrial Unionist* regularly featured news items on the Passive Resisters' Union (PRU), which had been formed in 1912 to "resist coercion, conscription and compulsory military training." They affectionately nicknamed the PRU the "Plucky Rebels Union," held joint meetings with them, and promoted their monthly paper *Repeal*. Although they admitted the PRU monthly was "attractive," they criticised it for carrying an ad for the "militant capitalist paper, *La Squeak du Travail*" (a reference to the moderate Labour paper the *Voice of Labour*). Overlapping membership further linked the PRU and the IWW. E. Kear, who was listed as secretary-treasurer of the Christchurch IWW local in 1914, had been one of the PRU delegates to the Unity conference in 1913. The PRU, perhaps influenced by the IWW, were no strangers to taking controversial direct action of their own. On one infamous occasion, they removed a Boer War gun from Victoria Square in Christchurch and dumped it into the Avon River.

### **Practising solidarity**

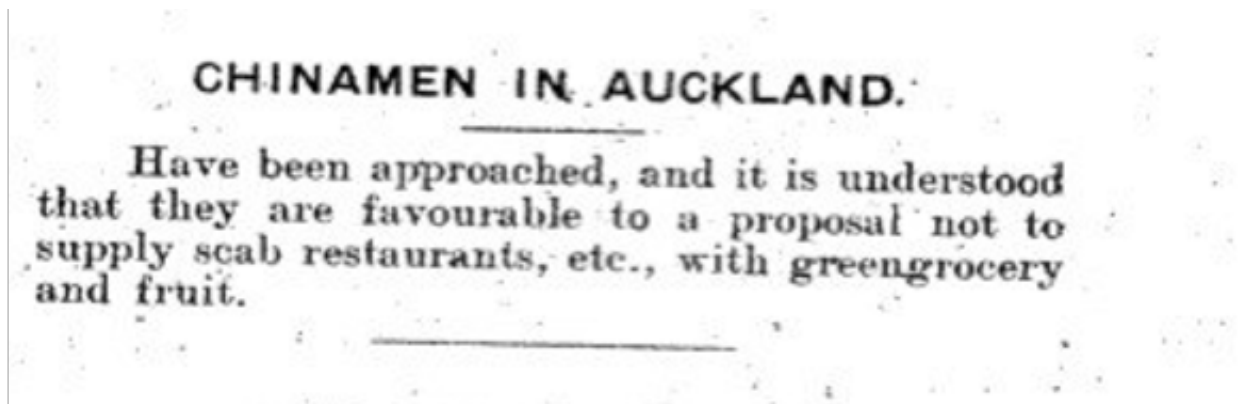
The IWW were also happy to hold out a hand of solidarity to those they called the "proletarian" NZSP members who were active in propaganda work. They maintained good relationships with these activists and others whose primary concern was the emancipation of the working class. They were uncompromising in their revolutionary aims, but they were always ready to offer their support to any branch of the working class involved in a struggle with capitalism. Paraphrasing

the *Communist Manifesto* they said, “we have no interests apart from the working class,” and will always support that class because, “we are of, and still in, the working class.”

Application No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Membership Card No. \_\_\_\_\_  
**Application for Membership**  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ 191  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Industry \_\_\_\_\_  
Street Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State or Province \_\_\_\_\_  
The above applicant, having subscribed to the principles of the preamble, and having answered in the affirmative to the questions, expresses his desire to become a member of the **Industrial Workers of the World**.

***Application form for membership of the IWW as printed in the Industrial Unionist***

Their approach extended out not just to workers of all occupations but reached out irrespective of race and gender. To the IWW, race and gender were not critical points of difference; only class divided and united people. At the IWW founding conference in Chicago, Bill Haywood had declared that the organisation “*recognises neither race, creed, colour, sex, nor previous condition of servitude.*” The New Zealand IWW endorsed this position; the only division they recognised was the class division that splits society into the exploiter and the exploited.



***“Chinamen in Auckland”. The IWW reached out to all members of the working class without distinction of race***

employers and wage workers. Membership was restricted to wage-earning members of the working class only. In reality, it was rare that a university graduate or professional person was associated with socialism in New Zealand in the early twentieth century.

**J. ROBBINS**  
**FRUITERER**  
**QUEEN ST. - MASTERTON**  
We ask you to support him, and when visiting the  
**Chinese** shops to think of the "White Man."  
**WORKERS PLEASE REMEMBER!** 

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Think of the "White Man": An Ad from the pages of the *Maoriland Worker*, which, unlike the *Industrial Unionist*, was not always inclusive of all ethnicities

#### Ki nga kaimahi Maori: the IWW & tangata whenua

The IWW made a distinct approach to working-class Māori. Until the *Industrial Unionist* appeared in 1913 little effort had been made to build links with Māori in New Zealand. The NZFL had virtually ignored Māori, and they likely paid the price for this neglect as some Māori volunteered as strike-breakers. The *Bay of Plenty Times* reported how the "natives" viewed the strike as affecting them adversely and were "anxious and willing to assist in the suppression of the strike" by signing up as specials.

In the NZFL publication, *The Tragic Story of Waihi*, Māori working as strike-breakers and involved in the violence are described as having their "primal savage instinct predominating." Such racist attitudes towards Māori were extremely widespread among white working-class men of the time. Despite this, Māori workers were keenly interested in organising and industrial unionism. For example, during the Waihi dispute, a delegation from the Huntly miners' union paid a visit to Hora-Hora where a hydro-electrical plant was being built, with a view to organising the workers there. Nearly all the workers were Māori. After listening to the delegates, they

expressed great interest and asked for a Māori speaker to be sent to discuss the matter further. However, it seems that the matter went no further. The *Maoriland Worker* noted the “*complicated and isolated*” position of the works, but it may also have been a lack of priority accorded to organising Māori.

Unlike the NZFL the IWW were keen to demonstrate their egalitarian ideas and recognised the importance of building links with all workers irrespective of race. The *Industrial Unionist*, uniquely for a workers’ newspaper, published a series of articles in the Māori language. In July 1913, IWW member Percy Short wrote the first appeal to Māori in their own language. It linked the workplace struggles on the waterfront and in the mines with the confiscation of Māori land. It talked about how ‘*in the old days*’ before colonisation, everything belonged to everyone (na te iwi katoa nga mea katoa). Translating the Industrial Workers of the World as “iuniana o nga kaimahi o te ao”, it was entitled *Ki nga Kaimahi Maori*:

*Ki nga Kaimahi Maori*

*E hoa ma, –*

*E tuhituhi ana tenei reta ki nga mate, ara nga tangata e kii ana nei he kaimahi.*

*Whakarongi mai! Tenei te huarahi tika mo tatau, mo te iwi rawakore, e whakakotahi ai tatou kia rite ai o tatou kaha ki o te hunga e pehi iho nei ia tatou.*

*E mohio ana tatou, ko nga mea papai katoa i te ao, he mea mahi na tatou ko nga kaimahi. Na reira e kii nei te I.W.W. (Iuniana o nga Kaimahi o te Ao), e tika ana kia riro i nga kaimahi aua mea papai. Engari, kei raro i te ahuatanga o naiane e riro ana te nuinga o nga hua o te werawera i te hunga, e kii nei he rangatira; Aa, he wahi itiiti noa iho e riro ana i nga mokai nana nei i mahi. He penei tonu te ahuatanga i nga whenua katoa i tenei ra.*

*Kati, i mua, ki te mahi tetahi tangata, ka puta te painga ki te iwi nui tonu: ko te whakaaro o tetahi, te whakaaro o te katoa. Ko nga tangata o mua, ka mahi tahi, ka kai tahi, ka ora tahi, ka mate tahi. Kua rereke taua tikanga inaianei. I mua, na te iwi katoa nga mea katoa. Inaianei, kei nga rangatira anahe te oranga, ara te whenua, nga maina, nga tima, nga mihini nunui, nga tereina me era atu mea. Heoi ano te mea kei a tatou, he haere ki te pinono mahi ki nga tangata*

*nana nei aua mea. Ko te kaupapa o to tatou oranga kua tahaetia e te hunga whaimoni. Kati, ma tatou ano e whakahoki mai ano te kaupapa o te oranga.*

*Me pehea tatou e rite ai to tatou turanga ki to te hunga e pehi iho nei i a tatou. Koia tenei. Me huihui tatou ko te iwi rawakore e haere nei ki nga rangatira ki te patai mahi atu, me te mea nei kei te mau mai te tiini a tana rangatira ki o tatou kaki. Kei o tatou puku ke taua tiini e mau ana – te tiini o te hemokaitanga. Ka kore he mahi, ka kore hoki he kai. Hei aha ma te rangatira to hemokaitanga. No nga mokai ano tena mate.*

*Heoi, me uru koutou ki tenei luniana whawhai, ara, te I.W.W., e ki nei: “Me aha to kara me to karakia. Kia piri! Kia kotahi te whakaaro! Kia manawanui! Kia maia!”*

*“E nga kaimahi o te Ao katoa, Whakakotahitia; kaore he mea e ngaro, ko te Ao katoa e riro mai.”*

*Na te Komiti o te pepa nei.*

To Maori workers

Friends,

*This letter is written to the ones who are suffering, the people we call the workers.*

*Listen! This is the correct path for us, the poor who have no possessions. We unite to gather our strength against the people who are suppressing us. We know that all the precious things in the world were made by us workers. Therefore the I.W.W. (the union of the workers of the world) says it is correct that the workers want to obtain all that is precious. However, under the current mechanisms, most goods produced with the sweat of the people are owned by what we call the bosses. Only a small portion is given to the slaves who do all the work. This is how it is in all countries of the world.*

*In the old days, the work of one person went towards the well-being of everyone, of the whole tribe. The thoughts of one were the thoughts of everyone. The old people worked and ate together. They struggled together. They lived and died together. However, the tikanga – the custom – has changed completely. In the old days, everything belonged to everyone. Now all*

*the wealth belongs to the bosses: the land, the mines, the ships, the big machines, the trains and a lot more. All we can do is go to the people who control our belongings and beg for work. Our wealth is being stolen by the money-chasers – the capitalists. It is through us that our wealth will come back to us.*

*How can we prepare our stand against those who oppress us? This is how. We, the poor, who have to go to the bosses and ask for work, should meet and say we are chained around our necks by the bosses. A chain is tightened around our tummies – the chain of starvation. If there is no work, there is also no food. The bosses don't care that you are starving. This struggle only affects their slaves.*

*Come join this fighting union called the I.W.W. We say: "What does it read on your banner and what is your chant? Let's stick together! Let's unite our thoughts! Be resolute! Be brave!"*

*"Workers of the whole world, unite; you have nothing to lose, you have the world to win."*

*By the committee of this paper.*



***Ki nga Kaimahi Maori (to Maori working men). The heading for the first article addressed to Maori as members of the working class***

In total, there were seven articles all in the Māori language written by Percy Short, who was a member of the *Industrial Unionist* Committee, and a licensed Māori translator. He had worked giving lessons in Māori in Feilding. One of Short's articles during the strikes of November 1913

appealed to the Māori not to join up as special constables or strike-breakers. Gathered together, the articles provide a remarkable attempt to give Māori access to IWW beliefs within the framework of Māori philosophical and cultural values. The response of Māori to these articles is unknown.

## **IWW & gender**

The fact that the IWW mentioned race and gender was unusual. Their professed attitude to race was straightforward, if simplistic: all members of the working class were welcome. The IWW's position on women was similarly straightforward. In the US, women had been at the forefront of the IWW since its inception. While the number of female representatives at their inaugural Chicago convention (around 12 in total) was quite small, the issue of gender equality was always at the front of the organisation's agenda. Quite a few of the early pioneers of industrial unionism were women. Those who spoke at the inaugural conference included Mother Jones, a powerful advocate of miners' rights and campaigner against child labour, and Lucy Parsons, an anarchist, labour organizer, and the widow of Albert Parsons.[\*] Luella Twining, who later managed Bill Haywood's speaking tours, was a voting member of the union.

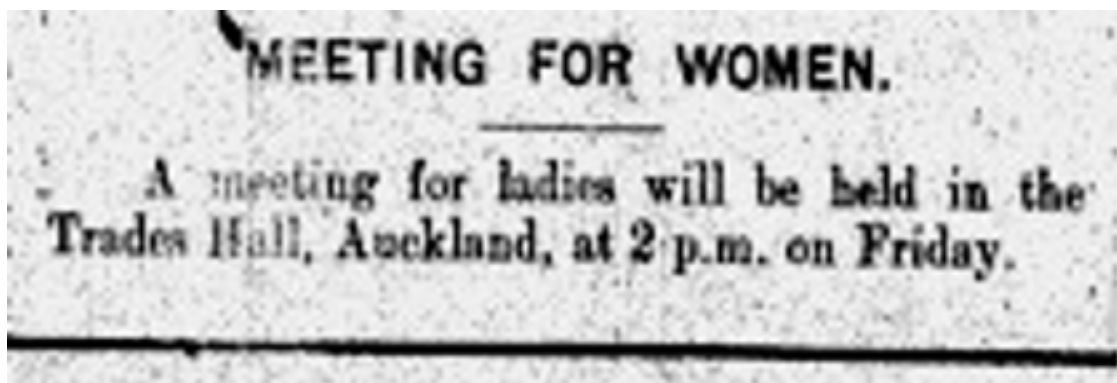
In their first few years, the IWW in the US attracted female revolutionaries, most notably Elizabeth Gurley Flynn (to whom American wobbly Joe Hill dedicated his IWW song 'Rebel Girl') and Matilda Rabinowitz. The IWW in the US organised chambermaids and prostitutes who, in 1907, went on strike in New Orleans. In a study of the place of women in the IWW and their literature, historian Ann Schofield concludes that the IWW "*vigorously and effectively organised women*" and sincerely included them into the organisation.

The masculine character of the IWW in New Zealand, however, has been the subject of some debate. Historian Erik Olssen talks of the "*vision of manhood*" which flowed through the ideology, and how there was a "*constant talk of manhood,*" although he acknowledges that industrial unionism gave men and women a "sense of their power and dignity." Historian Francis Shor expands on this idea of a masculine socialism and talks of a "virile syndicalism" running through the IWW. As evidence of the appeal to manhood that disregarded women workers, he points to a passage in the New Zealand pamphlet, *A Chunk of IWWism*, where the author A.H. (probably A.H. Holdsworth, a member of the Auckland IWW) writes that "A man who won't stand by his mates is no man at all". However, historian Melanie Nolan argues that the New Zealand



IWW was not particularly virile, and in general, this wave of radicalism led to an increase in women's groups. She does accept, however, that both sides of the Waihi dispute deployed masculinity in support of their side. The *Press* described the strike-breakers as "*clean, healthy young fellows,*" and Prime Minister Massey painted the special constables as heroic examples of men describing them as "*lean, sinewy, brown men from the country.*" Conversely, the supporters of labour denigrated the manliness of the strike-breakers and dignified the strikers as "*true men.*"

Women have always been a part of industrial action in New Zealand, organising their own unions, settling disputes, and supplying support to striking men, but there is scant evidence of the role women played in the IWW in New Zealand. The only available evidence shows that the IWW had at least one active female member. A certain Mrs Chapman was the newspaper commission agent in 1913. A meeting solely for women was advertised in November 1913 but the subject of the meeting's discussion remains a mystery.



