UNIONS IN COMMON CAUSE
UNIONS IN COMMON CAUSE
THE NEW ZEALAND FEDERATION OF LABOUR, 1937–88

edited by Peter Franks & Melanie Nolan
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In this book we use the Australian term ‘peak’ organisation or council to describe umbrella union bodies like the FUT or trades councils. The early federations of unions often used the American spelling — Labor — in their titles, e.g. the ‘Red’ Federation of Labor. After the First World War, the spelling ‘Labour’ was consistently used in New Zealand.
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On 9 October 1938, the Sunday before the general election that year, the Federation of Labour and the Labour Party held a rally in the Auckland Domain, attended by 80,000 people. The rally was preceded by a march by 27,000 trade union members from the waterfront and through the main streets of Auckland to the Domain. The Auckland correspondent of the Printers Union journal *Imprint* described the huge turnout as 'a thrill and also a wonderful sight to see more than 100 big banners assembled in line in front of the big crowd.' The banners included ones denouncing the former conservative government's 'slave camps' and praising Labour's achievements. A number of unions displayed their banners, as did women's organisations and trades' councils in the Auckland region. Labour won a decisive victory with 53 of the 80 seats in parliament and nearly 56 percent of votes.
Acknowledgements

This book stands on broad shoulders, which is appropriate, given its subject. This collection arose out of a conference held at New Zealand Parliament Buildings in November 2007 to mark the 70th anniversary of the formation of the New Zealand Federation of Labour (Fol). The conference is indebted to the Hon Margaret Wilson, then Speaker of the House of Representatives, who hosted the conference in the splendid Legislative Council Chamber at parliament, and who has provided us more recently with a foreword.

The conference was the result of a collaboration between the Trade Union History Project (TUHP) and the Council of Trade Unions (CTU). The TUHP organising sub-committee — Peter Franks, Dave Grant, Richard Hill, Dave Morgan and Melanie Nolan — consulted the CTU widely in the planning process and the two groups were joint conference organisers. This is evident in the range of presenters: labour historians Erik Olssen, Peter Franks, Melanie Nolan and Ray Markey; former union activists and veterans of the 1980s, Ken Douglas, Mike Sweeney, Syd Keepa, Martha Coleman and Dave Morgan; and the president, Helen Kelly, and secretary, Carol Beaumont, of the CTU. Thanks to Alex Burton, the proceedings were videotaped and the masters are held at the New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington. A conspicuous proportion of the nearly 100 people who attended on the day were trade unionists; the majority attending were active unionists, including a good number of ‘young ones’ keen to find out about the history of the labour movement.

The collaboration between the TUHP and the CTU is historical, in content and over time. The TUHP was formed in 1987 in response to concerns about the preservation of Fol records when the decision was made in mid-1987 to form the CTU. The Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr Michael Bassett, agreed to sponsor some TUHP activities through the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs. The president of the CTU, Ken Douglas, determined that the most urgent preservation priority was the arrangement, description and transfer of the Fol archives to the Alexander Turnbull Library. The TUHP devoted some of its grant monies to employ a professional archivist to do this work. The Fol archives were deposited with the Alexander Turnbull Library on 10 August 1988 and the TUHP was responsible, in association with the Dunmore Press, for the
publication of Cathy Marr’s *A Guide to the Archives of the New Zealand Federation of Labour 1937–88* soon afterwards. Having contributed to the preservation of the FOI records, it was appropriate that the last TUHP annual conference, before its name change to the Labour History Project (LHP), was a seminar in association with the CTU upon the 70th anniversary of the formation of the FOI.

The collaboration between the LHP and CTU has flowed on to working together on this collection, which appears despite economic uncertainty, changing employment roles of those involved and the many demands on their time. A number of organisations provided publication subsidies: the New Zealand Work & Labour Market Institute in the Faculty of Business at Auckland University of Technology, the LHP, the CTU, the NZ Amalgamated Engineering Printing & Manufacturing Union, the NZ Dairy Workers Union Te Runanga Wai U, the Maritime Union of NZ, the NZ Meat Workers & Related Trades Union, the National Distribution Union, the Rail & Maritime Transport Union and the Service & Food Workers Union Nga Ringa Tota. We are grateful to Ray Markey, Mark Derby, Peter Conway and Paul Tolich for facilitating the financial support.

Several people have helped us prepare the manuscript. We thank Erik Olssen and Ray Markey for revising their conference presentations. Hannah Flannery transcribed the panel discussion, and the CTU has made available its rich photographic archives. Librarians at the Alexander Turnbull Library, the National Library of New Zealand and Archives New Zealand have helped us find other illustrations. We are grateful to Peter Bromhead, Claire Colvin, Debby Edwards, Gerard Hill, Dion and Stephen Minhinnick, Tom Scott and the *New Zealand Herald* for permission to reproduce cartoons for which they hold copyright. The list of FOI officers and executive members is much the better for the help we were given by David Verran, Ken Douglas and Ray Bianchi. Ben Fraser of the Australian National University prepared the graphs for Chapter 1. We thank Jim McAlloon and David Verran for reading the text and making helpful comments.

We owe special debts to two people who have been staunch supporters of labour history in New Zealand. Firstly, Professor Pat Walsh’s PhD thesis on industrial relations in the post-war period up to the late 1970s was an essential foundation for much of this book in terms of both research and interpretation. Secondly, in discussions with Peter Franks over a number of years, the late Ted Thompson generously shared his insights into the history of the movement and helped shape the thinking that has gone into this book.

We appreciate very much all the help and support that has made this book possible.

*Peter Franks and Melanie Nolan*
Foreword

Margaret Wilson

In November 2007 I hosted a seminar at parliament to mark the 70th anniversary of the formation of the New Zealand Federation of Labour. I am delighted to write the foreword to this book.

The cliché that those who forget their history are doomed to relive it has an element of truth. It has not been easy for New Zealanders to access the history of working people. I was fortunate to study at Auckland University when Bert Roth worked at the University Library; he was the unofficial guardian of our history buried in the basement. While I know it is more efficient to Google for information today, in those days it was a real pleasure to wander through the shelves and alight on a pamphlet or a book that described or analysed the events of the 1890s and the early 1900s.

The first research paper I wrote at university was on the history and development of the Arbitration Court. I was assisted in this project by many trade unionists in Auckland who had a very good sense of the history of the movement of which they were a part. They were all members of the unions affiliated to the FOE, and many of them had been involved in the 1951 lockout or its aftermath. It is difficult for people to realise the scarring that is left by disputes of that magnitude. The Waihi lockout also seriously affected that community for many years. But it is not only events of conflict that contributed to the history of our trade union movement and shaped the attitudes of working people. The foundation of our social system occurred in the 1880s and 1890s and was driven by the energy and commitment of working men and women who had emigrated to New Zealand for a better life that included a fair wage, safe working conditions, and security.

Margaret Wilson was president of the Labour Party 1984–87, and worked as chief political advisor to Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer 1989–90. In 1999 she became a Labour MP and held several Cabinet portfolios, including Labour, Commerce, Treaty Negotiations and Attorney-General, between 1999 and 2005. She was Speaker of the House of Representatives 2005–8, and is now Professor of Law and Public Policy at Waikato University.
in times of need such as ill health and old age. New Zealand was described as the social laboratory of the world, forging new ways of solving old problems, such as the relationship between capital and labour and their representatives at the negotiating table. In many ways the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration system, which we borrowed from South Australia, was ahead of its time.

It was the essence of the trade union movement, however, to challenge and struggle to ensure its members’ interests were protected and promoted. And this is what unionists did in the early years of the 20th century. The union movement was born and nurtured by the democracy movements of the 19th century and therefore understood the need for the interests of workers to be reflected in political decision-making as well as industrial negotiation on the shop floor. It is not surprising, then, that the Labour Party was born from the foresight of those in the trade union movement who recognised a political voice was necessary if workers’ interests were to be pursued.

The fact that the Labour Party is the oldest New Zealand political party is no accident. Through many struggles, including the struggle over 19 years since the formation of the party to achieve the right to govern in 1935, the industrial and political wings of the labour movement have worked together. The relationship, like all relationships, has had its ups and downs. The remarkable capacity of the union movement to adapt to the challenges of the times has seen it survive adversities that would have destroyed other movements.

The formation of the FOL in 1937 was, in part, a response to the need of the Labour government to ensure it had the support of a unified movement as it embarked on its transformative social security programme. Of course, as the papers in this book point out, the ‘old’ Federation of Labour had been formed from the struggle within the union movement over methods of organisation to advance the interests of workers. Unity within the movement has always been difficult to achieve because of the strongly held ideological positions by strong personalities.

The traumatic experience of the 1951 waterfront lockout also tested the unity of the movement, but it recovered sufficiently to face the even greater challenges of the economic crisis of the 1970s and the neo-liberal response to that crisis in the 1980s. I remember only too well the numerous meetings and confrontations of the 1980s as the government endeavoured to reform the union movement to conform to the neo-liberal agenda. The decision of the movement to unite its public and private sector unions to form the Council of Trade Unions was another example of facing a challenge through combining the resources and strength of working people wherever they were employed.
Perhaps the greatest challenge was the Employment Contracts Act in the 1990s which attempted to destroy the organisational base of the union movement. Unions were characterised as destroyers of economic prosperity and impeders of development. The fact that the movement survived during this period is a tribute to the tenacity and courage of its activists and leaders. The industrial and political movements remained true to their purpose. They worked together to rebuild and refocus their organisations, policies and strategies to meet the changing economic, social and political reality. This enabled the re-emergence of the movements in 1999 and the beginning of a new era. That new era is characterised by a realisation that without a strong trade union movement New Zealand will never achieve the economic prosperity that will benefit us all. It is the trade union movement that provides the balance between the economic and the social conditions that enable us to move forward as a society based on fairness and equality for all citizens.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACTU</td>
<td>Australian Council of Trade Unions (it was the Australasian Council of Trades Unions 1927–47)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AJHR</td>
<td>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</td>
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<td>ANZUS</td>
<td>Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty</td>
</tr>
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<td>AOL</td>
<td>Alliance of Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATL</td>
<td>Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington</td>
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<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Beaglehole Room, Victoria University of Wellington</td>
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<tr>
<td>CARP</td>
<td>Campaign Against Rising Prices</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEPO</td>
<td>Council for Equal Pay and Opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEVEP</td>
<td>Coalition for Equal Value Equal Pay</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>Consumer Price Index</td>
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<td>CSSO</td>
<td>Combined State Services Organisation</td>
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<td>CSU</td>
<td>Combined State Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>CTU</td>
<td>New Zealand Council of Trade Unions</td>
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<tr>
<td>DNZB</td>
<td><em>Dictionary of New Zealand Biography</em></td>
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<td>DSIR</td>
<td>Department of Scientific and Industrial Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>Employment Contracts Act</td>
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<td>EEC</td>
<td>European Economic Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>EF&amp;C</td>
<td>Engine-drivers, Firemen and Cleaners</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPMU</td>
<td>Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union</td>
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<td>FOL</td>
<td>New Zealand Federation of Labour</td>
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<td>FSU</td>
<td>Federated Seamens Union</td>
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<td>GWO</td>
<td>General wage order</td>
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<td>HART</td>
<td>Halt All Racist Tours</td>
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<tr>
<td>IC&amp;A</td>
<td>Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICFTU</td>
<td>International Confederation of Free Trade Unions</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>ITF</td>
<td>International Transport Workers Federation</td>
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<td>IWW</td>
<td>Industrial Workers of the World</td>
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<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Archives</td>
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<td>NDU</td>
<td>National Distribution Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZEI</td>
<td>New Zealand Educational Institute</td>
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<td>NZLP</td>
<td>New Zealand Labour Party</td>
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<td>NZSP</td>
<td>New Zealand Socialist Party</td>
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<td>NZWU</td>
<td>New Zealand Workers Union</td>
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<td>PPTA</td>
<td>Post Primary Teachers Association</td>
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<td>PSA</td>
<td>New Zealand Public Service Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>RPI</td>
<td>Retail Price Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>Social Democratic Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSC</td>
<td>State Services Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWP</td>
<td>Standard Wage Pronouncements</td>
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<tr>
<td>T&amp;LCS</td>
<td>Trades and Labour Councils</td>
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<td>TUEA</td>
<td>Trade Union Education Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUF</td>
<td>Trade Union Federation</td>
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<td>TUHP</td>
<td>Trade Union History Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>TWAB</td>
<td>Transport Workers Advisory Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFL</td>
<td>United Federation of Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>VUW</td>
<td>Victoria University of Wellington</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAC</td>
<td>Women's Advisory Committee of the Federation of Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>WFTU</td>
<td>World Federation of Trade Unions</td>
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Timeline

1860s  Formation of the engineers’ and printers’ unions, the first unions with an ongoing existence.
1876  First trades and labour council established in Auckland.
1878  Trade Union Act gave unions legal standing.
1883  First national congress of trade unions held in Dunedin.
1889  Maritime Council formed.
1889  Maritime Strike.
1891  Liberal government takes office.
1894  Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration (I&CA) Act gives protection to unions, regulates wage negotiations and outlaws strikes.
1901  New Zealand Socialist Party formed.
1908  Federation of Miners formed.
1909  Federation of Labor, the ‘Red Federation’, formed.
1910  Shearers Union launches the Maoriland Worker (later The New Zealand Worker and the Standard) but loses control to the Red Federation.
1911  Red Federation membership doubled from 6,124 to 13,971.
1912  T&LCS Federation of Labour and NZLP merge to form United Labour Party (ULP).
      Liberal government falls and Reform government takes office.
      Waihi Strike.
1913  Unity conferences establish a United Federation of Labour and Social Democratic Party to replace the Red Federation, Socialist Party and ULP.
      Great Strike.
1916  Second New Zealand Labour Party formed.
1919  Alliance of Labour formed.
1921  I&CA Act amendment to provide for general wage orders (gwo).
      Communist Party of New Zealand formed.
1924  T&LCs Federation of Labour revived.
1928  United Party government replaces Reform.
1930  Alliance of Labour convenes open conference of industrial unions.
1931  Depression wage cuts.
       Coalition government of Reform and United parties.
1935  First Labour government elected.
1936  IC&A Act amendment restored compulsory arbitration, instituted compulsory
       unionism and allowed for national unions.
       Political Disabilities Removal Act allowed trade unions, on a majority vote of
       members, to make grants to a political party.
       Between 1936 and 1938 union membership increased threefold rapidly (81,000–
       249,000); union density increased from 16% to 48%.
1937  New Zealand Federation of Labour (FOL) formed. Angus McLagan elected
       president and Fred Cornwall elected secretary.
1939  Emergency Regulations provided for special wartime suspensions of labour
       legislation.
1942  McLagan appointed to the Legislative Council and the Cabinet.
1944  Cornwall dies. Ken Baxter elected FOL secretary.
1946  McLagan resigns from FOL. Alexander Croskery elected as president.
1949  National government elected.
1950  Militants walk out of FOL and form Trade Union Congress (TUC).
1951  Waterfront lockout.
1952  Croskery dies, Fintan Patrick Walsh elected FOL president.
1957  Labour government elected.
1959  The Standard ceases publication.
       National government elected.
1961  IC&A amendment introduces qualified preference in place of compulsory
       unionism.
1963  Fintan Patrick Walsh dies, Tom Skinner elected FOL president.
1966  Socialist Unity Party formed.
1968  Nearly 90% of registered unionists under IC&A Act (proportion had been 70.2% in
       1937; 84.1 in 1941; 80.1 in 1945; 70.2 in 1951; 66.9% in 1953; and 89.0 in
       1968).
       Nil wage order.
1969  Baxter retires, Jim Knox elected FOL secretary.
1971  340,605 or 86.3% of trade unionists affiliated to FOL.
        Labour government elected.
1973  Industrial Relations Act replaces IC&AG Act.
1975  National government elected.
1976  FOL Women's Advisory Committee established. This appointed committee was
        replaced by an elected WAC in 1981.
1979  Skinner retires, Knox elected FOL president.
        Ken Douglas elected FOL secretary.
1984  Labour government elected.
1985  FOL Maori and Pacific Island Advisory Committee (later FOL Maori Committee)
        established.
1986  Hui of Maori trade unionists in Rotorua.
        First women and Maori reps on FOL national executive as non-voting observers.
1987  Labour Relations Act.
        New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (CTU) formed. Ken Douglas elected
        president, Angela Foulkes vice-president and Ron Burgess secretary.
1988  Final FOL meeting.
1990  National government elected.
        Burgess retires, Foulkes elected CTU secretary.
1993  11 unions from manufacturing, transport and constructions sectors form Trade
        Union Federation (TUF).
        elected secretary.
        Labour government elected.
2000  TUF winds up and its unions join the CTU, which represents 86% of all
        unionists.
        Union density 22% of wage & salary earners.
        Employment Relations Act.
2003  Carol Beaumont elected CTU secretary after Goulter resigns.
2007  Helen Kelly elected CTU president after Wilson resigns.
2009  Peter Conway elected CTU secretary after Beaumont elected to parliament
CHAPTER ONE

Rescuing the Federations of Labour from the condescension of history

Peter Franks & Melanie Nolan

This history of the New Zealand Federation of Labour (FOL), 1937–88, is the first systematic examination of the FOL since Bert Roth surveyed it in 1973.¹ In this introduction we provide a critical overview of the few other attempts to write the FOL’s history, questioning their concentration upon the leadership’s ideology and arbitration stances. A certain periodicity suggests itself if the focus is on the FOL’s leadership, with 1963–68 being regarded as a turning point between autocratic and democratic trade union leadership and the breakdown of arbitration. Most of the accounts of the FOL have not put it into the context of wider social developments. In particular we address the view of some historians that the FOL, for substantial parts of its history, was not progressive and it did not represent workers well.

Institutional histories, even revisionist ones, are unfashionable among historians. Our second task is to map out new questions that can now be asked of the FOL’s role in New Zealand history when wider social developments are considered. While this collection does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of the FOL, it sets out to generate interest in the history of the peak New Zealand trade union federation by asking questions about its relationship to fundamental social issues such as systematic redistribution, representation and changing political culture in the 20th century.

LEFT  Trade union march to parliament, 1 July 1980. This demonstration — one of many around New Zealand — was part of the FOL’s Defence of Living Standards campaign and was in protest at the National government’s policies. Those leading the march are (from left): Fran Wilde, Labour candidate for Wellington Central; Peter Neilson, Labour candidate for Miramar; David Thorp, president of the Public Service Association; Pat Kelly, president of the Wellington Trades Council; Ashley Russ, FOL national executive member and Frank O’Flynn, Labour MP for Island Bay.

Dominion Post collection, ATL EP/1980/2086/10
Grounds for a biography of the FOL

The New Zealand Federation of Labour was the second organisation with that name. The Federation of Miners, formed in 1908, was the mainstay of the first New Zealand Federation of Labor established in 1909, whose members were commonly known as ‘Red Feds’. The Red Feds were committed to revolutionary industrial unionism and their organisation attracted at its height perhaps a fifth of New Zealand trade unionists in the tumultuous years leading up to the 1913 Great Strike. A number of leaders of the first federation exerted strong pressure in 1937 for the formation of the second federation. Given that they share the same name, the Red Feds are an important precursor to the FOL’s story. It is appropriate that the first substantive paper in this collection by Erik Olsøn (Chapter 2) considers the Red Federation of Labour 1908–14 and its legacy.

While Olsøn concentrates upon the Red Fed tradition of federation, we need to acknowledge that there was another tradition that also aspired to lead the trade union movement in federation. Indeed the federal union ideal was so widespread...
in New Zealand that from 1908 there were effectively two federations of labour for two periods: between 1910–12 and 1924–37. The New Zealand Trades and Labour Council’s Federation of Labour (1910–12) constantly opposed the Red Feds. It invited the American socialist Walter Thomas Mills to New Zealand to contest the message of radical socialist speakers the Red Feds engaged; and it adopted the *Weekly Herald* as a rival to the Red Fed’s *Maoriland Worker* as the New Zealand labour paper.1 The Trades and Labour Council’s Federation of Labour merged into the United Labour Party on 11 April 1912. Many regarded another peak organisation, the Alliance of Labour (1919–37), as the descendant of the Red Feds.1 However, there were other federation progeny. The Wellington Trades and Labour Council led the move to revive the ‘Old Trades and Labour Councils Federation’ in 1923, succeeding in Easter 1924.4 The story of federation between 1924 and 1937 is one of periodic and unsuccessful attempts to unite the Trades and Labour Council’s Federation (1924–37) and the Alliance of Labour. The New Zealand Trades and Labour Council’s Federation of Labour was less fiery and more quietly and consistently a failure than the Alliance of Labour, but it kept alive an earlier, non-radical federal ambition.7 Peter Franks in Chapter 3 considers how a single New Zealand federation of labour was finally formed in 1937.

A comparison between the two federations of labour, the Red Feds and the *FOL* raises a key question: why has there been so little written about the latter? Despite the *FOL*’s longevity and stability, over fifty rather than the Red Feds’ five years, and its commanding most of New Zealand’s private sector trade unionists rather than a minority, there has been little historical writing on this peak organisation that straddled industrial relations for half the 20th century. The numerically weaker and more disunited, but militant, Red Feds have proved to be more attractive to historians.4 There is no overview of the *FOL*, as there has been of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) formed in 1927.9 There has been no socio-political account of the *FOL* to match Olsens account of the Red Feds.10 Partly this results from relatively little work on labourism (which took as its guiding principle the immediate concerns of the workers) as opposed to socialism (which took as its guiding principle the need ‘to abolish capitalism and its class divisions’).11 Jim Hagan in his history of the *ACTU* stresses the importance and dominance of labourism in conflict with the revolutionary tradition. It is not so much that historians have ignored labourism; indeed accounts of New Zealand unions and unionists are riddled with discussion of the ideological and theoretical divisions between moderates and militants. Rather, it is that trade unionists who sought immediate gains have been put down as conservative and uninteresting.
The relative paucity of accounts of the FOL is disconcerting, given that the records are sufficiently rich to sustain any number of histories. Cathy Marr compiled an index of over 33 linear metres of FOL records held at Alexander Turnbull Library in 1988. There are annual reports, conference reports, executive minutes and verbatim transcripts of some meetings. The labour newspapers, Standard and Southern Cross, were editorially single-minded in support of the FOL; Fintan Patrick Walsh, the president of the FOL from 1952 to 1963, was a director on the board of the New Zealand Worker Printing & Publishing Company Ltd. Some version of the New Zealand Federation of Labour Bulletin appeared regularly for most of the period. In addition to the FOL papers there are also private papers of FP Walsh, Tom Skinner, Tony Neary, Peter Butler, Johnny Mitchell and other prominent unionists.

Of course there have been some accounts of a number of aspects of FOL history. Most interpretations of the FOL have appeared under the rubric of industrial relations, especially its role in the 1951 waterfront lockout and the industrial turbulence after 1968. There have been a number of biographies of, and memoirs by, key personalities. All the major leaders have entries in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. In the absence of a scholarly overview, popular accounts emphasise a two-part history. The three consummate examples of this popular left-wing history which reify socialist solidarity are Dr W B Sutch’s Quest for Security and Poverty and Progress (1966) and Chris Trotter’s No Left Turn (2007). They emphasise the role male urban trade unionists played up to the 1960s and the concern with ‘bread and butter’ issues. In the post-war period the FOL was ideologically conservative, having moved from attempting to institute socialism to supporting the consolidation of the post-war planning and reforming achievements. It became, in Sutch’s words, a ‘partner of the state’. The leadership of the trade union movement was influenced by Cold War politics. Groups of the braver, more radical ‘old federation’ could and did meet in reunion after the formation of the ‘lesser’ FOL. As Ray Markey shows in Chapter 5, the social, economic and political context changed and with it expectations of what peak unions do. There were kinds of peak organisations and they changed over time.

Leaders and times change, but the balance of historical concern has been on the former. Trotter describes the FOL by the 1980s as ‘decentralised and raucously democratic’. Labour’s 1930s reforms, Peter Fraser’s mid-century education reforms and the full-employment post-war economy mandated by Keynesian economics meant that a ‘much less regimented and increasingly adventurous working-class … began to fill the nation’s freezing works and factories.’ Between 1966 and 1986 this more aggressive generation racked up the greatest amount of working time lost
to strikes in New Zealand’s history.\textsuperscript{33} Leaders of the trade union movement were now ‘working-class warriors’. However, the ‘fiercely independent’ and ‘democratic’ network of trades council unionists in the FOL was merged in 1987 with the Combined State Unions to form the ‘oligarchic’ Council of Trade Unions (CTU). Trotter accuses the former president of the Public Service Association (PSA), Stan Rodger (the Minister of Labour at the time), middle-class university graduates in the Department of Labour and New Rightists of engineering the demise of a great institution. Under the guise of ‘professionalisation’, New Zealand’s unions, particularly the FOL, were significantly enlarged and restructured along the lines of the new managerialism.\textsuperscript{24}

Of course Sutch and Trotter have broader theses, but their top-down histories undermine human agency. In these stories things are done to workers’ institutions. Longer and earlier fundamental divisions between workers are sidelined. The organised working class was essentially monolithic, passive and reactive. Melanie Nolan (Chapter 4) and Ray Markey (Chapter 5) both question this view in their chapters. Markey argues that part of the problem is that a critical contributor to the FOL’s mobilisation campaigns and general agency were its district councils,

This Bromhead cartoon — published in the *Auckland Star* 9 June 1976 — illustrates the FOL’s reluctance to rock the boat too much, particularly during the years when Tom Skinner was president. Skinner is the waiter and National Prime Minister Robert Muldoon the cook.

New Zealand Cartoon Archive collection, ATL A-347-014. Reproduced with the permission of Peter Bromhead
colloquially known as trades councils, and even less attention has been given to these than to the FOL.\textsuperscript{15} Roth came closest to writing a history of the FOL that does not treat the FOL members as a mere plaything of its leaders or the government. His 1973 account of New Zealand trade unions was a textbook published by the education wing of Reed books.\textsuperscript{16} Roth’s approach was to consider four aspects of FOL history: industrial, economic, social, and international, thus rendering a relatively sophisticated analysis of not just the ‘bread and butter’ concerns and the internal development of an organisation but also its internationalism. Roth asked particular questions about his material. He was concerned with membership of the FOL, its constitution and structure, its contribution to politics, internal and national power and strength, and changes over time. However, Roth’s account ended in 1973 and, in some ways, his narrative supports the popular account with the idea that an FOL era ended in the 1960s: ‘With the death of [Fintan Patrick] Walsh [in 1963],\textsuperscript{17} the expulsion of [Peter] Butler [and the Labourers Union in 1962]\textsuperscript{18} and the retirement of [Ken] Baxter [in 1969],\textsuperscript{19} the classic period in the history of the New Zealand trade unions drew to a close.’\textsuperscript{20} Noel Woods too characterised the period 1938–61 as a significant era.\textsuperscript{11}

Pat Walsh’s work on industrial relations points to more continuity in a broader relational model of the state, employers and unions from the 1950s to the 1970s.\textsuperscript{13} He shows the extent to which all industrial developments over this time were contested. Some unionists were, for instance, parties to the dismantling of the arbitration system after 1968 and his argument could be extended to suggest that they were at the making of the CTU in 1988. None of the important developments involved unanimity within the trade union movement.

To some extent these different interpretations of the FOL history are generational, but Trotter and Roth overlapped and theirs is also an ideological disagreement. The history of the FOL is rendered one way by democratic socialist historians interested in class relations and another way by industrial relations advocates interested in the changing relationships between workers, trade unions, employers and the state.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed to return to the question about why there has been so little written on the FOL, many New Zealand historians have been less concerned about the mainstream rank and file and its industrial quiescence than they have about the role of militants, division and challenges to the New Zealand arbitration system because it suited their political positions. This book is an attempt at a broader overview of the FOL, temporally and in terms of political positions, than has been attempted previously. In addition to examining militancy, it also takes into account the views of those who believed that the highest standard of
living for average middle New Zealand families necessitated rising productivity, and economic and social order. Attitudinal studies indicate that those views were pervasive from the 1930s to the 1990s. But first let us consider the two-phase periodisation in the relatively small amount of historical writing on the FOL in more detail: the post-war ascendancy of the ‘undemocratic’ right-wing in the FOL, followed by the ‘democratic’ left-wing ascendancy.