***Meeting for women advertised in the Industrial Unionist***

The reach of the IWW to women may have been limited due to the nature of their employment, although this was not the case in the US. Women formed a relatively small part of the paid workforce in New Zealand; they were also overrepresented in occupations that had remained non-unionised, such as clerical workers and domestic servants. A study of the inner city community in Freeman's Bay, Auckland at the end of the 18th and beginning of 19th centuries revealed that three-quarters of women in paid work were employed in domestic work.

The IWW's view of the role of women workers was firmly and solely based on class position. In the US, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in a work entitled '*The IWW Call To Women*' wrote

*To us society moves in grooves of class not sex. Sex distinctions affect us insignificantly. It is to those women who are wage earners or wives of workers that the IWW appeals. We see no basis in fact for feminist mutual interest...nor of any possibility or present desirability of solidarity between women alone. The success of our program will benefit workers regardless of sex.*

To the IWW, the struggle of the working class and women was seen as one and the same thing. The *Industrial Unionist* wrote about the suffragettes in Britain and congratulated them on their use of direct action tactics, but then appealed for them to do the same to benefit the whole of the working class.

While the IWW did hold a progressive position, there is no evidence that the IWW addressed the more fundamental hierarchies associated with traditional gender roles, such as questioning what constituted “*women’s work*”. Similarly, there is no evidence that the IWW in New Zealand made attempts to organise women or speak directly to their experience in the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*.

### **The IWW and the farmers**

Being aware of the importance of reaching out to all workers in New Zealand, the IWW made appeals to not only farm labourers but also to small farmers. Because of their indebtedness to mortgage companies, many small farmers essentially worked for the banks, not themselves. The IWW demanded that they acknowledge that they were on the same side as ordinary working people in the cities and towns. In the eyes of the IWW, country residents’ lack of consciousness about capitalism was explained by the fact they were isolated from strike areas and relied on facts supplied by the “*journalistic prostitutes of the capitalist press*” to gain an understanding of the situation. The IWW expressed sympathy for their plight as “*overworked and much exploited.*” They warned farmers that hard times were coming and that capitalism would eventually ruin the majority of them. They pointed out that large companies like the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Company were buying up land in large quantities; the cost of freight was rising because of the increased monopolisation of transport by a few large companies, and, most importantly, they pointed to increased competition from countries such as China, Argentina, and Russia, that were beginning to farm vast acres of previously untouched land. All of this, they predicted, would seriously affect New Zealand’s share of the world markets

and force many farmers into unemployment. At that point, the IWW declared, they would appreciate why the workers were battling capitalism in the cities.

### **IWW and internationalism**

As well as building connections between disparate groups at home, creating international links was also important to the IWW because they saw themselves as part of the international working class. They wrote in the first issue of the *Industrial Unionist* that they were not “*merely a medium for the expression of the opinions of any small group existing in a particular locality,*” but rather that they were a “*local and national mouthpiece of an international movement.*” New Zealand Wobbly Frank Hanlon explained:

*The extent to which capitalism stretches its tentacles around the globe is illustrated by the fact that steel rails have been imported from China to America, the land of steel rails. No one country is independent of this...all are bound together economically.*

He reasoned that since capital was international, and the employing class was international, then the interests of the working class were also international. An article in the local IWW paper described that, after setting up the International Steel Trust, one of the “*steel kings*” remarked that they had “*an organisation more powerful than any government in the world.*” The IWW said that this demonstrated the importance of global organising. An international industrial union could also be more powerful than any government. As far as the IWW was concerned, the correct, and only possible, response to an organisation such as the Steel Trust, which pitted worker against worker, beyond national boundaries, was to organise, as one big union, in every single steel mill in the world.

As a corollary, close links were built and maintained with Australian workers, American workers, and with those further afield. An appeal from Swedish workers to help free imprisoned comrades was printed in the *Industrial Unionist*. An appeal for a boycott and blacklisting of Swedish ships and goods was issued with a reminder that the yellow and blue of the Swedish flag represented only the capitalists of that country, not the workers. They reminded their readers that there are “*...only two nations-the capitalist class and the working class.*” International solidarity was of central importance to the IWW, and they looked for ways to give practical effect to it.

In the period following the defeat of organised labour at Waihi, the NZFL adopted a more moderate approach that included a political as well as an industrial response. The IWW rejected this approach. They maintained an unrelenting dedication to direct action at the point of production and unity based solely on class position. As a result, the majority of the labour movement moved further away from the ideals of the IWW and deliberately disassociated themselves from previously held radical beliefs. Meanwhile, the IWW cemented relationships with other movements and people. Their impact on the anti-militarist movement was considerable. Their written approaches to Māori were ground-breaking. The inclusion of women was unusual for the time, despite their approach being somewhat simplistic and reductionist. While inflexible in their determination to acknowledge no oppressions other than class exploitation, they did seek to give effect to their egalitarian economic ideas and include those on the margins of the mainstream white, male workforce. In addition, their embrace of internationalism, while concentrated on those places with a high level of cultural similarity (US, UK, Australia, Canada), did seek to embrace and unify workers thereby reducing the power of nationalism.

Workers of New Zealand, get up and start doing things. The workers of other countries are on the move; let us move with them! Our conditions are anything but what they should be, for the hours are too long and the pay too short to permit us to live as human beings should live.

*Industrial Unionist, 18 November 1913*

## Chapter 7: IWW Communications - *Sticks of Mental Dynamite*

New Zealand workers were kept informed about events at home and abroad through pages of the IWW newspaper, the *Industrial Unionist*, produced by the Auckland branch. News items about activities from fellow workers in Australia, America, and Europe were mixed in with local reports and articles. A regular column even updated readers about worker activities in the Sandwich Islands, now known as the Hawaiian Islands.

It was essential that the IWW develop its own channels of communication. It was and remains difficult for radical organisations to get widespread public attention and to get fair and accurate reporting of the issues they raise. The capitalist-owned media is, and always has been, biased in favour of their interests. They frequently misrepresent issues as a result of a desire to deliberately mislead readers, because of a lack of knowledge, or because they misunderstand the arguments being advanced. Writing in the *Maoriland Worker*, IWW member Frank Hanlon argued that New Zealand's media was guilty of manipulating the news items it received from the US to present the IWW as an organisation whose activities consisted of "*blowing up buildings, creating riots, wholesale machine-smashing, etc.*" The New Zealand media gave the local branch a similarly unsympathetic reception following its first meeting in 1908. *Grey River Argus* reporters were aggrieved by a motion passed at that first IWW branch meeting expelling all members of the media. Unsurprisingly, the attendees had felt it unlikely that the *Argus* would give impartial reports. In response, the newspaper thundered, "*Usual experience of the gentlemen who cry aloud against a biased and unfair press...generally comes from men of a more or less eccentric nature.*" Another description in the *Observer* was even more scornful:

*The agents of the self-styled Industrial Workers of the World are seldom men who toil. For the greater part they are either callous adventurers or weak-minded dupes, who have never followed a useful occupation. Spreading the Satanic doctrine of murder and destruction is their chosen occupation, and the unthinking type of worker is the tool they select to carry out the most dangerous part of their mission.*

Throughout its short existence in New Zealand, the IWW was under a consistent and sustained attack by the mainstream media. Various scandals were reported from overseas in an attempt to discredit the IWW in the eyes of the New Zealand public, and the most prominent members were individually held up for inspection and even ridicule. Charles Reeves, who was described

in court as a “*prominent exponent of the IWW doctrine*,” found his occupation as an oyster opener mocked by the *Observer*, who referred to him as “*Mr Oyster Reeves*.” He was fined £1 for a charge of disrupting a compulsory military drill with cries of “*turn your heads you cockatoo*.”

This hostile relationship with the mainstream media meant that the IWW had to turn to alternative, independent methods to communicate with their target audience. The *Industrial Unionist*, self-proclaimed as the “*most revolutionary paper south of the line*,” first appeared as a monthly in February 1913, with the intention of it becoming a weekly as soon as possible. The paper was primarily sold on the streets and at meetings, and it is possible some sympathetic shopkeepers stocked it.

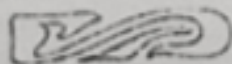
In the first issue of the *Industrial Unionist*, the importance of working class media was emphasised. Editors expressed hope that in future “*a hundred working class newspapers will be founded in New Zealand and Australia*.” The IWW considered the landscape of radical media deficient and decried that organs of this kind were necessary to fight capitalism. Their ambitions were so lofty that they aimed to replace the *New Zealand Herald* as the bestselling daily. The IWW viewed the existing mainstream newspapers as “*rags*” that were “*owned and controlled by men whose material interests must for ever conflict with the interests of the workers, hence, therefore, the misrepresentations, the hypocrisy, and bare-faced lying*.” They were not far off the mark in this claim; the history of the New Zealand media is one of ownership by competing businessmen and groups, each with their own set of political ideas and agendas.

Within the *Industrial Unionist*, there was no place for “*advertising for the boss*,” nor was there room for “*over the teacup columns*” (e.g. insider or gossip columns), sporting or society sections, adding that they can “*get plenty of sport out of the movement*.”

Read the

# INDUSTRIAL UNIONIST

The Australasian Organ of the I.W.W.



"The most Revolutionary Paper  
South of the Line."

**GET IT!**

Address: 118a, Victoria Street West, Auckland, N.Z

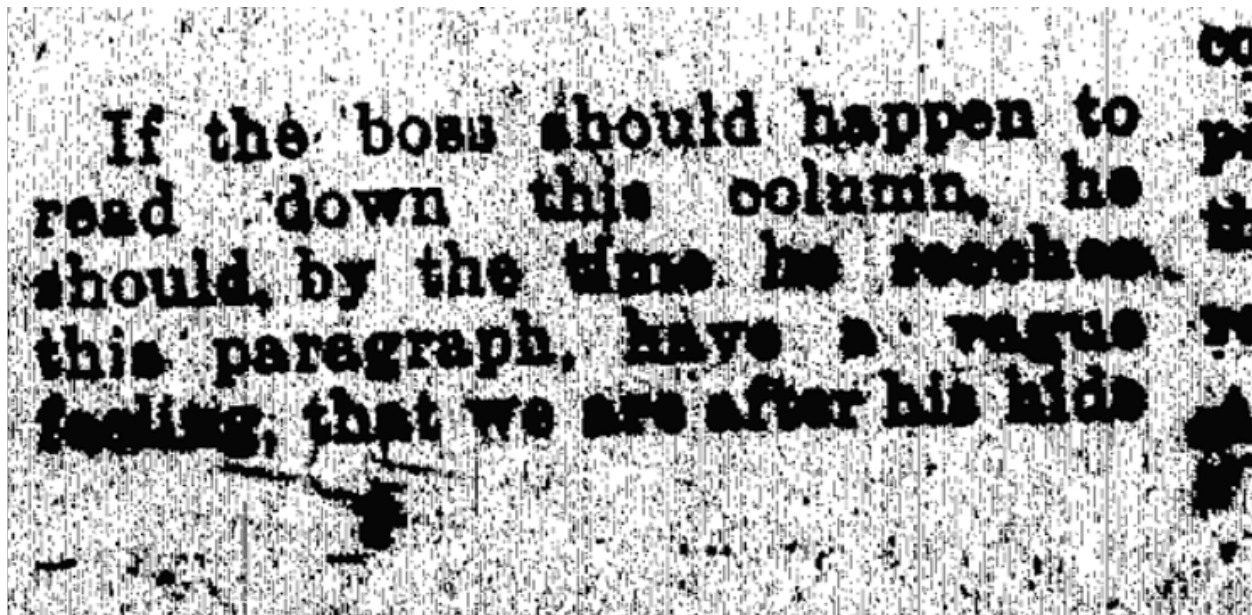
***"The most Revolutionary Paper South of the Line"***

The people writing and printing the *Industrial Unionist* worked entirely voluntarily. As anti-capitalist they felt that they could not take advertising from capitalists with a clear conscience. Proudly they directed the worker to note that:

*The fact that this newspaper, being free from advertisements, contains exactly the same quantity of reading matter as one twice its size which is half full of advertisements.*

These veiled swipes at the *Maoriland Worker* exemplified the undercurrent of irreverent humour that ran through every issue of the *Industrial Unionist*. Many businesses did advertise in the *Worker*, and the revenue from advertising was actively sought from sponsors irrespective of their political beliefs. Indeed, NZFL organiser Robert Semple, who was also a member of the *Worker's* executive board, spent much of his time soliciting adverts.





***“If the boss should happen to read down this column he should, by the time he reaches this paragraph, have a vague feeling that we are after his hide”. A typical example of the type of irreverent humour found running through the Industrial Unionist.***

The *Industrial Unionist* only lasted from February until the end of November 1913. During its short lifespan circulation increased steadily, and by July 1913 it sold 4000 copies of each issue. This compared well with the more established *Maoriland Worker’s* circulation of 10,000 at the time.

The *Industrial Unionist* presented itself as a weapon in the fight against capitalism and worked to capture the attention of the worker. Articles written by workers, along with short, boldly-printed statements, broke down the theory of class war and industrial unionism into memorable and easily repeated slogans. Expressions such as “*an injury to one is an injury to all*” were a lesson on the importance and necessity of worker solidarity encapsulated in just a few words. Editors of the *Industrial Unionist* saw the beauty in simplifying a political theory. They said that the IWW preamble was:

*remarkable for its condensation of a whole philosophy in so few words. There, in language too plain for a standard 1 child to misunderstand, is stated the economic position of the Working Class, the nature of the struggle and the remedy.*

The simplicity of the presentation of the IWW ideologies was designed to appeal to the workers and help them understand the nature of the capitalist system. Writer Ted Howard underlined the attraction of this simplicity:

*the idea of organising all the industrial workers of the world into one union, and then by someone pressing a button, stopping the wheels of industry and starving the damned capitalist out, seemed as [easy] as falling off a log.*

However, along with the slogans and simplification of political ideas, there were longer articles expounding theories and lessons on subjects such as economics and sabotage techniques. Erik Olssen in his work *Red Feds* has cast doubt on whether the followers of the IWW were looking for education; he argues that “*visions of class solidarity and industrial unionism appealed to miners not for intellectual reason, but because it gave coherent expression to the logic of their everyday working experience;*” and that “*probably few of those rank and file revolutionaries had much knowledge of syndicalist and anarchist ideology.*” Evidence, however, clearly counters Olssen’s argument.

### **Worker education is worker power**

The IWW were determined that workers should be educated and empowered because they believed workers’ emancipation was only possible through the acts of a radicalised educated working class. To this end, the IWW in New Zealand continuously encouraged the workers to educate themselves and to participate in decision-making. “*What a monster is that thing ignorance! Work for its abolition!*” the *Industrial Unionist* exclaimed.

NZSP-implemented worker education in Waihi was a powerful example of the importance placed on it by the era’s radical socialists. There, they ran a writing competition for schoolchildren with a gold medal prize for the best essay. Entitled, “*The People’s Flag, the Red Flag,*” the subject of the competition was a comparison of living conditions under capitalism to those in a post-revolutionary society. This event was a response to a competition run by the head teacher of the Waihi South School whose subject was the Union Jack flag. The teacher organised the competition after hearing union president Bill Parry call the Union Jack a “*piratical flag.*” The teacher instructed his pupils not to enter the socialists’ competition, but the response was overwhelming. The president of the Waihi NZSP, Charles Smith, wrote that “*entries are*

*rolling in such numbers as to predict a right royal time for capitalism in the near future from our young companions in revolt.”*

Across the world, Wobblies were lauded for knowing their revolutionary political theory. The US-based influential revolutionary socialist and syndicalist journal, *Internationalist Socialist Review*, which had a readership in New Zealand, carried serious heavyweight articles. The people that wrote the articles for the *Industrial Unionist* were self-educated members of the working class who demonstrated a wide knowledge of subjects. New Zealand Wobbly Charlie Reeve, for example, is described as having “*a love for, and a knowledge of, the humanities, and was capable of giving faithful resumes of the writings of Carlyle, Tolstoy, Voltaire, William Morris, and Thomas Paine.*” This appetite for literature amongst socialists of all hues was not unusual during this period. In his memoirs, Pat Hickey relates how the future treasurer of the NZFL, John Dowgray, landed in New Zealand with “*15/-s in his pocket and with two tons of books.*” Robin Hyde’s description of her IWW-father spending all his money on books is equally illustrative of an organisation that valued the written word.

The fact the IWW ran economics classes (such as King’s in Waihi) was typical of their dedication to education. Another early Wobbly, George Farland, who was widely read, had a passionate belief in the value of education and considered the union library just as valuable as the strike fund. Tom Barker referred to literature as “*mental sticks of dynamite*” with which to fight the class war. The *Industrial Unionist* continually exhorted its readers to contribute to their paper. Contributions came in the form of poetry, cartoons and articles. A poem by the Auckland Wobbly Alec Holdsworth entitled *The Ballad of The Agitator* described the workers’ struggle in all corners of New Zealand:

### **The Ballad of the Agitator**

By Alec Holdsworth

You shall read the tale of our lives, red-writ,

On the night-black walls of Pain.

You shall trace our trail by the jibbet posts,

Fair memorials of our slain!

Where the whited bones, in dark undertones,

Still defy the accursed chin.

In the silent North, where the pine woods sleep

Till they shudder, reel, and crash;

Where the miser-mountains their hoar reveal

At the torrent's threat and thrash;

We unfurled the flag, yea, the old, red rag,

In defiance of Law and Lash.

We obeyed the call of the siren-West,

Her deceits, we made them plain;

For her lovely eyes o'er the sky-line peep,

And her lips are sought in vain,

But we sowed the seed, in the hour of need,

And the slaves will reap the grain.

We have shown our hand in the drowsy East,

And the yellow man, and brown,

They have joined the ranks of our martyred ones,

They have laughed the tyrant down.

There are lonely graves, 'mid the eastern waves,

That shall find a fair renown.

We are known where coral and palm creep out

From the sun-white, glaring sand;

We have camped out-Back in the deadly heat

Of the Never-Never land.

Be it kauri pine, be it sea-deep mine,

We have battled, hand to hand.

We have scoured the breadth of the Seven Seas,

With the old, red flag in tow,

We have told the man on the fo'c'stle head,

He has told the boys below.

Oh, the grimy ones, they are sons of guns

When there comes a kick for dough!

There is not a land where the slave must sweat,

Not a town of soot or sun,

But we dare the worst, and we give our best,

And the work is freely done.

Tho' no tear be shed o'er our martyred dead, we are ever marching on.

Whilst remains a breath, twixt the earth and sky

To unfurl our ensign red

Whilst the hand of toil bears the brand of shame

Whilst the children cry for bread

We will make no pause. We'll defy the laws

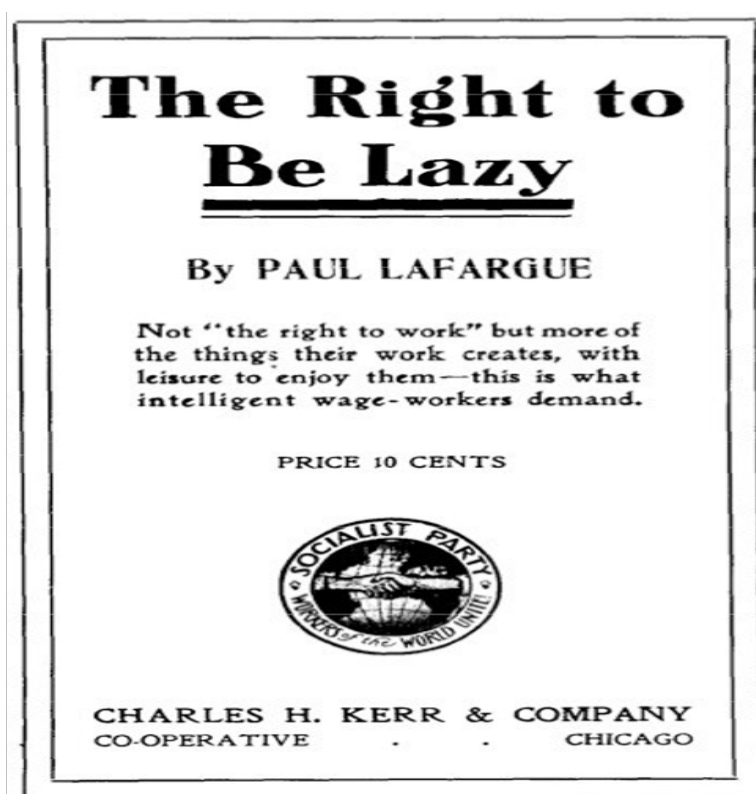
Till the last of us be dead

### **Disrupting bourgeois ideas**

As part of worker education, the IWW consistently challenged the status quo. Revolutionary unionists developed “*counterpublics*” where the hegemony of bourgeois and “*respectable*” working class values were challenged by a competing set of values in the public sphere. The IWW continually asked workers to question what was normal and respectable. They pointed out that those who perpetuated the ruling class ideology—the teachers, the historians, and the writers—all needed to earn a wage, so they had an interest in teaching what the ruling class wanted to be taught.

Through the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*, the IWW explained how the ruling class maintained their hegemony through the “*hypnotism*” of the working class: constantly fooling the worker into giving their consent to be robbed, making them slave-like, and destroying their ability to act in their own interests. The system began its hypnosis with early indoctrination. In pre-school, children were given dolls and toy guns to play with that reinforced gender and racial stereotypes. Later, at school, history teachers indoctrinated young people with bigoted nationalism. Reading lessons were used to bolster a fierce commitment to property rights under the guise of upholding honesty and contentment with one's lot in life. The flag was saluted, and hymns and patriotic songs were sung. Upon leaving school, workers faced a daily torrent of lies and misinformation from the media. All of this wore away resistance to oppression as “*dripping water wears away a stone*.” Sadly the hypnosis was so complete that institutional coercion and oppression, namely judges, police, and soldiers, rarely had to be used.

It is difficult to quantify the extent of IWW's influence on cultural change. By making people aware of the fallibility of the existing system, some may no longer accept that those in authority necessarily know best, or are acting in their best interests. The ideas of the IWW resonated with some workers and helped give voice to those previously unheard. Many ordinary working people wanted more out of their lives, not just in financial terms, but also in terms of the respect they were accorded. Evidence of a shift in attitudes appeared in the newspaper reports of the day. The New Zealand Observer complained that even the factory worker and tram conductor were swelling out their chests and styling themselves as producers of wealth. Another commentator protested in total disbelief that workers said that "*we will do as little as possible for our wages...and they are cheered by the hundreds on a Sunday afternoon*".



***"The Right To Be Lazy" – One of the pamphlets sold by the IWW***

The fundamental nature of work was questioned, and this highlighted the new creed's rejection of traditional bourgeois values. One writer said that the real payment to workers under capitalism was premature death; overwork, low pay, and noisy, dangerous workplaces were the norm. Instead of the right to work, the newspaper argued that the working class should be calling for "the right to leisure." Conversely, they said that instead of a "*fair day's pay for a day's*

work,” the call really should amount to “*a poor day’s work for a poor day’s pay.*” The length of workers’ hours was held up as a prime example of what was wrong with the system, and the IWW repeatedly called for a working week of 40 hours. They advised the Auckland tramway workers (in the rather gendered language of the time) that rather than working forced overtime, “*you might be taking your wife or girl out for a walk, or to a picture show.*” At the 1912 NZFL Conference, J.B. King spoke of the day when the working day would be “*a six hours’ day, then a four hours’ day...*” In a speech at Waihi, he declared, “*the less you work, the longer you live,*” and advised the workers to “*take as many 15 minutes [breaks] as you can.*”

The IWW urged the go-slow to increase employment; they marketed a pamphlet by Paul Lafargue, entitled *The Right To Be Lazy*. He argued that wage workers must abandon the idea that they should work hard, and, instead, accustom themselves “*...to working but three hours a day, reserving the rest of the day and night for leisure and feasting.*”

The IWW’s questioning of the work ethic was so exhaustive that the initials were often reported by the media to stand for “*I Won’t Work.*” Instead of taking this as an insult the *Industrial Unionist* accepted it and asked: “*I Won’t Work...long hours, under unhealthy conditions, at an unorganised ill-paid task. No, who will?...I will work necessary hours, under healthy congenial conditions, granted my every need is satisfied. Now who won’t?*”

New vocabulary also reflected cultural change. The IWW addressed each other as “*Fellow worker*” and signed off letters as “*Yours fraternally.*” That which had previously been held in high esteem was mocked and considered unimportant. In one instance, the Presbyterian minister in Waihi, unsettled by this irreverence and rejection of existing social mores, complained to the commissioners who visited the town during the strike. He said that the trade union had not lowered the Union Jack flag over their hall when the king died, nor had they raised it for the coronation of the new king.



## **N.Z. I.W.W. Circular.**

### **INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD.**

Fellow-workers,—The members of the I.W.W. Local, 175, Auckland. wish to call your attention to the case of J.

Ettor and A. Giovannitti, in order to obtain a united protest from the workers of New Zealand against the attempt of the textile employers of America to jail or electrocute these innocent men; in order to intimidate and prevent organising in future.

suggest the passing of the following or of a similar resolution:—

“That this meeting of ..... of New Zealand protests in the name of Freedom and Justice against the dastardly attempts to victimise J. Ettor and others whose worst crime is loyalty to their fellow-workers in time of trouble.”

All statements in this circular can be amply verified. Resolutions of protest, and money collected for the defence fund, can be sent to this branch, and will be immediately forwarded to headquarters in America and duly acknowledged in THE MAORILAND WORKER.

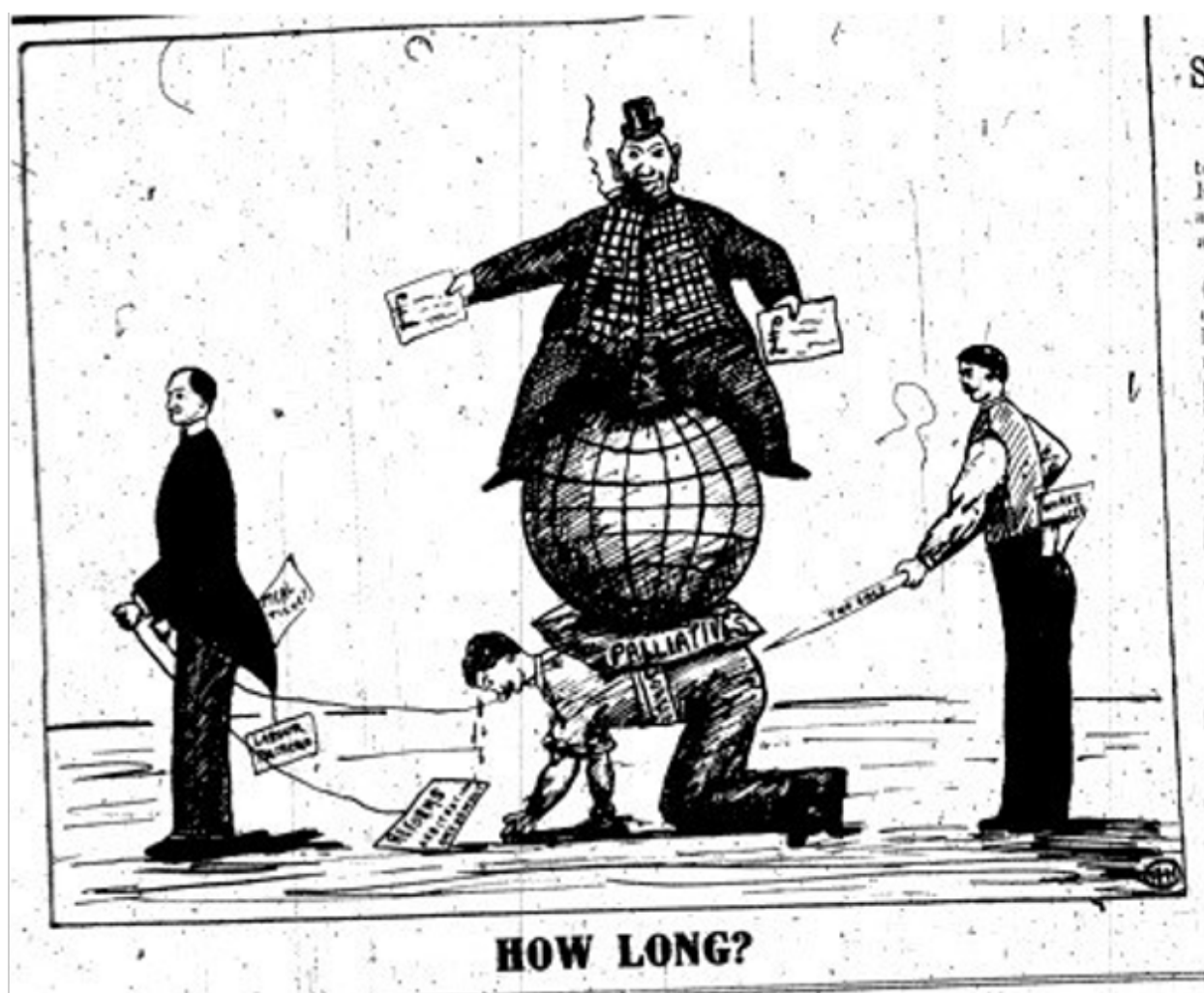
Do not be influenced by factional feeling or prejudice; your protest may turn the scale in favor of these men, who risked imprisonment and death in the interests of the workers.