**Shape of the biography: two-part arbitration story of the FOL**

The two-phase account of FOL history is based on an assessment of the FOL’s commitment to the arbitration system and the level of strikes over time. The FOL’s commitment to compulsory arbitration is held to be the condition of partnership with the Labour government after 1935. The Labour government moved to make good its election promises to improve wage levels, working conditions and living standards. Labour’s industrial legislative programme bolstered union numbers, reshaped industrial organisation, re-instituted minimum wage rates and increased the unions’ financial strength. In the process the political partnership committed the FOL to industrial advocacy and negotiation rather than militancy. The FOL moved towards militancy when commitment to arbitration waned. The FOL, however, had its own agenda too which, we would argue, has been neglected in the standard history of the FOL in terms of arbitration.

**Part one: Classic Cold War system**

The Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration (IC& A) Act was designed in 1894 to ‘encourage the Formation of Industrial Unions and Associations and to facilitate the Settlement of Industrial Disputes by Conciliation and Arbitration.’ The IC& A Act 1936 restored compulsory arbitration, which had been largely removed in 1932, and also made union membership compulsory for workers in any industry covered by an arbitration award. A further amendment in 1937, the ‘blanket clause,’ made awards binding on all industrial unions, employers or associations engaged in or connected to an industry whether they had participated in award negotiations or not. Union membership trebled between 1935 and 1938, from 81,000 to 249,000 and then more slowly. There were 272,843 members a decade later. A whole range of new groups were brought under the arbitration system for the first time. Compulsory unionism resulted in change mostly for white-collar, semi-professional and factory workers — i.e. clerks and office workers, public accountants employees, architectural assistants, engineers’ draughtsmen, wireless operators, dental and optical assistants, Harbour Board officials and stevedores and foremen … hospital employees, ice cream workers, oyster canning
workers, paint and varnish workers, rubber workers, laundry employees, glove workers, fruit preserving and vegetable canning workers, tobacco workers, wire goods workers, sports goods employees, warehousemen and a number of shop assistants. The trade union movement had never been so diverse and it was only going to become more so from this point.

The 1936 Act also provided for the formation of national unions for the first time. Previously a union could only cover one of the eight industrial districts into which New Zealand was divided, although these individual unions often joined together in a national federation. From 1936 there was a growth in unions and awards but a small number of large national unions with ‘growing numerical strength’ were reinforced. While the number of unions peaked in 1951, only 25
of the 412 unions in 1953 had more than 1000 members. Over three-quarters of union members belonged to a small number of large unions. The strongest and most militant of unions were relatively unaffected by compulsory unionism and the strengthening of the arbitration system, but of course numbers were significant.

Unions initiated participation in the arbitration system by registering under the IC&IA Act with the Registrar of Industrial Unions (a Department of Labour official). This guaranteed ‘exclusive jurisdiction’ in an industry but at the cost of restricting union activities, such as their freedom to strike, and gave the registrar a veto over union rules. Membership fees were limited and unions (until 1964) could not provide welfare, training or educational services. The IC&IA Act of 1894 constrained unions to work only on ‘industrial matters’, interpreted very narrowly by the courts as applying to wages, hours and conditions of work. The Political Disabilities Removal Act 1936 increased the rights of unionists and public servants, in particular allowing trade unions to make grants by a majority vote to a political party, even if their rules did not provide for this. In the 1920s unionists made up 90 percent of the Labour Party’s membership. After 1936 the majority of party members continued to be unionists but there were many more of them and the greater proportion of party finances were derived from union affiliation fees, political levies and donations, in particular from the largest and strongest half dozen unions. The FOL’s annual conference traditionally and significantly met the week before the annual conference of the New Zealand Labour Party.

The FOL increasingly became the representative of workers both in the arbitration system and with the government. Awards were settled by conciliation and arbitration. After World War II, unions and employers settled down to a system of uniform national wage rates for each occupation, linked by relativities, and affected by more general uniform increases. Under its periodic Standard Wage Pronouncements from 1919 until 1952 the Arbitration Court had indicated wage levels it considered appropriate for skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers. So ingrained were these occupational relativities that when, for instance, the court awarded an extra five shillings a week for tradesmen under the Engineers Union’s Metal Trades Award in 1950, the printers and a number of other employers of tradesmen immediately followed suit and granted the increase without requiring unions to argue a case before the court. General wage orders (GWOs), which increased all award wages, grew out of cost of living orders. After World War I employers had partly conceded the principle that wages should be indexed to the cost of living. The War Legislation and Statute Law Amendment Act of 1918
The New Zealand Waterside Workers Union was the leader in the post-World War II upsurge of militancy in the trade union movement. Toby Hill, pictured carrying the clock, was elected the union’s national secretary in 1942 when he was 27 years old. He held the position until 1952. Hill and the Jock Barnes, the watersiders’ national president, were vilified by the press, Labour and National politicians, employers and the FOL leadership for the union’s industrial action. They were also falsely accused of being communists.

provided for the general adjustment of wages during the currency of awards in line with movements in the cost of living. A group of unionists unsuccessfully sought ‘stabilisation’ in the depression that occurred in the wake of the lifting in 1921 of the war commandeer (where Britain bought New Zealand’s primary products at guaranteed prices) and the deterioration of the economy. The state, led by ex-trade union leaders, was more successful in achieving this long-term aim during World War II. The growing power of the FOL’s national executive was forged in the 1940s. During the war Peter Fraser, the Labour prime minister, was seen to rely for support on the party machine and FP Walsh’s leadership of the unions. Walsh was a critical member of the government’s Economic Stabilisation Commission, which kept inflation and unions in check. The FOL
The watersiders led a walk-out from the 1952 FOL annual conference. This was followed by the formation of the New Zealand Trade Union Congress as a rival national federation to the FOL. It was an ill-fated move which made it easier for F P Walsh and other FOL leaders to isolate the rebels from the majority of unions. The FOL was quick to hit back with this front page article in the FOL Bulletin.
conferred regularly with the Labour Cabinet and F.O.L. president Angus McLagan was appointed to the Legislative Council and the Cabinet in 1942 as Minister of Industrial Manpower.10

The ‘perfect’ partnership between the state and the F.O.L. was shorter than is usually suggested and arbitration was the cause of discontent. In particular the war was the turning point in the growing importance of general wage orders. There were two GWOs before 1940, but six between 1950 and 1960 and five between 1960 and 1970. The F.O.L. and the majority of unions supported the introduction of economic stabilisation policies during the war, which accelerated the bureaucratic tendencies in New Zealand unionism. Increasingly, the F.O.L. conducted the workers’ case on behalf of the whole of the trade union movement in all hearings before the Arbitration Court to do with standard wages or cost of living bonuses. The F.O.L. operated on a shoestring; its research office was in abeyance from 1950 to 1958 but it was still responsible for preparing submissions to the court which had flow-on consequences for all workers.11 The predominance of the court and the consolidation of relativity considerations as the key criteria in wages settlements ‘gave the wage determination process an ordered and predictable character’. Most unions were concerned to

observe the correct procedures of conciliation and arbitration; to lodge claims at the appropriate time and in the proper manner; to be informed on the pattern of settlements in other disputes in order that their own relativity-based claims might be effectively advanced; to polish their court-room strategy in the event of a court hearing; to monitor, where resources permitted, the compliance with the award by employers and to initiate corrective procedures if necessary; and always be alert for the possibility of demarcation breaches by members of any of the other 350 or so unions in New Zealand.12

It was a conservative system but one that ensured that gains made by stronger groups of workers were passed on to others and provided a comprehensive labour code for low-paid workers. It was an adversarial system in which the interests of the F.O.L. were not always the same as the Labour Party in power.

The F.O.L., for its part, first called on the government to increase wages and benefits in line with the cost of living from the end of stabilisation, effectively in 1950.13 Consumerism had been controlled during the war by monetary controls and rationing, but after the war these restrictions were not immediately lifted.14 When they were removed on 8 May 1950, the resulting price increases, continuing shortages and bad quality goods caused widespread discontent, although the wartime subsidies on butter, eggs, milk, bread, flour and other staples continued. The removal of the subsidy on coal coincided with rising wharf
surcharges and resulted in the Auckland Gas Company doubling the price of gas to its consumers in 1950. Protests, particularly from women’s groups, led the government to subsidise gas companies. The FOL had concentrated its energies on the general wage order hearings. At these pivotal hearings, pursuant to the Economic Stabilisation Act 1948 and Economic Stabilisation Regulations 1953, the court sought to ‘promote economic stability’ by taking into consideration a range of issues from the ‘relative movement’ in the incomes of different sectors of the community, to economic conditions affecting finance, trade and industry.

The FOL was centralised and increasingly powerful under the post-war arbitration system. Union density (the proportion of workers who are union members) is usually measured in terms of the percentage of workers in unions registered under the IC&EA Act. This indicates that a majority of trade unionists were members of the FOL: 70.2 percent in 1937 rising to over 80 percent by 1987. The government recognised the FOL as representing the views of the trade union movement on social and welfare policy as well as industrial relations.

A small group of officials and a small group of unions had an increasing influence. The FOL’s annual conference of delegates representing affiliated unions determined policy. The cap on the number of delegates that large unions (for instance those with 30,000 members) could send to annual conference was limited.

Graph 1: Number of trade unions and union members affiliated to the FOL, 1937–87.
The 1968 nil wage order
In June 1968 the Arbitration Court rejected a claim by the FOL for a general wage increase. The Court’s ‘nil wage order’ and its aftermath shocked trade unionists, alarmed employers and frightened politicians. There were strong calls for action by unions and an angry mass demonstration at the opening of parliament. FOL president Tom Skinner tried to defuse the demands for industrial action by proposing a second application to the court. On the eve of a special FOL conference in July he was outvoted on the FOL executive and the conference voted unanimously that unions use ‘all available channels’ to get a wage rise. Despite the conference decision, Skinner continued to work for a second application. The National government rejected joint proposals by the FOL, the New Zealand Employers Federation (NZEF) and the Minister of Labour, Tom Shand, to change the criteria for general wage order applications. Skinner next approached a number of large employers directly and persuaded them to support a five percent general wage increase. Having secured employer support, the FOL and the NZEF agreed to apply jointly for another wage order on the understanding that unions would be urged to scale down industrial action. The Arbitration Court granted a five percent general wage order, with the union and employer representatives on the court outvoting the judge. Robert Muldoon, the Minister of Finance, denounced the joint application as ‘an unholy alliance’.
On 16 July 1968 — a month after the nil wage order — the FOL and the NZEF met and agreed on a new general wage order application to the Arbitration Court. The FOL agreed to ask unions to scale down their industrial action before the application was decided. The FOL leaders are (from left) Tom Skinner, Ken Baxter, Jim Napier, Jim Knox, Len Hadley and Frank Thorn. The NZEF leaders, on the other side of the table, are (from right) Peter Luxford, Frederick Baird, Vivian Blakeley, Royce Baigent, Cyril Read, Eric Salmon and Colin Clayton.

Dominion Post collection, ATL EP/1968/2/97/a2
Industrial disputes were the barometer of industrial relations and the spotlight has been placed on 1951 as the moment of disunion in the union movement. This was one of the longest and costliest industrial disputes. The 1951 waterfront lockout was accompanied by strikes of seamen, miners, hydro workers, freezing workers, drivers and others involving 22,000, mostly male, workers and their families in a population of two million. The waterfront dispute lasted 151 days with estimates of economic loss varying between a low of £42 million, according to the Government Statistician, and a high of £100 million, according to left-wing accounts. It was also the most bitter of disputes. Upon declaring a State of Emergency the government introduced the Waterfront Strike Emergency Regulations, which made it an offence for anyone to be ‘a party to a declared strike’ and gave police large powers of pursuit and arrest.

Much has been written on the FOL’s role in 1951. The FOL, representing about 70 percent of unions, did not support the locked-out watersiders in 1951 and hardly a word has been published defending that position, although the FOL national executive did write a justification of its position at the time. Similarly there has been little written about the Labour Party opposition in parliament, which did try to rally against the emergency regulations. The militants were
isolated, the government decided to make political gain from an industrial dispute and the FOH is held to have allowed it to happen. The New Zealand Waterside Workers Union suffered a complete defeat. Arguably the strongest union ever formed in New Zealand — with its own band, debating clubs and welfare organisations — was destroyed. It was broken up into 26 port unions, and the Auckland leaders were blacklisted and never employed in the industry again. Jock Barnes, the union’s national president, served two months’ hard labour for criminal defamation. The National Party won the snap election held just over seven weeks after the industrial action collapsed. Jack Marshall, later a National prime minister, summed up the political repercussions of 1951:

"Politically the gains for us [National] were enormous. We had established our capacity to govern and had removed the threat of union domination. We had manoeuvred the Labour Party into an equivocal position, neither for or against the militant unions, and had weakened their power base in the Federation of Labour. We had gained in public confidence, and increased popular support."

The union leaders agreed that it was one of the defining moments of New Zealand history.

The events of 1951 were dramatic, but broader developments meant that 1951 was no turning point industrially. Strike statistics, for instance, show that 1951 was an aberration; from the late 1940s to the late 1960s there was a low level of strikes.

Graph 2: Working days lost in stoppages, 1937–87.
Part two: Undoing the system

The FOL certainly seemed reluctant to change its direction in the post-war period. It continued to pursue its traditional wage strategy of supporting the highest possible rates for skilled workers, which it expected to ‘trickle-down’ through relativities to the rest of the labour force. It was only nominally supportive of equal pay and reluctant to support a substantive campaign.

The years from the late 1930s to 1960s are regarded as the classic period of the arbitration system and FOL dominance; thereafter both unravelled. In the past a number of commentators have pointed to the importance of leadership: FP Walsh’s ties to the Labour government underpinned the close relationship between the industrial and political wings of the labour movement. Similarly Barry Gustafson invests his account with leadership concerns:

Muldoon [National prime minister between 1975 and 1984] had for many years had a reasonably close rapport with Skinner, the FOL President. In public and to their respective constituencies both men attacked each other but in private they
pragmatically made arrangements to their mutual advantage. When the economic and industrial relations deteriorated and criticism of Skinner became more widespread in the union movement, he decided to retire. His successor was the FOL Secretary, Jim Knox. Unlike Skinner, who was as much a politician as a unionist, Knox was almost the stereotypical working-class warrior.\

Working-class warriors emerged as the economic conditions deteriorated. But, as Pat Walsh indicates, the rules of the system changed too. For instance in 1949 the government legislated for special dispute procedures. Pat Walsh emphasises the period 1960 to the late 1970s as one of a ‘slow walk away’ from the industrial relations system instituted in 1894.\textsuperscript{97} The system was finally reformed in the 1980s.

The watersiders’ unions were re-established on a regional basis after the 1951 lockout. The South Island Watersiders Federation reaffiliated to the FOL in 1952, and the North Island Federation in 1954. Neville Colvin shows Jim Napier (the watersiders’ main post-1951 leader) kissing and making up with the FOL. FP Walsh (right) holds the bouquet of flowers while Toby Hill (left) eats his words. However, after a tough period of unemployment and victimisation after 1951, Hill returned as an important trade union leader in the 1960s.

These two unpublished cartoons (and those on pages 28 and 129) were given to Toby Hill by Neville Colvin. They are now in the possession of Gerard Hill (Toby’s son) and are reproduced with his permission.
This is a history of protective tariffs and changes in workers' occupations as much as leadership. It emphasises a slow loss of commitment to the system. It also looks at wider social influences outside the trade union movement. The whole system operated behind a wall of protective tariffs and import controls, which insulated New Zealand industry. Marketing boards insulated primary producers and the service economy that grew in its wake. Arbitration was one of the planks of a protected economy, which provided full employment for white males.

State intervention thus was one factor contributing to undermining the system. When the National government attacked compulsory unionism in 1961, FP Walsh was clear that it was more than a freedom of association issue:

Make no mistake, it means more than the abolition of compulsory unionism. It means the right of unions to negotiate collective agreements on the basis of their economic strength, to take strike action, and to picket during the period of a strike.

While compulsory unionism was abolished in name, the FOL, the NZEF and Department of Labour officials met and agreed to insert a standard unqualified
preference clause in all awards requiring workers who were covered to join the union. This effectively ensured that compulsion continued. As Pat Walsh has outlined, before World War II there was a single-tier bargaining structure, based upon awards and agreements settled within the conciliation and arbitration process. In the post-war period this simple system gave way to an increasingly complex three-tier bargaining structure. Awards and agreements settled through the arbitration system became supplemented by a highly complicated second tier of direct bargaining between unions and employers outside the system; in addition the increasing frequency and significance of CWOS added a third tier to the bargaining structure.

By the late 1960s faltering economic growth, rising inflation and growing unemployment were undermining the industrial stability of the post-war era, with its centralised wage-fixing, moderate inflation and full employment. The National Party tried to re-establish effective economic management with its National Development Conference and National Development Council of New Zealand in 1969, but the whole wage-fixing system was rocked by the Arbitration Court’s famous nil wage order in 1968. Where once the union movement as a whole had sought to establish the highest rates for skilled male workers and relativities to those rates for everyone else, from this point both militant unionists and some employers looked for a new industrial order. As already indicated, Pat Walsh emphasises that the

The cover of a Labour election pamphlet for the 1946 election. While labour could rightly boast that its policies had improved the lot of women and children, the political and industrial Labour movement strongly supported full male employment and the male breadwinner wage.
walk away from arbitration was leisurely. Throughout the 1970s, the FOL and the NZEF worked with National and Labour governments to try and prop up the arbitration system. Far from encouraging militancy, as Trotter asserts, the FOL worked overtime to support the arbitration system and discourage strikes. This was in accord with the views of the majority of unions. Little research has been done on the views of union members. A detailed study in 1975 of the attitudes of nearly 400 workers in four different workplaces shows that the majority were cautious and conservative. Most were Labour voters who supported unions and saw them as effective with regard to wages and conditions. However many felt ‘distant from their union, uninvolved in its problems, members in a formal sense only …’ They were reluctant to strike, much preferring ‘to use established disputes procedures …’

In his final speech as president of the Council of Trade Unions in 1999, Ken Douglas reflected on the history of the union movement and the changing strategies of the peak union organisation:
Before 1987, the main aims of the FOL were the maintenance of living standards and wage bargaining, in that order. The intention was to achieve the first by the second — to use wage bargaining to defend the integrity of the industrial wage … I am not sure that the wage bargaining policy was ever fully tested. We never had free wage bargaining, and bargaining rested on the three pillars of the national awards system, compulsory arbitration, and fixed occupational relativities. All of those were neither free nor bargaining: they were consequences of the regulatory apparatus that successive governments maintained. The regulatory apparatus was designed to reduce industrial disputation, and whether it was wise or fair or even sustainable, the thinking of that time was that the best way to maintain industrial harmony was to maintain a network of wage relativities.71

Historians have long been aware of the pressures on the system, especially changes in work and workers. Roth made a strong attempt to include women, Maori and the unskilled in his history of trade unions, but it ended in 1973. There were potentially significant institutional repercussions for the FOL in the changing occupational structures and greater individual and collective mobility, Maori urbanisation, higher levels of participation by women in paid work and professionalisation in many new occupations after 1973.76 The proportion of Maori living in urban areas rose from 17.3 percent in 1936 to 70.7 percent in 1971.77 The Maori workforce was transformed from a largely rural one with most employed in the primary sector to an urban occupational profile with most employed in manufacturing and services. In 1956 only 7 percent of the Maori workforce was professional, managerial or clerical compared to 27 percent of Pakeha. Only 3.4 percent of Maori workers earned £700 or more compared with 18.6 percent of Pakeha.74 Census income statistics indicate that in 1961 the average annual income of Maori men was 90 percent of that of non-Maori men.79 This is a massive improvement compared to the 1930s.80 Manufacturing and service industries expanded rapidly in post-war New Zealand, as did the high level of demand for public buildings on the one hand and private homes on the other. Large construction sites, and even whole towns, were required to meet the needs of forestry and hydropower industries. Hydro-towns such as Mangakino and Atiamuri and ‘timber towns’, like Kawerau, Murupara and Kaingaroa mushroomed.81 The forestry company, New Zealand Forest Products, attracted a range of workers from within New Zealand, both Maori and Pakeha, but also from overseas such as Pacific Islanders, the British and the Dutch to its ‘high pressure’ development at Tokoroa (the settlement for workers at the large Kinleith paper mill).82 To do so, it had to make employment attractive. Once there, single-company and single-site agreements developed, which bore little relationship to the old traditional occupational relativities.
At a time of massive change the FOL seemed intent on looking backwards. In 1965 it took a case to the Arbitration Court in which it requested that the court make a general pronouncement on the percentage margin that should apply between skilled and unskilled workers. The ‘Margins for Skill’ case was based on FOL research which showed that between 1909 and 1965 skilled tradesmen’s margin over the general labourer had declined from 34.9 percent in 1909 to 19.4 percent in 1965.

Certainly the FOL was committed to the male breadwinner wage and was reluctant to support equal pay. Between 1943 and 1972 the proportion of women’s wages to men’s wages rose from 47 percent to about 70 percent. Initially this was something the FOL opposed. In August 1947 the FOL, in a standard wage hearing before the court, sought among other things an increase in the female rate as a proportion of the male rate, from 60 percent to 90 percent. This was the first union-wide attempt to narrow the gendered wage differential. The FOL argued that the ‘question of equal pay is quite divorced from that of family and dependent benefits. Dependent differentials are properly provided by separate benefits unrelated to wages.’ These ‘differentials’ were the universal family benefit of 1946 and tax concessions that had existed since 1914. The FOL wanted male rates to be paid to women ‘performing work normally performed by adult male workers.’ From this point, organised labour slowly began to support ‘the rate for the job’. Separating concerns about men supporting wives and children on low wages from the call for equal pay was the first major post-war success for the equal pay movement.

Some of the slowness of the equal pay movement was due to the fact that the issue was lobbed back and forth between the court and the legislature. The government claimed that what constituted equity was a matter for the court to decide and the court decided it was something for parliament to decide. In 1950 the FOL unsuccessfully applied to the Arbitration Court to increase the female rate to 75 percent of a male wage and to base wage increases for men upon the ‘notional family’ of a man, wife and three children. The court said that raising the female rate would largely affect single women and would thus be unfair to families. At the same time, it was argued that basing wage increases upon a family unit that was larger than most families was also unjust, inequitable and inflationary. The court claimed that the 1936 amendment to the Industrial Relations Act providing for a family wage for men was, ‘more or less obsolete’ because the state already determined the economic status of the family man independently of the court by its family allowances and minimum wage policies. The law specified differential wage rates for men and women only between 1936 and 1954. Nonetheless most men’s wages remained higher than women’s as a result of their ‘family responsibilities’ into the
More importantly, this shows clearly the complex relationship between the industrial and the political in the arbitration system.\textsuperscript{88} White-collar unions prompted change from within and from outside the FOL.\textsuperscript{89} The new executive of the Wellington Clerical Workers Union (CWU) in the 1960s not only lambasted the ‘old guard’ of its own union led by FP Walsh,\textsuperscript{90} but also attacked the FOL’s failure to ‘initiate and support applications to the Court of Arbitration for a major review of margins for skills and for equal pay for equal work.’\textsuperscript{91} In 1962 CWU delegates to the Wellington Trades Council succeeded in getting it to recommend that unions seek equal pay in all new awards. The president of the Wellington Trades Council urged all unions to ask for equal pay in their wage negotiations for it ‘would be foolish’ for the national executive to demand equal pay from the government, ‘only to be told by the Minister that the Unions themselves did not seem to be seeking this measure.’\textsuperscript{92} But the FOL continued to be half-hearted.\textsuperscript{93} In 1964 a FOL delegation to the prime minister asked the government to legislate for equal pay because union attempts to get equal pay provisions written into key awards, or female rates lifted much closer to male rates in other awards, had been unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{94} At the same time, the FOL’s stated policy was to bring a test case on equal pay to the Arbitration Court as soon as a suitable opportunity presented itself, and also to take the matter up again with government when the situation was economically propitious.

In 1969 the FOL came out more strongly in support of equal pay.\textsuperscript{95} Addressing the annual conference, Tom Skinner, FOL president, said that the time had come to take action for equality of pay ‘where it is appropriate’, but that the federation needed a sound case to work on and would move ‘on a suitable occasion’ to establish a precedent. Although the conference reaffirmed the FOL policy of ‘equal pay for equal work for males and females’, it failed to support a remit from the Federated Shop Assistants Association asking for a test case to be prepared in connection with the hairdressers’ dispute.\textsuperscript{96} By 1970, however, caution had been abandoned in the face of pressure from female-dominant unions which was strongly articulated by women delegates at FOL conferences. Instead of taking a test case to the Arbitration Court the FOL decided to urge the government to introduce equal pay by legislation. The annual report presented to the 1970 conference was ‘emphatic’ in its demand that members strongly support equal pay, and urged a united effort by the entire trade union movement to force the government to ratify the relevant ILO convention.\textsuperscript{97}

Above all it needs to be emphasised that for most of its history only a minority of New Zealand wage and salary earners were members of the FOL. The wage and salary earners data comes from the census and it shows that a minority of workers

1950s and 1960s.\textsuperscript{87} More importantly, this shows clearly the complex relationship between the industrial and the political in the arbitration system.\textsuperscript{88}
were FOL members. Taking the figures at face value, on average, about 45 percent of wage and salary earners were FOL members.\(^9\)

Apart from the railway unions, state sector unionists were not affiliated to the FOL. Maori were not counted in the statistics as wage and salary earners until 1951 and part-time and casual workers (presumably women and young people were overrepresented in this category) have been consistently under-reported since then.

Institutionally, representation underwrote the FOL’s response to matters such as equal pay. As others have found for other labour institutions, the FOL was a mix of progressivism along with sexism and racism which changed over time just as the wider society changed. The FOL became relatively progressive in some ways on selected issues of representation. Developments in representation and institutions were linked. Changes in the basic wage strategy and hiatus in the post-war industrial system meant that equal pay found favour at a time when new power relationships within the FOL saw the rise of white-collar unions such as the clerical workers and shop employees, which had a high proportion of women members and whose leadership was committed to equal pay.
Only 12.5 percent of delegates to the FOL conference in 1976 were women, although it must be remembered that women’s representation in parliament and in most other institutions at that time was even lower. Women’s advisory councils were not established by the FOL until the late 1970s and by state sector unions until 1984. Since its establishment in 1937 the FOL had held that women’s organisation ought to be integrated with occupational or industry unions at national and district levels. Unions largely ignored the particular interests of Maori workers until the 1980s. In 1986, a national hui of Maori unionists debated the formation of a separate movement. They decided to remain within the established unions but called for Maori representation in union structures. When the CTU was formed in 1987 it decided to keep separate structures for women and Maori in place by a very narrow margin: the card vote was 265,463 for and 265,187 against. This decision proved critical for increasing participation by women and Maori in policy making. In Chapter 6 the panellists in this collection cover the FOL’s grappling with this issue.

Most trade unions representing workers in the state sector were not affiliated to the FOL. Few of the state sector unions were registered under the IC&EA Act and
their membership numbers were thus excluded from official statistics on union membership. They had a separate organisation, the Combined State Services Organisation, later the Combined State Unions (CSU), and a different system of industrial relations. Wages were set according to the principle of fair relativity with the private sector. This was determined by a survey carried out by the Department of Labour of trades and labouring occupations in the engineering and construction industries. There were also negotiations for different occupational groups and national negotiations between state sector unions and the government.

Pat Walsh argues that ‘considerably less than half of New Zealand’s employers belonged to an employer’s union in 1960.’\textsuperscript{102} Similarly, the FEL might have been the important union representative but it did not represent the majority of workers. This placed a governor on policies of militancy in the New Zealand context, a country in which non-Labour governments were in power for longer than Labour governments (28 compared to 22 years up to the mid-1980s).
And of course the impetus to the formation of the CTU came from the PSA, the largest state union, which provided much of the leadership, advocacy and research for the CSU. There were joint FOL-CSU campaigns against the National government’s economic policies which led to an affiliation movement, and ultimately the CTU. The oil crises in the 1970s and Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 saw New Zealand’s economic situation deteriorate rapidly. Unemployment rose and union opposition to the series of wage and prices freezes saw rising industrial action. In 1979 the National government threatened to derecognise the PSA in an electricity dispute. The dispute was resolved without the derecognition bill being passed but the FOL’s support of the PSA in the dispute signalled closer relations and close interests as the National Party attacked union rights and FOL policies designed to raise living standards: ‘One lesson of the derecognition struggle was that even the largest union in the country could not stand alone.’