Write without delay.—Yours fraternally, C. T. REEVE, Sec.-Treas.

Queen's Buildings,  
Wellesley street, Auckland.

*Circular demonstrating the use of the new forms of address, fellow worker and yours fraternally*

Icons of the status quo and respectable society were denigrated with new titles: the “*mare*” (mayor) of Auckland; capitalists were “*fat*”; Lieutenant General Baden Powell was referred to as “*Bathing Towel*” when on a visit to Auckland; members of the church were dismissed as “*sky pilots*”; moderate labour leaders were referred to not only as “*fakirs*” but also “*responsibles*” and “*respectfuls*” in recognition of the media lauding them as such. The IWW often referred to themselves as “*irresponsibles*,” and one frequent contributor called himself “*The Irresponsible*.” Farmers were referred to as “*Henry Hayseed*” and “*cow charmers*” among others. The Federation of Labour often went by the initials *F.O.O.L*. The capitalist system as a whole was called the “*octopus*” in view of its tentacles reaching across borders.



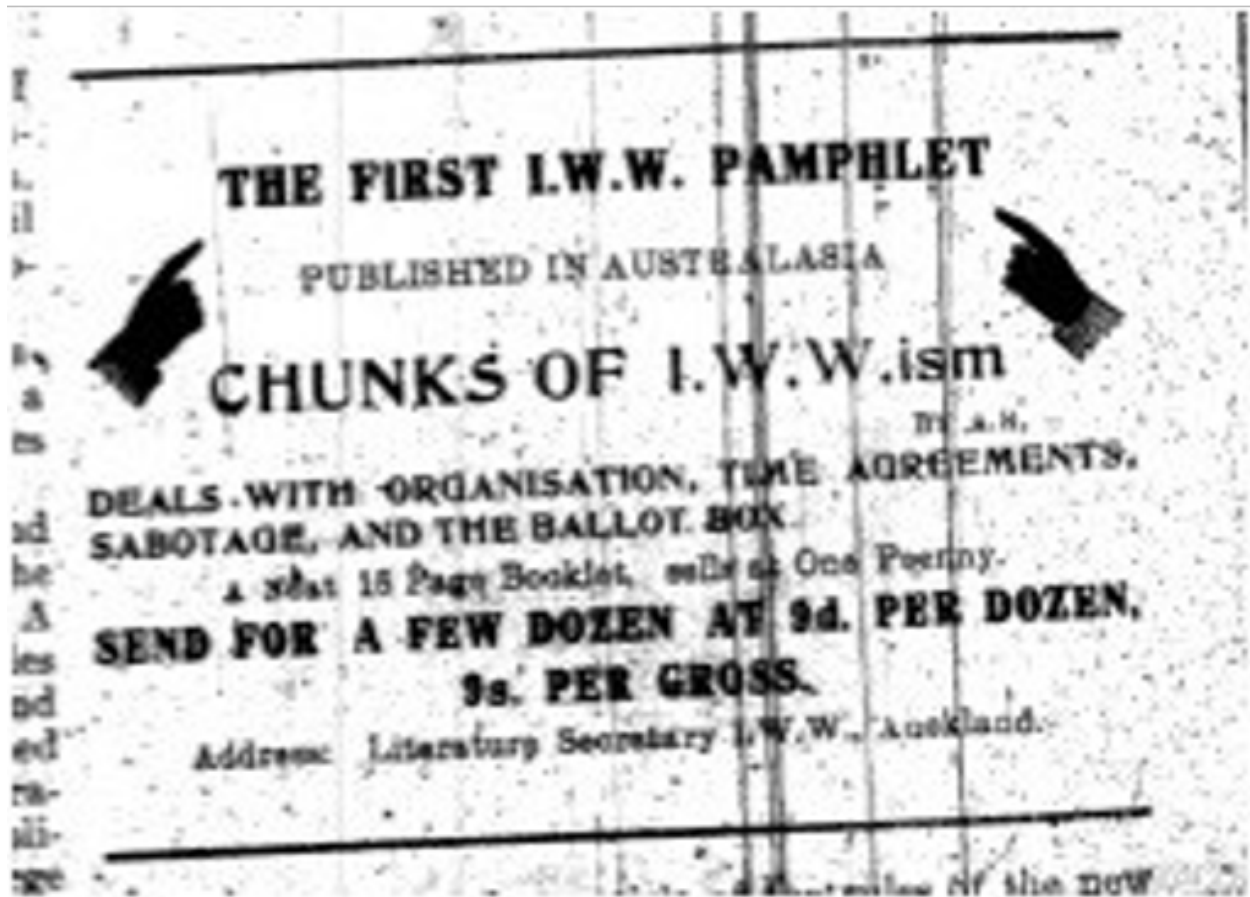
*The worker typically being crushed by the capitalist, who is often overweight in IWW art*

IWW artwork mocked non-worker elements of the dominant culture and reinforced class solidarity. Workers were drawn as either noble warriors of the class war or as downtrodden half-starved victims of capitalism; capitalists were universally depicted as well-dressed, fat, white men.

### **Pamphlet propaganda**

In addition to the *Industrial Unionist*, pamphlets were a vital and complementary propaganda tool. “*When speakers are scarce and papers fail, the handy pamphlet is always available as a silent propagandist,*” proclaimed the *Industrial Unionist*. Among the range of pamphlets advertised for sale in the paper was a self-published one-penny pamphlet entitled *Chunks of I.W.W.ism*, written by A. Holdsworth. Consisting of a collection of articles from the *Industrial Unionist*, it was proudly advertised as the first IWW pamphlet published in Australasia. It sold at least 1500 copies. Another self-published pamphlet, *Industrial Unionism: aim, form, and tactics of a Workers’ Union on I.W.W. lines* by Frank Hanlon, reportedly sold in the region of 2000 copies.

The sales announcement came with a pre-emptive apology for the 25 per cent profit on each pamphlet sold. In case anyone considered the IWW to be capitalists masquerading in revolutionary clothing, the local IWW explained that this money was used to build up the literature department because the source of pamphlets not printed in New Zealand was precarious. An IWW member met every boat from the US to see if any fellow workers were aboard with an “appropriate swag” of new reading material. Similarly, an anarchist group in Auckland was a further source of syndicalist and anti-parliamentary literature.



*Chunks of I.W.W.ism. The first I.W.W. pamphlet published in Australasia*

Other “*silent propagandists*” were stickers placed on walls, lampposts, billboards, and in workplaces. They were described as measuring 2 inches by 2.5 inches and had text such as:

**HOW TO MAKE YOUR JOB**

**EASIER**

**GET WISE TO I.W.W. TACTICS**

—  
**Don't Be a Pacemaker.**

**Someone has to be Slowest-Let**

**It be you.**

---

**Don't Be a Bosses Man by Trying**

**To Do More Than Other Men.**

**Faster Workers Die Young.**

**Live a Long Life.**

**JOIN THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS**

**OF THE WORLD,**

**THE FIGHTING UNION.**

---

**MAKE**

**MARGARINE WAGES**

**MEAN**

**MARGARINE WORK.**

**JOIN THE I.W.W.**

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## Literature for Rebels.

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Are you a live wire desirous of pushing propaganda in the most effective manner?

If so, become an agent, and communicate with the Lit. Secy. I. W. W. corner Swanson and Albert Streets, Auckland.

The following publications supplied post free:—

I. W. W. Its History, Structure, and Methods.	3d.
Eleven Blind Leaders	3d.
Why Strikes are lost and how to win	2d.
The Farm Labourer and the City Worker	2d.
Industrial Unionism	2d. each, 1s. 6d. per dozen
The Right to be Lazy	3d.
Economics of Labour	1d.
Social General Strike	2d.
Industrial Unionism the Road to Freedom	3d.
Direct Action and Sabotage	3d.
Wage Labour and Capital	1d.
Chunks of I. W. W.ism	1d. each 9d. per dozen, 9s. per gross

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*"Literature for Rebels"—Pamphlets on sale advertised in the Industrial Unionist*

## **On the street: IWW public meetings**

In addition to pamphlets, stickers, and the newspaper, meetings held in halls and in the open-air were crucial to counteract the misinformation distributed by the mainstream press. Speakers professing beliefs in revolutionary industrial unionism and socialism were frequently seen on the streets of Auckland, addressing crowds numbering in their thousands. The IWW's own Tom Barker, Edwin Sayes, Fred Williams, and John Desmond were particularly renowned. There was a man called Jack Harris who cycled around the whole of the Auckland province delivering the revolutionary message and a "Grandma Green" who was described as the "*grand old woman of the revolutionary movement.*" When Peter Fraser and William McLennan gave a talk on the Waihi Strike in May 1913, the *Industrial Unionist* said it was an "*instructive address to those depending upon the capitalist sheets for their news.*"

In the first six months of 1913, the IWW held over 100 outdoor meetings in Auckland. In June they reported that they ran an average of four outdoor meetings a week in spite of the inclement weather. In the same issue of *Industrial Unionism* the first IWW social was reported to have been a great success. A full timetable of the upcoming activities was advertised including a speakers' class held every Thursday. There was a promise for more debates and educational classes. These activities followed on from the traditions of the Auckland branch of the Socialist Party; in addition to meetings and lectures, it offered members an active and vigorous social life. A "*Socialist Sunday School*" had 50 children attending in 1912 under the tutelage of an NZSP member, Oscar McBrine. The party arranged informal teas every Sunday and dances once a fortnight. It organised May Day parades, fancy dress balls and picnics, all with healthy doses of socialism. Tom Barker, shortly after arriving in Auckland, remarked that he did not know "*where this kind of education was so consistently and regularly done as in Auckland...*"

The October 1913 issue of the *Industrial Unionist* vividly describes the outdoor meetings of this era. It wasn't just socialists lecturing in the street, but a wide variety of different people representing different ideas:

*After missing two meetings the Local appointed Fellow-worker Jim Sullivan as city organiser. He was soon on the job whipping lazy speakers into line, result: very good meetings. Sunday night, September 7, doubtful weather caused the outdoor chairman to close the street meeting, accept Fellow-worker Kotgen's offer of a talk inside and Seand invited the audience up to the room.*

*Several went and listened to an interesting talk on Syndicalism, followed by a lively discussion. Sunday afternoon, September 14, Charlie Reeves and a chairman held a big crowd at the foot of Queen Street; likewise at night, with other speakers assisting. Sunday afternoon, September 21, Reeves again held forth, and held a big crowd for an hour and a-half, in spite of an eloquent single-taxer on one corner and Wild Willy the Woolly prohibitionist on another; he was followed by F. Hanlon, who gave a short, but trenchant talk on Constructive Industrialism, mentioning Sabotage too. At night a splendid meeting was held near Grey Statue. Fellow-worker F. Williams, after a long absence from the "box" delivered a telling half-hour talk, the enormous crowd never moving. W. Murdock (sic) and others followed.*

To add to the mix of ideas and people, overseas visitors often spoke at meetings. The Auckland branch frequently had IWW members from America and elsewhere who gave lessons from their struggles. In one week E.J.B Allen from England (who had come to reside in New Zealand), two French workers from San Francisco, and George Hardy from Australia all visited the branch.

### **The sounds of the IWW**

Songs were an important weapon in the IWW armoury of propaganda, both in New Zealand and abroad. Tom Barker "*described singing and choruses*" as the "*hall-mark of a successful movement.*" They were easy to remember and useful in spreading the revolutionary message. When the IWW were originally considering producing a songbook in the US, its chief proponent J.H. Walsh, an organiser for one of the strongest locals in Spokane, Washington, pointed to the ease with which the popular songs of the day swept the country and remained in people's memories. Tom Barker described how IWW songs caught on and were sung at meetings in between speakers to keep hold of the audience's attention. The US IWW printed its own *Little Red Songbook* that was sold in New Zealand. Years later, John A Lee recalled people singing the IWW refrain at meetings:

*Work and pray,*

*Live on hay*

*You'll get pie in the sky*

*When you die*



This chorus, from a Joe Hill song written in 1911, was a parody of the hymn “*In the Sweet Bye and Bye*.” Parodying hymns and popular songs was a common feature of IWW songs and was one way of subverting what the bourgeoisie held up as respectable. Typically the lyrics of the songs ridiculed the ruling classes and their structures and examined the exploitative nature of capitalism with the aim of stirring up revolutionary feelings within workers. They dealt with aspects of life with which workers could identify. The songs were not only of protest, but also spoke of hope for a better future. The first verse of the song entitled the “*Commonwealth of Toil*,” written by American IWW activist, Ralph Chaplin, declared:

*But we have a glowing dream*

*Of how fair the world will seem*

*When each man can live his life secure and free.*

*When the earth is owned by Labor*

*And there's joy and peace for all*

*In the commonwealth of Toil that is to be*

New Zealanders produced their own IWW songs. The miners of Waihi had their own version of “*God save the King*,” which called for “*God to save local Wobbly J.B. King*” instead. Even as early as 1909 the *Evening Post* reported the IWW organising secretary T. Park was writing songs. The *Post* wrote that one song, set to the tune of the well-known hymn “*Beulah Land*,” had a final verse that ran:

*The creed that held you long in thrall*

*The boundaries fixed by knaves, shall fall*

*When Yellow, Brown and Black and White,*

*The workers of the world unite*

The newspaper described how all six verses, and a “*formidable chorus*” could be heard ringing out from meetings at the socialist hall in Manners Street.

### **On the road**

To help spread the IWW message the Auckland local sent speakers around the country. In his diary, union activist Jack McCullough wrote that he heard an IWW speaker sent from Auckland while he was in Whanganui. In 1913, Tom Barker embarked on a trip to the South Island with “*a bundle of potential rebels in his bag, a pile of Industrial Unionists*. Naturally, as befits a truly proletarian organisation he didn’t travel first class, unlike the “*responsible union leaders*” of the New Zealand Federation of Labour. Instead, he was “*more likely to be seen emerging from underneath a tarpaulin on a goods wagon*.” A couple of months later Tom Barker wrote up his experiences for the *Industrial Unionist*. His report was mostly positive despite being arrested for obstruction when conducting a street meeting in Christchurch and fined £10 with £7 costs. He reported that both Wellington and Christchurch received him enthusiastically and that workers in Christchurch had formed a local. At the time of writing, he fully expected another six locals to form by Christmas. Other places where he was received keenly included Greymouth, Runanga, Blackball, Westport, and Paparoa. In Waiuta he received his best reception. At a meeting organised by I.W. Parrot, he met P. Scholland, T. Stonbridge, J. Bond and D. Jones, all of whom he described as “*direct actionists*.” He held a meeting there that lasted three and a half hours and sold all his literature, too.

As the year 1913 progressed, and, partly as a consequence of the gathering strength of the anti-conscription movement, the IWW, in common with branches throughout the world, increasingly had their outdoor meetings stopped by police. The *Industrial Unionist* reported of “*vague hints and threats floating through the daily press in regard to deporting soapbox agitators*.” They expressed their fear that a parliamentary bill was being considered that would limit free speech and the right to picket during times of strike. In preparing themselves for the possible battle they warned that they were ready to resist any attempt to suppress free speech.