"First cuckoo of spring". This 1982 cartoon by Gordon Minhinnick from the New Zealand Herald shows a determined David Thorp (Public Service Association president) moving in on an alarmed-looking Jim Knox (FOL president). Prime Minister Robert Muldoon and Minister of Labour Jim Bolger are the bird spotters. As Ken Douglas points out in Chapter Six, the PSA’s call for a new Council of Trade Unions was carefully orchestrated and built on the increasing co-operation between state and private sector unions in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Ken Douglas addressed the PSA advisory council on 13 July 1982 about the ‘affiliation question’. And, in turn, Colin Clark, PSA deputy general secretary, suggested the union movement form a New Zealand Council of Trade Unions which would ‘unite not only the FOL and the CSU but also the large white-collar unions currently outside both organisations’ (the bank and local government employees). Along with increasing joint involvement in wages policy discussions, an inter-union CTU working party was established in 1982 to discuss the formation of a new central trade union organisation to replace the FOL and the CSU. It produced draft rules in April 1983 and held a preliminary constitutional conference in February 1985. Ray Markey considers the CTU’s establishment in more detail in Chapter 5.

A broader history still? The peculiarities of the FOL’s world, 1937–88

Wider institutional relationships were changing, too. The Labour Party, and indeed, from 1949 the National Party too, had controlled the business of shaping the economic, social and cultural framework; the Arbitration Court being one of the primary vehicles. Increasingly from Labour’s election in 1984, governments gave a large part of control of the economy to the market. With the floating of the New Zealand dollar and the lifting of tariff walls, the international financial world became a much more important element. But that raises the issue of whether economic and occupational changes were the principal influences on the FOL’s policy making and executive action. Developments external to the trade union movement were important too: demographic history and the changing average social unit; the history of mentalité — the attitudes of ‘average’ New Zealanders; and the political economy.

Demographic history

There are important family–work–union linkages in the post-war period, when trade union politics were affected by demographic and socio-economic changes. Family variability was at its lowest in the 20th century and this had political ramifications, albeit indirect.

It is commonly held that families in the past were universally large and that slowly they have grown smaller. There is a widespread contemporary belief that the family is breaking down with rising sole-headed families and divorce rates destroying their fabric. Ian Pool, Arunachalam Dharmalingam and Janet Sceats have written a much more subtle account of continual family change which is relevant to trade union history. They identify four main phases of the ‘family
transition model’. There was an early colonial hyper-fertility with Pakeha reaching almost maximum fertility up to 1880. From the 1880s to 1930 the family size declined unevenly — in demographic terms there was reproductive polarisation or variability. As genders balanced there was a rising number of spinsters and a lower proportion of bachelors (in 1874, half (49%) of adult men had never married; by 1926 the figure had dropped to 30 percent) at the same time as there were some large families. They characterise the post-World War II period as the era when variability diminished, with most New Zealanders marrying and having smaller families. The fourth phase is a period of family diversification again: one of more family and reproductive polarisation, smaller families still, a ‘baby bust’ (although there are also a baby blips at times), cohabitation rising at the expense of marriage against a backdrop of the contraceptive revolution and delayed childbearing. They end with addressing concerns over ‘baby deficient’ or unsustainable small families. The Maori transition differs from Pakeha, with the transition from the first to the second stages being delayed and then the transition from the third to the fourth being accelerated. After 1966 Maori experience was similar to that of Pakeha.

So the FOL existed at a time when family variability narrowed: most New Zealanders married and most had small families. Full employment was at its peak in the post-war period, with controlled immigration, import restrictions, tariff protection and the flowering of the welfare state. The gap between rich and poor also narrowed to reach a low in the 1970s and 1980s before it widened once more. The FOL then had better reasons than at any other time since Pakeha settlement for pitching its policies to the average New Zealander and their similar family needs. However, policies founded on this basis floundered from the 1970s as family diversification increased.

**Attitudinal changes**

Similarly it can be argued that there was a common mentalité in the period 1937 to 1988 that underwrote FOL policy. Social attitudes are much more difficult to measure than demographic trends. How do we measure consensus on core economic processes? When the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in 1948, Dr Colin Aikman, speaking on behalf of the New Zealand government, said:

> Experience in New Zealand has taught us that the assertion of the right of personal freedom is incomplete unless it is related to the social and economic rights of the common man. There can be no difference of opinion as to the tyranny of privation and want. There is no dictator more terrible than hunger. And we have found in
New Zealand that only with social security in its widest sense can the individual reach his full stature. Therefore it can be understood why we emphasise the right to work, the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, widowhood and old age. Also the fact that the common man is a social being requires that he should have the right to education, the right to rest and leisure, and the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community. These social and economic rights can give the individual the normal conditions of life which make for the larger freedom. And in New Zealand we accept that it is the function of government to promote their realisation.\textsuperscript{110}

While there were no attitudinal studies in the immediate post-war period, there are indicative measures. Take, for instance, the survey of primary school teachers on equal pay conducted in the late 1950s by their union, the New Zealand Educational Institute (\textsc{nzei}); i.e. an occupation with a large number of educated women in its ranks and generally held to be progressive.\textsuperscript{111} In May 1957 the \textsc{nzei}
released the results of a survey of 4000 teachers, 3886 of whom said they would not accept equal pay if there was not also the provision of an adequate family benefit.\textsuperscript{112}

This core consensus fell away slowly from the 1960s, later than most accounts indicate. A number of recent studies suggest that there has been a transition in social values constituting significant cultural change in the late 20th century. New Zealanders’ attitudes to social inequality, for instance, have been tracked for 20 years as part of the International Social Survey Programme. In 1992, 70 percent of respondents to the survey still said income differences in New Zealand were too large. By the most recent survey in 2009 that had fallen to 60 percent, even though the country had become more unequal over that time. In 1992, half (52 percent) of respondents said that workers’ pay should be influenced by the cost of supporting a family, or whether they had children. Those beliefs have dropped away to 34 percent in 2009. Half the respondents to the survey (52 percent) also said it was the government’s job to reduce income differences between people. More recently that figure has also fallen to 40 percent; the majority no longer think it is up to the state to reduce inequality. Inequality rose everywhere in the Western world in the last couple of decades of the 20th century but it rose fastest in New Zealand. Once New Zealand was considered an equal society.\textsuperscript{113} ‘New Zealanders once prided themselves on being an egalitarian society, but research shows we not only tolerate increasing income disparity but appear to welcome it.’\textsuperscript{114}

This cultural change emerged piece by piece, changing institutional relationships.\textsuperscript{115} It amounted, however, over the lifetime of the FOL, to a fundamental shift in values.

\textit{Political culture}

New Zealand’s political culture, furthermore, was peculiar. A number of historians have pointed to the Liberal government’s ‘social contract’ at the turn of the 20th century; a social contract developed upon the basis of a social consensus over continual progress, class harmony and egalitarianism.\textsuperscript{116} In Australia this was known as the Deakinite settlement until Paul Kelly popularised it as the ‘Australian settlement’, but there was a New Zealand variant too. Conflict was resolved by a social consensus over a male breadwinner wage, white New Zealand and tariff and industry protection.\textsuperscript{117} Less attention has been given to the political culture in the post-war period when a second ‘social contract’ developed: a statist and centralist consensus over the welfare state and Keynesian policies that stretched from Savage’s to Muldoon’s governments, 1935–83 — most of the lifetime of the FOL. It was a stronger and more long-lasting social pact or ‘accord’ than others
It has been described as ‘socialism of middle New Zealand’, i.e. that ‘full employment, an expanding economy and a stable currency could be achieved by central government management, deficit financing and high public expenditure.’

Its effect was that there was relatively little conflict in post-war New Zealand and the trade union movement was one aspect of this. Certainly the FOL was not as sharply divided by Catholic or communist factions as in Australia or by feminist or indigenous movements when they emerged. The role of communist members in the New Zealand trade union movement, for instance, never provoked the political debate that it did in Australia. Communist Party membership peaked in New Zealand during World War II at about 2000. Even though it was led (1950–63) by FP Walsh, who had been a militant and early member of the Communist Party, and (1979–88) by Ken Douglas who was a prominent leader of the Socialist Unity Party, the FOL did not split along ideological lines. The Trade Union Congress 1950–51 was a short-lived split. The point is that there was general social agreement after 1951. Certainly the National Party, the Labour Party and the FOL generally found agreement.

Unlike Australia, there was general anti-communist feeling. The FOL executive in the post-war period was right-wing, albeit on the right of a left-wing New Zealand institution and a participant in the international developments of the early stages of the Cold War. In May 1949 on FP Walsh’s motion, the FOL agreed to cancel its association with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) by a vote of 197 to 61. The WFTU had been formed in 1945 to bring together country-wide trade union groups. Representatives from 56 countries representing 67 million workers had joined the WFTU. The ACTU president Albert Monk, the Australia-New Zealand representative on the WFTU executive committee, described it as being under communist control; it was “one way traffic” and had unfortunately failed in its efforts to function as an international trade union organization to compose different political ideologies and methods to achieve objectives. The drive to isolate the Soviet Union in international affairs saw a number of trade union federations withdraw from the WFTU. American and British trade unions called a conference in Geneva in June 1949 which FOL leaders Alexander Croskery, FP Walsh and Len Hadley (who became the first trade unionist to be knighted, in 1974) attended to establish a new world-wide federation of ‘free’ trade unions to ‘advance the cause of world peace, check communist infiltration into free trade unions and promote higher standards for workers on an international level.’ In April 1950 at its annual conference the FOL officially affiliated to the non-communist ‘democratic’ ICFTU which claimed 50 million affiliated workers.
The FOL promoted progressive politics from the 1940s to the 1980s: equal pay, opposition to apartheid, the Vietnam War and nuclear weapons with the same kind of majority consensus as occurred over support for the ICFTU. However, by the 1970s, and certainly into the 1980s, the consensus was fraying. The end of certainty over the post-war political culture coincided with the end of the FOL.

Conclusion

The history of an institution is greater than a sum of the biographies of its leaders or indeed the external factors operating upon them. Rather than the leadership determining its character or willfully determining strategic direction, the history of the FOL has to be grounded in the wider period, 1937–88, and within New Zealand’s culture. While clearly the FOL was a different institution when it went out of existence than it had been in 1937, its world had changed too. Others have examined the economy, the changes in work and workers and the evolving industrial relations systems. To this survey we have added wider issues such as family formation, societal attitudes and political culture. We have followed here the views of those like Raymond Williams who hold that workers are ‘real agents’; within constraints they created and changed the values and culture that sustained solidarity and the FOL.134

So, finally, were the working people of New Zealand well-served by the FOL in this period? Within the framework of a protected economy and a highly regulated wage-fixing system for its entire institutional history, the FOL played a central role in ensuring that gains made by stronger groups of workers flowed through to all unionised workers. The question remains whether the FOL could have done more, and how much it was responsible for what occurred — or whether it was over determined or just plain ‘lucky’. However 1937 to 1988 was the period in which income inequalities were reduced to the narrowest on record. By any measure, the FOL and its affiliated unions were able to protect the wages of ordinary workers to a greater extent than in the periods before or after, which was a rare feat.135 The FOL was an organisation of and for its times. By the 1980s it was running out of steam. A more representative peak organisation, a new approach and a wider agenda were needed.

Notes


Membership rose rapidly during 1911 from 6124 to 13,971; it was estimated that by February 1912 the Red Feds had 43 affiliates and almost 15,000 members. There were still 322 unions and 60,622 members registered under the IC&A Act at the end of
the year. Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, Appendices, Table 2, ‘Unions registered under the I C and A Act at 31 December of each year.’

3 Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, p 139.


6 Evening Post: 31 March 1923; 4 April 1924: 17 May 1924: 2 October 1924: The conference to form the Trades and Labour Council’s Federation was held in Dunedin at Easter on 19 April 1924. The Wellington Trades and Labour Council (WTLC) led the move to revive the ‘Old Trades and Labour Councils Federation’ in 1923: when it was reformed in 1924. John Read, the WTLC president was elected as the first president of the TLC’s Federation of Labour. The best account of the TLC Federation of Labour is Kath Clark, ‘Splendid Isolation: the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council and the Question of Unity, 1928–1937’ in Pat Walsh (ed), *Trade Unions, Work and Society: The Centenary of the Arbitration System*, Palmerston North, 1994, Dunmore Press, pp 109–25.

7 On his visit to New Zealand in June 1930, Walter Citrine, general secretary of the British Trades Union Congress, was struck by the division between the TLCs and the Alliance of Labour. On arriving in Auckland, he was told that ‘the Trade Union Movement was very divided here between the big Unions in the Alliance and the smaller ones in the Trades Council. The feeling was not good between them, although they all combined politically in the Labour Party.’ Diary of a journey around the world by Walter Citrine, vol 2, citrine/i/111. Archives, London School of Economics, p 426.


10 For a discussion comparing the ACTU and the FOE, see Bradon Ellem and Peter Franks, ‘Trade Union Structure and Politics in Australia and New Zealand’, in *Labour History*, no 95, November 2008, pp 43–68.


Grant A and Roses.

Graeme Hunt, theses, C Waterfront Dispute in a waterfront dispute, the effectiveness of restrictive government measures on representations of watersiders during the 1951 waterfront dispute, particularly within the Auckland Region; A Bibliography, Andrew David Cooper, 'The 1951 Waterfront Dispute in Canterbury: A Select Annotated Bibliography', and Leo Clayton, 'An Annotated Bibliography of the 1951 Waterfront Dispute in Wellington', Master of Library and Information Studies theses, VUW, 2001.


18 See the DNZB for articles on those substantially involved in the FOL: T A Anderson (1888–1964); Chip Bailey (1921–63); Ken M Baxter (1883–1975); Peter M Butler (1901–95); Nada (Nan) Clark (1922–64); Fred Cornwell (1875–1948); Alex Croskery (1878–1952); Alex Drennan (1899–1971); Dick Eddy (1882–1953); Toby Hill (1915–71); Florence Humphries (1915–81); Walter Knox (1919–91); Angus McLagan (1891–1966); William Noel Pharazyn (1894–1980); Tom Skinner (1909–91); F P Walsh (1894–1963).


21 The old New Zealand Federation of Labour ‘Red Fed’ Auckland (Transport) Branch grand re-union of men who remained loyal to their union in the 1912 strike: 17th December 1938, at 8 p.m. in the Forestiers Hall, Auckland, New Zealand Federation of Labour, Auckland (Transport Branch), 1938, ATL.

22 Trotter, No Left Turn, pp 289–90.


24 A thesis developed in Bruce Jesson, Only Their Purpose is Mad: The Money Men Take Over New Zealand, Palmerston North, Dunmore Press, 1999.


26 Roth, Trade Unions in New Zealand.


28 Peter Franks, ‘Butler, Peter Michael, 1901–95’, DNB, vol 3 (1941–60), Auckland, Auckland University Press and Department of Internal Affairs, 2000. Butler was a member of the FOL national council (1941–47) and its national executive (1948–59). He was defeated as an FOL executive member and in 1962 his labourers union was suspended from the FOL.


30 Roth, Trade Unions in New Zealand, p 89.


36 The IC&LA Amendment Act 1932 removed protection for male unions; it continued if workers and employers agreed but few did. Women’s unions were exempt, Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, p 11.
38 Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, Table 3, pp 169–70.
44 Ibid.
45 T W Bentley, ‘Trade Union Financial Assistance to the New Zealand Labour Party 1930–1966’, MA research essay, University of Auckland, 1973, p 20. The unions were the New Zealand Waterways Workers Federation, the Federated Seamen’s Union of New Zealand, the New Zealand Workers Union, the Post and Telegraph Workers Union, the New Zealand Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union and the Amalgamated Society Railway Servants.
46 The FOL’s 1970 annual report said that, while the FOL conference should take priority for unions, ‘We believe it should be in the common interests of the two organisations for the FOL delegates to attend the Labour Party conference, if their Unions are affiliated to the NZ Labour Party. We hope that at the NZ Labour Party’s fifty-fourth conference an industrial policy will be brought down in the interests of the wage and salary earners.’ FOL, *Minutes and Report of the Proceedings of the Thirty-Third Annual Conference held in the Trades Hall, Wellington, on April 28, 29, 30 and May 1, 1970*, Wellington, 1970, p 38. At the 1970 Labour Party conference, unions held 407 card votes out of a total of 737. Peter Franks, *Working in the Labour Party*, unpublished paper, 1980, Peter Franks collection.
47 Most were settled at conciliation (which was essentially the same as today’s mediation although more structured and formal. Writing in 1960, Sir Arthur Tyndall, the longest-serving judge of the Arbitration Court, emphasised the importance of conciliation in the New Zealand system: ‘An analysis of the total of 2000 awards made during the last 13 years shows that 75 percent represent complete settlements by the parties. In addition, during the same period 1005 industrial agreements were made; so that out of 3005 enforceable documents only in 486 did the court have a direct hand in settling some of the terms. Sir Arthur Tyndall, *The New Zealand System of Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration*, reprinted from the *International Labour Review*, August 1960, Wellington, Government Printer, 1960, p 9.
50 Federation of Labour (New Zealand), *Joint Statement on War Policy by the National Council of the Federation of Labour and the National Executive of the New Zealand Labour Party*, Wellington, Standard Print, 1940; New Zealand Federation of Labour, Minutes of a meeting with Cabinet, 9–10 January 1942, MS papers 8771, ATL.
51 The FOL continued to be run on a shoestring until the 1980s. In an interview with Peter Franks, the watersiders’ leader Ted Thompson (FOL executive member 1971–80 and vice-president 1980–83) said it was a fault of both Skinner and Knox that the FOL was run ‘on a skin-flint basis, no question about that. You’d think that they were paying it out of their wages.’ Interview with Ted Thompson, 18 November 1997, Peter Franks collection.
53 Minister of social security to the Federation of Labour, 2 July 1956; K Baxter to minister of social security, 6 August 1954, minister to the Federation of Labour, 2 July 1956, SS? W2756 7/5/21, New Zealand Federation


62 Most of the watersiders outside Auckland got their jobs back, including the leaders of their local unions.


64 Roth, Trade Unions in New Zealand, pp 75–8.


69 Evening Post, 11 November 1960.


74 Joel Seidman, Attitudes of New Zealand Workers, Industrial Relations Research Monograph no 1, Industrial Relations Centre, VUW, 1975, p 97, 99. Seidman, emeritus professor of industrial relations at the University of Chicago and his assistants conducted in-depth interviews with 399 workers at a metal working plant, a wood products factory, a sawmill and a construction company. 56% of those interviewed were European, 27% Maori and 12% Pacific Islanders.


77 Manatu Maori, Nga toha i te as at i te Maori: Maori Mobility: A review of research, Manatu Maori, Report 1, Wellington, 1991, Manatu Maori, p 22.
58 UNIONS IN COMMON CAUSE


82 Gareth Roderrick, 'A saga of modern day pioneering: Tokoroa and its place within New Zealand social history', 489 essay, VUW, 2006.

83 Federation of Labour, *Submissions to the Court of Arbitration Concerning Margins Payable for Skill*, Wellington, 7 September 1965.


85 Standard Wage Pronouncement, 1947, p 19, MS papers 4100–32/6/1, MS Group 0049, ATL.


91 Minutes, Executive Council of the New Zealand Clerical Workers’ Association, Dunedin, 10–12 April 1961, Peter Franks’ collection.


94 Keith Holyoake to T E Skinner, 28 July 1964. FOL, Prime Minister file, FOL records, MS papers 4100-18/41/5, MS Group 0049, ATL.


96 FOL conference — minutes and report of proceedings, 1969, p 38, MSX 2394, MS Group 0049, ATL.

97 FOL conference — minutes and report of proceedings, 1970, p 43, MSX 2395, MS Group 0049, ATL. A few of its constituents did not change their minds, however. See Christchurch Star, 9 November 1970. Most notably, in 1970 the Grocers’ Award, hitherto an ‘equal pay’ award, explicitly stipulated that female grocery assistants were to receive less than their male counterparts.


99 Women made up only 2.3% of delegates on average between 1960 and 1969. This proportion rose from 4.1% in 1970 to 12.1% in 1976. A J Geare, J J Herd and J M Howells, *Women in Trade Unions*, Industrial Relations Research Monograph no 6, Industrial Relations Centre, VUW, 1979, p 11.


102 Walsh, ‘The Rejection of Corporatism’.
103 Jack Lewin had wanted the p.54 to affiliate to the FOL in the 1940s.
106 Ibid, p 288.
107 Ibid, p 298.
108 *New Zealand Censuses, 1874–1926*, Conjugal Condition of People.
110 Colin Aitken, a Legal Adviser in the Department of External Affairs (1948–55) had been a member of the New Zealand delegation at the San Francisco UN Conference in 1945. He joined the New Zealand delegation Peter Fraser led to the Paris Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in late 1948 which resulted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Aitken advised Anne Newlands but, in her absence, also presented the case for economic and social rights and the right to join trade unions in a speech to the General Assembly in September 1948. Colin Aitken, ‘New Zealand and the origins of the Universal Declaration’, *Victoria University of Wellington Law Review*, vol. 29, no 1, January 1999, p. 5, re Human Rights UNGA Resolution 217 A (III), 10 December 1948.
112 *Dominion*, 16 May 1957; *Otago Daily Times*, 18 May 1957; 19/1, Box 10, CEPO Equal Pay Archives, p.34.
115 Massey University Department of Marketing’s International Social Survey Programme, quoted by *New Zealand Listener*, 1–7 April 2010, p 15.
123 *New Zealand Federation of Labour Bulletin*, vol 1, no 1, October 1949, p 6.
Prime Minister George Forbes (standing above and to the left of the white banners), with two policemen standing behind him, addresses a crowd of people gathered on parliament steps in the early 1930s. The Great Depression of the 1930s hit New Zealand very hard. Production fell, wages were cut and between 80,000 and 100,000 men lost their jobs. The conservative Reform–United coalition cut government spending in an attempt to balance the books; thereby making things worse. Unemployed women were largely excluded from the unemployed relief schemes and from unemployment statistics. Unemployed men had to work for their meagre dole. Public servants wages were cut by 10% and then a further 10%. The police were exempted from the second wage cut. The Arbitration Court cut private sector workers’ wages by 10% but this was not enough for employers who demanded that compulsory arbitration be abolished. The government gave in to the employers. This meant that unions could not fall back on the court’s protection in the face of demands for further wage cuts. There were widespread protests against the government’s policies. It rushed laws through parliament giving the government power to declare a national emergency and to sack public servants. Many people were prosecuted and jailed for taking part in a riot.

CHAPTER TWO
Precursors of the second
New Zealand Federation of Labour

Erik Olsen

The origins of the second Federation of Labour, the one that Peter Fraser bullied the country’s union leaders into creating in 1937, can be told quite simply in institutional terms. Why Fraser played such a critical role — although one totally ignored by his biographers — can only be understood by explaining what had happened on the industrial and political fronts since his arrival in New Zealand in 1911.¹

Fraser probably migrated because the country had become famous throughout the English-speaking labour-socialist world because of the first New Zealand Federation of Labor, widely known as the Red Federation or Red Feds. This organisation’s dramatic rise in 1908–10 signalled the successful integration of the day-to-day struggles of revolutionary unionists with the larger goal of revolutionary socialism. As a builder’s labourer in London, heartland of Tom Mann’s Syndicalist Education League and the Socialist Party of Great Britain, Fraser would have known that many revolutionaries thought New Zealand most ripe for revolution.²

Fraser did not long remain impressed by the success of this synthesis of strategic goals with the tactical struggle at the point of production. The failure of the Auckland General Labourers Union’s direct action in the summer of 1911–12, followed by the defeat at Waihi,³ disillusioned Fraser and many other revolutionaries with the Red Federation’s strategy. They were not persuaded that ‘Big Bill’ Hayward’s Industrial Workers of the World, an

Peter Fraser, 1918. When the industrial action led by the Red Feds failed, Fraser decided to support political action over syndicalism.
organisation that damned political action and focused on waging class war at the point of production, had the answers. Fraser reverted to the strategy spelt out by Daniel De Leon, the official line of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which gave primacy to the revolutionary political wing rather than industrial unions.

The idea that working men could only survive if they combined together to contest capital’s dominance had a long history. Robert Owen’s vision in the early 19th century of a Grand National Consolidated Trade Union, uniting skilled and unskilled, survived its own defeat and the collapse of Owenite socialism. Other organisations picked up the vision of a unified labour movement that transcended distinctions based on skill, craft, religion or even nationality and race. In the United States the Knights of Labour, briefly important in New Zealand in the late 1880s and early ’90s, heralded the same vision, although the local branches

Annual conference of Trades and Labour Councils of New Zealand, 1908. The T&LCs, which were formed in the main cities in the 1870s and 1880s, were the country’s first federations of trade unions and their first national conference was held in 1885. By the late 1900s the T&LCs were the face of ‘moderate’ labour as opposed to the ‘militant’ Red Feds.
were political rather than industrial organisations. The loose federation of Trades and Labour Councils (T&LCS) that first met in Dunedin in 1885, and then met annually in national conference from 1891 until 1912, expressed the vision in weak form, and began to discuss creating a more unified and thus more powerful national federation following the spectacular success of the Blackball strike of 1908. They established a New Zealand Trades and Labour Councils’ Federation in 1910. In 1912 that federation — still an idea rather than an organisation — and the first New Zealand Labour Party merged to form the United Labour Party.

As is well known, after that strike the various miners’ unions on the West Coast formed a federation to which, before long, the North Island’s major miners’ unions affiliated. In 1909, following the affiliation of the West Coast Workers Union, the Miners’ Federation enlarged its ambitions and re-named itself the
New Zealand Federation of Labor. This organisation, unlike that proposed by the T&LCS, had a powerful central executive armed with authority to levy members and call strikes. The leaders of the T&LCS were furious, but to no avail. They had been upstaged, for now, and the bitterness sown would grow and eventually bring the Red Federation to its knees. That, however, would only become clear during the Waihi Strike of 1912 and the Great Strike of 1913.6

The ‘Red’ Federation of Labor’s dramatic rise and fall fundamentally altered the history of industrial relations, the labour movement and national politics, while leaving a powerful legacy of ideas and tactics, to which I shall return.7

The United Federation of Labour
After the defeat at Waihi the federation lost considerable mana among many of its affiliates and members. While many of the rank and file joined the Industrial Workers of the World, the Red Federation’s leaders tried to find common ground
with the main army of the industrial movement, the T&LCS and their political arm (at that time the United Labour Party). Two great unity conferences were convened in 1913 to end the civil war that had torn the labour movement asunder and had made defeat inevitable at Waihi. At the second of those great meetings the delegates agreed to form two new organisations: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the United Federation of Labour (UFL).

Between the July unity conference and the start of the 1913 strike in October the UFL remained an idea rather than an organisation. The rank and file at the Taupiri coal company’s mines in Huntly and on the Wellington wharves, disillusioned with the old Red Federation and determined to seek a showdown with the class enemy, had their way. The UFL’s executive did its best to contain the conflict, and even sought a negotiated settlement. It was too late. The class enemy, backed by the Massey government and its special police, won the battle.

In 1914 the delegates to the UFL’s first conference, much subdued, weakened the
central executive’s power considerably and deleted the revolutionary preamble to the constitution. Thereafter its main role was to lobby government on behalf of unions and to convene open conferences where representatives or delegates from unions could discuss and debate issues.10

Labour historians have viewed the UFL as a sell-out and have largely ignored it. In the circumstances that seems unfair. Compared to the rout that followed the maritime strike of 1890, the consequences of 1913 were insignificant. The UFL deserves some credit.11 The UFL’s continued existence, and its ability to provide political protection for the union movement, helped ensure that even those unions that took a hiding in 1913 recaptured the arbitration unions which had been set up to institutionalise their defeat. By 1916 they were stronger than they
had been. But the new mood of caution induced a sectionalism among miners, seamen and watersiders — whose unions had borne the brunt of the struggle. As each decided to look after itself, the UFL conferences helped ensure that the vision of unity stayed alive and that the debates and conversations continued.  

Because they dominated the agenda for the next generation, those issues are worth rescuing from the monstrous condescension of history. The UFL’s executive recognised that it lacked ideological legitimacy; so did many delegates to the 1915 conference. But many also insisted that ‘A Labour movement run on the class lines promulgated by the German thinkers will not do. A purely class movement is as selfish as capitalism itself.’ The issue was of more than scholarly interest. The power of the central executive over affiliates, especially in the matter of calling strikes, also affected the size of the capitation fee and the likely fate of any member union that refused to follow the central line. Whereas the miners and the watersiders tended to favour the former position, in part because the size of their membership gave them an effective veto, the railway unions refused to tolerate any clause that might involve them in a strike ‘involuntarily.’

These issues led on to constitutional matters. Should the organisation model industrial unionism by creating eleven national industrial departments, each with its own national executive that then sent delegates to a central executive for the entire organisation, as the ‘Red’ Federation had proposed in 1912 and the UFL had accepted in 1913? Or should the craft and local character of most unions be reflected by organising the UFL around regional councils and abolishing industrial departments, as the 1914 conference had done? The delegates also debated two symbolic issues which cut to the heart of the matter and aroused even more passion: was a preamble that identified a larger ideological purpose necessary, and should paid officials of the movement be allowed voice and vote.

By the end of 1915 issues relating to World War I — the threat of conscription, the rising cost of living and ‘profiteering’, the threat of dilution (the process of deskilling) — began to distract men from the older issues. The distractions multiplied in number and grew in urgency in 1916–18. The threat that men would be conscripted for military service, while there was no impost on wealth, made political action once more a matter of grave importance. The fear that disabled returned men would be used to break down wage rates concentrated workers’ minds further. Having to deal with a government headed by William Ferguson Massey (the hammer of the Red Feds) unsettled them still more. Many believed the worst of the National government (as the wartime coalition between the Reform and Liberal parties was known).
The second New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP) was formed in July 1916, but few organisations joined and it had little prospect of becoming important (the SDP retained its separate identity). The UFL applauded but remained the major forum for debate within the labour movement. The popularity of the idea of One Big Union, especially potent in Australia and Canada at this time, gave the UFL a new potential significance. While the fledgling NZLP busied itself with fighting conscription and getting its leaders out of gaol, the UFL debated how best to organise production in a socialist society. Ideas about worker control, or worker-employer councils, gained currency. Such ideas presupposed that all workers be organised industrially and nationally. By 1917 the UFL boasted some 50,000 affiliated members, and delegates representing another 20,000 regularly attended its open conferences.

Others became impatient with the UFL and its ‘timid’ affiliates, especially the railway unions. To what extent the impatient shared NZLP leader Harry Holland’s belief that the imminence of capitalism’s final collapse made unity imperative is not clear, but almost certainly the sense of global crisis helped persuade some to opt for faster strategies. Many unionists — especially the heirs to the traditions of revolutionary industrial unionism and the Industrial Workers of the World — had no expectation that the new Labour Party would be able to protect the workers let alone advance the cause, despite Holland’s confidence. Only a united union movement, they believed, could stop the government and advance the socialist cause. The fact that the law seemed to render national industrial organisations either illegal or ineffectual provided further reason for unifying and forcing the government to yield. The court’s success in destroying the Shearers’ Union in 1917 only increased the sense of urgency.

Apart from the miners, only the transport workers had a strong sense of sectional identity. In 1916 railway unions and the watersiders took the initiative and formed the Transport Workers Advisory Committee. Even at the first meeting, in July 1916, it was clear that the railway unions remained suspicious of any attack on their autonomy. As Edward Henderson of the Locomotive Engineers, Firemen and Cleaners Association put it: men with 35 years of service, looking forward to superannuation, would not cede to any organisation the power to call strikes. The idea of an advisory board emerged as a compromise that would permit ‘mutual consideration and mutual help’ while providing a mechanism for educating the workers into the advantages of one big union ‘with full democratic control by the rank-and-file.’ The unions of tramwaymen — all trams now being owned by public authorities — shared the same view.
The Transport Workers Advisory Board (TWAB), in short, was to prevent, not foment, strikes! But the threat of united action, especially strike action, would lend weight to moral suasion. Or so it was hoped, and, at times, so it proved to be. Ironically the TWAB, like the UFL, proved much more effective as a lobby group than it did as a central executive. The very threat that an issue in one industry and place, whether it was Auckland’s drivers or Dunedin’s trammen, might become the catalyst for a national stoppage, or worse, usually made the government — still the Reform–Liberal coalition — keen to negotiate a settlement. The government’s fears increased, as did its willingness to pressure employers, when the Federated Seamen’s Union joined towards the end of 1918. Indeed the TWAB demonstrated how easily a determined union could bypass the Arbitration Court and get the government either to concede their demands, usually wage increases, or bully the employers into concessions. Because of the strategic significance of the transport unions, the board proved much more effective than the UFL.

The success of the TWAB was paralleled by the success of the sectional Miners’ Federation. Only the UFL could articulate a class perspective, or so most left-wing unionists believed, although the De Leonites, still powerful in Wellington, and a handful of unionists who quickly identified with the Bolsheviks (who seized power in Russia in October 1917) remained convinced of the central importance of revolutionary political action. In 1917 the UFL decided to repudiate the local and sectional legacy of the past and move as quickly as possible towards ‘the principle of one Union only for each trade or industry throughout New Zealand.’ (It should be remembered, as Tom Bloodworth told the 1917 conference, that because of the Arbitration Act the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners was organised into 36 separate unions and the Agricultural and Pastoral Workers into 11.)

With the UFL seriously flirting with a commitment to One Big Union, the idea of a universal clearance ticket, that would allow any worker belonging to an affiliate to work in another trade or industry, again attracted support. So too did the idea that by organising on this basis the workers could take over and manage industry, either by themselves in a socialist republic, or in co-operation with employers (as envisaged in Britain’s Whitney report and guild socialism, G.D.H Cole’s synthesis of revolutionary and evolutionary, impossibilist and constructivist strategies).

A powerful legacy of ideas
An institutional narrative can no longer carry the story forward. To understand what happened next we must briefly focus on a powerful legacy of ideas. Since 1895 most immigrants to New Zealand had come from either Australia or Britain,
and in particular since 1900 from the mines and sheep runs of Australia and the industrial Midlands in Britain. In the 1890s and 1900s these industries and regions had become strongholds of unionism and socialism. Cadres of largely self-educated workingmen accepted as axiomatic the superiority of Marx’s analysis of capitalism’s development with its emphasis on the proletarianisation of all labour, the inevitability of class war, and the equally inevitable triumph of socialism. Although revisionism and constructivism appealed to more unionised workers, here as elsewhere, the most active and energetic were often converts to Marxism or one of its revolutionary variants, such as De Leonism or syndicalism.

In the 1890s and 1900s various radical interpretations of Marxism won a following, especially in certain regions where class war was fought openly and aggressively (such as the mines and lumber camps of the North American west). The most influential at the time was Daniel De Leon, one of the architects of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the principal inspiration for the Socialist Party of Great Britain. De Leon preached that industrial labour alone could never accomplish a socialist revolution unless it was led by a revolutionary political party. Unionists, without revolutionary political leadership, inevitably became engrossed in struggles over hours and wages. Several De Leonites had also visited New Zealand in the 1900s, and the Canadian agitator H M Fitzgerald certainly sowed De Leonite seed in the country’s mining towns. In 1908 the annual IWW conference in the United States expelled De Leon and repudiated his belief in the need for a revolutionary political party to guide the workers. Only through revolutionary industrial unionism, waging class war at the point of production, could capitalism be destroyed and socialism introduced. The

The American Marxist theoretician and militant unionist, Daniel De Leon. A lawyer and lecturer at Columbia University, New York, De Leon joined the Socialist Labor Party, America’s oldest Marxist party, in 1890. He quickly rose in the party’s ranks, becoming editor of the party paper, The People. He soon assumed party leadership, installing his personal views on syndicalism and Marxism into the party platform. In 1905, De Leon joined Eugene Debs and others to form a militant trade union, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In 1908 the IWW expelled De Leon and rejected his belief in the need for a revolutionary political party to guide the working class.

Daniel DeLeon: The Man and His Work: A Symposium, National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party, 1919
The principal exponents of this view were William Hayward and Eugene Debs in the United States and Tom Mann in Australia and England. Mann, who had been a key leader in the industrial conflicts that erupted in England in 1890, worked in Victoria for most of the 1900s, was the organiser for the New Zealand Socialist Party (NZSP) in 1902 and became converted to the importance of industrial rather than political action. In 1911 he returned to England and formed the Syndicalist Education League. Through his visits to New Zealand and thanks to his Victorian mates, such as Bob Ross, editor of the Maoriland Worker, and Harry Scott Bennett, an organiser for the NZSP, Mann was well informed about the vitality of the revolutionary movement in New Zealand.29

Although the leaders of the labour movement, like their followers, engaged in bitter sectarian squabbles, in retrospect we can see that they shared many more beliefs than they realised. Whatever their views of political action, all believed that technological progress doomed the artisans and craftsmen to extinction, and that the unskilled were the true proletarians, the shock troops of the revolution. The superiority of industrial as against craft unionism could be deduced from that axiom. Many believed, as Harry Scott Bennett explained in his revolutionary weekly, Social Democrat, that in building national industrial unions workers created the self-governing institutions of the future socialist republic.30 His class in Marxian economics, one of several social activities organised by the Auckland Socialist Party, trained a generation of revolutionary De Leonites.31

The men from the Bummery, notably J B King, a brilliant Canadian organiser, and EJB Allen, an immigrant from England who had given up the advantages of birth and education to join the world’s most advanced revolutionary movement, also taught a wide range of new tactics for waging industrial war. King taught classes in industrial sabotage at Waihi in 1912, and had to flee the country to evade the police. His legacy was doubtless local and limited. Allen’s ongoing influence was larger because in 1913 the Worker Print re-issued his textbook on the tactics of industrial warfare (stopwork meetings, go-slow, one-day strikes, absenteeism, etc).32 One historian claimed that ‘the go-slow’ was so common by 1918 that it had virtually become ‘the time honoured method of calling attention to grievances.’33

Revolutionary ideas appealed most strongly to young men in industries characterised by high internal mobility, large-scale operations and strategic importance to the economy, such as mining. Men working in trans-Tasman or
even trans-Pacific industries, such as seamen and shearsers, proved particularly amenable. So did many working-class immigrants in downtown Auckland and Wellington where the NZSP organised a wide range of activities for the itinerant young worker.

The powerful cadres of workers battle-scarred by the conflicts of 1908–13, and anxious for revenge against both the class enemy and their own timid leaders, provided a remarkably disciplined and cohesive core of activists in many unions. After the early successes of the Labour Party in returning such well-known revolutionaries as Harry Holland and Peter Fraser to parliament, many of these activists became suspicious if not hostile towards the movement’s political leaders. 'Political action', as Arthur Cook of the Workers Union said in 1920, ‘has become too damn respectable.’ It is unclear how common it was for Irish Catholics to become revolutionaries, but Britain’s brutal repression of Sinn Féin, both in and during the Irish civil war (1918–22), changed that. The coalition government even banned Green Ray, the local mouthpiece for Sinn Féin and a socialist Ireland.

Rapid population growth and large concentrations of young single men made Auckland and Wellington the flashpoints (as they had been in 1908–13). Each city boasted a large and lively branch of the NZSP until it abolished itself in favour of the SDP. In Wellington the De Leonites were still sufficiently powerful to greet the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and provide the basis for a nascent Communist Party, whereas in Auckland and the mining towns of Huntly and Waihi the legacy of the Bummery was so strong that De Leonites such as MJ (Joe) Savage became the labour movement’s moderates. Marxian study groups and associations also flourished in the mining towns. Many revolutionaries thought the revolution imminent. The Petone Marxian Club, for instance, resolved to meet each Monday at 8pm ‘right up to the day of the Revolution.’

The rise of the Alliance of Labour

War-time inflation and high levels of frustration, caused by the fragmentation imposed by the Arbitration Court, not to mention ongoing delays, fuelled impatience among unionised working men. The constant sacrifice of men to the great Moloch of war compounded impatience with anger and resentment. As broken men returned from the war looking for work, and ‘fat cats’ roared by in their ‘flash’ automobiles, often stirring up clouds of choking dust, men and women struggling to make ends meet became prey to the ‘bacillus of the dread “Scientificus Socialismus”.’ Union membership climbed still further. In some districts even un-unionised workers became ripe for conversion.
As a wave of industrial unrest rippled around the world in 1918–19, often sparking attempts to emulate Russia’s Bolsheviks, the executive of the UFL suffered a crisis of ideological legitimacy. It had no national departments, its district councils had become the most dynamic and powerful parts of the organisation, and the national executive was no longer genuinely national (being based on the Auckland District Council in 1918–19). As UFL president John Dowgray told the conservative politician Downie Stewart: ‘The Federation … is only a sort of bureau, it has little or no funds, and has no say in the management of the Unions who comprise its membership, it has taken the place of the Trades and Labour Councils.’ Besides, most of its member unions remained within the arbitration system and much of its time was devoted to proposals for reforming the arbitration system.

Two catalysts prompted the UFL’s executive to disband. First, the Miners’ Federation seceded and the revived Watersiders Federation, led by ‘Big Jim’ Roberts, viewed the UFL with utter contempt. Second, there was yet another move to create an organisation along national industrial lines. The move came from the Otago Labour Council (OLC), a brand new organisation modelled on the latest ideas about revolutionary industrial unionism. Mark Silverstone, a Jewish refugee from Poland who had grown up in East London and arrived in Dunedin in 1904 where he played a major role in providing intellectual leadership to the revolutionary left, led the charge to re-model the union movement on the basis of the soviets. The OLC sent a remit to the 1918 UFL conference requesting that a conference be convened of all national industrial organisations and associations, which resulted in the National Industrial Alliance of Labour (AOL). The leaders of the UFL were
ropeable, but realised that the initiative had passed from them. The UFL itself affiliated, and recommended its member unions do the same.

An unexpected ideological conjuncture also facilitated the formation of yet another national organisation based on industrial principles. As noted earlier, according to Jack Vowles, in 1917–19 the vision of guild socialism allowed ‘bummer’, De Leonite and old-fashioned state socialists like Tom Paul of the Printers to unite. Even Fabians and Christian socialists subscribed to this cunning synthesis of the major traditions of English socialism. Following the nationalisation of the means of production — a step that required either political action or revolution — industrial councils would be set up to govern each industry. Each industrial council would elect delegates to a national council which would become an industrial parliament.

The AOL, unlike the UFL, has received some attention over the years (although its dynamic leader, ‘Big Jim’ Roberts, still awaits his biographer). Almost sixty years ago, Russell Stone wrote a thesis and an article about the unions and the arbitration system in which, among other things, he discussed the AOL and the arbitration system at some length. Michelle Slade also wrote a Master’s thesis on ‘Industrial Unionism’, focusing especially on the period of the AOL’s greatest strength, 1919–24. At the institutional level, where her analysis was strongest, she
argued that the ANZL had been hampered by structural problems from the start, especially the absence of central control. This reflected, she held, the caution of its leaders. She ignored the influence of the cautious railway unions, especially the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS) and the Locomotive Engineers, Firemen and Cleaners Association. In short it was not just that the post-war economic slump of 1920–21 exposed the organisation’s weaknesses, thus reinforcing the caution of the leaders. The slump and a handful of failed strikes greatly strengthened the caution of the rank and file; a caution that had become virtually neurotic and certainly endemic among railway and tramway employees.10

For all that, the ANZL revived the syndicalist dream, and its leaders attacked the Labour Party and its MPs as ‘rats’ and ‘scabs’. The Maoriland Worker became the mouthpiece for the new syndicalism and the watersiders founded the Transport Worker to help spread the message. Most of the leaders had been involved in the Red Feds as members of unions or even as leaders of local branches, but they believed that the leaders of the Red Federation had lost the battle through various mistakes. Some of the personal enmities spawned in these years plagued all attempts to achieve unity for another generation. The post-war slump demonstrated that even the best organised and most militant could accomplish little by direct action. Whereas in 1919–20 the government was often scared that the ANZL might bring the country to its knees, in 1921–22 it became clear that not even the ANZL would risk striking. The Miners’ Federation, having hoped for much from the ANZL, left; the Seamen’s Federation, having watched with interest, never got around to joining.11

Incidentally, all this was the context for the formation of the New Zealand Communist Party, which put down strong roots in the mining towns, and joined the Third International — and for EJB Allen’s pamphlet on Labour and Politics, published by the Auckland Labour Representation Committee in 1922, in which the great syndicalist theorist argued that only the Labour Party, through political action, could achieve socialism.12

Even after recovery set in — if we can characterise the instability of the mid-1920s in those terms — it proved difficult for the ANZL to organise its potential membership, let alone formulate coherent goals and policies. As Slade showed,
membership was never stable and affiliates came and went. Whenever an unaffiliated union struck it looked to the AOT for help, and usually the AOT’s executive, dominated by ‘Big Jim’ Roberts, did its best. When affiliates wanted to strike, by contrast, the AOT’s executive was usually cautious, unwilling to squander scarce resources on a forlorn cause. And the miners and seamen, once the standard bearers for industrial unionism and even the vision of One Big Union, preferred to enjoy the fruits of sectionalism.

But the times were against the syndicalist dream. The post-war slump, wage reductions and various attacks on working conditions, not to mention a succession of industrial defeats eroded the mana of the AOT. In 1923–24, on at least two occasions, the executive refused to strike despite a clear mandate from the rank and file. Disillusionment spread among its own activists. There were no
new affiliates; the Miners’ Federation collapsed, and district councils emerged yet again as the key organisations. People began to talk of letting them affiliate.

Roth was probably correct to date the decline of the AOL to the mid-1920s, but even in its heyday it had been open to attack from the left as ‘an organisation of national secretaries’, to quote Tom Stanley (of the ASRS). Geography, in short, kept trumping ideology. Even before the Reform Party’s smashing triumph in the 1925 elections the AOL was in full retreat.

Apart from the transport workers, the AOL had made little progress in organising national industrial unions. In 1924 it began admitting craft and sectional unions. The abolition of the wage system disappeared from its goals and an adequate minimum wage for male breadwinners suddenly re-appeared as the major revolutionary objective. The abolition of the arbitration system also disappeared from the agenda, being replaced with various ideas for that system’s reform. In 1925 and again in 1927, 1928 and 1930 the AOL convened an open conference, just as the UFL had, reminding the ideologically sophisticated of Marx’s quip that history repeats itself, ‘the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.’ Other developments underlined the farcical. The Massey government had refused to allow the Post and Telegraph Officers’ Association to join the AOL, and in 1925 forced the ASRS to secede and recognised the Railway Tradesmen Association when it seceded from the ASRS. The AOL also sought a rapprochement with the Labour Party (which desperately needed more affiliates). In 1925 the Labour Party’s conference elected Roberts to the party’s executive.

In the four main cities the Trades and Labour Councils were once more in business and formed their own federation in 1924. Their focus was on local politics; the appeal of municipal socialism meant that local issues were important to many unionists. During the 1920s there were several unsuccessful attempts to unite the Trades and Labour Councils Federation and the AOL of Labour. For example, in 1925, when Roberts conceded that only two industrial departments had any claim to being properly organised, the AOL established a ‘miscellaneous’ industrial department so that T&LCS could join. And matters got worse. In 1927–28, when the farmers and the employers formed a common front intent to abolish arbitration, Roberts suddenly found a whole slew of reasons for keeping ‘Labour’s leg irons’. And matters got even worse when unemployment began to soar in 1929–30. The communists increasingly attacked the legitimacy of unions, and even the strongest unions found that direct action failed. Not that this was entirely obvious then. The Communist Party’s growth in the mining towns of the West Coast helped the miners to achieve unity once more. ‘The communists won control of the UMWA
UNIONS IN COMMON CAUSE

ABOVE This 1931 Labour Party election poster attacked the humiliating unemployed work schemes and invoked the outraged ghost of Richard John Seddon, Liberal premier 1893–1906, to condemn the conservative government. The subliminal message was that Labour was a moderate, progressive party following in the Liberals’ footsteps.

RIGHT Hundreds of unemployed workers marched from the Hutt Valley to parliament on 30 January 1932 to demand better conditions. Here members of the Petone Unemployed Workers Movement, led by a brass band, march down the main street of their town. One of the banners says: ‘No. § Scheme [a work for the dole programme] means Economic Dominion Disaster.’

Evening Post collection, ATL G-8841-1/2-EP
[United Mine Workers] because they were organised and they alone had a plan’, and the UMW affiliated in the hope that the AOL could be made more aggressive. In 1927 Fintan Patrick Walsh, ex-Wobbly and Irish revolutionary nationalist, and a Communist Party sympathiser, seized control of the Federated Seamen’s Union, and for a brief moment it appeared as if the AOL might become the instrument for a new generation of revolutionaries.

The legacy of the Alliance of Labour

It is easy to measure the AOL against its own vision and score points — too easy and of little use. As Stone concluded, many years ago, when the economy boomed strikes succeeded and sparked a wave of militancy; when export prices fell and unemployment rose strikes usually failed, leaving revolutionaries to choose the ‘chiliasm of despair’ or huddle beneath the ‘umbrella of the Arbitration Court’.

When unemployment soared in 1930–33, and farmers and businessmen united to attack the court for introducing rigidities into the country’s internal cost structure, the AOL and its members clung to the Arbitration Court as a drowning man might cling to a lifeline.

With the repeal of compulsory arbitration for men
in 1932 even that lifeline snapped. The strongest unions, the Watersiders and the Freezing Workers, went down in defeat, and nobody even dreamed of helping them. ‘Industrial labour’, as the *New Zealand Worker* said, ‘has been beaten to its knees.’ Only 15 strikes occurred in 1933, the lowest number since 1915. In 1933 the jobless outnumbered union members and the Unemployed Workers’ Movement boasted more members than the largest union.66

Yet even in failing, the AUI kept the vision of a powerful industrial organisation alive; kept the syndicalist vision of the centrality of a well-organised union movement to Labour politics alive; and helped sustain the cadres of activists who would, when conditions improved again in the mid-1930s, finally grab the moment. Many were members of the Communist Party, for the absence of unemployment in the Soviet Union enhanced the appeal of communism.67 Communists were also to the fore in organising demonstrations, talking tough,
and resisting evictions. It ought to be said, in passing, that Roberts and his executive were converted to the importance of political action more than a decade earlier than some of those who shared the syndicalist vision.68

More to the point, although we still lack any decent scholarly account, during the years 1925–28 the aol managed to create a constitutional structure that recognised the ongoing power of localism and sectionalism together with the importance of forging a powerful national organisation. Despite the bitter feud between Roberts and Walsh, which weakened the aol still further in 1935–37, activists on both sides remained loyal to the old syndicalist vision of One Big Union and the tactics of class warfare at the point of production that had been developed by the pre-war revolutionaries. The national leaders had also come, each along his own path, to recognise the central role of the Labour Party. The old De Leonites who now ran the Labour Party also still shared that old De Leonite dream of a labour movement consisting of a united industrial wing and a revolutionary political party.

When in 1936 Labour enacted compulsory unionism, it made inevitable the formation of the second Federation of Labour. Peter Fraser, who had retained strong links to men on all sides of the factional disputes, except for communists, called up all debts and used all his not inconsiderable skill and influence to compel the warring factions of the aol to join with the almost moribund Trades and Labour Councils’ Federation to form the second New Zealand Federation

LEFT Part of the crowd of 4–5000 unemployed waiting for a deputation to report back on a meeting with Gordon Coates, a senior minister in the Coalition government with responsibility for employment, 10 May 1932. Journalist Pat Lawlor described what happened next:

When the deputation came out with its message I saw the ignition of the riot rocket before it ascended and descended the city. The first speaker … seemed to appeal to the crowd that Mr Coates had at least promised something, but the mob yelled derision. “Bring Coates down here,” was the cry. The succeeding speaker, on behalf of the single men, was inflammatory. “Coates,” he said, “has promised us nothing.” And he followed up in a voice that swept the crowd that “whereas they had asked for bread, Coates had promised them a stone.”

This was the end of the temper of the mob. “Down the town” — the ominous cry rang out. A spare half dozen of police detached themselves from the force in the grounds, but they were too late. The mob, driven desperate with waiting, commenced to move towards Lambton Quay. Too late for the police, too late for specials, they surged onwards. The cry went up: “They’re wrecking the Town.”

I followed in the state of the mob. Nothing could be heard but the sounds of violence. I passed many cars upended, and, in company with two excited policemen who declared “What can we do?” viewed the wreckage. Many windows were broken and there was looting. The streets were in disorder until the specials reinforced the police. From 7 p.m. onwards, the city was in fair control of the police and the specials. As I went home, I saw many rioters in the hands of the police, a multitude of windows shattered. The tally next day: 174 windows broken valued at £2,200 (nearly $230,000 in 2011 money), much looting, 23 arrests and a few injured. (Pat Lawlor, Old Wellington Days, Wellington, 1959, pp 147–9)
Police break up a meeting of unemployed and relief workers in Cuba Street, Wellington, on 11 May 1932. Fifty mounted and foot police baton-charged the crowd of 2000. Many were injured. Margaret Thorn, a prominent Labour Party activist, said the foyer of the Wellington Trades Hall was like a battlefield casualty station.

The Depression saw the worst riots in New Zealand’s history. Hunger, poverty and the loss of hope triggered violent clashes between the unemployed and police. The first riot took place in Dunedin in January 1932. The next, and most serious, riots were in Auckland on 14–15 April. Twenty thousand public servants and unemployed marched to the town hall for a meeting organised by the postal workers’ union. Thousands were unable to get in and there was a confrontation with police. After the unemployed leader Jim Edwards, who was trying to calm the protestors, was batoned by police, the crowd went berserk. Thousands moved down Queen Street, smashing shop windows and looting goods. The following night there was a second riot in Karangahape Road. Two weeks later further violence broke out in Christchurch during the tramways strike. There were fierce clashes between union members, scabs, police and special constables before a return to work was negotiated.
of Labour. Fraser opened the conference and Paddy Webb, founding president of the first Federation and now Minister of Labour, chaired every session. As a result, as Roberts said — as president of the Labour Party — the unions became ‘a branch of the Socialist movement with its working-clothes on.’

In adopting the symbol of De Leon’s tww — a workman’s forearm swinging a hammer — as the new Federation’s logo (front cover), they signalled their ongoing revolutionary resolve to insiders. The origins of the Federation of Labour cannot be separated from the history of industrial unionism in New Zealand, which in turn can not be separated from the history of socialism. Nor, for that matter, can the history of socialism be understood without recognising the importance of industrial unionism and the quest to create a Federation of Labour.

Notes

1 Michael Bassett and Michael King, Tomorrow Comes the Song: A Life of Peter Fraser, Auckland, Penguin, 2000.
3 The six-month strike by the Waihi Trade Union of Workers over the formation of a company-inspired breakaway union ended in November 1912 with violent attacks on the strikers and their families, including the death of Frederick Evans, one of the strikers.
7 There are only two surveys: Bert Roth, Trade Unions in New Zealand: Past and Present, Wellington, Reed Education, 1973, especially chs 2 and 3; and two essays by Olsen, the first of which was co-authored with Len Richardson, ‘The New Zealand Labour Movement, 1880–1920’ and ‘The
the importance of the founding conference, obviously, but what is obvious in retrospect was certainly not obvious in prospect; there are many accounts of the founding meeting but Gustafson, Labour’s Path to Political Independence, ch 8, remains the most thorough.


10 Olssen, Red Feds, discusses the national events. See Richardson, Coal, Class and Community, ch 6, for the new sectionalism that prevailed among the miners.

11 The negative view largely reflected the work of left-wing historians who accepted uncritically the views of the contemporary left: see Roth, Trade Unions in New Zealand, pp 41–5 and Conrad Bollinger, Against the Wind: The Story of the New Zealand Seamen’s Union, Wellington, NZ Seamen’s Union, 1968, ch 9.

12 After the 1925 conference the coal miners formed their own federation, although John Dowgray, the gritty Scot who combined ideological vision with canniiness, remained president of both the Miners Federation and the UFL; Richardson, Coal, Class & Community, pp 70–9. For the Seamen’s separatism see Bollinger, Against the Wind, chs 9–10; and for an overview Roth, Trade Unions, ch 3. Olssen, Red Feds, pp 216–17, demonstrates the success of the strikers in rebuilding their control and their unions.

13 e.g. Maoriland Worker, 14 and 21 July 1915.


15 Maoriland Worker, 21 July 1915.

16 This was scarcely surprising, but it was inaccurate. See Olssen, ‘Towards a Reassessment of W.F. Massey: One of New Zealand’s Greatest Prime Ministers (Arguably)’, in James Watson and Lachy Paterson (eds), Massey Re-appraised: Proceedings of a Conference on W.F. Massey November 2006, forthcoming from Otago University Press, 2011.