The issue seemed especially problematic in Christchurch. Local 2, a newly formed branch of the IWW, reported that prosecution for street speaking was increasing. Clearly, it was not an activity that was punished uniformly, however. On the same night that anti-militarist P. Fletcher went to jail for street speaking, the “*Starvation*” (or more commonly Salvation) Army, speaking on the

very same street, escaped any attention from the local constables. The *Marlborough Express* reported that the Christchurch council turned down an application for a permit to hold street meetings by the local IWW, yet granted permission to the Salvation Army and the Plymouth Brethren.

This repression was the only small hindrance to the growth of the IWW in New Zealand. By the middle of 1913, they had increased rapidly in size; a report in the August issue of the *Industrial Unionist* showed the IWW Auckland local in fairly sound financial health. The report of the half-yearly general meeting found “all reports satisfactory.” The secretary reported that finance was encouraging; money was raised from pamphlet sales and donations at open-air meetings, and they were able to hand a sum over to the financially stricken *Industrial Unionist*. They also moved to “larger and more commodious premises.” However, the report did not give exact monetary figures; this may have been intended to hide the perilous nature of the IWW’s finances. Certainly, they generated some income. Although the paper struggled financially, pamphlet and literature sales were healthy. Their two self-published pamphlets had almost sold out, with over 1,000 of the two-pence pamphlet being sold.

The IWW used a whole range of different communication methods to get their messages out to working people: the *Industrial Unionist* newspaper, stickers, posters, pamphlets, street speaking, speaking tours, and face-to-face meetings. These were all common in the era before radio. The mainstream media also contributed to people’s knowledge of the IWW, and many workers supported the organisation in spite of the media’s attempts to discredit it. The idea of industrial unionism grew dramatically in a short time. But despite this growth, a battle in the second half of 1913 was to see the whole union movement tested to the maximum.

The Boycott will be used with telling effect on all small businesses and others who contribute in any way towards the weakening of the strike

*Industrial Unionist, 11 November 1913*

## Chapter 8: The Great Strike of 1913

Newly radicalised unionism in New Zealand received a stern test sooner than those involved anticipated. Matters came to a head towards the end of 1913 when “*strike fever spread like a huge epidemic wave*,” according to the New Zealand Wobbly and miner Edward ‘Banjo’ Hunter. New Zealand was rocked by a series of strikes that became collectively known as the “Great Strike.”

On 6 October 1913, sixteen Huntly miners were laid off allegedly due to a seasonal shortage of work. The sixteen included three prominent union officials and thirteen who were described as “militants” by the *Maoriland Worker*. The newspaper noted that fourteen new workers had been employed since the layoffs, making a mockery of the management’s claims of being overstaffed. All 560 miners stopped work a fortnight later due to the treatment of their comrades. Meanwhile, in Wellington, on 22 October a stop-work meeting was held by waterside workers to discuss a dispute involving their shipwright allies. At issue was the decision by the Union Steamship Company (USS Co) to refuse to uphold a 30-year-old practice of giving a travel allowance to workers. When the employers met, they decided that workers were in breach of their existing agreement so they locked them out. Needless to say, the workers were incensed; by the next day, riotous scenes were occurring in the capital. Such was the fury of the workers that they responded to the Mayor’s refusal to give permission to use the Basin Reserve for a meeting by purportedly tearing down the gates and holding the meeting regardless.

Strikes immediately erupted elsewhere. On 28 October the Auckland wharf workers struck in sympathy with the Huntly miners. By November, in Auckland, around 10,000 people had joined the strikes and the city was virtually at a standstill. The desire for radical change infected other parts of the community: inmates at an old persons’ home struck to protest about the quality of the food, and prisoners at Lyttelton Gaol formed a union and tried to affiliate to the United Federation of Labour (UFL).

As the strikes and demonstrations proliferated, the state deployed the largest body of coercive power since the New Zealand Wars. Marines and machine guns were landed at Wellington’s

wharves. The huge guns of a royal navy warship were pointed at Auckland. Socialist activist Harry Scott Bennett wrote, *"You would imagine that Auckland was in a state of civil war."* As in the 1890 strikes, the government again recruited thousands of volunteers to help defeat the strike and to reopen the wharves. Many were recruited from the countryside and enrolled as "special constables." Armed with specially made batons that exceeded the normal length of those issued, and some with their own firearms and horsewhips, they became known as "Massey's Cossacks" and "specials." The situation quickly developed to the point where the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the strike represented a *"modified civil war between town and country."*

### **The police, the military and the "specials"**

As in Waihi the previous year, the police were encouraged to use force to deal with strikers. Police Commissioner John Cullen urged his men, *"If they don't go, ride over the top of them."* Colonel Chaffey of the Mounted Rifles advised the specials to *"let the first charge be a lesson to the workers of New Zealand. Pick your man and put force behind your blow, and, if you have to shoot, shoot straight."*

Many men on both sides of the dispute carried guns; it was not made illegal to do so until 1921. Wellington gun shops reportedly sold out of stock, and journalists gave accounts of gunfights. There were reports that during the disturbances two strikers and one special were wounded by gunshot. One striker, J.P. Hassett, allegedly fired shots at Police Commissioner Cullen but missed. Luckily, a jury found him not guilty of this charge, but, unfortunately, he received the maximum sentence of two years imprisonment with hard labour for having taken part in a riot. In Auckland, Charles Chatfield, a known associate of prominent Wobbly, Charles Reeves, was arrested and charged with attempted murder. The 18-year-old had aroused the suspicions of passing special constables because he was wearing one of their badges. They stopped to question him, and he tried to flee. In the ensuing scuffle, he pulled two loaded revolvers and allegedly shouted, *"for every man taken we'll take a boss, a scab, and a special."* The revolvers were quickly removed from him. On his way into the police station after his arrest, he was heard commenting to a friend that *"it was all for the good of the cause."* Mercifully for Chatfield, when his case came to trial in the following February, the judge believed his excuse that he never aimed the revolvers; he was merely attempting to remove them out of his pockets. He was acquitted of the charge.

In total over 3000 special constables were enrolled in Auckland and Wellington where they were trained and protected by the military. They were also stationed in smaller towns across the country, with approximately 800 in the Christchurch-Lyttelton area.

The extent of military involvement during the dispute is not fully known, but there is evidence that they played a significant part. General Godley, the Commander of the New Zealand Forces, wrote proudly of his army who, disguised as police, helped repress the strikers:

*At Wellington, the Mounted Rifles...made short work of the strikers. Mounted and armed with stock whips, they rode through the town, and not only effectively dispersed riotous gatherings but pursued the rioters into the houses and then dealt with them in such a manner that they had little stomach for a continuance of law-breaking.*

When Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, was later asked why he had departed from traditional policy in letting the military be involved in an industrial dispute, he explained that the action had been taken at the express wish of the New Zealand Government.

### **Rural solidarity**

Before the strikes, the Farmers' Union declared that they would come into the cities in the event of any industrial trouble to load their produce onto ships. The IWW warned that they would be considered a "social enemy" and declared:

*If the farmer and his son are going to carry on distribution and production, then the IWW proclaims that it is the duty of the working class to go landwards and look after the farms...If you do dirty work Mr Farmer, you will get a dirty deal. Stay at home and mind your own business.... If you value your stock, your herds and your house....*

The *Maoriland Worker* issued a warning to farmers of the possible consequences of their actions through the re-telling of a story from Australia, which was very much in the IWW tradition:

*On being refused a meal at a farm an itinerant worker "gave a meaningful look at the grass which was long and dry, and said "tell the missus Bryant and May ain't dead yet" (Bryant and May being a brand of match).*

A notice that similarly fiery spirits existed in New Zealand accompanied this tale. *Industrial Unionist* contributor George Bailey was arrested in Wellington and charged with inciting arsons during the Great Strike for suggesting to the specials' horse groomers that they drop a few lit matches in the stables.

The relationship between the farming community and the urban working class was not, however, quite as adversarial as it may appear. Many farmers who came to the towns with an opinion of the strikers as hotheads and a menace to the country actually returned to the countryside with a different attitude about them and their cause. Clearly, there was some sympathy for the strikers in 1913 in the rural areas. The media reported that many farmers and others in rural communities offered to billet the wives and children of strikers until the troubles were over. There were other reports of farmers being supportive of the strikers. A farmers' co-op donated "£1000 and a hundred tons of potatoes to the strike fund." The NZ Truth reported a Mr. Fox of the Farmers Union declaring that there was much support for the strikers, and more would be done in support "*but unfortunately they were in the grip of the moneylenders.*" Another farmer was quoted as saying:

*We did not want our butter to rot...we came to Auckland for that purpose only... [however] we found that we had to do ordinary police duty...I have had my eyes opened now, and realise that we have been made use of by the merchants of the city to crush the workers in their effort to obtain fair treatment.*

### **Urban solidarity**

As could be expected, different groups of organised workers supported each other. The *Industrial Unionist* reported many instances of this solidarity displayed between workers during the strikes of 1913. Ship workers refused to work with strike-breakers on the USS Co-owned SS *Maunganui*. They walked off the ship and were subsequently arrested and prosecuted for desertion. Similar events happened aboard the SS *Corinthic* and *Opawa*. The *Industrial Unionist* further reported that five sailors from the HMS *Pyramus* were imprisoned due to a refusal to carry out duties in relation to the strike.

In fact, support went beyond the unionists and striking workers. In a study of industrial relations in the UK, James E. Cronin described how strike actions often affected broader segments of the working population than those immediately involved in the strike. During the 1913 dispute,



shopkeepers, publicans, and restaurateurs refused service to strike-breakers and specials. In Wellington, people who lived in working-class suburbs like Te Aro joined in the demonstrations and pickets.

Another offer of worker solidarity reported frequently in the *Industrial Unionist* were barbers who offered to shave strikers free of charge. Auckland midwives and nurses also announced that three of its members had declared their willingness to attend, without pay, the wives of any strikers due to give birth.



***An example of solidarity shown amongst the working class during the Great Strike***

Women were certainly visible during the strikes. While not necessarily supportive of revolutionary socialism, women were on the streets in support of the strikers during 1913 in “splendid solidarity.” One *NZ Truth* report entitled “Buckle St. Embroglio” showed their unwavering solidarity:

*“...two women, stubbornly and with loud protests, refused to budge from the positions they had taken up on the footpath. This was enough to encourage the crowd—the valiant women defying what had been euphemistically termed “law and order.”*

Another newspaper report told how “*several women were parading the streets wearing, sashes bearing the devices “Unity is strength – Don’t scab!”*”

Court reports tell more stories of women being involved in strike-related actions. For example, Agnes Udall was charged with being part of an unlawful assembly, and a Mrs Florence Nelson was charged with affray and wilfully destroying one window and two lamps in the Royal Tiger Hotel. A report in the *Evening Post* mentioned that the strike committee advised strikers to stick with the “*organised women,*” who among other things made sure their children didn’t go hungry.

The IWW stressed that lessons should be learned during the Great Strike, particularly about the importance of solidarity to the success of the struggle:

*Thick-headed littleness has been conspicuous by its absence among strikers, Union officials, and Labour men of all kinds during the Auckland strike. Many, who three weeks ago, passed each other with a stony stare, have been seen cordially congratulating each other upon Labour’s remarkable loyalty...*

*Men who would have heatedly called an I.W.W. man a ranting extremist, and fellows in the IWW who would have sneered about the ‘reactionary’ now eagerly, scout together, eat together, joke together, and discuss the situation...*

*The strike is a victory if we go no further than that. Such is the spirit of Solidarity that shall soon weld Labour into an invincible army.*

They furthered this message by using the *Industrial Unionist* to point out that just 2 per cent of the world owned nearly all of the world’s wealth, “That is a lot of (wage)-slaves and a very few slave owners.” However, they expressed fear that if a pre-emptive fight between the two classes erupted, then the working class, which included the police, the army, and scabs, would turn on itself, and the fight would be lost. “*With solidarity,*” however, “*all the tyrannical forces of capitalism become as helpless as an un-layed (sic) egg.*”

New Zealand historian Richard Hill provides some evidence that even the regular police displayed sympathy with the strikers. The police had made their own attempt at unionising, but Police Commissioner Cullen and Minister of Justice Alexander Herdman quickly crushed this. They simply moved the newly formed Police Association’s secretary, Constable Charles Smyth,

from Auckland to Greymouth. There, he was consequently sacked from the force over a minor misdemeanour involving timekeeping, something Smyth declared a simple mistake. The *NZ Truth* also remarked upon this appearance of solidarity between the strikers and police. The newspaper commented that the police's performance during the first weeks of the strike was no more than "*perfunctory*." It appeared that if no serious breaches of the laws were committed then they were happy to turn a blind eye. In return, the strikers assisted the police by removing those who created a nuisance. The Chief of the New Zealand Defence Forces, Colonel Edward Heard, was driven to remark that during the Great Strike, he viewed some of the police officers as sympathetic to the strikers and reluctant to act against them.

The IWW did not lead the strikes but always supported the strikers and worked on strike committees. They were out on the streets organising, agitating, attending meetings and demonstrations, and giving speeches. Production of their paper increased dramatically from once a month to three times a week. It was full of encouragement and praise for the strikers and appeals to those not striking to join in. They reported that they were selling an average of 5,000 copies a day. The editor's name was listed as "A. Block": an actual block of wood kept on a chair in an office, who was to be introduced to any visiting police officers if the need arose.

### **Media reporting on the strike**

Unsurprisingly, throughout the Great Strike the mainstream media printed reports biased in favour of employers. The *Dominion* portrayed itself as objective and neutral; the editor stated that "*we must enable the public to arrive at a just and intelligent decision on the rights and wrongs of the matter.*" One of its journalists, however, exposed how the paper manipulated the news. Pat Lawlor revealed in his autobiography that he was not allowed to publish his original report of strike activities in Wellington. Initially, he wrote that he heard the "*sinister note of a revolver*" emanating from the specials who were reacting to an attack on their Buckle Street quarters. When he reported this, the editor, C. Earle, and the Commissioner of Police pressured him to believe he was mistaken. He wrote what he believed to be the truth, but when it was printed he was "*heartbroken*" to find that it had been changed to be "*all in favour of the police.*" Strangely, despite his initial indignation, Lawlor described how he came to accept such "*discretion*" as necessary.

The IWW sought to challenge this kind of misinformation in the pages of the mainstream media. The *Industrial Unionist* wrote that although there were reporters who wished to honestly report the facts, “*blue pencils are cheap enough,*” referring to the practice of editing articles. As a remedy, they checked the facts in the daily papers and published their own version of events. When they could, the IWW exposed untruthful reporting. In one instance, they followed up a claim in the *New Zealand Herald* that 40 men continued to work on the Auckland Exhibition site during the strike. They went and checked the site, finding only one special and one boy at work. They happily related that despite reports to the contrary, the exhibition workers were still as solid as a “*constable’s baton.*”

Of course, the IWW were not opposed to using misinformation and exaggeration as a political strategy. They reported an outbreak of typhoid in the specials’ camp in the Auckland Domain. This could have created a real concern for those thinking of joining the specials, as the threat of infectious disease was a very real fear in 1913. Whether this report was true or not remains a mystery.