17 The longevity of the party has increased the importance of the founding conference,


30 *Social Democrat*, 24 March and 24 November 1911.

31 This was Tom Barker’s view; Barker became a revolutionary thanks to Bennett. *Tom Barker and the I.W.W.*, recorded and edited by E C Fry, Canberra, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1965, pp 8–9.


38 Minutes of the Petone Marxian Club, 21 October 1912, H O Roth ms, 94–106 07/01, ATL, Wellington.


40 In a letter 31 March 1919, Downie Stewart ms, Hocken Library, Dunedin.


43 His papers, held by the Hocken Library, are particularly rich for this period. See the short biography of him in Gustafson, *Labour’s Path to Political Independence*, p 167 and Richard V Tubb’s essay in *DNZB*, vol 3, pp 473–74.

44 The ‘Report’, Mark Silverstone ms, Hocken Library.


46 *Maoriland Worker*, 9 July 1919, p 5, for the endorsement by the UFL 1919 conference. E J (Ted) Howard, ex-Red Fed, was president of the UFL in 1919.

47 ‘Report of Executive … January 1919.’

48 His papers, held in the Beaglehole Room, have often been ignored by labour historians working on the inter-war period.


50 Slade, 'Industrial Unionism in New Zealand, 1916–1925'.

51 Burdon, New Dominion, remains the best overall discussion of the post-war slump. See also Richardson, Coal, Class & Community, pp 188–92 and for the Seamen's Union, Bollinger, Against the Wind, ch 10 and Hunt, Black Prince, ch 3. See also Roth, Trade Unions, pp 45–7. For relations between the AOT and the Labour Party see Brown, Rise of New Zealand Labour, ch 3.


53 For a summary of Slade's argument see 'Industrial Unionism in New Zealand', pp 2–3.

54 Roth, Trade Unions, p 47.

55 Apart from the works by Stone, cited in note 49 above, the main accounts are those by Roth, Trade Unions, pp 47–9 and Olsen, 'New Zealand 1920–40', in Fry (ed), Common Cause, pp 16–19.

56 The first had actually been held in 1920. See Report of proceedings of the open conference convened by the N.Z. Alliance of Labour ..., Wellington, November ... 1920, Wellington [1920].


62 Richardson, Coal, Class and Community, pp 214 (for the quotation) and 218–21.

63 Roth, Trade Unions, p 48, devotes considerable attention to the role of Norm Jeffery, an Australian organiser sent by the Communist Party. See also Hunt, Black Prince, pp 91–101.


67 There are few scholarly accounts of the Party's role in these years; see Thané Maxwell, 'The New Zealand Communist Party During the Depression: The beginnings of the attack on the Labour Movement's Hierarchy, 1928–1935, with special reference to Dunedin', BA (Hons) dissertation, University of Otago, 1985.


69 Standard, 9 December 1936.

70 After my presentation at the 2007 seminar Ken Douglas told me that Ken Baxter, who had belonged to the WW in Sydney in 1919–20, and was secretary of the FOL from
1944 until 1969, claimed to have done this off his own bat. Kerry Taylor made the same claim in his entry on Baxter in *DNZB*, vol 4, p 41. When Peter Franks was working on his history of the Printing Unions, *Print & Politics*, Gerry Ditchfield, a former national secretary of the printers and one of Baxter’s protégés, gave him a file of papers that he had been given by Baxter. In this file was a note by Baxter about how the FOL came to adopt this symbol. In short, he made a unilateral decision after he became secretary, which he says was approved by Alex Croskery (then FOL president) and F P Walsh (then FOL vice-president). The hammer was not officially adopted by the FOL until just before Baxter retired in 1969. Personal communication, Peter Franks to Erik Ollsen, 12 July 2010.
The Labour Cabinet 1935. Back row: Lee Martin (Minister of Agriculture), Tim Armstrong (Minister of Labour), Bob Semple (Minister of Public Works), Bill Parry (Minister of Internal Affairs), Mark Fagan (leader of the legislative council), Fred Jones (Minister of Defence), Frank Langstone (Minister of Lands) and Paddy Webb (Minister of Mines). Front row: Dan Sullivan (Minister of Industries and Commerce), Peter Fraser (Minister of Education, Minister of Health, Deputy Prime Minister), Michael Joseph Savage (Minister of External Affairs, Native Minister, Prime Minister), Walter Nash (Minister of Finance) and Rex Mason (Attorney-General, Minister of Justice). Five of Labour’s Cabinet ministers — Savage, Semple, Parry, Webb and Fagan — were born in Australia and were former miners and union leaders. With Fraser and Armstrong, they had been prominent in the upsurge of militant unionism and socialism in New Zealand in the early years of the 20th century.
CHAPTER THREE

Predominance of support for moderate policy: The formation of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, 1937

Peter Franks

The formation of the New Zealand Federation of Labour was an important turning point in the history of trade unions in New Zealand. Before 1937 unions were fragmented and divided. In 1937 they created a central organisation that became an influential voice for workers. Four main factors crucial to the institution of the NZFL in 1937 are considered in this chapter: the context in which the NZFL was formed, the public row between rival union leaders on the eve of its formation, the founding conference in April 1937 and the debates that took place at that conference.

Context

The mass unemployment, wage cutting and social distress of the Great Depression of the 1930s had left trade unions in a very weak state. Bert Roth has estimated that in 1935, union density — the proportion of employees who were union members — was just over 20 percent. This includes membership of state unions, as well as unions registered under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration (IC&AR) Act.¹

Working people rallied behind the Labour Party which swept to office in 1935. Nine of the ministers in Labour’s thirteen-member Cabinet were former union leaders and five were former miners, including Michael Joseph Savage, the prime minister. The Labour government moved quickly to improve workers’ conditions and to reform industrial legislation. It restored Depression wage cuts and its amendments to the IC&AR Act restored compulsory arbitration, made trade union membership compulsory for workers covered by awards, and allowed for the registration of national unions.² The following year, the Act was amended to provide ‘blanket coverage’ which made an award binding on all employers engaged in or connected with the industry that the award covered.³
The Labour Department was flooded with inquiries about forming unions. For example, domestic workers, dental nurses, life agents, Maori guides at Whakarewarewa and staff of the Blind Institute wanted to form unions while the Women’s Division of the Farmers’ Union was interested in a union for housekeepers on farms. In 1937, one observer noted that ‘trade unions are springing up by dozens, new unionists enrolling by thousands.’ The largest group to be organised were clerical workers. Despite strong employer opposition, clerical workers’ unions were established throughout the country. Membership of unions registered under the IC&AL Act more than trebled from 80,929 in 1935 to 254,690 in 1939, while the number of awards increased by over 40 percent from 417 in March 1936 to 598 in March 1938.

A comparison between 1929 and 1937 shows the effects of compulsory unionism on different industries and occupations. The membership of the Watersiders and Seamen’s unions dropped slightly. Union membership rose by a quarter among footwear and railway workers. In industries such as building, electrical supply, meat freezing and printing, membership increased by 40 to 70 percent. At the other end of the scale, in occupations and industries where unions had been non-existent or very weak in 1929, many thousands were recruited. In 1929 there was only one clerical union with eight members; in 1937 there were over 20,000 members of clerical unions. Shop assistants’ numbers increased from 5000 to 17,000 and the labourers from 6000 to 12,000. The clothing, dairy, drivers, engineers and timber workers unions tripled their membership. The most spectacular increase was the New Zealand Workers Union, which represented the rapidly growing numbers employed by the Labour government on public works projects as well as some rural workers. Its membership increased nearly five-fold to 28,000. There was also a substantial rise in the membership of state unions. The Public Service Association (PSA), which was a voluntary union, increased from just under 7000 members in 1935 to over 12,000 in 1937.

It is easy to see the huge growth in union membership in the late 1930s as something that was predetermined by the compulsory unionism legislation. The change in the law was very important, but the increase in membership was also the result of one of the greatest organising drives in New Zealand’s labour history. Tim Armstrong, the Minister of Labour, acknowledged this with his comment that, ‘The number of unions that has sprung up throughout the country has surprised even me … the response is beyond all my visions.’

In the early years of the first Labour government, the mood of the labour movement was optimistic and determined, but also apprehensive. Fascism was on the rise in Europe and a new war seemed increasingly likely. Of course, war
had already broken out in Spain, Ethiopia and China. There was a lot of anxiety about what conservative forces might do in New Zealand to defeat the Labour government. Angus McLagan, the first FOL president, told the annual conference of the Workers Union in 1937:

We are fortunate in having a Labour Government in power, but that does not mean that trade unionism is safe … There is the danger that if the employers cannot succeed in turning out the Labour Government by Parliamentary methods they will resort to extra-parliamentary methods as they have done in other countries.11

The *Standard*, the Labour Party’s weekly newspaper, regularly reported stories of bad employment practices and attempts by employers to frustrate the government’s legislation. In July 1936 its industrial correspondent wrote: ‘The leopard cannot change his spots. The unscrupulous employer has not undergone a change of heart because there is a Government of the People in power. The writing is on the wall. It is a fight to the finish — the individualistic capitalist versus the workers.’12

The Labour Party and the government believed that a strong trade union movement was needed to improve workers’ living standards and to help protect democracy. Labour also wanted a disciplined union movement with a strong national organisation. After a well publicised sit-down strike by freezing workers in early 1937, the industrial correspondent of the *Standard* criticised ‘ill-advised and sporadic direct action.’ He argued that ‘industries of Dominion scope should be organised … in a more cohesive way and … should have an effective national executive that would be able to co-operate intimately with the Minister of Labour.’ An editorial in the same issue of the *Standard* said that strikes were now ‘an anachronism’. ‘The workers today have friends on the Treasury benches, and the sooner they realise that an appeal to them can and will bring results which strike action will not, the better it will be …’13

**Controversy between industrial leaders**

There was much support for a united central organisation of unions. But on the eve of the formation of the FOL, a public row broke out in the press between leaders of rival factions of the Alliance of Labour (AOL).14

This row had its origins in a split in the AOL that came into the open at its 1935 annual meeting and resulted in a walk out a year later. One faction was led by ‘Big Jim’ Roberts, secretary of the Waterside Workers Federation and Arthur Cook, secretary of the New Zealand Workers Union. They had the support of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), the main railway workers union. The other faction was led by Fintan Patrick Walsh,15 president of the Seamens Union and the newly organised Clerical Workers Union, and Lew
Glover, who had been a prominent Watersiders leader. It had the support of the Seamen, Hotel Workers and Freezing Workers unions and had successfully courted the Trades and Labour Councils Federation, which represented the large number of small craft unions.

The divisions between these two factions reflected differences over politics and trade unionism as well as a clash of personalities — particularly between Roberts and Walsh. I will analyse those differences further when I discuss the debates at the FOL’s founding conference.

Between February and April 1937 the Wellington Evening Post published a lengthy correspondence between Walsh, on one side, and Cook and Roberts, on the other. No holds were barred. It began with claims about who represented the real AOL and descended into accusations of conniving with employers, helping ‘free labourers’ or scabs, undermining the Labour Party and behaving like Hitlerite dictators.
Cook accused the Walsh faction — the ‘racketeer Alliance’ — of wanting the conservative Forbes–Coates government to stay in power, of gerrymandering the AOT’s 1936 annual meeting and of allowing scab unions to affiliate. Walsh assailed Roberts for attacking the Labour Party in his statement in 1919 that ‘If we have elected our “rats” to Parliament, it is a good means of getting them out of the way.’ Cook replied that ‘... no man in the Labour movement in any part of the world has poked his nose into the affairs of other unions more than Mr Walsh ...’ Roberts berated Walsh for having been a member of the Communist Party and accused him of ‘rushing off time after time’ to organise scab unions in the meat freezing industry.

Walsh said Roberts had ‘become famous for side-stepping a fight with the boss and all he did against the [Depression] wage cuts was to blow off a lot of hot air from the steps of parliament.’ Roberts was known to socialists as a ‘money crank’. In 1919 Roberts had said that ‘the whole political history of Labour can be written in one word “rat”,’ and this was an attack on the Labour Party. Roberts replied that he had been criticising labour politicians in Australia and France, not New Zealand. Walsh was a fair-weather friend whose union had only joined
This cartoon by Ken Alexander was published on the front page of the *New Zealand Free Lance*, 29 April 1936. Titled 'Into the Stratosphere', the caption read: 'When speaking on Unemployment Expenditure, the Hon HT Armstrong (Minister of Labour) said: "... the Sky's the Limit." In the capsule, Savage is holding the ladder. To his left is Sullivan, the Minister of Railways and above them, looking through the telescope is Fraser. Semple is pumping gas into the balloon while Nash, kneeling, is worrying about what it will cost. On the right are the former Coalition government leaders Forbes (left) and Coates.
the party after Labour won power. Roberts said he believed that ‘the old system of banking and credit which made mankind the slave of money was wrong …’ On the other hand, Walsh supported ‘the good old solid conservative banker and usurer.’

Walsh lashed out:

The Labour Movement … has got used to Mr J Roberts making fantastic claims about the important positions he has held in various countries, the inspections of industrial plants he has made throughout the world, the dinner costing £300 he gave to the staff at the ILO office when at Geneva, and his aptitude to twist statements made by other officials …

Roberts riposted:

To a wealthy man like Mr Walsh, £300 spent on a dinner would be a mere flea-bite to his bank account, but, alas, poor me, if I were to exceed a humble “fiver” on such lavish entertainment, visions of bankruptcy would give me violent indigestion until I could raise a loan to meet the liability.

Each side denounced the other for airing their differences in the capitalist press, yet the controversy ran over 14 issues of the Evening Post. As the quotes from their statements show, both sides were trying to denigrate the other rather than debate genuine political differences. It was an extraordinary display of bad behaviour, but it certainly showed that labour history is not boring.

In November 1936 Angus McLagan, who was secretary of the United Mineworkers of New Zealand, which was independent of both sides, urged the calling of a unity conference. The rival factions of the AOF then issued invitations to rival unity conferences, one on 23 March and the other on 2 April. While the public debate was raging, other union leaders and Labour Cabinet ministers exerted pressure behind the scenes. The rival conferences were cancelled and Peter Fraser, the acting prime minister, agreed to open a national industrial conference in Wellington on 14 April.

The national industrial conference

The conference was attended by more than 300 delegates representing 212 organisations and 178,000 of the 191,000 members of unions registered under the IC&A Act. Unfortunately there is no list of the unions and delegates at the conference. However, Labour Department figures give a comprehensive picture of the trade unions registered under the IC&A Act in 1937.

At this time 30 percent of workers belonged to national unions. The largest was the New Zealand Workers Union with 28,000 members. The ASRS had
12,000 members, the Timber Workers 6600 and the Watersiders 6000. There were only 16 national unions. The great majority of unions were local, organised around a craft or occupation. Excluding the national unions, the average size of registered unions in 1937 was only 337 members. There were 35 unions with a total of 5000 members in the building and construction industries and 79 unions with 23,000 members in the food and drink industries. While most of the craft or occupational unions were small, some were large. The Auckland Hotel Workers had nearly 5000 members, the Wellington Shop Assistants 4300, the Auckland Tailoresses 4000 and the Wellington Hotel Workers and Clerical Workers had 3700 each.

During the conference there was a lot of talk about how the body would bring the organised workers of New Zealand into one organisation. In an important sense that was true. About 93 percent of members of registered unions were represented at the conference. With the exception of three of the four railway workers unions, the state sector unions did not join the FOL. The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), then the only teachers’ union, attended the conference as observers but decided not to join.16 The state unions were, in the main, very conservative. Their members had better conditions than the private sector, for example superannuation, and saw themselves as different from other workers. In 1941 a remit asking for a vote on joining the FOL was excluded from the order paper for the PSA conference because the subject was considered too controversial.17 In turn, the private sector unions looked down on the state unions. The national industrial conference had to vote on whether the NZEI and the unemployed workers could attend ‘as they are not unions’.18

The conference was opened by Fraser and chaired by Paddy Webb, the acting Minister of Labour. Both had been prominent ‘Red Feds’ and Webb was the first president of the ‘Red’ Federation of Labor. Fraser’s speech, which was covered by

Paddy Webb, Minister of Mines in the Labour government, chaired the national industrial conference. Webb, a lifelong friend of Michael Joseph Savage, was a miner who came to prominence in the Blackball strike on the West Coast in 1908. He was the inaugural president of the ‘Red’ Federation of Labor. In 1913 Webb was elected to parliament, winning the Grey seat in a by-election for the Social Democratic Party. One of the founders of the New Zealand Labour Party, he was called up for military service in 1917. Webb refused to serve in accordance with Labour’s opposition to the war. He was court-martialled, sentenced to two years’ hard labour and lost his civil rights for ten years. Harry Holland, who became leader of the Labour Party in 1919, replaced him as MP for Grey. Webb succeeded Holland as MP for Buller in 1933 after the Labour leader’s sudden death.

J T Allen, Parliamentary Portraits, Christchurch, 1936
the *Standard* in two lengthy reports, was a none too subtle reminder to unionists that, in the government’s view, the industrial wing of the labour movement was subordinate to the political wing.

He pointed out that unionists were a minority and that the government depended on the goodwill of the majority of voters:

… we must remember that trade unionists … cannot, by themselves or even with the aid of those who are more or less in touch with the Labour Party, maintain what was won sixteen months ago. A majority of the people of this country, who have votes under our democratic constitution, must become convinced, not temporarily but permanently, that the policy of the Labour Government is in the best interests of the people as a whole … If the people lose faith in the good intentions and the ability of the Government then all that has been achieved will be lost and what we are hoping for will never be attained. Now it seems to me that an understanding of that fact should be the starting point of approach to the problems which will confront this conference.

Fraser warned unions to act responsibly:

We do not want people to get the idea that because the Labour Government has come into office, power without responsibility has been placed indiscriminately in the hands of any section of the community, because there is nothing more dangerous than power without responsibility. For instance, cases have come to our notice of organisers adopting practically the spirit of the most tyrannical employer and causing unnecessary trouble, partly through a spirit of enthusiasm but mainly through ignorance, and the Labour organiser who is ignorant of the ideals and aspirations of the movement is a danger and a menace.

Militant workers who acted irresponsibly were little better than scabs:

Probably the most extreme individualist is the blackleg. He takes to himself the right of deciding when he will work, how he will work and what pay he will work for, regardless of the effect upon his fellow workers. There are sometimes groups of organised workers who act as detached irresponsible bodies, without consideration of the interests of their fellow workers or the interests of the movement which ostensibly they are part of — who act without consideration as to whether or not the building we are trying to erect in this country is brought down about our ears. They are on the same plane as the individualistic blackleg.

Fraser urged unions to give their full support to the government. Labour’s policy was making it possible for workers to get a good standard of living. Unions had to be patient. ‘We have to place the good of the whole above the desire of individuals,’ he said. ‘… the Government is … preparing a policy for the removal of want in the lives of the workers. Go slow tactics and sit down strikes are not helpful to the
Government as the production of this country must be increased if it is to make progress. He urged delegates to ‘forget the dissensions of the past, even the little differences of yesterday …’ He said he was not appealing to the conference for unity. He was telling them it was essential.

Like Fraser, Webb urged delegates to ‘forget all about the petty differences of yesterday …’ The new organisation should not only work with the government to improve living standards but to achieve socialism. He stressed that the industrial and political labour movements had to act as one. ‘We have been sent to Parliament by you to work for you, and we pledge you the loyal services of one hundred percent of the Government. We on the other hand expect a hundred percent loyalty from you.’

The first fight started as soon as Fraser had left the conference. This was over the draft constitution that would be discussed by the delegates. The Trades and Labour Councils Federation and the Walsh/Glover faction of the AOL had circulated their draft while the Workers Union, Watersiders and ASRS had put forward another draft. The debate about which draft would be discussed took almost all the first day. The conference finally voted to discuss the Trades and Labour Councils and Walsh faction’s draft. To spend the best part of a day arguing about which constitution should be discussed may seem incredible. While discussions about constitutions can be pretty dry, the debates at the national industrial conference were highly political. Essentially they were about what kind of trade union movement there should be in New Zealand, what kind of central organisation it should have and who should lead the movement.

**Industry or occupational unionism**

Together the ASRS, Watersiders and the Workers Union had over 45,000 members. They believed that unions should be organised on an industrial basis, not on craft or occupation, and that local unions should be amalgamated into national unions. Arthur Cook and ‘Big Jim’ Roberts — who were the main speakers for their views — had been syndicalists, and were president and secretary of the AOL for many years and strongly believed in the ideal of One Big Union. At the time there was much support for national unions and industry unionism. For example, there were strong moves to unite craft unions into national, industry unions among the engineers and printers.

Most of the unions that had grown spectacularly as a result of compulsory unionism were occupational unions, for example the clerical workers, drivers, hotel workers, labourers and shop assistants. For most of the old and new craft/occupational unions, industry unionism was radical and threatening. At the
One of the main debates at the 1937 national industrial conference was over the way unions should be organised — should there be industry unions or occupational (craft) unions? It was a central tenet of syndicalists and socialists that industry unionism was the superior form of organisation, a bunch of sticks the boss couldn’t break. This cartoon was published in the Maoriland Worker (the predecessor of the Standard) on 3 May 1912.

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The second day began with a tussle over the basis of representation at the conference. The ASRS, Watersiders and Workers Union tried to amend a conference, the main speakers for these unions — Walsh, Glover, Alex Croskery of the Shop Assistants and Fred Young of the Hotel Workers — argued for gradual change and respecting the rights of small unions. Although they were divided over trade union organisation, leaders like Cook, Roberts, Walsh and Croskery all supported the Labour Party. After Fraser’s speech, Cook and Walsh moved a resolution stating the conference’s ‘utmost confidence in the Labour Government’ and pledging ‘full support’ to the government’s policy. There were a handful of Communists; their main representative was Tom Stanley of the Auckland Labourers Union.

The second day began with a tussle over the basis of representation at the conference. The ASRS, Watersiders and Workers Union tried to amend a
recommendation by the credentials committee that gave the small unions proportionately greater voting strength than the big unions. Charles Chapman, one of the Printers Union leaders and the Labour MP for Wellington North, chided the big unions, saying: ‘It should be remembered that the craft unions are the basis on which unionism has been built and it would be unwise to leave the craft unions in the power of the bigger unions.’ Roberts said that if the recommendation was adopted, ‘the larger unions would be put out of action at this conference.’ Lewis McIlvride of the ASRS said the question was whether the conference stood for majority rule or not. The conference should ‘secure a government of the trade union movement which will be truly representative … in other words majority rule.’ Young replied with a pointed attack on the Workers, Watersiders and Railways unions. Three large organisations had associated themselves in the conference ‘and if the amendment is carried they would have 97 votes exercised by a single man. Our friends ask whether we want majority rule. Yes, we do, but we don’t want coterie rule.’ The amendment was defeated by 204 votes to 53.43

After adopting the credentials committee’s recommendations, the conference finally started to make decisions on the constitution. In a nod to the Red Feds, it accepted a proposal by Cook and Roberts that the new organisation be called the New Zealand Federation of Labour. The preamble to the constitution and the FOL’s objectives were adopted with comparatively little debate. The preamble read:

It is desirable for the furtherance of Unionism in New Zealand that a definite Federation of Labour Unions shall be maintained, which Federation, while leaving to each Union full self-government over its own industrial affairs, will be the means of securing unity of action on all general matters for the national welfare of Unionism.44

The FOL’s objectives were:

a) To promote the complete organisation of all workers by grouping them on the lines of class and industry to enable them to secure the full value of their labour.

b) Socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange.

c) To affiliate with the recognised Labour Federations in other countries and to co-operate with those organisations in raising the standard of living.44

Roberts successfully moved that workers should be organised ‘on the lines of class and industry’ and there was little debate about the new organisation’s objectives. Stanley was unsuccessful in moving an additional objective: ‘To use the full power
of the workers to oppose imperialistic wars.’ He said these wars, ‘urged on by the desire of the capitalists for a re-division of the world’s wealth’, had become ‘a serious menace to the workers who are the people who have to fight and pay for the wars.’ In a prescient comment, Jack Read of the Timber Workers asked what stand unions would take if Britain was attacked by Germany and Italy and said: ‘I am not prepared to refrain from defending our country against Fascist countries.’45

Composition of the Federation of Labour
A heated debate about the composition of the FOL ensued. Glover proposed that it include national unions and national federations, trades councils and local trade unions where there were no trades councils. ‘We do not stand for craft or trade unions,’ he said, ‘but we are dealing with them at the present time, because if we wish to lay the foundations of an industrial movement in this conference today we must deal with the problems as we find them.’ Roberts moved to exclude local unions. He said if his amendment was adopted, the number of unions in New Zealand would be reduced and added: ‘I think we shall all agree that it is quite unnecessary to have 500 or 600 small unions in New Zealand.’ A delegate interjected: ‘It might be desirable.’ Roberts disagreed:

We know that they can be better organised than that. We have agreed on the principle that the workers should be organised along the lines of industry, but if you reject the amendment and carry the motion you will not be organising on the lines of industry — you will be organising to extend local unionism.

Walsh appealed to Roberts to leave things for twelve months so unions could be organised in the districts. ‘From the districts let us build our national councils.’ George Thurston of the Canterbury Engineers Union supported Roberts. He said the Engineers Union had been trying to build a national organisation for the whole industry for years:

We have 8000 members and there are 1000 outside. If we are to carry out the wishes of the Government, we must get those other unions in with our society so that we can tell the Government what we want. If we are socialists we will do it, but if we are craft unionists looking for a job we will support the motion.

Croskery said Glover’s proposal was simply making provision for every type of union organisation. ‘Mr Chapman said this movement was built on craft unionism. Are we to go to the carpenters, plumbers, painters, and so on and say “Here, you have got to get into a union organised along the lines of industry.” Do you ever hear such folly?’ Cook urged the conference not to undo its decision that workers should be organised on the lines of class and industry:
What is the position today? I was in the Arbitration Court a little while ago. On one side of the table was Mr Bishop, with one assistant, representing the Employers Federation. On our side were the representatives of forty or fifty unions clamouring to be heard. No wonder the employers have ridden on our backs for so many years when we had such a stupid form of organisation as that.

Roberts’ amendment was defeated by 220 votes to 91.46

On the third day there were debates about the powers of district councils, the basis of representation at future FOL conferences and whether the FOL officers should be elected by all union members. Glover proposed that only
trades or district councils be represented at future FOL conferences. He said the trades and labour council form of organisation was the only one which had weathered the storm over a long period of years. 'If they were going to create an organisation with power to represent industrial workers, they must give power to people in local districts.' Roberts moved an amendment that the FOL conference comprise representatives of national unions and national federations and local unions affiliated to district councils. Glover's proposal was designed to cut the national officers of national unions out of the FOL. 'If you turn down my amendment you turn down the rank and file. It is being said all over the country that paid secretaries are ruling the Labour Movement.' McLagan supported Roberts. He said the conference had a duty to lay down a basis of representation that would be fair to the mass of the workers. If representation was confined to district councils, the conference would be very unrepresentative. Roberts’ amendment was carried by a large majority 'amid cheering'.

John Liddell of the Auckland Tramways Union moved an amendment that the FOL president, vice-president and secretary be elected every two years by a plebiscite of affiliated unions. Adam Black of the Wellington Engineers Union said he believed in rank and file control, 'but how many men, apart from those who attend these conferences, are familiar with the names of the men who would be submitted as candidates?' Cook was surprised to hear that some delegates, 'who, I suppose, would claim to be democrats, are in favour of denying the workers a vote as to who should be the officers of their organisation.' Walsh said he was a firm believer in the right of the rank and file but the amendment was simply 'not practical at this stage in the development of our organisation …' The amendment was defeated.

The election of officers gave something for everyone. McLagan, the miners’ leader and former communist who had stood aloof from the factional disputes, was elected unopposed as president. His election 'was received with cheers and the singing of “For He’s a Jolly Good Fellow”.' Fred Cornwell, secretary of the Painters and Decorators Federation, the Wellington Trades and Labour Council and the Trades and Labour Councils’ Federation, easily won the position of secretary. There was a close contest for vice-president. Dick Eddy, president of the Workers Union, Walsh and Stanley were nominated. Stanley won a respectable 42 votes on the first ballot. His supporters largely switched to Eddy on the second ballot and he defeated Walsh by 137 votes to 111. In the election for the two executive members, Walsh and Ted Canham, a watersider and 1913 veteran, narrowly defeated Alex Croskery and Jack Read.
Capitation — 6d or 1/-

The last big debate was about the amount of money that affiliated unions would pay the FOI in capitation. This debate reflected the different interests of large and small, industry, occupational and craft unions, and different views about the kind of organisation the FOI should be.

Glover moved that capitation be 6d per union member per year (with half going to local trades councils). The Watersiders and the Workers Union proposed 1/- per member per year. Supporters of the higher amount argued that one reason the AOT had been ineffective was because it had been starved of funds. Cook said it was ‘impossible to conduct the affairs of the organisation on a capitation of less than 1/-.’ He argued that the FOI needed an organiser to set up district councils and support the re-election of the Labour government, a research bureau ‘with the latest literature on matters concerning industrial and political labour’ and ‘the services of the most able men to conduct negotiations in disputes.’ The new organisation had to be able to foot it with the Employers Federation.

Supporters of 6d capitation pointed out that many unions had suffered financially during the Depression and had limited funds. Jack Read said unions ‘have had a bad time during the past few years and a 6d capitation will make it easier to get the organisation going.’ Adam Black said the Engineers Union already paid 2/- a year to their own federation and 1/- to the Labour Party. If they had to pay 1/- to the FOI ‘practically the whole of our funds will be dissipated in paying capitation to various organisations.’ Alex Croskery pointed out that 75 percent of his members were women. ‘While I subscribe to the principle of the equality of the sexes I have never been able to get the Arbitration Court to adopt it. I cannot charge women workers the same rates as … men.’

Noel Pharazyn of the Wellington Clerical Workers said ‘some of the new organisations of a mushroom type — such as his — had great numerical strength but not all the members were genuine trade unionists.’ Asking them to pay 1/- in capitation ‘to an organisation with which a great many of them are entirely out of sympathy is to create an almost impossible hurdle for us to surmount.’ Roberts replied:

... if the payment of sixpence per member per year is likely to wreck this organisation, then it is a much easier ship to wreck than I imagined ... I have never appealed to the wage workers in vain. If we tell them we want a shilling a year to put this organisation on a sound basis they will be delighted to pay. The man who started unionism at threepence per week did a great disservice to New Zealand. In England they pay 2/6 or 3/- and nobody growls. We have to educate the workers to organise, and, as stated by Mr Cook, we ought to appoint an organiser. We
ought also to have a first-rate man to advocate our case in the Courts. At present what do we do? We send an ill-equipped man to fight against Bishop, who makes a fool of him.

Once again, it was Walsh who put the pragmatic argument. He said that as far as the seamen were concerned, the level of capitation was nothing. However, the trade union movement was in a transitional period. Compulsory unionism had brought into the movement workers who had never been in contact with unions:

Mr [Peter] Butler and I were responsible for organising the clerks in Wellington, and I can assure delegates that they are most difficult to handle. They have no understanding whatever of trade unionism, and if we go to them now — just as we are trying to get them enthusiastic and interested in the movement — and tell them they must pay a shilling per member into this organisation, many of them will use every excuse for not coming in, and further, very large numbers of them will be permanently antagonised against us. I submit that it should be our aim — it is our duty, in fact — to bring them whole-heartedly into the industrial movement, and I do not think it would be good policy at this stage to make the capitation fee a shilling per member.

The emphasis on the needs of the new unions was too much for some delegates. Peter Carr of the Auckland Tramways Union (and a future Labour MP) said that if a shilling was too much for the clerical workers to pay for the benefits they had already received and could hope to receive in the future, ‘it might be better for them not to organise at all.’ Dick Eddy said it should be obvious to delegates ‘that unless we have sufficient funds we cannot function properly. I have struggled for years in unions with no funds and have been laughed at by the employing classes, but directly we amalgamated and became a force they sat up and began to take notice.’

Peter Butler of the Wellington Labourers Union said he didn’t think any delegate would say 1/- was too much but it was a question of practical politics. ‘If we adhere to the 1/- capitation … we shall keep a lot of small organisations out. Take the case of Mr Pharazyn’s union. Mr Pharazyn himself does not require any education in working class philosophy, but he is in a difficult position in that he is representing people who have been opposed to us for years.’ Butler cleverly reframed the argument. ‘Make the capitation a shilling and you will keep thousands of them out. Make it sixpence and there is every prospect of building up a strong organisation. If we want additional money we can always make a special appeal.’ The amendment was defeated by 182 votes to 69. A further amendment that capitation be 9d per member was also defeated.7
The debates at the conference show that there were very different views about what the FOL and the trade union movement should be. Was the FOL to be a well-resourced organisation which would be a leader in reorganising unions along the lines of class and industry? Or was it to be a national voice for workers that was an umbrella organisation, acting in workers’ collective interests but accommodating different types of unions?

It would be wrong to put too much emphasis on the divisions at the conference. At times the debates were quite sharp, but nobody walked out and — for the first time in New Zealand labour history — unions had a central organisation that represented most of them. When Peter Fraser returned on the final day to give the closing address, the mood of the conference was one of unity and harmony. Cook summed this up: ‘During the first two days our ship met with stormy weather, but as we progressed the weather moderated and we have now succeeded in bringing the ship of solidarity in the industrial labour movement safely to anchor in the water of Wellington Harbour. I feel sure that the differences of the past have disappeared altogether.’ Roberts put a brave face on the defeats he had suffered on major issues. He said that ‘although some of us may not agree with the constitution arrived at, the fact remains that the foundation has been laid and we may be able to build on it and improve as we go along.’

Fraser took the opportunity to make another call for discipline and industrial peace:
I assume also that the national organisation will see to it that adequate discipline is kept in the ranks of labour and that a few men, however good their intentions may be, will not be allowed to involve in trouble a considerable section of the workers, and that the Government will be given an opportunity of discussing any matters before action of a drastic nature is taken by any section of the workers, because industrial peace is an absolute essential factor to the success of our and your programmes …

The last word went to McLagan, who said the conference showed ‘that if we as workers and representatives of the workers are prepared to get together and discuss our differences of opinion in a friendly spirit there is no problem that we may be confronted with which cannot be solved.’ He assured Fraser and the government of the full co-operation and support of the unions:

It is my conviction and I believe the conviction of all delegates here that with industrial labour united and supporting political Labour there is no danger of a capitalistic Government being again returned to office by democratic methods. I say, by democratic methods. But we must realise that when democratic methods prove useless to our opponents they will not confine themselves to democratic methods.

The national council of the FOL, 1942, which included representatives of the district trades councils and the members of the national executive. Front row: Fintan Patrick Walsh (executive member, second from left), Frederick Daniel Cornwell (secretary, third from left), Angus McLagan (president, fourth from left), Richard Eddy (vice-president, fifth from left) and James Roberts (executive member, sixth from left).
One of the largest demonstrations in Wellington’s history took place on Thursday 2 August 1945. Over 10,000 workers marched with bands and banners to parliament from the central post office, the railway station and Kaiwharawhara in opposition to fascism and in support of the Labour government’s decision to nationalise the Bank of New Zealand.

Opposition to the ‘Money Power’ was a concern of many in the labour movement in the 1930s and 1940s. The Labour government’s cautious financial policies were one of the issues in the political fight between the government and the rebel MP John A Lee who was expelled from the party in 1940. At the 1944 party conference, former Cabinet minister Frank Langstone, who had been a Lee supporter, rallied a large majority in favour of nationalising the BNZ. Nash, the finance minister, who disliked the idea, waited over a year to introduce the legislation. Farmers unions, the chambers of commerce and the bank’s shareholders mounted a public campaign to keep the bank in private hands. In mid-1945 the newly formed Dominion Council of Co-ordinated Business Associations called on ‘all opposed to National Socialism’ to join it in a demonstration against nationalisation.

This was an ill-considered decision. The Wellington Trades Council and the Labour Party reacted by calling on unions and workers to participate in the demonstration and state the case for taking over the bank. Fred Schramm, the Speaker of parliament, said that both sides had equal rights to place their views before MPs and decided the opponents of nationalisation would go first. The DCCBA beat a hasty retreat but the trades council and the Labour Party went ahead with their demonstration.

The workers’ banners included ‘Money Power Backed Corporal Hitler’, ‘Money Power Against Progress’, ‘New Zealand Labour or Fascism’ and ‘We Support Parliament’.

There was also political theatre. The demonstrators included a group claiming to represent the shareholders of the BNZ. The Standard (9 August 1945) reported: ‘Associated with this group were three sorry-looking figures labelled “The Bare Bodkin” [National MP William Bodkin], “The Artful Doidger” [National MP Fred Doidge] and “The Bulgy Zombie” [National MP Ronald Algie]. In top hats and bowler hats, with some of their number dressed rather chillily as women, the burlesque “Shareholders” took up their position at the foot of the steps in the forefront of the demonstration and
boldly displayed their placards. These included: ‘We built the bank with your money. Now you want to take it from us — YOU CADS’. Drawn up on the steps was the Port Nicholson (Waterside Workers) Junior Band. Their neat appearance no less than their musicianly playing drew much favourable comment.’

‘Big Jim’ Roberts, president of the Labour Party, and Angus McLagan, president of the FOL, member of the legislative council and a Cabinet minister, spoke. The photo above shows McLagan at the microphone. To his right, Schramm is in the Speaker’s robes and wig, then Fintan Patrick Walsh, Dan Sullivan, Minister of Industries and Commerce, and Roberts. Sid Holland, Leader of the Opposition, is in the second row between Walsh and Sullivan.

In a powerful speech, McLagan attacked the DCCBA for trying to identify Labour with fascism. ‘Not only do we repudiate the slander — we hurl it back in the teeth of those who have uttered it and say that they and they alone are the friends of fascism …’

He attacked the opponents of nationalisation for saying that only private owners could successfully manage a bank. ‘What does past experience teach us? How have these self-styled financial wizards performed in the past? Let us cast our minds back to the period of the last depression, to the years from 1931 to 1935. What financial ability did our co-ordinated big business friends show then? … Instead of taking steps to bring about increased consumption so that the basic needs of the people could be met and production could be continued, what they did was to cut wages, salaries, pensions, all forms of remuneration of the working people, and thus reduce consumption still further …’

‘My thoughts go back to the last time I spoke here — in 1931, when I and other trade union representatives spoke to the political representatives of the vested interests and pleaded with them not to drive New Zealand down to destitution. We pleaded in vain.’

A voice from the crowd said: ’They told us to go and eat grass.’

McLagan continued: ‘We learnt our lesson then. To-day we do not plead. To-day we have come here in unconquerable numbers, conscious of our strength, aware of our democratic rights and determined to protect our democratic rights. These ex-friends of Mussolini and Hitler, these representatives of privilege, conceived the idea of coming here in force to intimidate the government, to over-awe the government by a display of numbers, to … prevent it from going on with its programme of democratic legislation … We have come here to match their numbers with greater numbers. We have come here to prove to these plotters that the people of this Dominion are so firmly wedded to democratic principles that they will not allow any vested interests to imperil their democracy … We believe in full employment and a minimum family income for all. We believe in Social Security and an adequate standard of comfort for the aged, the widows, the orphans, the sick and the disabled. We believe in the taking over by the government of institutions such as the Bank of New Zealand. We believe that the government should transform such institutions into organs for rendering public service instead of grasping for private profit!’

John Pascoe collection, ATL F-1839-1/2 (left) & F-1841-1/4 (above)
The National Party was formed in May 1936 to fuse the remnants of the Reform and United parties and other anti-Labour political forces into a united, mass-based conservative party. This front page cartoon from the second issue of *National News* — published shortly after the FOL's founding conference — shows that the new party was quick to attack unions in an attempt to undermine the Labour government. Union bashing was to be a persistent theme of National Party publicity. This cartoon was inaccurate. Labour politicians, particularly Peter Fraser, played the key role behind the scenes in encouraging the argumentative national groups of unions to form a single national union centre.

There is a danger that Fascism will rear its ugly head. We have decided to support the Spanish people against Fascism. I am sure we shall be even more prepared to support the New Zealand Labour Government against Fascism, and I am sure I can tell Mr Fraser and his Government that if at any time any extra-Parliamentary organisation attempts to overthrow the Government of New Zealand it will be immediately met with the full forces of organised Labour.18

The *Standard* hailed the formation of the FOL as ‘the greatest step towards unity for the working class that has ever been taken in this country.’ The workers had ‘a Federation in which they can repose all their hopes … the policy of the future must be to co-operate fully, actively and continuously with the Government.’19 The FOL quickly established itself as the central organisation of unions. Within six months 150,000 unionists had affiliated to it and district councils had been set up in Auckland, Waihi, Gisborne, Napier, New Plymouth, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, Westport, Greymouth, Dunedin and Invercargill.20
Conclusions

Cook and Roberts lost the most important debates at the conference. Their plea that the FOL should be given sufficient resources to match the employers federation fell on deaf ears. Throughout its existence, the FOL was run on a shoestring. There was support for the argument that national, industrial unions were the best form of organisation. In the late 1930s the FOL supported several initiatives to create industry unions. For example there was an almost successful attempt to amalgamate all workers in the new motor assembly industry in Wellington into the Engineers Union. There was an ambitious attempt to amalgamate the labourers, timber workers and freezing workers with the Workers Union. The FOL organised a conference to discuss this proposal but it failed. A number of successful amalgamations did take place: for example, the Engineers, Printers and Carpenters established strong national unions. However, most unions remained organised by occupation or craft and the great majority supported the arbitration system.

Roberts argued that if representation at FOL conferences was confined to trades councils, ‘a score of paid secretaries would be running the federation forever.’ Although it was decided that future conferences would be more representative, the FOL was largely run by paid union officials. In 1937 communists hailed the FOL’s ‘remarkably democratic constitution’ which, unlike the card vote system of the British Trades Union Congress, would ‘give the smaller unions their fair share in determining the policy of the Federation.’ In practice, the FOL’s voting system, which gave small unions proportionately greater strength than the big unions, encouraged the conservatism that characterised the federation for most of its fifty-year existence. The occupation-based, pro-arbitration majority of unions assured FOL leaders, in Noel Woods’ words, ‘of a predominance of support for moderate policy.’

The FOL’s close relationship with the Labour government was important in making it a conservative force in the trade union movement. As Paddy Webb put it, ‘We are not out to fight the Government, but to co-operate with it, because the Government is part of you yourselves.’ Despite their differences in 1937, Roberts, Walsh, Cook and Young and most other union leaders were united in defending the government when it came under attack. They played key roles in ensuring the expulsion of the dissident MP John A Lee from the Labour Party and in mobilising union support for conscription in World War II.

In July 1937 Mclagan told the Workers Union’s conference that the FOL’s chief task was to co-ordinate union efforts and lay down common policy. ‘Some unions in the past had succeeded by their efforts in obtaining fair wages and conditions
— the mine workers, for instance, were still far ahead of others; but what any one section could get was limited by the general level of what other workers got. Before any section could advance much further an organisation must be set up to secure a general advance. The Federation, with the co-operation of its affiliations, could bring about such a general advance. Throughout its existence, the FOL’s main aims were the maintenance of living standards and wage bargaining for all union members, regardless of their industrial strength. It relied on centralised wage-fixing and compulsory unionism to deliver to workers and for most of its history it was successful in doing so. The FOL’s enduring legacy was that it created a national voice for workers, a central organisation to represent their collective interests. In bad times, as well as good, that voice has continued to be heard.

Notes

2 Contemporary New Zealand — A Survey of Domestic and Foreign Policy, Wellington, NZ Institute of International Affairs, 1939, pp 146–51.
3 Under the IC&A Act collective agreements between unions and employers were known as ‘awards’ because they were ‘awarded’ by the Arbitration Court (whether they were the result of collective bargaining or of a court decision).
10 Standard, 22 July 1936.
11 Ibid, 8 July 1937.
14 H O Roth, Controversy Between New Zealand Industrial Leaders (being a compilation of the letters to the Evening Post, Wellington, by Messrs. A. Cook, J. Roberts and F.P. Walsh), Auckland, University of Auckland Library, 1972.
16 Evening Post, 16 February 1937.
17 Ibid, 22 February 1937.
19 Ibid, 17 February 1937.
20 Ibid, 6 March 1937.
21 Ibid, 16 March 1937.
22 Ibid, 6 March 1937.
23 Ibid, 16 March 1937.
24 Roth, Controversy between New Zealand Industrial Leaders.
27 Bert Roth, Remedy For Present Evils: A History of the New Zealand Public Service Association.
25 Minutes of the National Industrial Conference Held at the Trades Hall, Wellington from April 14 to 19, 1937, Wellington, 1937, p 3.
29 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Minutes of the National Industrial Conference, p 3.
33 Standard, 22 April 1937.
34 New Zealand Federation of Labour Unity Conference Wellington April 14–19 1937 (partial transcript of proceedings of Unity conference), p 11. MS Papers 4100, 1/1, ATL.
35 The rival constitutions are in the Fol's papers. MS Papers 4100, 8/2/1, ATL.
41 Minutes of the National Industrial Conference, p 4.
43 Constitution and Rules of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, n.d., 94-106-51/01, ATL.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid, pp 36–45.
50 Minutes of the National Industrial Conference, p 10.
53 In a report of the conference, the Communist International's International Press Correspondence (26 June 1937) optimistically hailed the vote for Stanley as 'a tribute to the growing influence of the Communist Party in the trade unions.' It said the biggest threat to the Fol was Walsh's presence on its executive. He was 'the main agent for Trotskyist propaganda in New Zealand' and 'a well-known slanderer of the Soviet Union and opponent of the United Front and the People's Front'. MS Papers 94-106-51/01, ATL.
54 Minutes of the National Industrial Conference, pp 10–11.
56 Standard, 22 April 1937.
57 Partial transcript of proceedings of Unity conference, pp 77–84.
59 Standard, 22 April 1937.
60 Fol's News Bulletin, 20 September 1937, MS Papers 94-106-51/01, ATL.
61 Roth, Advocate, Educate, Control, pp 40–51.
63 International Press Correspondence, 26 June 1937.
64 Noel S Woods, Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration, p 133.
65 Partial transcript of proceedings of Unity conference, p 11.
67 Standard, 8 July 1937.
Fintan Patrick Walsh was the dominant personality in the FOL from World War II until his death in 1963. He was an FOL executive member 1937–44, vice-president 1946–47 and 1948–52 (he was defeated in 1947 and re-elected in 1948) and president 1952–63. His power base in the union movement rested on his leadership of three quite different organisations: the Seamens Union (national president 1937–63), the Wellington Clerical Workers Union (president 1937–63) and the Wellington Trades Council (president 1937–63). He was also secretary of small unions of biscuit and confectionary workers and fishermen.

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CHAPTER FOUR
The tyranny of averages and the politics of indexing: The Walsh Years, 1937–63

Melanie Nolan

Did the New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP) manage a compliant union movement with a strong national organisation after the New Zealand Federation of Labour (FOL) was formed in 1937? Opponents of the FOL believe Peter Fraser forced unions into federation in 1937 in order to create a lackey. On the other hand, opponents of the NZLP have regarded the party as the FOL’s follower, obeying its socialist objectives with excessive willingness. Putting to one side which organisation was the more dominant, the political relationship between the FOL and NZLP was clearly close; it has dominated the literature of New Zealand’s industrial history during what is known as the ‘Walsh years’, when Fintan Patrick Walsh was FOL president from 1952 to 1963.

The relationship of the political and industrial wings at the leadership level between Fraser and Walsh was important, especially for the success of the stabilisation policy. This policy sought to steady or at least restrain upward movement of costs, prices and wages to constrain the cost of war, control inflation and maintain living standards from 1940 and into the post-war period. After a conference on stabilisation in 1940, the government established the Economic Stabilisation Committee in September 1941. Its members were the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Industries and Commerce, the acting chairman of the Economic Stabilisation Conference and five representatives of employers and employees. It was followed by a smaller Economic Stabilisation Commission. The emphasis on personalities and wartime relations has drawn attention away from the FOL and the government’s independent policies, and obscured the grounds for disagreement between the two wings of labour in the long term. For instance, the government adopted stabilisation policies before the war, with import and exchange controls implemented in 1938. For its part the FOL had both workers’ and consumers’ interests, which were not always the same as the government’s interests.
Political and union leaders could agree on a wages policy at a particular time. Closer attention, however, to the problems that implementation of an agreed wages policy faced — wage drift outside the aegis of the Arbitration Court, the compression of wages and the frustrations of an increasing number of unions with the arbitration system — reveals a more contested industrial history surrounding a challenge to the male breadwinner policy, particularly the politics of indexation. This wider vista means cutting Walsh down to size in our histories of the period. It also shows the importance of unlikely industrial actors in a context which is usually considered masculinist. Women were critical industrial actors in the Walsh years, a period when the so-called average worker, the basis of industrial relations from 1930s to 1960s, was no longer simply the male breadwinner. But women’s role loomed large in the post-war cost of living debates as well.

As others have shown, FOL wages policy went through four phases between the 1930s and the 1960s: (i) the pre-war period when it was getting established; (ii) wartime stabilisation when the FOL was closely involved in government economic policy through the relationship between Walsh, Fraser and the Minister of Labour, Angus McLagan; (iii) 1947 to the early 1960s — the heyday of general wage orders (gwo), what might be described as the gwo system; and (iv) the three-tier system that developed in the late 1950s. Between 1894 and World War II the Arbitration Court had regulated labour conditions and settled disputes when collective bargaining or conciliation between employers and workers had broken down. In the ‘Walsh era’ collective bargaining through conciliation councils still occurred, but it was overshadowed by gwo. There were precedents but the court’s power of fixing general wages was set out in the wake of the Economic Stabilisation Act 1948. Gwo directly affected 40 percent of wage and salary earners and indirectly affected the other wage-fixing tribunals for watersiders, public servants and railway workers; it eventually spread through the whole wage structure. The court’s role in the post-stabilisation economy loomed larger than the relationship between the NZLP and FOL. Rather than the relationship between the political wings of labour, the significant debate was in the court over averages, indexes and the allocation of resources. These gwo hearings were important, colourful public and political events — or as Professor John Roberts, son of union leader ‘Big Jim’ Roberts described them, ‘the grand inquest of the nation’.

Distinguishing between FP Walsh and the Walsh Era

Technically, as Bert Roth has suggested, the Walsh era was the period when Walsh was FOL president from 1952 to 1963. Walsh stood unsuccessfully for vice-president in 1937 but was vice-president in 1946 and from 1948 to 1952. Indeed,
he was on the FOL executive for all but three years between 1937 and 1963. But, as Noel Woods suggested, earlier leaders such as Ted Canham and Fred Cornwell were lesser powerbrokers (indeed he suggests that they were mere figureheads) than Angus McLagan and Dick Eddy and, especially, FP Walsh. Jock Barnes is not the only one who argues that Walsh called the shots over the 1951 waterfront lockout. Others have drawn attention to the closeness of Walsh's friendship with Fraser for the entire first Labour government (1935–49) and, of course, his role on the Stabilisation Commission. Bruce Brown speaks for most by observing that, despite Walsh not becoming president of the FOL until 1952, 'he was in reality its dominating personality from the time of the war.' Certainly few discuss the FOL between 1937 and 1967 without dwelling on FP Walsh.

More than any other FOL leader, Walsh has attracted stereotyped and strong reactions which Dean Parker canvassed in summary in a 1988 Metro article about the 'Black Prince.' Ideologically Walsh was a moving target, deciding that the centre of all evil moved from Rome to Moscow and maybe back again. His relationship with the communist movement, as well as with Catholics, has
The National Party continued its accusations that the FOL 'bosses' dominated Labour in the 1940s. This 1943 National election poster shows the unionists' hand pushing Labour ministers like pawns on a chessboard. Fraser, Sullivan and Semple are pawns, Nash is the rook and Webb (who loved horse racing) is the knight. The popular left-wing broadcaster Colin Scrimgeour ('Uncle Scrim') is the bishop. By this time Scrimgeour, a strong Labour supporter in the 1930s, had fallen foul of Fraser and had been sacked as head of commercial broadcasting. Scrimgeour stood against Fraser at the 1943 election.

Unionism had been decimated by the Depression but, with compulsory unionism in 1936, the number of unions and their memberships initially both grew. Amalgamations finally checked the number of unions, which peaked in 1951. Only 25 of the 412 unions in 1953 had more than 1000 members; three-quarters of the union movement belonged to the large unions. The Labour Party had a total campaign budget of £4,063 in 1938. Six big unions — the the New Zealand Waterside Workers Federation, the Federated Seamens Union, the New Zealand Workers Union, the Post and Telegraph Workers Association, the New Zealand Hotel Workers Federation and the ASRS — donated over £13,000 or over a third of the £37,000 campaign contributions. By the 1940s the big unions' contributions to the Labour Party had been whittled back.
Peter Fraser’s appeal to union members to vote Labour on the front page of the Federation of Labour Bulletin illustrates the close links between the FOL and the Labour Party. It also shows Labour’s emphasis on full male employment and living standards. Although Labour got 47 percent of votes at the 1949 election, it lost eight seats to National.

FOL collection, ATL MSX:2496:2
been a matter of some conjecture. Walsh was Fraser’s ‘muscle man’. He was the thuggish strongman who had an Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) past and who may have been responsible for the disappearance of at least one or two seamen opponents over the sides of ships into the Tasman Sea. His power was based on his control of two unions, the Federated Seamen Union of New Zealand (1927–63) and the Wellington Clerical Workers Union (1936–60); and he was president of the Wellington Trades Council (1937–63). Walsh occupied a powerful position on the Stabilisation Commission from 1942 to 1950. Cabinet meetings under Fraser included Walsh, and they were said to have been subject to Walsh’s train schedules to his Wairarapa farm. Walsh is held to have dominated the Joint Council of Labour, i.e. the regular meetings of the NZLP and the FOL. Stouthes in the union movement between the Wellington Trades Council’s Management Committee and Tony Neary over the FOL’s cases to the Arbitration Court in the 1950s saw the union movement’s disagreements bandied about in libel cases before the Magistrates Court. Walsh’s machinations and political manoeuvrings have long been exposed publicly. Indeed, more than any other FOL leader, we have a large body of critical work on Walsh’s personality, politics and the inter-union libel cases he was involved in to the point of a full-length biography. It seems to agree with one commentator’s view:

Walsh was not a pleasant man, he was not particularly well liked, but he was widely respected as an able and effective union leader. It is hard to believe that he maintained his dominance of the trade union movement for so long without grudging respect and support, and that can only be won achieving what workers need. Popular stereotypes prevail of a movement increasingly militant according to Walsh’s powerful political postures. Cartoons in the 1940s show Labour in the FOL’s pocket. The 1936 Political Disabilities Removal Act permitted the big unions, including the Seamen, Watersiders, Railway Workers, Hotel Workers and Postal Workers, whose coffers were swelled by compulsory unionism, to contribute to political parties. They did not support the NZLP to this extent in the 1940s, although the FOL continued to call on all unionists to support the NZLP throughout the war. The relationship is said to have cooled by the 1950s. It was well-known that Walsh and Fraser’s successor as Labour leader, Walter Nash, did not get on at all. The contrast between the FOL’s relationship to the NZLP’s first (from formation up to 1949) and second (1957–60) governments has been the subject of some analysis.

After Labour lost office in 1949, the FOL was characterised publicly as a wage machine: Walsh was the public face leading the union movement in its almost
bi-annual gwos. On 31 March 1959 the *Otago Daily Times* published a cartoon representing FOL affiliated unions as pigs fighting at a trough. Walsh demanded an apology, which was unreservedly given, but the image was commonplace. By the 1960s the media noted ‘the strong displeasure of the New Zealand employers at the new militancy of the FOL, and the cartoonists were given fresh practice in converting their version of Walsh from the goodie of yore into an incorrigible baddie.’ When the Arbitration Court handed down a nil wage order in 1968, the machine was characterised as finally broken.

Walsh’s considerable role in unionism and the FOL from 1937 until 1963 has been well documented by historians, overshadowing the activities of the FOL. The best works are unpublished history theses, especially Pat Walsh’s work. I would argue that FP Walsh has made it difficult for labour historians to address the wider issues of FOL in its first three decades, the period 1937 to 1967.
one hand, the FOL was always more than Walsh. When the FOL was formed in 1937, Angus McLagan was elected president and Fred Cornwell was secretary from 1937 to 1944; the latter had been the secretary of the Trades and Labour Council’s Federation of Labour, was director of the New Zealand Workers’ Printing and Publishing Company, member of the Economic Stabilisation Committee and Commission and a member of the Manpowering Committee. Ken Baxter was FOL secretary from 1944 until 1969. Others who took on leadership roles at various times included McLagan, Canham, Cornwell, Roberts, Alex Croskery, Peter Butler, Bill Fox. They may not have had the charisma of Walsh, but they were powerful union leaders to a man. Biographers have noted the importance of each of them to the close relationship between the FOL and the NZLP.