The IWW were also openly critical of the main trade union leaders for not being more open with the strikers about their plans. It was the rank and file who initiated the disputes and carried out much of the organising. The IWW asked the central strike committee why they assumed that the “*collective intelligence of twenty men is superior to... [that] of ten thousand.*” They accused the committee of damaging the spirit of solidarity. Rumours of deception and suspicions of incompetency circulated. The only way to have a successful strike and to maintain solidarity, the IWW said, was to allow the rank and file to have the fullest amount of control possible. Delegates were necessary to discuss coordinated action in meetings, but their role was to be led by those they represented, not the other way around.

The Great Strike provided an ideal opportunity for the IWW to champion their direct action ideas and put some of the talk into action. They recognised that inciting violence was a sure path to defeat, but they used the government’s threat of violence against workers to illustrate the brutality of the capitalist state. They called for the strikers to defend themselves, but “*Don’t take the initiative. Don’t exasperate the police by yelling at them.*” The *Industrial Unionist* issued a request for strikers to maintain self-discipline not to drink alcohol. An article entitled “*Turn it Off,*” advised “*a half-handle is just sufficient to make some do something silly enough to cause the beginning of a defeat,*” and ended with a plea not “*to swill just now.*”

In "the War of the Folded Hands," the IWW congratulated workers on their "magnificent attitude" in not responding to the extreme provocation from columns of "armed men whose very appearance tends to inflame the blood." The article continued that indiscriminate rioting belonged in another century and that sound organisation rendered it unnecessary.

**THE BOYCOTT.**

In a subsequent issue we may be able to publish the names of business people who try in any way to break the strike.

Two dairy firms, we understand, have supplied horses and supplies to the special constables. Another important drapery firm is allowing some of its employees to act as special constables.

Licensed victuallers are also warned that to take in strike breakers will lose the working class support in the future.

Messrs. McKeown, bakers (at the bottom of Queen Street) have made a contribution to the Strike Fund.

Particulars, which are substantiated, of any act against the strikers, or their cause, will be welcomed at this office.

***The Boycott – Articles listing those businesses who were acting against the strikers (and those contributing to the strike fund) appeared regularly in the Industrial Unionist throughout November 1913***

Despite appealing for a passive reaction, the IWW were not pacifists. Tom Barker warned that, “every economic question is settled by force and it is a question which side can exercise most force.” They admitted that they were not scared to answer violence with violence, arguing, “it is not the subject class that dictates whether violence [is used]... but it is the class in power that dictates this.” They added, “if this is what they want we will cheerfully accept it and meet them to the best of our ability”. Even the more moderate New Zealand Federation of Labour (NZFL) member, Harry Holland, advised “If they hit you with a baton, hit them with a pick handle, and have something at the end of it.”

Rather than explicit violence, the IWW called for more subtle uses of direct action like “*tissue bags of cayenne*” that, “are not well received by prancing police horses.” A call was issued to workers to visit the properties of farmers, who had ventured to town to break the strike and sow blackberry and sorrel in their fields. Both are fast-growing weeds that are particularly difficult to get clear. A later issue declared—maybe with slight exaggeration— “Blackberry and Sorel...are fetching monopoly prices!” In another example of disruptive action, the *Industrial Unionist* reported that a train due to leave Palmerston North was found with its couplings unlinked. As a result the train, loaded with 300 farmers headed to Wellington to enrol as specials, was delayed for some hours. The mainstream media reported that the windows of the train were smashed with bottles and stones, the train line was blocked by milk cans and a barrow, signal wires were cut and switches disrupted. A fire on the horizon was thought to be the burning of the Tokomaru Bridge, although this proved not to be the case.

### **What is to be done?**

There appeared to be differences of opinion within the IWW on the appropriate response during the strike. On a number of occasions, through the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*, Frank Hanlon appealed to the Auckland strikers to increase their resistance to the specials by following Wellington’s example where violence against specials was seemingly more widespread. He said that some people considered that the “*be very quiet dope*” was overdone, and as a result the specials (or the invaders as he called them) simply became bolder and more insolent. The Wellington people had dealt with such insolence with the appropriate attitude, he claimed. He further reported that food was being delivered to the homes of the rich in Remuera. People anywhere but in Auckland, he wrote, would have long overturned the carts and taken the food for themselves.

Tom Barker described some of the actions in Wellington. In one, a squad of cyclists acting as lookouts gave advanced warnings of farmers, who were riding along the Hutt Road into town to sign up as specials and scab labour, while barbed wire was stretched across the road from the sea to the adjacent hills. The farmers were showered with stones as they tried to walk to town. In another exploit, Barker described a raid on a compound of specials that aroused them from their sleep and led to a mad panic on horseback out of the compound. Upon exiting, the specials encountered a road littered with nuts and bolts, making their horses stumble and fall, spilling their riders. Marbles were also used to upset the horses, as were ropes passed between horses' legs which when yanked caused the horses to fall. In yet another action, Barker described the burning down of a lumberyard that made the specials' batons. The media on 29 October reported a suspicious fire that burned down the Stewart Timber and Hardware Company in Courtenay Place, and it was known that this mill had been making batons for the specials.

These batons were particularly contentious, and there were many reports of railway workshops refusing to make them. One notable account from Hamilton suggested that the foreman of the firm Ellis and Burnand refused to take on an order. The *Industrial Unionist* revealed that the foreman was a relative of Fred Evans, the striker killed at Waihi by a similar sort of weapon.

The boycott was another tactic used against businesses trying to break the strike. The beauty of the boycott was that it broke no laws. During the strike in Waihi in 1912 it was applied widely. The strikers ignored the engine drivers, whose break away from the union precipitated the strike, and their families and any trader who dealt with them were similarly shunned. Even a picture show in Waihi was boycotted because the accompanying pianist was the daughter of an engine driver. In 1913, the *Industrial Unionist* regularly printed the names of people and companies they considered to be guilty of contributing towards weakening the strike:

*“One of Nathan’s store men was seen going to Otahuhu with stores on one of A.B. Wright’s wagons... [for those] who are scabbing.”*

And,

*“Mansell, the grocer, of Eden terrace has been recognised as a ‘special’.”*

The IWW recognised that many smaller unions were prepared to break ranks and defy calls to strike. The IWW warned employers contemplating the use of such people that they had a weapon that would penetrate their “*fat-encased heart*” in the shape of “*two thousand staunch adherents*” of whom at least two-thirds “*are prepared to use that weapon—sabotage—and use it well.*” They called upon individual militants within the working unions to make good use of the tactics of sabotage. A report from Christchurch announced that “*rebels*” were employed as specials ensuring that “*£300 worth of damage could be caused at any time.*” There were other reports that “*IWW workers*” were masquerading as scab labourers to carry out acts of sabotage and injure other workers who were breaking the strike.

Calls for sabotage came from other quarters. Harry Holland, editor of the *Maoriland Worker*, urged a crowd in Wellington’s Post Office Square to take the names of the specials and “*when the strike is over...look after their goods...see the packages don’t fall overboard.*” Sometimes advice on sabotage came from even more surprising corners. The *Industrial Unionist* could not hide its delight when the *New Zealand Herald* printed a scientific article describing how a small amount of sugar mixed with cement prevented it from setting. The IWW exclaimed:

*We have known rebel papers to point out that paint peels off after drying when salt has been added, and that varnish containing castor oil cannot be expected to dry...but for rascality in the audacious advocacy of sabotage the NZ Herald seems well to the fore.*

The issue of sabotage was repeatedly used against the IWW, and the *Industrial Unionist* wondered whether the media would manufacture situations so they could denounce “outrages” allegedly caused by the strikers and the IWW. On 18 November 1913, several daily newspapers reported what has been described as the only serious attempt to sabotage commercial transport during the Great Strike. The news reports said that plugs of gelignite fitted with detonators were found on a railway line just before the passing of the mainline express between Auckland and Wellington, which coincidentally was carrying Tom Barker on his way to Wellington.

In speculating about this action, the *Industrial Unionist* noted that several members of the employers’ federation were recent arrivals from the US, where the tactic of employing “*some half-witted or ignorant worker*” to plant dynamite, only to arrange for its discovery just in time, was used on more than one occasion. The *Industrial Unionist* expressed grave concern about



this possible development but reasoned that the amateurishness of the plot meant the newspapers did not make much of it. Surprisingly, they did not. The New Zealand Herald quickly dropped the story and then reported four days later that the 75-year-old street vendor who claimed to have found the dynamite had been charged with placing it himself. He subsequently pleaded guilty to the charge. During his sentencing, the judge reflected that the offence was “*due entirely to the weakening of his mind with advanced years.*” He still saw fit to send him to prison for five years. Despite the man’s conviction, the *Industrial Unionist* continued to view the story as similar to the scare tactics used by employer associations abroad. The paper suggested that the guilty man was possibly bribed or just too feeble to resist the demands made upon him.

During the strike, stickers with ‘IWW’ boldly printed across the top appeared all over Wellington. The *Press* described that “*agents of the notorious Industrial Workers of the World*” were distributing literature amongst strikers on the Wellington waterfront. The *Marlborough Express* reported that a “*new and disturbing factor*” had arrived in Wellington in the form of IWW organiser Tom Barker, who gave speeches advocating sabotage and urged the workers to organise as a class.

It was just such a speech, described in court as “*one of the most dangerous...ever uttered in the Dominion,*” that led to Tom Barker’s arrest for sedition along with other leading figures of the labour movement including Peter Fraser, Harry Holland, Robert Semple, and George Bailey. These arrests and charges were designed to demoralise the striking workers and destroy their leadership. They failed. The Strike Committee declared:

*workers are determined to still fight on, well knowing the fact that this is not the movement of a few men, but of a large body of educated militant unionists...[the arrests] will have no effect whatever as far as we are concerned as there are men equally able and willing to take their places.*

Sympathetic prison officers treated all those arrested as honoured guests. When Barker, who had been arrested in Auckland and bailed to make his own way to Wellington to face the charges, arrived in the capital, a large cheering crowd and a strong force of mounted police met him. He was then escorted to Post Office Square, which had become the centre for speechmaking, accompanied by the crowd who were reported to be whistling the “*Marseillaise,*”

and loudly singing “*Glory, Glory, Hallelujah.*” His charge of sedition was eventually dropped; he was instead found guilty of a breach of the peace. He was remanded in custody until sureties of £1500 were raised. He was finally released in January 1914.

## **Defeat**

In the face of strike-breakers and the protection afforded them by the specials, the strike could not last. By 18 November, the port in Wellington had been reopened. The UFL conceded defeat the next day. In Auckland, the strike lasted five days longer, but by year’s end, the majority of the country’s workers were back on the job. The Huntly miners stayed out until 6 January 1914 but returned to work when farmers started working the mine. The victory for the employers did come at a cost. It took 58 days for a complete return to work. The estimated cost to employers was approximately £1,000,000, equivalent to approximately \$150 million today.

In retrospect, the strikes can be viewed as badly misjudged by organised labour. Historian Henry Roth points out the rashness of sending the workers into a battle for which they were not prepared. It was early in the farming year: the rural population was available to come into the cities to act as special constables, and the wharves were in the quietest period of the year for loading goods.

However, many historians agree that employers were determined to crush militant unionism before it had a chance to grow any stronger. They manipulated the trade unions into a fight they were unlikely to win and were backed by a government which was determined to use all means necessary to support them. There is evidence that the police infiltrated the innermost circles of the unions. Wellington police force Superintendent, J. W. Ellison reported that surveillance was conducted on strike planning and further suggested that detectives had acted as agent provocateurs in stirring up the strikers and their allies.

By contrast, New Zealand historian Miles Fairburn argues that there is no proof of a concerted plan to provoke a strike. He claims that it would have been impossible for the government to plot a showdown with the UFL as it was not possible to predict where and when such a showdown would take place or what the plans of the unions were. He points to the government’s inconsistent response, citing the fact that the unions that struck illegally before 1913 were not fined. He says that the government was not of a single mind to crush the strikers.

Fairburn further claims that the employers had not demonstrated any wish to have a fight with the unions. Rather, he argues that they were incredibly tolerant of the various wildcat stoppages that occurred throughout 1913. Tellingly, there is evidence clearly contradicting Fairburn. As early as 1908 the Employers' Association of Wellington proposed setting up "*a bureau to recruit scabs*" and established a blacklist against union men. At the second Unity Congress in 1913 the delegates heard that the employers' federation was "*raising a huge fund to fight the organised workers.*" This fund was established with the stated aim "*to Combat Socialism, Syndicalism and Anarchy*" and a manifesto was issued stating the intention to "*oppose extreme agitation, syndicalisers, and revolutionary socialists; [and] to promote unity of the genuine workers and the employers.*" Furthermore, in August 1913, employers met secretly to establish reserve forces of strike-breakers.

It is somewhat ironic that the various employers' associations in New Zealand formed a national federation that transcended industry categories just like the IWW model. They regularly met to discuss concerted action in industrial disputes. A circular entitled "*Re: Waihi Strike Defence Fund*" announced a meeting of 50 "*leading citizens, merchants and manufacturers*" to be addressed by Mr Pryor, the secretary of the New Zealand Employers' Federation, to discuss how they can best respond to the dispute in Waihi. There is also evidence that the engine-drivers' breakaway union in Waihi was funded by employers in New Zealand, with the stated aim of "*smashing*" the NZFL.

Moreover, the governing Reform Party had been reducing union power through new legislation. During 1913 parliament passed the Labour Disputes Investigation Act that could force compulsory arbitration on the parties involved, thus making it effectively illegal to act outside the arbitration process. Penalties for striking were increased and the definition widened to include the refusal to sign a new contract in order to secure an increased benefit. The Police Offences Act was amended to outlaw aggressive picketing and the harassment of strike-breakers. Taken together, all these actions suggest that employers and the government set up the fight with militant unions. It proved hugely damaging to the whole movement and the radicals of the IWW.

The Great Strike of 1913 is one of the most important events in New Zealand's labour history. It engulfed most of the cities and towns and came close to being a civil war. The government deployed all of the force it could muster, and "*Massey's Cossack's*" became infamous. The IWW was one of many contributors to the struggles of workers throughout these strikes. On the

streets and through the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*, the IWW pushed direct action such as boycotts and sabotage. Repression was the inevitable response of a conservative government, and significant legal and extra-legal methods were used to shut down workers' aspirations. While there is debate among historians about which side provoked the dispute, the evidence clearly points to a joint venture of state and capital united to pre-emptively crush the amalgamation of more worker power.

It is reported that several guerrillas are mapping out an itinerary for a somewhat protracted sojourn in the country as soon as a list of farmer "specials" names has been compiled.