On the other hand, little has been written about what the organised workers sought, and, in the process, what the FOL’s policy between 1937 and 1967. Politics of personality is one obstacle to considering policy; another is that the FOL’s objectives were contradictory from the outset. The FOL had three objectives when it was formed:

1. to promote the organization of all workers to enable them to secure the full value of their labour and the grouping of workers on lines of class and industry;
2. the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange; and
3. to affiliate with the recognized labour organizations in other countries and to co-operate with these organizations in raising the standard of living.
From the FOL’s formation, not only were the objectives inconsistent in practice, but the workers’ movement was not monolithic in support of any of them. AEC Hare estimated that in 1942 about half the unions had fewer than 100 members and were small, powerless and reliant on the arbitration system. And, as more than one commentator pointed out, industrial unionism was difficult to apply to smaller weaker unions and groups. What of the other objectives? Most unions were mainly concerned with living standards between 1937 and 1967. There was more support for gradual raising of the standard of living than there was for socialisation. In this chapter I examine the FOL from 1937 to 1967 by concentrating upon the third, neglected objective, aimed at raising the standard of living.

Pre-war concerns about poverty silenced by wages policy: Stabilisation

It is said that New Zealand’s Depression was longer, albeit shallower, than elsewhere. When the NZLP was elected in 1935, as is legend, it introduced compulsory unionism and a welfare state. Labour politicians were keen to particularise New Zealand’s depression experience and blame the ‘nationalist government’, while being keen to internationalise and to take the credit for the high post-war standard of living. During the 1940s the FOL proudly reported, too, that New Zealand’s cost of living was among the lowest in the world and attributed that to the NZLP’s policies. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, New Zealand workers were said to have more wealth per capita than either Britain or the United States and sometimes Australia.

At the time it was elected, the NZLP was concerned about poverty. It set about providing the ‘necessary factual bases for policy measures of a social nature’. Dan Sullivan, minister for industries and commerce, called this ‘Science in Relation to Social Problems’; he called for a ‘more Ordered Knowledge … more intensive study of the human and social aspects of science.’ Surveys conducted under his auspices in the late 1930s set out to measure the extent of poverty; for instance, the NZLP forced local bodies to conduct the 1936–37 Housing Survey accounting of the housing stock. Sullivan instituted two new branches of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) to concentrate on ‘science and society’. In April 1937 Evan Parry was appointed chairman of a newly established Bureau of Social Science Research. WT (Torrance) Doig, the secretary and executive officer of the bureau, published its first major study, A Survey of Standards of Life of New Zealand Dairy-farmers, in 1940. It was followed by a survey of tramway employees and a boot and shoe operatives survey, which was conducted but the completed report was never published. It was intended that the ‘scientific’
information it researched would help the government to arrive "at decisions on policy measures relating, *inter alia*, to wages, cost of living and price control".\textsuperscript{13}

In 1936 Sullivan had also revived the recently folded New Zealand Standards Institute, making it a branch of the DSIR. Standardisation, especially of quality and price, was a benefit to consumers and would establish standard of living benchmarks:\textsuperscript{14}

The advantages to be gained by the application of the principle of standardization to everyday commodities and processes are manifold and, furthermore ensure the intelligent, speedy and economic application of technological progress with resultant benefit to industry and consumer.\textsuperscript{15}

Along with JB Condliffe, Doig argued that 'the standard of living of a whole community is too vague' and covered a wide range of disparities distinguishing between individual, group and class standards. Following the theorist TH Marshall, he set out to consider not just consumption but non-material elements: leisure, conditions of work, environment, education, health and length of life. In 1930 GB Fisher had analysed the 1926 census which showed a range of incomes.\textsuperscript{16} New Zealand had a degree of equality not found elsewhere but 'equally much more marked than one would have supposed from popular statements on the subject'. Labour's newspaper was concerned with the disparity of the standard of living between groups.\textsuperscript{17} In 1938 the Social Science Research Bureau contracted Otago University researchers 'to do a series of experiments on low-cost family dietaries' to find the best diet at the lowest cost for a family of two adults and three children.\textsuperscript{18} The bureau contracted Professor Kolb, an American authority, to oversee standards of living surveys.\textsuperscript{19} Such research ended in 1939 when war broke out, and it was not resurrected after the war, as JH Robb has shown, not because it revealed social disparity but for a range of other reasons.\textsuperscript{20} The Social Science Research Bureau was closed and the Standards Institute was transferred from the DSIR to the Department of Industries and Commerce and its work reoriented.\textsuperscript{21}

Concerns about poverty and unequal distribution disappeared in the wake of World War II, and then a developing wages policy that was targeted at the 'average family'. In the late 1930s, for instance, the NZLP conference discussed the idea that it 'initiate and supervise a cost of living survey' and also

compile statistics showing production of goods, also proportion of production of capital goods compared to consumer goods, and average share each family would receive it divided equally and in relation to accepted minimum stands of living, presumably with a view to promoting equal shares.\textsuperscript{22} The government had powers in setting minimum wages (if prices were controlled), it influenced living
standards with family benefits, housing, health, education and pension policies and more widely with its monetary policies, but it effectively gave up a direct role in wage-fixing once it laid down the criteria on which the court based its decisions. The discourse of the distribution of wealth which it had promoted before World War II did not emerge again until the 1970s when the Gwo system was being cast aside.

The industrial system based on the average ‘unit’ was promoted along with stabilisation during the war, and this basis continued after the war. All industrial parties wished to avoid the steep price rises during World War I and the concomitant post-war depression in 1920–21. Economic stabilisation regulations were introduced as the Rates of Wages Emergency Regulations in 1940 to provide for stability, through control of wages and prices.63 In late 1942 the Economic Stabilisation Emergency Regulations were introduced and a wartime price index established covering essential commodities and services. Any wage rises had to go through the Arbitration Court. The government subsidised essential commodities to ensure stability and limit price rises.64 These measures were largely successful. Prices and wages were in balance and it was not until 1945 that an adjustment was needed under the regulations. The Retail Price Index base was 1000 for 1942 and it had only risen to 1013 by 1947 — just over one percent.

Above all, stabilisation was based on a male breadwinner system and full male employment; the arbitration system awarded the average man in full-time paid employment with a dependent wife and three children a decent basic wage, although the concept of the fair wage for an average family became more notional as the government provided for family allowances.65 Australia and New Zealand were conspicuous in their post-war international advocacy of a full employment, male breadwinner system, i.e. a political pledge for full male employment at fair wages. In the wake of World War II there was full male employment throughout the western world.66 Australia and New Zealand also strongly advocated a male breadwinner system. Clause 35 of the Australian–New Zealand Agreement (1944) included a resolution to cooperate ‘in achieving full employment in Australia and New Zealand.’67 The two countries also declared they would cooperate in propagating the policy internationally — indeed it was their main ‘article of faith.’68 And true to their word Prime Minister Fraser and his deputy Nash for New Zealand, and external affairs minister H V Evatt for Australia, advocated the full employment policy in post-war international forums. Their advocacy was part of the reason that the objective of full (male) employment was written into the United Nations’ (UN) Charter, the International Labour Organisation Charter and the Monetary and Financial Conference (Bretton Woods) Agreement of
Fraser chaired the UN Economic and Social Council in 1944 and moved the full employment clause. He declared that ‘for the average man the right to live depended on the right to work.’

The point is that an adequate male breadwinner wage before the 1940s had only been aspirational. Justice Henry Higgins of the Australian federal Arbitration Court gave the male breadwinner wage its most famous definition in his 1907 ‘Harvester Judgement’, when he stated that the basic wage should be sufficient to support a family of five. New Zealand piggybacked on this concept, which was central to its industrial relations. Research has suggested that most unskilled labourers did not receive a basic wage sufficient to support a family of five in the following decades in Australia. The same is true of New Zealand. Most workers were simply not included in the arbitration system until after 1936. Family size was more diverse before World War II than during the post-war period. Work was seasonal or dependent on the weather and of course there was unemployment.

The FOL was formally committed to the continuance of stabilisation at a time when full male employment was finally realised; it formally chose stabilisation over socialism. If the 1937 FOL conference left the issue of contradictory ‘socialisation’ versus ‘raising living standards’ objectives unresolved, then the issue was sorted in 1941. The overwhelming majority of unions at the 1941 FOL conference supported stabilisation and maintaining living standards. The conference endorsed the joint industrial and political labour executives’ stabilisation plan by 166 to 26. The Wellington Carpenters’ Union made a gallant effort to change delegates’ minds. Bill McAra moved but lost his motion:

That the Economic Stabilisation Conference failed entirely to grapple with the fundamental issues and this conference affirms the principle that with the confines of the present economic and social order the standards of living and the social needs of the masses of the people are subservient to the making of profits by the few. This conference, therefore, directs the incoming national executive to direct its efforts to intensive educational work among trade unions with a view to development of demand among the rank and file of the trade unionists and their organisations to effect the necessary changes and achieve Socialism now.

FP Walsh’s report to the FOL’s national council in 1946, published as The Walsh Report, set out FOL policy. Higher productivity was the best way to ensure a higher standard of living. The FOL conference endorsed stabilisation in 1947. The FOL executive stated in 1949, ‘Capitalism, whether we like it or not, is the system whereby we, in fact, gain the means to live. If we smash it, without bothering whether we are able to replace it with something better, we must destroy our own livelihoods with it.’
The heyday of general wage orders

When stabilisation was gradually withdrawn in the late 1940s the Arbitration Court came to play a more important role; governments, Labour and National, simply did not intervene in issues such as wages relativities or equal pay. The Economic Stabilisation regulations replaced the former ‘emergency regulations’ in 1949. The National government lifted most subsidies (food subsidies continued) and direct controls in 1949 and 1950. As expected, the cost of living for workers rose. The Retail Price Index (RPI) rose 1.7 in 1949, 5.6 in 1950 and 11 percent in 1951. The evidence on which wages would be adjusted was statistical facts, especially changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI), although of course there was a difference between RPI and CPI which was the cause for some disagreement over increases. Not surprisingly the FOL established a research office in 1941. The first FOL research officer was Ray Perry, who was sent to the New Zealand Legation in Moscow as second secretary in 1944. His first article in the Standard was a review of Horace Belshaw’s Standards of Living which made clear his view that Labour had a choice between increasing productivity as a basis for increased standard of living or redistributing the existing ‘cake’. In late 1947 the research officer, Mrs D M Sorrell (who had been a member of the Social Science Research Bureau 1936–39) prepared a report on ‘Effective Wages’ setting the case that the FOL aimed ‘not merely at keeping wages in line with the cost of living but at improving the standard of life generally and effective wage levels in particular’ and its view that increased productivity would achieve that.

By the late 1950s the FOL was consulting economists but not earlier, and worse, for the first half of the 1950s there was no FOL research officer. Before 1958 Walsh, as FOL advocate, had to find his own assistance in preparing two cases. As he complained to a Clerical Workers Association conference,

> You have no idea of the amount of time it takes to prepare a case. It is months and months of slogging, getting these figures, having that checked, no research officer. It is a slow job ...

Others have pointed to the voting strength the clerical workers provided for Walsh within the FOL, but in a more mundane way Noel Pharazyn, Inga Renner, Nan Clark and other clerical union executive members were Walsh’s private secretariat.

The rising cost of living was irrefutable, then, but the extent of catch-up was debatable. The Employers Federation was better served with researchers than unions were, while the court availed itself of the services of the Government Statistician. The court made clear that company profits and the like would not determine wage adjustments; as indeed it had consistently from 1894. To avoid
a decline in living standards, the legislation was amended to allow the court to adjust wages at its discretion. In 1951 the GWO prescribed an increase of 15 percent determined under the Arbitration Court. The RPI was still high at 7.8 percent in 1952 and 4.6 in 1953. There were further GWOS of 10 percent in 1953 and 13 percent in 1954.

Rather than Walsh personally becoming ideologically distanced from the Labour hierarchy in the later 1950s, the interests of the NZLP and the FOL diverged. John Roberts makes the point that, as a result of the 1951 lockout, the FOL was willing to work with the National government, which recognised it as the sole voice of organised labour. And one of the concerns was the way in which averages were played around with. Walsh's attack in 1958 on the Labour Finance Minister Arnold Nordmeyer's so-called Black Budget (which cut imports and raised indirect taxes on tobacco, alcohol and petrol) has to be put into the context of the FOL's concern that the restructuring of the CPI in 1957 would have a detrimental effect on unions' ability to secure adequate wage claims. The report of the 1948 Index Committee made it clear that certain things such as expenditure on 'private motoring and on alcoholic liquor', were excluded not just because they were luxuries (for the index was not restricted to essentials) but principally because expenditure varied so greatly between different families. In 1957 they were added into the index again, meaning that changes in food prices were slightly less decisive. Then the 1958 budget was seen as a direct attack on workers' standard of living through the imposition of regressive, indirect taxes, at a time when a generally accepted principle of the labour movement was that taxation should be progressive, i.e. based on the ability to pay, not the rate of consumption. Nordmeyer was responding to a massive balance of payments crisis not by borrowing overseas but raising monies internally, which meant cutting imports and cutting consumption. Walsh responded to the budget with a statement carried in the daily media and the Standard pointing out that the effect of this new taxation would be a 5 percent increase in the CPI by the end of September 1958 which would be added to a 2 percent increase since the last GWO. When the matter was discussed by the Joint Council of Labour on 15 July the only hope that Nordmeyer could offer was, after an admission that the CPI could well increase by the amount suggested by Walsh, 'that the Government was hoping that it would be offset by strenuous endeavours on the part of the Government to keep the cost of food down.'

When the suggestion had previously arisen in 1956 that an effective wage index should be instituted, the FOL complained that the 'many' wage-earners on the basic award rates would suffer. The NZLP and the FOL increasingly disagreed
over calibrating the standard of living. This was the cause of disaffection, rather than Walsh's ideological commitment to communism or factional fighting. More generally, the FOL was increasingly concerned that the court was making insufficient attempts to compensate workers for rising wages and promoting a declining standard of living.39

The main point is that, after a concern in the 1930s over matters of distribution and inequality, the average wage was focused upon.40 This was at a time when economists argue that disparity was increasing. Brian Easton, using annual tax data, argued that the share of income of the top ten percent fell from 37.5 percent in 1959–60 to 33.5 percent in 1973–74.41 His conclusions are supported by AB Atkinson and Andrew Leigh, who recently argued that the share of income of the top income groups fell in the 1930s, rose again after World War II and slowly declined from the end of the 1950s to the mid-1980s; they suggest the share of the top 20 percent of income earners grew in the immediate post-war period.
and slowly declined from 53 percent in 1956 to 46 percent in 1984. Conflict between party and federation grew after 1945 at a time when New Zealand’s rich were getting richer.

Pat Walsh on the Walsh Years: outside the Arbitration Court

Thanks to Pat Walsh and others we have a good overview of the three-tier wage-fixing system which started to develop from the 1950s. The watersiders unsuccessfully attempted to avoid the stabilisation legislation by directly negotiating with employers rather than submitting to mediation by the Waterfront Authority. The RUL was instrumental in the watersiders’ defeat in the 1951 lockout. But then a period ‘of remarkable industrial harmony’ set in with ‘negligible levels of unemployment’ from 1952 to 1967. Amidst industrial quiescence, strong militant unions and employers quietly agreed upon a complex three-tier wage system.

The first tier consisted of industrial awards and agreements that continued to be negotiated within the system and registered with the court. The wages prescribed by awards and agreements before World War II were fairly comparable with the actual rates paid, what are known as ruling rates. There had been GWOS but in the wake of the 1936 Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration (IC&A) Amendment Act, wages were largely determined by negotiated and arbitrated awards.

The second tier involved bargaining conducted outside the arbitration system. It included single-company, multi-employer and regional agreements. Some of these were registered with the court, particularly single-company agreements, but most were not. They were related to the high post-war investment programme. Actual wages paid varied considerably depending on local labour market conditions.

The third tier involved GWOS. There were two GWOS during the war: in 1940 and 1942. There were six GWOS in the 1950s: 1950 (an interim order), 1951, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1959. To begin with, GWOS applied only to the basic rates with a cap on how much of a weekly wage they applied to. GWOS did not apply to holiday pay and overtime. Union pressure mounted for GWOS to be automatically linked to second-tier payments and a ratcheting process began.

As a consequence, the slow uneven emergence of this three-tier wage-fixing, amid acute labour shortages, led to ‘wage drift’ or a developing gap between award rates and ruling rates: the percentage margin of weekly earnings over nominal or award weekly wage rate rose from 8.1 percent in 1947 to 22.4 percent by 1960. At the same time there was a compression of wages, with the differences between skilled and unskilled workers decreasing over time. The Arbitration Court’s Standard Wage Pronouncements (SWPs) set a margin or differential in
wages for different skill levels. SWPS need to be distinguished from GWOS. SWPS not only set margins between unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workers; they were an indication to unions and employers of the court’s policy. The 1952 SWP, however, was the last one the court made. Given that the GWOS only applied to basic hourly wage rates, low-paid and unskilled workers’ effective wages crept up in relation to skilled workers. The differential had been 34.9 percent in 1909, 25.8 in 1919, 17.9 in 1937 and 16.7 in 1952. It rose to 21.2 percent in 1960 but not to the 1919 differential, let alone that of 1909. The FOL was concerned about this and brought an unsuccessful ‘Margins for Skill’ case to the Arbitration Court to re-establish the 25 percent margin existing in 1919 for skilled workers.

‘Wage drift’ — the gap between award wages and the wages that workers were actually paid — grew steadily during the 1950s and early 1960s. Between 1947 and 1965 the margin of ruling or paid rates over award rates rose from 8.1 percent to 30 percent.

over unskilled workers. Meanwhile the real value of wages declined between 1955 and 1960 while this complex system emerged. And, at the same time, more fundamental changes still were occurring.

**Changing work and workers**

All three themes — wage drift outside the Arbitration Court amid labour shortage, the extent of the compression of wages, and the frustrations with the stabilisation system — were greater in the post-war period 1945 to 1967 than has been generally acknowledged because the discussion has not considered women’s position, and to a lesser extent Maori.

Union membership rose and diversified and conditions improved during the first Labour government’s term. There was a growth in white-collar and other areas of female employment, especially for married women. New Zealand had a labour shortage so desperate that the government and employers were prepared to relax the male breadwinner system. The participation rate of married women, especially in part-time work, rose from 3.7 percent in 1936 to 7.7 percent in 1945, 9.7 percent in 1951, 12.9 percent in 1956, 16.0 percent in 1961 and 19.9 percent in 1966: i.e. a more than five-fold increase in thirty years.

These years also saw the massive inclusion of Maori into the wage system, which resulted in a type of wage compression. In 1945 three-quarters of the Maori population was rural. The Maori workforce went through an almost total industrial transformation in the three decades after 1945. The point is that, while Maori often found themselves at the bottom of wage scales, skilled and unskilled differentials narrowed at this time. Gender rather than race threatened the basic wage.

The F.O.L was only too aware of working women, but Maori equality in the workforce was not an issue before the 1970s. The F.O.L struggled with the problem of equal pay. Some affiliates, such as the Clerical Workers, pushed hard. The Minister for the Welfare of Women and Children, Dame Hilda Ross, was lambasted in 1956 for being ‘out of touch with existing conditions’ when she said that there was ‘no need for married women to work in New Zealand.’ Indeed, the F.O.L discussed the tyranny of averages in its 1962 survey of household budgets. It pointed out that an important differential of budgets was whether the ‘wife works’. Walsh’s address on *The State of New Zealand’s Economy* noted that ‘Information received so far bears out the contention of unionists that the minimum wage rates now being paid are insufficient to enable a family man to live on his earnings on a forty-hour week.’ Salary and wage earners had found that they need to ‘work longer hours to take a part-time job, or else their wives must go to work in order to maintain
their living standards. And the FOL did not want to facilitate this, or more particularly to support equal pay. The tax regime was changed in 1953 over its protests. Until 1953 the basic tax unit was a married couple living together with dependent children. After 1953–54 the tax unit was the individual. The FOL argued that this was an encouragement for married women to enter the workforce.

It was committed to a male breadwinner and full male employment system.

In the standard wage hearing before the Arbitration Court in August 1947, the FOL sought among other things an increase in the female rate as a proportion of the male rate, from 60 percent to 90 percent. This was the first union-wide attempt to narrow the gendered wage differential. The FOL argued that the ‘question of equal pay is quite divorced from that of family and dependent benefits. Dependent differentials are properly provided by separate benefits unrelated to wages’ — i.e. the universal family benefit of 1946 and tax concessions that had
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existed since 1914. It wanted male rates to be paid to women ‘performing work normally performed by adult male workers’. From this point, organised labour slowly began to support ‘the rate for the job’. Separating concerns about men supporting wives and children on low wages from the call for equal pay was the first major post-war success for the equal pay movement.

Support for the male breadwinner wage competed with calls for justice for women in paid employment. The 1947 FOL request for a female rate of 90 percent of the male rate was rebuffed, as was its application for an effective female rate of about 70 percent in 1949. There was some suggestion that the FOL believed that if an employer had the choice between male and female workers at the same rate, he would choose male employees. The Clerical Workers Union supported equal pay in 1942, sought it in 1946 and made a strong claim for it in 1949; and the Clothing Trade Employees Federation did so a year later. The FOL in its 1950 GWO application sought minimum wage rates for adult females to be increased by 75 percent of the increase granted to adult males, but was again unsuccessful.

The New Zealand Trade Union Congress, the FOL’s militant rival during 1950 and 1951, was no more successful when it applied for adult females to receive the same increase as adult males. In the 1952, 1954 and 1956 GWO hearings the FOL continued to request a 75 percent ratio for adult females, and was turned down each time. In its 1959 general wage case the FOL made an impassioned plea for equal pay as a general principle since amending ‘awards to provide for equal basic rates of pay for men and women … [was] outside the scope of this application.’ It argued that ‘The fact is that differentiation between men and women in the matter of wages is an unjustified survival of beliefs in a less enlightened age.’

Although the New Zealand workers’ representative at the 1951 ILO conference had voted for the Convention on Equal Remuneration, and FOL support for ‘the rate for the job’ was confirmed at annual conferences and in the standard and general wage cases, this was as progressive as the union movement got. Most unions did not seek equal pay.

For its part, the court had turned down the applications as being not just or fair under the Economic Stabilisation Regulations, which it interpreted as authorising the court ‘to amend awards and agreements for the purpose only of restoring or preserving a proper relationship between the rates of remuneration of various classes of workers.’ The court had done nothing to create the gendered differentials in the first place; nor was it taking any initiative to dismantle them. It rejected the FOL’s 1947 application because it represented ‘a drastic departure from past and present industrial practice’ in New Zealand. In the absence of equal pay legislation, the court worried that equal pay would cause unnecessary inflation
pressures as women’s ‘spending-power’ rose without increased productivity. The result would be economic instability and industrial unrest, which would upset post-war stabilisation.

In the 1950s the court was troubled by the implications of extending social security, the gradual rise in the female wage as a proportion of the male wage, and the increasing difficulty of defending any social or family element in male wage rates. The IC&#xa; 1936 had defined the basic male wage as sufficient to provide for the needs of a man, his wife and three children. In its 1952 SWP judgement, the court rejected the view that the family wage was materially affected by the 1946 introduction of the universal family benefit, which provided for children regardless of wage. It also stated that the Minimum Wage Act 1945, and its amendments in 1947 and 1949 (all of which raised the female wage as a proportion of the male wage) did not suggest that the 1936 basis for wage-fixing needed to be altered. Yet the rise in official minimum rates for women, from 47 percent of the male rate in 1936 to 66 percent in 1949, was a significant narrowing of the gendered

The FOL national executive, 1959. Back: Harry Thompson (Plumbers), Jim Napier (Watersiders), Len Hadley (Photo Engravers, Motion Picture Projectionists, Tobacco Workers) and Frank Fenton (NZ Workers Union). Front: Ken Baxter (secretary), Fintan Patrick Walsh (president) and Tom Skinner (vice-president). Skinner, the president of the Auckland Trades Council, defeated four opponents to be elected vice-president in 1959. He was not a Walsh supporter and Walsh distrusted him. They eventually established an uneasy working relationship.
wage gap. In 1952 the Minimum Wage Act was amended and gendered wage differentials were dropped. Yet in the following year the Arbitration Court gave men a higher wage increase than women, effectively widening the gap again. After protests the relativity was restored in 1954 in separate public and private sector tribunals. In 1954 the basic wage clause in the T&G Act was dropped, and was never reinstated. Yet despite ‘creeping’ wage equality and the removal of the legal requirement to differentiate by gender, the court would not concede equal pay while the government remained committed to economic stabilisation.

The FOL continued to be half-hearted about equal pay until the late 1960s. Most of its energies went into securing the highest male breadwinner wage possible within the court. Wage scales were compressed, not just between skilled and unskilled, but also male and female. Much of this compression occurred outside the Arbitration Court. The skill margins decreased from 25.8 percent in 1919 to 16.7 percent in 1950, while it rose to 21.2 percent in 1960. The FOL remained concerned that the gap had fallen over time and in 1965 brought an unsuccessful ‘Margins for Skill’ case, arguing that the differential ought to be restored to something like the 1919 figure, which it claimed had been 35 percent. The court refused although it increasingly took into account ‘qualification payments’ case by case. Meanwhile the gender differential narrowed much more dramatically than that of skill. Men’s wages were officially 53 percent more than women’s in 1936, 34 percent in 1949, with most estimates suggesting it was down to 30 percent by 1970 even before equal pay. In 1960 the differential (nominal as opposed to ruling of course) between men’s and women’s wages in the public service was abandoned with the passing of the Government Service Equal Pay Act. This, however, was outside the arbitration system. Any change to equal pay had to come from outside the stabilisation system and without FOL sanction. It was committed to a male breadwinner and full male employment system and opposed the rise in women’s workforce participation.

Meanwhile another group of women, a number of whom were FOL members, was taking a different tack and their organisation also indicates the extent of general change. Housewives’ unions and women’s groups had protested against the rising cost of living for families when stabilisation was lifted in 1949 and 1950. In the 1960s they complained about the taxation regime on married women who were ‘assisting in industrial productivity’ but not receiving the rewards. It amounted to taxation without benefit. However, housewives unions’ membership was declining by the 1960s while broader consumer groups emerged. A national consumer conference in Wellington in 1958 led to the establishment of a government ‘quango’, the Consumer Service, consisting of
nine members of the public, including the FOL secretary, FP Walsh and several ‘housewives’ representatives, together with four government department heads (of Health, Labour, Scientific & Industrial Research and Industries & Commerce). It was meant to be non-political and independent of government direction. It was superseded by the Consumers Institute in 1964, which concerned itself with standards. A second ‘consumer’ group was concerned with ‘bread and butter’ cost of living issues and the ‘crisis of inflation’ facing that New Zealand families. Flo Humphries founded the Campaign Against Rising Prices (CARP) in 1966 with a membership consisting mostly of housewives and working mothers. The movement crossed the Tasman – Phyllis Johnson and Vilma Ward formed CARP groups in Australia in the 1970s.

Humphries was secretary of the Auckland Drug Factories Employees Union, delegate to the Auckland Trades Council and FOL conferences, and later the first woman to represent the FOL overseas in 1971. She campaigned for equal pay and against the rising cost of living. In November 1966 she was one of five women who placed an advertisement in the Auckland Star, asking ‘Who wants to do something about high prices?’ Humphries was elected president of the new organisation at its inaugural public meeting. CARP aimed to protect consumers and achieve price stability. Like the FOL, its members complained that high prices were disrupting decent family life; husbands were working long hours to make ends meet and mothers were ‘going out to work’. CARP had more success with keeping prices down than it did over stemming the flow of women into paid employment.