*Industrial Unionist, 8 November 1913*

## Chapter 9: The Demise of the IWW?

The defeat of the militants in the 1913 Great Strike had a profound effect on New Zealand's labour movement, and the IWW suffered greatly as an organisation. Some historians say that after 1913, direct action as a tactic was discredited, and workers instead looked to parliamentary politics to solve their issues. In 1914, Auckland Wobbly, Frank Hanlon, described how *"the scattering far and wide of the most active members nearly killed the organisation."* Many of its most prominent supporters left the cities to go overseas or to rural areas. They did so largely because of the collapse of the strike and the subsequent repression. Some workers feared the kind of reprisal delivered to Charles Reeves, one of the most prominent speakers during the strike in Auckland. He was severely beaten by specials when he was spotted on a ship departing for Australia. He later told the judge in the case relating to the assault that he was leaving because he was tired of New Zealand and wanted a change.

Hanlon, residing in Wellington after the defeat, added that the levels of militant activity were low. He lamented the decline of radicalism in the local branch of the NZSP, a place he once likened to an IWW local. Sadly, it had evolved into a place chiefly *"...composed of philosophers who play poker...and teach each other the tango."*

Similarly, some employers tried to blacklist militants after the strike. Although this proved difficult, because it was hard to differentiate the militants from the non-militants, there was an atmosphere of reprisal. Leaders of the trade union movement, including IWW member Tom Barker, remained in prison on charges of sedition long after the collapse of the strike. IWW members and other radicals who had committed their ideas and beliefs to print left themselves open to prosecution and state repression. Many fled the country, while others adopted more conciliatory approaches.

Meanwhile, the United Federation of Labour (UFL) continued its swing to moderation. At their 1914 conference, the secretary-treasurer of the UFL, Mark Fagan, went so far as to say that those who had preached, *"Sabotage, anarchy, and syndicalism...should have their heads chopped off."* The new president, Dan Sullivan, praised Bob Semple and Pat Hickey for being

willing to moderate their views, and he expressed his pleasure that the IWW had been unable to influence the conference.

At the start of World War I, Frank Hanlon wrote that reports of the patriotism taking hold of the working class were false. He said that what had been described as “*enthusiastic demonstrations of patriotism*” consisted chiefly in Wellington at least, “...*of a small crowd of youths...led by college larrikins.*” He added that “*in Labour circles there is a wholesome absence of jingoism, most...expressing the very same opinion that ‘war is no good to us.’*”

However, there is significant evidence of widespread public support for the war. Unions were not unified in their views on the war, but most initially supported it. In New Zealand, like the rest of the Western world, the unifying call of “international solidarity” among workers was quickly drowned out by devotion to country and to empire.

The declaration of war extended a free hand to the state to repress dissent. The IWW was a particular target for this in New Zealand and elsewhere in the world. The mainstream media was an enthusiastic handmaiden in further discrediting and undermining the IWW. Yet there were clearly many who held firm to the ideals of direct action and one big union for all of the world’s workers.

### **Seditious people & propaganda**

Various regulations were imposed and legislation passed with the intent of outlawing the IWW and its literature. In 1915 an amendment to the Customs Act prohibited “*the importation into New Zealand of the IWW newspapers Direct Action and Solidarity, and all other printed matter published or printed by or on behalf of the society known as the Industrial Workers of the World.*” John Salmond, the Solicitor General of New Zealand, viewed their literature as “*a public mischief and a public evil.*” Somewhat sarcastically, over in Australia, the editors of *Direct Action* thanked the New Zealand government for this tribute to its strength and recognition of its influence. Being caught in possession of such literature could bring a lengthy jail sentence. Two months after the law was passed the Post and Telegraph Department reported that it had withheld “*14 single copies of Direct Action*” and “*six bundles of Solidarity.*” Correspondence from known activists was also examined, censored, and confiscated. One such person was Syd Kingsford who a police memorandum reported as “*appearing to be an agent in Christchurch for the distribution of ...IWW literature.*”

In 1917, Charles Johnson of Wellington, described as being prominent during the 1913 strike and convicted of striking a special constable, was sentenced to 12 months hard labour for being in possession of a large amount of such literature, namely three copies of the *International Socialist Review* from the US, three copies of *Direct Action*, and four copies of *Ross's Monthly*, an Australian socialist magazine.

Under wartime regulations, workers who were suspected of being IWW supporters could be excluded from the wharves as a danger to shipping. Sidney Fournier, who was a prominent unionist and had been on the strike committee in Wellington during the Great Strike, was one such victim. He was sentenced to 12 months in prison in 1917 for making an anti-war speech and being found in possession of an IWW membership card and literature following a police search of his home, although he claimed that they belonged to a deceased flatmate. Upon release, he found he could no longer obtain employment in his former workplace on the Wellington wharves.

### **Whither the IWW?**

Clearly, the post-strike wartime environment severely affected the functioning of the IWW, their ability to organize, and their channels of communication. Historian Peter Steiner concludes that there is no evidence of the IWW operating after the last issue of their newspaper the *Industrial Unionist* published on 29 November 1913, in which they declared that the strike was going strong and workers were holding out. The state's repressive tactics and the hysteria of the media understandably meant that IWW supporters had to be more clandestine in their operations. They could not openly declare themselves as IWW members. As a result, traces of IWW activity after 1913 are scant, but there is evidence that they continued to operate.

In February 1914 the NZSP discussed how to raise funds to re-launch the *Industrial Unionist*. Sporadic reports of activity also appeared in other media over the next decade. *Direct Action* mentioned several New Zealand IWW activities and listed contact details for IWW locals in Auckland, Christchurch, Denniston, and Wellington. In 1914 *Direct Action* carried an article by H.J. Wrixton, who described himself as the secretary of the Wellington IWW local. Additionally, it received orders, letters and donations from places in New Zealand including outlying areas like Bulls, Paengaroa and Ngakawau, among others.



Stickers and posters continued to appear. The Wellington branch of the NZSP was driven to complain to the local IWW secretary about the stickers that were placed on the socialist hall walls. He said that a specific board would be put up for IWW literature.

Wellington was also advertising IWW literature for sale in 1915. Tom Barker's anti-war poster, for which he was subsequently imprisoned in Australia, was smuggled into the country and distributed. Based upon an army-recruiting poster it read, **TO ARMS! Capitalists, Parsons, Politicians, Landlords, Newspaper Editors, and Other Stay-at-Home Patriots, your country needs you in the trenches!! Workers, Follow your Masters.** These posters were so inflammatory that a judge suspended court proceedings pending their removal after some were posted outside the Supreme Court Building.

# **To Arms!**

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**Capitalists, Parsons, Politicians,  
Landlords, Newspaper Editors and  
Other Stay-At-Home Patriots.**

---

**your country needs  
YOU  
in the trenches!!**

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**WORKERS**

**Follow your Masters**

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*The Poster that caused the suspension of the Supreme Court*

Other evidence of continued IWW activity includes a move by workers to set up a “*Workers University*” in Auckland in late 1915. Documents seized by the police in a raid on IWW rooms in Australia uncovered a letter from the “*Workers’ University Direct Action Group.*” Sent from Auckland, the letter was signed by W. Bull, J. Neitz and W. Fillop. It requested help to get a circular printed because it was impossible in New Zealand. Newspapers reported that Neitz, a German, had been subsequently interred on Somes Island under wartime regulations.

The circular announced that “many revolutionaries” had decided to form the group to:

*Bring the university to the workers’ back door by leaflets couched in the simplest language possible, disrobed of the technical and metaphysical terms so much used by labour fakirs, fakirs on newspapers, and professors in the pay of the moneyed classes. By such means to educate the mentally lazy and those who by overwork are shamefully robbed of that nerve-force or energy so necessary for educational achievement*

They went on to write

*Our education scheme will deal with economics, biology, physiology, and scientific sabotage, etc.... our ideas will be given out showing how a few individuals here, and a few there, on different jobs, can on any day and at all times by incessant silent sabotage, and, without the knowledge of the boss. Without the knowledge or approval of the mentally sluggish and the indifferent, ignorant and cowardly majority, wring concessions-particularly the shorter hours so necessary to enable the unemployed to become absorbed. By scientific sabotage silently and Jesuitically applied, victimisation and detention will become a thing of the past. Remember that Durand, [\*] the syndicalist agitator sentenced to death in France was saved by systematic sabotage.*

The circular continued asking that only “*live wires*” join, as “*spittoon philosophers and blowhards*” impeded the fight. The group claimed that 50 such “*live wires*” were already members. The agent who rented a property to the group at 26 King’s Chambers on Auckland’s Queen Street confirmed that there were around 30 members, who he described as “*rough, unkempt fellows, although some of them seemed to be extremely intelligent and well-read.*”

The police were also keenly interested in these live wires. Although they did not have enough evidence to prosecute, the police had reported their activities to the landlord who subsequently

sought to evict them. They disappeared with the gas bill and rent unpaid. Simultaneous police actions were taken on similar groups across the country. The *Evening Post* said that meetings were still being held in a private house, and rather incredulously lamented the fact that they had not been admitted. In the same article, it was noted that IWW literature was still being distributed in Auckland, and stickers bearing go-slow messages were still appearing.

The repression of IWW supporters and anyone thought to be even vaguely sympathetic to the group continued throughout the rest of the decade. The 1919 Undesirable Immigrant Exclusion Act gave the state the power to ban entry to anybody deemed disloyal and disaffected and to prohibit the immigration of anyone considered a subversive. The first person to fall foul of this act was Moses Baritz who had arrived in New Zealand as a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain to give a series of lectures in which he was critical of the New Zealand Labour Party. The New Zealand authorities decided that he was really Moritz Baritski, a cohort of American anarchist Emma Goldman and a supporter of the IWW. Baritz's denial of the accusations and his insistence that he was an advocate of parliamentarianism meant little. He was deported to Australia, described as a likely "*source of danger to the peace, order and good Government of New Zealand.*"

### **With help from the mainstream media**

Along with the ban on radical literature and other tactics of state repression, the mainstream media continued to discredit the IWW. The organisation was explicitly linked with Germany adding further fuel to the already repressive climate. An editorial by the *Press* in 1915 maintained that the UFL was as an offshoot of the IWW beholden by its constitution to report directly to the International Secretariat in Berlin.

Suspicious fires were routinely reported as IWW acts. In 1918 IWW men were blamed for a house fire in Runanga. The IWW was blamed for the sinking of the cargo ship, the *Port Kembla*, following an explosion off Farewell Spit in September 1917. The ship had left Melbourne and had just stocked up on coal at Wellington before heading for the UK when the disaster occurred. At the time, Australian dock workers were on strike. The ship had been loaded by scab labour, which raised suspicions that the IWW was to blame. The media said the IWW "*had shown itself capable of outdoing even German brutality.*" The *New Zealand Herald* openly accused the IWW in Australia of planting a bomb on board. While admitting that there was "*no direct evidence of a*

*bomb agency*” in New Zealand, they wondered aloud about the mysterious disappearance of the ship after it had left the port of Auckland. The *Feilding Star* advised the Prime Minister that if “*some of these murderous enemies in our midst were put up against a wall and shot, as a frightful example to the lawless and the traitorous, there would be no more strikes or sinkings.*” After the discovery of German-laid mines in New Zealand waters, the mention of IWW responsibility for the *Port Kembla* sinking was quietly dropped. Linking the IWW to brutal wartime acts was just one way that the state-serving media kept readers in fear of the ever-present threat of revolutionaries and subversives in their midst.

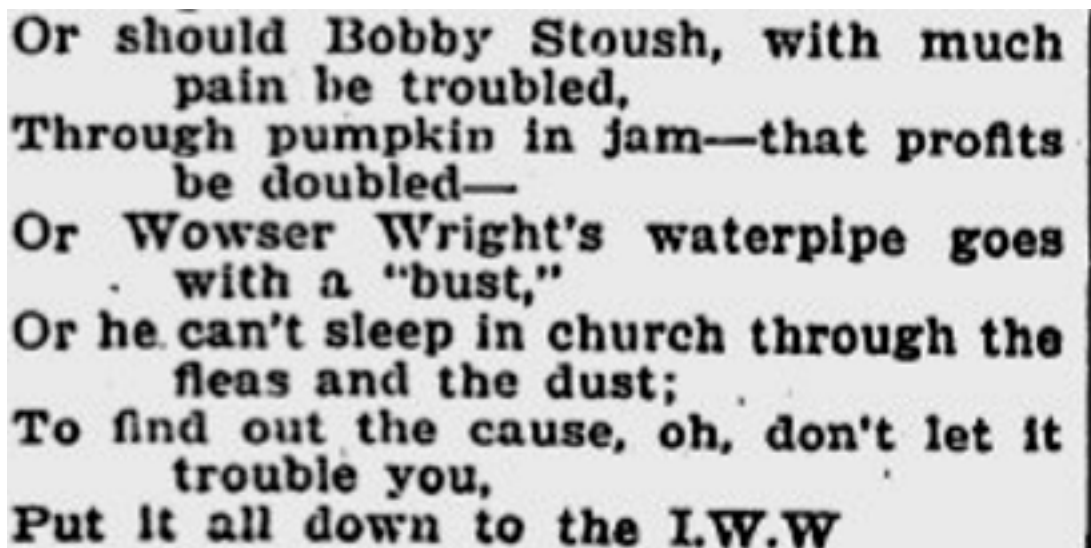
The fear-mongering, however, was not always successful. Many workers could see through the transparent efforts of the state and capitalist media to paint the IWW as a dangerous organisation. The *Maoriland Worker*, with tongue firmly in cheek, expressed surprise that no one had so far blamed the IWW for an outbreak of measles in England. A poem in the *NZ Truth* summed it up. Its first verse ended:

*Should a boiler blow up, or a steamer go down,*

*Or somebody curses the cross or the crown,*

*A scapegoat they'll find, so don't let it trouble you-*

*Put it all down to the IWW*



Or should Bobby Stoush, with much  
pain be troubled,  
Through pumpkin in jam—that profits  
be doubled—  
Or Wowser Wright's waterpipe goes  
with a "bust,"  
Or he can't sleep in church through the  
fleas and the dust;  
To find out the cause, oh, don't let it  
trouble you,  
Put it all down to the I.W.W

## Direct action lives on

Despite the state repression, the negative media, and the belief by some that IWW-style tactics had failed, workers continued to take direct action during the war. Many workers had firmly adopted the idea that the class war should be fought at the point of production.

By 1915 the arbitration unions set up by the employers to break the Great Strike had been taken over by militants. These unions had been bought into break the strike in 1913, but, as the *NZ Truth* described, had since been "...soaking in IWW philosophy and are now carrying out IWW methods." Workers had learned the lesson that strike action was not always necessary and, indeed, could be harmful. Direct action became standard in the arsenal of weapons used by trade unions. The go-slow, wildcat strike, and stop-work meeting all became common tools deployed in the workplaces of New Zealand, in what has been called a second wave of syndicalism. The influence of revolutionary unionism could also be found outside the main population areas of New Zealand due to the fact that many of those who had been blacklisted in the cities had moved to rural areas and smaller towns. This led Tom Barker to remark how "*many a special constable were wondering how things happen unluckily on the farm since the strike.*" In 1917, Whanganui, Gisborne, and Napier, all small provincial towns that had not joined the strike in 1913, saw industrial trouble that led to farmers working the wharves.

The Alliance of Labour, established in 1919 with the aim of forming one big union and holding a belief in direct action, was decried as the IWW in disguise. A report in the *NZ Truth* made the Alliance membership sound very much like it was inspired by IWW beliefs; among other things, Labour MPs were jeered at and harangued for their job consciousness, not class consciousness. The spirit of the IWW clearly lingered on in New Zealand. As late as 1925 the *Evening Post* reported that Bluff had been placarded with IWW posters.

The Great Strike was a massive defeat for organised labour and for the IWW in particular. Many members simply left, and the organisation became an explicit target of state repression. Many previously radical unionists adopted reformist politics, and questions were raised about the effectiveness of direct action tactics. The First World War compounded the tremendous pressure on radicals and the ideas they were trying to spread. Severe wartime restrictions allowed the state to repress those on the fringes, while the vast majority of the population embraced the patriotic slaughter that was to consume the country for five years. The media

continued to discredit the IWW, linking them with Germany and with acts of brutality. In spite of all of these measures, IWW ideas continued to infect future generations with dreams of freedom.

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[\*] The last sentence of the circular refers to French worker Jules Gustave Durand who was sentenced to death by guillotine in France in 1910 after being found guilty of inciting others to murder during a strike. His sentence was commuted to seven years in prison, and finally overturned altogether, after an international wave of strikes and protests that saw action being taken across Europe, and in Chicago and Australia.

Only the workers themselves can remove the curse of leadership. The future destiny of the Working Class rests with the rank and file. In their hands alone is the power to achieve victory and emancipation.

*Industrial Unionist, 1 March 1913*



## **Chapter 10: A World to Win, A Hell to Lose - the legacy of the IWW**

The repression faced by the IWW seriously hindered their activities, and ultimately contributed to their failed bid to change society and the attitudes of the working class. In terms of the IWW's primary aim of being "One Big Union" of fully class-conscious workers, their period of activity in New Zealand can only be considered one of total defeat. The organisation was too small, and, although it was growing, its defining battle came too early in its history.

To measure success it is necessary to look at an organisation's own internally derived definitions and measures of success. However, evaluating the success of a radical movement must also take into account the movement's experience of being under attack from the state and capital. Certainly, the IWW was the target of a sustained attack by these forces united against it. It was seen a significant threat to the status quo, and particular legal and extra-legal measures were taken to destroy it.

Success, though, can have wider definitions. The effects of any organisation are often indirect and unanticipated, short-term, long-term, or both. Increased state repression is frequently an unintended short-term consequence of the actions of social movements; over the longer-term, however, such repression may mobilise people in support of the issue.

One organisation may exert a lasting impact on other organisations. Clearly, the IWW's ideas exerted significant influence on the NZFL in its early days. Despite later attempts to disavow that history, those ideas set the paradigm for much of what followed.

Furthermore, the failure of one movement leaves lessons for others, potentially increasing their chances of success. Movements can highlight other problems in society thereby galvanising new struggles. The experiences and knowledge learned by individuals can also be taken into new struggles. Social movements can greatly influence culture, and even transform existing social structures. These effects are generally more profound and enduring than simple law or policy changes. In these ways an organisation that failed to achieve their specific aims or collect sufficient resources can be considered successful.

The lack of money and members are understood to be central reasons for the failure of the IWW in New Zealand. Recruiting new members and building a mass movement were not of paramount importance in the early stages of development. Pat Hickey said that, “the argument as to the numerical strength carries little weight; the matter of prime consideration is the activity displayed.” Activity was seen as evidence of support and strength, but little IWW institutional capacity was built. As a result, when repression came, the organisation effectively dissolved. Certainly the IWW were always involved in industrial disputes, organising meetings, and agitating through the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*, but they were never large enough to lead a strike. Ultimately, without a growing membership base, the aspirations of the IWW could never be met.

Similarly, the lack of finances can be understood as the consequence of deliberate actions in the IWW such as not taking money from sources that did not match their principles. That very independence from moneyed sources meant that the IWW did not have to compromise its revolutionary principles. Additionally, the lack of money was seen as a beneficial safeguard against the development of an elitist leadership clique within the organisation. It kept the organisation and its organisers grounded in its membership. Unfortunately it also meant that the ongoing financial support necessary to sustain the *Industrial Unionist* was not there even at the height of the Great Strike when they published their last issue.

The IWW revelled in being labelled “extremists.” In their view, the extremist was the pioneer of social change, someone who shaped history through the introduction of new and fresh ideas. They were brave and proceeded irrespective of the criticism hurled at them. “Are the IWW extremists?” They asked themselves in the pages of the *Industrial Unionist*. “We should smile.” Their position on the fringe, however, left them exposed and vulnerable.

The importance of industrial unionism in New Zealand, then, was as an idea, not as an organisation. The *Maoriland Worker* made the point that there were a lot of people running around the country calling themselves “IWW” without being formal members. It was, after all, possible to be a Wobbly without a membership card. Even without the backing of a large-scale organisation, it was possible for an individual, or individuals, to act as agitators on the job.

Measuring the spread and impact of IWW ideas, on the other hand, then paints a picture of success. They helped spread a belief in the central importance of solidarity among the

international working class. The IWW can also be considered a success in the cultural legacy it bequeathed to working class culture. They worked on a whole range of issues. They sought not only to better the conditions of workers, but they sought to embed a cultural change in people's beliefs systems. They aimed to replace bourgeois ideals with working class values.

The IWW also transformed people. There is evidence that it permanently impacted the worldviews of its members and supporters; many of them aligned with other social movements and continued with the struggle against capitalism long after the IWW declined as an organisation in New Zealand.

Traditional measurements of movement success include acceptance by the mainstream and the ability to become a contender in the political system. However, in the case of the IWW, such an idea was not only anathema, but, with their views on taking part in the political system, impossible. While they actively supported actions of immediate benefit to the working class within the existing system, their goal was revolutionary change. To quote Eugene V. Debs, one of the founders of the IWW,

*...no strike was ever lost...I lost the strike of the past that I may win the strike of the future.*

The direct influence of the IWW on day-to-day organising effectively ended at the same time as the end of the Great Strike of 1913. The IWW can, however, justly claim to have left a significant legacy. It did have an enduring effect on the labour movement of New Zealand. Although the major union organisation that remained after the Great Strike was principally reformist, it had been modernised. The need to organise by industry, not craft, was understood. It was better prepared to face the dual challenges of a capitalism that was becoming more organised and more demanding of its work force and work that was becoming more routine and dull. The rank and file were given a well-received lesson in direct action. The centre of working class politics was as likely to be in the streets or workplaces as in parliament. A change in thinking about establishment figures left a healthy distrust of leadership. This meant that later industrial action was largely due to the actions of the rank and file.

Since 1913 many things have changed, but the working class of New Zealand still face many of the same problems today as they did 100 years ago: poor housing, low pay, unemployment, and inequality.

As forecast by the IWW, the activity of the parliamentary wing of unionism, the Labour Party, has been one of compromise with capitalism and anti-working class action. The IWW's belief in the conservative and corrupting pressures of parliament have been proven correct. Jim Edwards, the son of the leader of the unemployed workers movement of the 1930s, described the excitement felt that accompanied the election of the first Labour government in 1935 "The revolution was happening," he said. The Labour Party immediately set about with plans designed to improve the lot of the working class. The unemployed received a Christmas bonus, wage cuts were restored, and state housing and national health schemes were implemented. Sadly, the excitement felt by some about Labour's first electoral victory in 1935 didn't last. In reality, by the time the first Labour government came to power, they had already moved significantly to the right on the issue of ownership of the means of production – the central idea behind the IWW's motto of the "world's wealth for the world's workers."

Josephine Milburn has highlighted Labour's drift away from ideas of socialism with three quotes from Peter Fraser, the NZFL leader in 1912/13 and Labour prime minister throughout the 1940s. In 1913 Fraser was writing, "Industrial Unionism plus revolutionary political action, in my opinion, provide the most effective and expeditious means of reaching [socialism]." By 1918, Fraser had moderated his views. Instead of revolution he called for "the peaceful and legal transformation of society from private to public ownership and the increasing of democratic control over land and industry". By the early 1930s Fraser saw Labour's main objective as a simple one: jobs for the unemployed. Even on the night of their victory, Michael Joseph Savage, the then leader, assured the country that Labour was not going to represent any particular section but would govern in the interests of all the people. One of the co-founders of the New Zealand Communist Party, Alex Galbraith, later expressed his dismay at how the leaders of the Labour Party, in particular Robert Semple and Fraser, had become a pillar of the capitalist system and were being used by the ruling class to attack the working class. "From class against class to servile bootlicker of the bourgeoisie", he wrote of Semple.

The Labour Government, now the new managers of capitalism, struggled to control the workers, who seemed to have a never-ending list of demands. In 1945, a Labour Minister, Bill Parry, was driven to remark that he didn't understand why people were asking for more when "everything has been done." The movement of the Labour Party away from their roots culminated in the Rogernomics of Lange's 1984 Labour Government, and today, it is exceedingly rare to hear any

member of the Labour Party talk of socialism, instead they adhere to the ideals of neo-liberalism.

Along with their critique of reformist unionism and parliamentary action, the IWW left us with a vision of freedom: of a world without bosses, without politicians and without a coercive state. In a world where the many labour movement officials seem to have given up striving for worker ownership and control, and are instead happy just to snatch a few crumbs from the master's table, remembering the IWW can be a potent reminder that there is an alternative.

Rather than being historical relics, the IWW's ideas and actions have greater relevance today than the left ideologies that triumphed one hundred years ago. Social democracy and authoritarian communism have been tried and found wanting. The idea of an international organisation of working class people is as necessary now as it was then.

After 100 years of disappointing work by politicians and trade union officials, perhaps the IWW was right. They would have viewed the unions, with their relatively well-paid bureaucracy of self-serving officials, continual attempts to control the rank and file, and links with the politicians of the Labour Party, as significant contributors to the decline of a once vibrant movement that confronted capitalism head on. Today, it is a movement that is largely docile, demoralised, and demobilised. Instead of a vision of the world's wealth for the workers, the unions settled for reformism. Capitalism has come to be viewed as something to manage and work with, not overthrow. The result is the collapse of a class struggle that challenges the legitimacy and values of capitalism.

Obviously the wholesale adoption of 100-year old ideas isn't useful either, but the IWW can still provide inspiration for a different way of organising society. Such a transformation is not only possible, but necessary, if we are to meet the challenges of increasing inequality and environmental degradation. Parliamentarianism has proven to be inadequate in the fight for the socialist society. Instead the fight should return to communities and points of production, using the whole range of tactics the IWW bequeathed us, as well as finding some new ones. The anti-union legislation passed in the last three decades has left the working class hamstrung in what actions they can legally take. This makes industrial unionism and innovative ideas of direct action as preached by the IWW more relevant today. Even though work has changed since the early days of the twentieth century, the increase of workers in the service industry puts them in

a powerful place to take direct action. In a highly competitive market, any delay or disruption in providing a service can be highly damaging. A simple strike of “folded arms,” or a work-to-rule, like that taken by the Starbucks Workers Union where they followed their company’s policies to the letter slowing service down so much that their boss capitulated to their demands for more staff, is incredibly effective.

The greatest legacy of the IWW is the importance of global solidarity by workers and for workers. In this age of global neo-liberal capitalism, such solidarity is essential. New Zealand Wobbly Charlie Reeves who was imprisoned in Australia for his connection to the IWW, wrote in 1919 that it was “useless waiting for heaven born leaders, saints or prophets, in our hands, lies the remedy.” In forecasting the revolution he said:

There will come a time, when we, the workers, will put our arms around the world, and make it a playground for all humanity, when each will give his best, and all the evils that now exist, will be swept away; with the light of gladness in our eyes, with the song of freedom, singing in our hearts we will march to the haven of reality, of life, see our children happy, our wives, equal mates, and love, sunshine, flowers, songs, ours, all ours, because we have striven...we have a world to win, a hell to lose.

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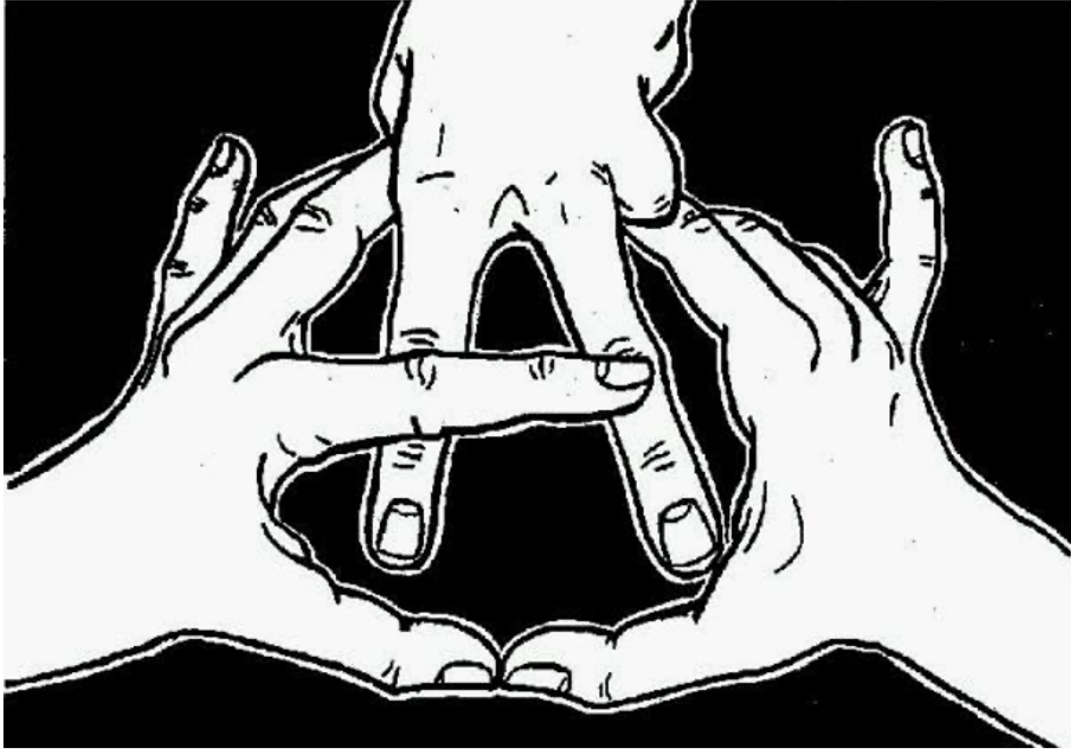
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