Conclusion

The FOL has always been regarded as masculinist and thereby committed to a high standard of living based on a high male breadwinner wage. It was deeply ironic for there to have been major improvements in women’s wages between 1937 and 1967, so often overlooked because data collection was based on men’s position. Writers such as Richard Edwards and Ross McKibbin have emphasised the underlying tension about changing internal relations within the labour movement as much as relations without. The FOL’s strategy of seeking the highest male breadwinner wage to achieve the highest standard of living came under increasing pressure by the late 1960s. Of course a range of women’s organisations led by the Federation of New Zealand Housewives (formed in 1957) and CARP supported FOL strategy. Ironically, however, women in paid employment, particularly married women working in the growing white-collar jobs, worked against FOL objectives in the years in which Walsh was president both of the FOL and the Clerical Workers
Union. The institution of family benefits and the ending of the post-war baby boom also undermined the FOL strategy. In 1955 only 12.1 percent of the total male adult and married wage and salary earners were married men with three or more dependent children.10

The pressures on the gwo system were mounting more generally, however, not just the ‘wage unit’. The compression of wages, especially the margin for skills, the growing capacity of some employers to pay more in a time of labour shortage, the frustrations of an increasing number of unions and employers with the arbitration system and the politics of indexing all conspired against the system that governments, employers and the FOL had constructed in the immediate post-war years.

Notes
2 National Party propaganda, 1946 and 1949 elections, ATL.
4 In 1942 the Economic Stabilisation Commission members were: A T Donnelly, CMG (chairman of the Commission, barrister and chairman of the Bank of New Zealand), Hon Angus McLagan (m.t.c and Minister of Industrial Manpower), F P Walsh (FOL), Fred Cornwell (FOL), William Marshall (Dairy Industry Council), C V Smith (New Zealand Manufacturers’ Federation).
7 There were precedents. The War Legislation and Statute Law Amendment Act, 1918, gave the court the power to issue general orders but lapsed in 1923, was revived in 1925 but no other general decisions were made until 1931. The Finance Act 1931 allowed the court to make a general order but the arbitration system was virtually suspended in 1932. The court had power to make general orders under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Amendment Act; during the war there were only two general orders because of the success of stabilisation. The court’s powers of fixing general wages orders were embellished under the Economic Stabilisation Regulations 1953 made under the Economic Stabilisation Act 1948, and there were regular gwo’s in the post-war period as stabilisation was relaxed.
8 W A E Green, J L Roberts, J J Loftus, An Examination of the Role of the Arbitration Court in Fixing Wage Rates in New Zealand, Wellington, Victoria University College, 1955, p 1. My thanks to Peter Franks for drawing my attention to this study, a copy of which is held in the Department of Labour library in Wellington.
11 Peter Franks, Chapter Three above.
12 The inaugural FOL executive was F P Walsh, A McLagan, R Eddy, E Canham and Fred Cornwell, Standard, 20 April 1937, p 7, BR.
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14 Bramble, Never A White Flag.
17 See Walsh ‘Dispute within the Trade Union Movement’ and his criticism of the ‘Groupers’ — Tony Neary, Peter Butler and Des Nolan in Dispute within Trade Union Movement, 18 August 1919, FOL Archives, MS Papers 4100, ATL 415.
19 Michael King and Michael Bassett, Tomorrow Comes the Song: A Life of Peter Fraser, Auckland, Penguin, 2000.
20 Conrad Bollinger, Against the Wind: The story of the New Zealand Seamen’s Union, Wellington, NZ Seamen’s Union, 1968.
22 Roth, Trade Unions in New Zealand, p 62.
24 Having said that, the meeting on 30 May 1951 during the waterfront lockout was described as ‘icy’. Michael Bassett, Confrontation ’51: The 1951 Waterfront Dispute, Wellington, A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1971, p 179.
29 T W Bentley, ‘Trade Union Financial Assistance to the New Zealand Labour Party 1930–1960’, MA research essay, University of Auckland, 1973, p 20. The national unions were the NZ Waterside Workers Federation, the Federated Seamen’s Union of NZ, the NZ Workers Union, the Post and Telegraph Workers Association, the NZ Hotel Workers Federation and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants.
30 For example, Standard, 21 June 1941, BR.
32 Bollinger, Against the Wind, pp 242–43.
33 Otago Daily Times, 31 March 1959, FOT President’s Speech. 1959, BR.
34 Bollinger, Against the Wind, pp 242 and 243.
37 A contrary view that seeks to argue that New Zealand industrial relations ought to be viewed through personalities is given by Jo Burton, ‘Changing the Rules. The Nil Wage Order and New Zealand Industrial Relations in the 1960s’, MA thesis, VUW, 2001.
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D Stalker, R A Brooke (Industrial Emergency Council), Fred Cornwell and P E Warner to the Hours Committee; Fred Cornwell and P E Warner (Apprenticeships Committee), R Eddy (National Council for Primary Production), R Eddy, Adam Black, W Clarke (Repatriation Committee), F G Young (Supply Council) R Eddy, Francis Allerby, J Moulton, Peter Butler (National Building Committee), Report on Officers and Executive Members’ Appointments, pp 4–5, FOL, 7th Annual Report, 1944, FOL Annual Reports, 1938–50, MS XL411 2/1, ATL.

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Evening Post, 18 March 1937.


1936–37 Dunedin Housing Survey and 1937 Wellington Housing Survey.

Evening Post, 18 March, 20 and 21 April 1937. The committee consisted of Elizabeth Gunn, C E Beeby, E H Langford, E Marsden, G H Ormond Wilson MP and D Wilson and held its inaugural meeting on 20 April 1937.


Evening Post, 29 August 1938.

Ibid, 17 September 1936 and 17 February 1937. See also the DSIR Annual Report, 1937.


10% of the adult population which received income had an average weekly income of $7 or more; 8.1% earnt less than $52, 27.3% earnt $52–154, 19% $155–207; and 30% £208–311; 5.3% £312–363.


It was published in the Journal of Science and Technology.

Evening Post, 16 December 1938.


Evening Post, 6 April 1939.

Ibid, 20 April 1938.


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Australian National University, 1967,
pp ix–x; P

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Zealand Women and the State, Christchurch,
77 FOL, Minutes of the Tenth Annual confer-ence, 1947.
78 FOL, The History of the Carpenters’ Dispute, 1949, Wellington, 1949, p 2, BR.
79 Hare, Report on Industrial Relations in New Zealand, pp 188–189. The research office existed 1941–49. The New Zealand Federation of Labour Bulletin was established in 1949. In 1956 a research officer was again appointed. Dave McDonald filled the role for 21 years until 1978. McDonald prepared all the general wage orders; eight cases from 1936 until 1970 and then a ninth in 1977.
He handled other cases such as the price of butter and the restoration of margins for skill case in 1965 and represented the FOL in various council and committees — on
decimal coinage, the Consumer Council, Vocational Training, the Metric Board, productivity, National Development Conference, superannuation and equal pay.
He attended conferences and committees overseas including the ICFTU in Singapore and Taiwan and the OECD in Paris. New
80 A R Perry, New Zealand Standard, 22 May 1941. Horace Belshaw, Standards of Living, Wellington, Modern Books in association with the NZ Institute of International Affairs, 1941.
81 Standard, 4 December 1947.
82 Franks, ‘Hurrah Hurrah, for F. P. Walsh’, p 119.
84 Under the Economic Stabilisation regulations the FOL was obliged to justify claims for general wage orders by presenting evidence dealing with changes in the Consumer Price Index; economic conditions affecting finance, trade and industry; changes in the volume and value of production in primary and secondary industries; relative movements in incomes of different sections of the community and all other factors which the Arbitration Court deemed relevant. The first criteria was generally held to be the most important. D L Mathieson, Industrial Law in New Zealand, Wellington, Sweet & Maxwell, 1970, p 373, Alexander Szakáts, Trade Unions and the Law, Wellington, Sweet & Maxwell, 1968, pp 48–9.
86 Standard, 3 July 1957.
87 Dominion, 28 & 30 June 1958; Standard, 2 July 1958.
88 Minutes of Joint Council of Labour meeting, 15 July 1958, FOL Archives, MS Papers 4100, 22/21, ATL.
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90 FOL Minutes, The New Zealand Federation of Labour Bulletin, p 16, MS X 2391, ATL.


98 The Department of Labour began ruling rate surveys from 1952.


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101 New Zealand Federation of Labour, Margins between wage rates paid for skilled and unskilled labour, August 1960.


110 F P Walsh, *The state of New Zealand’s economy*, Wellington, 1961, pp 11, 17, BR.


112 Pronouncement of Court of Arbitration specifying standard rates of wages.

113 Standard Wage Pronouncement, 1947, p 19, in FOL, Records, 1922–89, MS papers 4100–32/61, MS Group 0049, ATL.


116 An interim general order was given in 1950, Book of Awards, vol 50 (1950) p 1072, New Zealand Clothing Trade Employees Award.

117 General Wage Order increase — submissions, 1959, MSX 2460, MS Group-0049, ATL.

118 General Wage Order increase — submissions, 1959, MSX 2460, MS Group-0049, ATL.


121 Woods, *Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration*, p 142; Margaret Corner, *No Easy


123 For a discussion on the Housewives unions, see Nolan, Breadwinning, pp 148–9, 210–211; P Hobson, secretary Canterbury Housewives’ Union to minister of social security, 5 June 1964, SS7 W2756 7/5/22, Housewives’ Association 1846–64, NA.


127 Sydney Morning Herald, 4 August 2009.

128 Campaign against Rising Prices Collection, 1966–78, MSS & Archives A-220, University of Auckland Library.


130 Green, Roberts and Loftus, An examination of the Role of the Arbitration Court in Fixing Wage Rates in New Zealand, p 38.
FOL president Tom Skinner addressing a stopwork meeting of more than 20,000 trade unionists at Carlaw Park, Auckland in 1967. Three thousand boilermakers, engineers, seamen and watersiders gathered in Freemans Bay and marched through central Auckland to the meeting. It was one of a series the FOL held in the main cities in protest at the National government's economic policies.

This photo symbolises Skinner's position as a 'man alone' figure. While he stood aloof from most unionists, there was wide support for his cautious, moderate policies. Elected president after Walsh's sudden death in 1963, Skinner quickly became the unchallenged leader of the trade union movement. He was FOL president for 16 years, longer than anyone else, and was overwhelmingly re-elected in 1976, the one occasion when someone stood against him. Skinner's main concern was that widespread direct bargaining would destroy the arbitration system and the protection this gave to weak unions. His style was to use industrial action to build pressure for a settlement and to manoeuvre the government, the employers and the unions themselves to reach an acceptable compromise.

FOL collection, ATL PAColl-0980-1-02
CHAPTER FIVE

Troubled times: 1967–88

Raymond Markey

... the FOL was an organisation of and for its times. By the 1980s it was running out of steam. A new approach and a wider agenda were needed.

PETER FRANKS, OCTOBER 2007

The formation of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions (CTU) as successor to the Federation of Labour (FOL) and the Combined State Unions (CSU) in 1987 marked a turning point in the consolidation of peak unionism in New Zealand. It followed 20 years of major socio-economic transformation that significantly affected the environment in which the FOL operated. The growing diversity of the workforce affected the nature of union organisation itself, and the changing economic environment and political responses of government challenged traditional relationships with employers and the state. Social change also created new political issues and movements, which intersected with trade union concerns. The FOL struggled to meet these challenges. Formation of the CTU represented a successful accommodation to the changing nature of unionism and the workforce. The peak union body was arguably less successful, however, in meeting the trials associated with the new economic and political environment that emerged from the 1980s.

The following account analyses how the FOL responded to its new environment as it attempted to continue to provide industrial and political leadership to the New Zealand union movement. The chapter begins with a discussion of the social, economic and political context and a theoretical appraisal of the general role of peak or central union organisations, which provides a framework for the remaining analysis of the FOL. Three main dimensions of FOL agency are examined in detail: mobilisation, exchange with employers and the state, and regulation in industrial, political and social spheres. The conclusions assess the overall journey of the FOL in this period.
Social, economic and political context

The environment in which the FOL operated during its last 20 years was subject to major social, economic and political change. This context impacted on the nature and outcomes of the industrial relations system, the structure of industry and the nature of the workforce. Politically, National governments ruled in 1968–72 and 1976–84, with Labour in office for 1972–75 and 1984–90.

An economic downturn in New Zealand occurred in 1967, commencing a period of growing economic instability characterised by rising unemployment and high inflation (which reached 18 percent in 1980). In the 1980s, as a result of Britain’s entry to the European Community, global competition, high unemployment and substantial balance of payments deficits, New Zealand underwent major structural economic change, involving privatisation and deregulation of markets. Eventually, the labour market also was deregulated with the Employment Contracts Act in 1991.³

The centralised arbitration system which characterised New Zealand industrial relations came under pressure between the late 1960s and early 1980s. The reasons for this were repeated government interventions (including two wage freezes), the conservatism of the Arbitration Court, the long-term decline of wages’ share of national income and labour shortages. These circumstances led to marked growth in wages drift based on increases in second-tier (above-award) bargaining with employers. Those unions which were allowed by their size and strategic position to bargain directly with employers on an enterprise level increasingly did so. Second-tier payments represented an average of 30 percent of award rates by 1965.⁴

Industrial disputes increased substantially in this context, as they did in the 1970s for most of the developed world. Working days lost in New Zealand reached 277,348 in 1970, the second highest level recorded since the official series of work stoppage statistics began in 1921, and the highest since the 1951 waterfront lockout. A large proportion of strikes were short, often of a protest nature. In 1976 the number of working days lost (488,165) far exceeded those for 1970. Although this figure declined somewhat until the mid-1980s, it remained at a level far exceeding the pre-1976 figures. In 1985 a new high was reached (756,432), only to be exceeded again in 1986 (1,329,054) with the greatest number of working days lost ever. Managerial practices were the single highest cause of disputes from 1981 to 1985 (33 percent), but nevertheless, almost half of working days lost were in stoppages related to bargaining.⁴

Substantial continuity can be observed in the industries where most industrial disputes occurred throughout this 20-year period. The most dispute-prone
industry was meat freezing in the 1970s and 1980s, accounting for 40–60 percent of all working days lost in many years. Manufacturing, transport and storage were the other leaders. However, a growth in white-collar workers’ militancy also occurred at this time. Although they did not engage in strikes as frequently as their blue collar colleagues, they commonly employed tactics of overtime bans, stopwork meetings, go-slows and ‘working to rule.’ Public sector stoppages were not included in official statistics at that time.

These trends occurred within a context where the nature of jobs and the structure of employment were transformed. The white-collar workforce grew substantially in this period. The proportion of the total New Zealand workforce in professional, technical, administrative, managerial, clerical, sales and services occupations grew from 44 to 61 percent of the total workforce between 1966 and 1991. The proportion of the total workforce accounted for by manufacturing declined from 24 to 16 percent from 1976 to 1991. Female labour force participation also grew such that women accounted for 27 percent of the workforce in 1971 and 28 percent of union members. By the 1990s women accounted for 50 percent of the workforce and union membership. These developments impacted directly upon the FOT’s capacity as a peak organisation.

**What do peak unions do?**

Peak union councils have generally attracted scarce attention in the theoretical literature of industrial relations, despite their long-term historical importance. Peak councils are organisations which unions join to further the common interests of unions by collectively determined strategies and activities. They seek to represent unions at different levels: regionally (trades councils), sectorally (the CSTU) and nationally (the FOT and the CTU). In other countries, peak councils have represented unions on political and religious lines as well as geographically. For various reasons associated with the historical nature of the New Zealand industrial relations system, the FOT and its predecessors and successor have been particularly significant actors in this country. At the regional level, trades councils have also played a significant industrial relations role. Yet, the published New Zealand literature exploring the role of peak union councils is as limited as elsewhere. This gap in the literature hinders the development of a framework by which we can evaluate peak bodies.

One approach to filling this gap is to borrow from general theoretical literature regarding trade unions. Allan Flanders’ distinction between movement and organisation provides a particularly relevant perspective for the evaluation of peak union bodies. The relationship between movement and organisation, the
two essential elements of unions, allows us to understand the dynamics of union growth and development. According to Flanders, the members of a movement combine because of a community of purpose.

The bonds of organisation are different. An organisation must have effective means for ensuring that its members comply with its decisions. These means are its sanctions: the rewards it can offer and the penalties it can impose to uphold its internal discipline. On the strength of its sanctions, rather than the appeal of its objectives, the unity and power of an organisation depends.\(^1\)

However, even though a movement had to be channelled into an organisation for the survival and growth of unions,

They could not subsequently allow it to languish and disappear. Trade unions by their very nature have to be dynamic organisations. They must constantly renew their vigour by keeping the spirit of a movement alive in their ranks. In this respect, they differ for instance, from business organisations.\(^1\)

Between the elements of movement and organisation there may be tension, particularly between organisational objectives for consolidation, exchange and regulation, and broader social and political purposes. These aspects of unionism may be seen to determine the power of peak union bodies. Richard Hyman has distinguished between power over unionists, employers and political agencies, which is necessary to create power for achieving the organisation’s broader objectives.\(^1\)

Cathie Brigden took this a step further by amalgamating Hyman’s and Flanders’ concepts to describe organisation power and collective movement power.\(^1\)

Building on Chris Briggs,\(^1\) Bradon Ellem and John Shields further developed a theoretical framework that specifically identifies three major dimensions (or roles) of peak union bodies, each of which may be manifested in industrial, political or social spheres of activity:\(^1\)

1. as agents of mobilisation. Their ability to attract a substantial affiliated membership is a major determinant of their power, affected by external (economic and political) forces and factors relating to the nature of the labour movement, such as the level and spread of unionism. Other forms of mobilisation which I would include are the ability to organise mass activities and campaigns, and training of effective delegates. Flanders’ concept of movement corresponds with the agency of mobilisation, which may be manifested by mass campaigns as well as affiliated membership. This corresponds with Brigden’s collective movement power.

2. as agents of exchange with employers (bargaining), the state (lobbying with government or representation in state agencies), and social movements.
Empowerment as an agent of exchange with the state or employers requires a structural coupling, whereby these bodies grant legitimacy to the peak union body in a structured relationship. This corresponds with Hyman’s power for.

3. as agents of regulation producing and policing industrial agreements, influencing legislation, or regulating the labour market and other social relations. The social mode of regulation is the rarest form, and is based largely upon a developed sense of ‘place consciousness’. This corresponds to Hyman’s power over, or Brigden’s organisation power.

The success of a peak union body as an agent of regulation depends upon its success as an agent of mobilisation and an agent of exchange. Effective exchange also depends upon effective mobilisation, except that a structural coupling with employers or the state may in the short term compensate for weakness in mobilisation. These concepts will be applied in the following analysis.

The FOL as agent of mobilisation

The FOL’s role as an agent of mobilisation fundamentally derived from its level of affiliated membership and how representative it was of the workforce and trade unionists as a whole. This included its degree of inclusiveness of women and Maori at membership and leadership levels. In addition, the role of the FOL in mass campaign mobilisations was significant, and a strong indicator of Flanders’ concept of unions as a movement, or of Briggs’ concept of collective movement power.

New Zealand union membership remained quite stable at over 50 percent from the 1960s to 1980s, with the assistance of compulsory unionism. This significantly contributed to the representativeness of the FOL, whose membership doubled from its formation in 1937 to reach 340,000 in 1971. Nevertheless, FOL coverage of unionised workers was declining. In 1973 the FOL’s affiliated membership represented 88 percent of registered unionists. It also included about 4000 members from unregistered unions, notably the United Mineworkers. By 1983 membership declined to 83 percent of registered unionists. This actually understated the decline because of the large and growing membership of unregistered unions, particularly in the public sector. By 1973 the FOL’s affiliated membership represented only 67 percent of all unionists. Consequently, the FOL’s position as an agent of mobilisation declined during the 1960s and 1970s.

The main non-affiliates were the growing white-collar and public sector unions. Almost half of private sector white-collar unionists (40,000) were not members, their largest organisation being the Bank Officers Union. An attempt to form their
own peak body in 1968, the New Zealand Council of Salaried and Professional Organisations, was short-lived. However, the public sector unions represented a larger group, most of which were not able to register under the arbitration system and operated in an entirely separate industrial relations environment. They had their own peak body, the Combined State Services Organisation (CSSO), which became the Combined State Unions (CSU) in 1978. The name change symbolised a shift in emphasis, from being service/staff organisations to more traditional unions willing to engage in industrial action and identify with a broader union movement. Until this shift, relations between the FOL and the CSSO had been strained, since the FOL regarded the CSSO as conservative. However the CSU’s affiliated membership was over a third of the FOL’s membership. The CSU’s largest affiliate (and the country’s largest union), the Public Service Association (PSA), which presented separate submissions to the Arbitration Court for general wage orders (GWOS) which provided across-the-board increases in minimum wage rates. The CSU was predominantly white-collar but also included blue-collar organisations such as the railway unions. Some of these blue-collar affiliates were also members of the FOL, notably three of the four railway unions and the New Zealand Workers Union, whose membership was not confined to the public
sector. Some of the CSU’s white-collar affiliates, such as the PSA, also joined the short-lived Council of Salaried and Professional Organisations.23

Only a few blue-collar unions did not belong to the FOL. After a 1971 demarcation dispute over handling of containers, the Storemen and Packers disaffiliated, but the union itself was internally divided and the left-wing branches in Auckland and Canterbury rejoined the FOL. In 1971 a group of small unions consisting of the Wellington Labourers, Painters and Saddlers rejoined.24 The larger New Zealand Tramways Employees Union affiliated in 1974.

Although the unions had successfully mobilised female workers in terms of membership, there was a lag in adopting policies that supported women workers and in women occupying union leadership positions. From the late 1970s a ‘gender revolution’ occurred.25 The FOL established a Women’s Advisory Committee and in 1977 a Working Women’s Charter, as shown on page 152, was developed by women unionists to address the right to work for women, equal pay for work of equal value, elimination of discrimination in the workplace and family-friendly policies. It proved controversial among male unionists raised on notions of male wages based on the family breadwinner concept enshrined in the arbitration system. The FOL finally adopted the charter on the third attempt, in 1980. In 1977 there were only two female presidents and one secretary in 58 national unions. The 1980 annual conference of the FOL had only 45 women among 409 delegates, and in 1983 there were 69 women among 412 delegates.26 By the 1990s this position had changed substantially as women increasingly took union leadership positions. Sonja Davies (Shop Employees), and leading promoter of the charter, became the FOL’s first female national executive member in 1978 and vice president in 1983.27 Joyce Hawe was the first Maori woman on the FOL executive in 1981, and in 1987 Angela Foulkes (Bank Employees) became vice-president of the CTU and, in 1991, secretary. Although it was not always

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LEFT Wellington unionists marched to Federation House, the headquarters of the Employers Federation, in protest at the use of injunctions during industrial disputes, 6 July 1974. Toby Hill (president, Wellington Trades Council) is in the left foreground. To his left is Jim Andrews, a well-known Wellington identity. To Hill’s right is Jim Knox (FOL secretary). Con Devitt (Boilermakers Union secretary) is just behind Knox. FOL executive members Len Hadley, Frank Thorn and Wally Clement are to the right of Knox.

This followed the gaoling of Bill Andersen, secretary of the Northern Drivers Union and a leading communist, for defying a court injunction to prevent drivers and seamen taking industrial action against the use of non-union labour on the Waiheke Island ferries in Auckland. Andersen’s imprisonment led to widespread industrial action. Prime Minister Norman Kirk said the government and the public had had a ‘gutsful’ of the unions, thereby heightening tensions. Tom Skinner was successful in negotiating a face-saving compromise that got Andersen released quickly and the crisis was defused.

Dominion Post collection, ATL EP/1974/3908/19
New Zealand Working Women’s Charter

1. The right to work for everyone who wishes to do so.
2. The elimination of all discrimination on the basis of sex, race, marital or parental status, sexuality or age.
3. Equal pay for work of equal value — meaning the same total wage plus other benefits.
4. Equal opportunity of entry into occupations and of promotion regardless of sex, sexuality, marital or parental status, race or age.
5. Equal education opportunities for all.
6. (a) Union meetings to be held in working hours.
   (b) Special trade union education courses for women unionists to be held with paid time off for participants.
7. Equal access to vocational guidance and training, including on the job training, study and conference leave.
8. Introduction of a shorter working week with no loss of pay, flexible working hours, part-time opportunities for all women [workers].
9. Improved working conditions for women and men. The retention of beneficial provision which apply to women. Other benefits to apply equally to men and women.
10. Removal of legal, bureaucratic and other impediments to equality, superannuation, social security benefits, credit, finance, taxation, tenancies, and other related matters.
11. Special attention to the needs and requirements of women from ethnic communities as they see them.
12. Wide availability of quality child care with government and/or community support for all those who need it, on a 24-hour basis, including after school and school holiday care.
13. Introduction of adequate paid parental leave (maternity and paternity leave) without loss of job security, superannuation or promotion prospects.
14. Availability of paid family leave to enable time off to be taken in family emergencies, e.g. when children or elderly relatives are ill.
15. Sex education and birth control advice freely available to all people. Legal, financial, social and medical impediments to safe abortion, contraception and sterilisation to be removed.
16. Comprehensive government-funded research into health questions specific to women.
easy for these women in a traditionally male space, the shift towards genuine representation of the growing numbers of women unionists was critical if the FOL was to succeed as an agent of mobilisation.18

In terms of the mobilisation of the union movement for mass campaigns, the period after 1968 was highly successful for the FOL as it embarked on a strategy of national leadership of industrial and political activity at the grass-roots level. The series of campaign actions began in 1968 in response to the nil general wage order of the Arbitration Court. At a time of high inflation the court sought to relieve inflationary pressure, but this meant real wage decline for workers. Thousands of workers reacted with stopwork meetings and protest marches throughout the country, and a special FOL conference assumed leadership around a demand for a minimum five percent increase.19 This proved an effective strategy, as we shall see later in this article. In 1976 the FOL led a national campaign of rolling stopwork meetings over the government’s wage freeze and legislation outlawing strikes over non-industrial matters and against the public interest.20 This was followed by the 1979 one-day general strike over Prime Minister Muldoon’s intervention to overturn an agreement between drivers and their employers for an 11 percent
Around 91,000 union members took part in rallies organised by the FOL and the CSU in October/November 1982 against the wage freeze. The rallies were held in 35 towns and cities around New Zealand. This photo shows 600 unionists marching up Trafalgar Street, Nelson towards the cathedral. In the front row are Larry Sutherland (president of the Nelson Trades Council and local organiser for the Wellington Shop Employees Union), Barry Tucker (general secretary of the PSA and secretary of the CSU), Sonja Davies (industrial advisory officer, Wellington Shop Employees Union and FOL executive member) and Ken Douglas (FOL secretary).

CTU Collection, ATU, PACU 4939-5.
wage rise, which he considered inflationary. In Auckland 900 job delegates called for a 24-hour general stoppage, after which the FOL called for a national stoppage on 20 September. Transport and most manufacturing industry were halted, and subsequently the court awarded effectively the same as the original agreement, with a 10.5 percent wage increase plus allowances.11

In the early 1980s the campaign momentum became more continuous as the FOL adopted a more militant approach under the leadership of Jim Knox (president) and Ken Douglas (secretary). Nevertheless, the FOL’s organising was accompanied by ongoing negotiations with the government and employers in pursuit of similar objectives to previous campaigns, principally to maintain a centralised arbitration system. An attempt was made by the FOL to broaden the agenda from a narrow industrial relations focus to the development of an Alternative Economic Strategy, although this had limited impact on unions
and their members. During 1980–83 the FOL led a campaign for ‘defence of living standards’, involving tens of thousands of workers in rolling stoppages throughout the country, jointly organised with the CSU. Its focus was cuts in government expenditure and jobs in the public sector, the demand for a living wage increase in opposition to government wage restraint policy, and a rejection of the government’s offer of a wage/tax trade-off, i.e. tax cuts for wage restraint. A campaign newspaper was distributed. The campaign mode of activity continued in the 1983–84 ‘right to bargain’ campaign, focusing upon opposition to another government wage freeze, with rolling stoppages throughout the country continuing. This contributed to the National government’s defeat and election of a Labour government in July 1984.13

The campaign momentum continued under different circumstances with the Labour government. After the lifting of the wage freeze in late 1984, unions undertook widespread industrial action as they fought for wage increases. This was clear from the new high point of working days lost to industrial action during 1985–86. Union refusal to moderate wage claims created tension between the FOL and CSU, on one hand, and the Labour government on the other hand. From 1986 the unions were forced more onto the defensive in the context of economic deregulation and rising unemployment, but they did not capitulate. The introduction of the State Sector Bill in December 1987 instigated a mass protest campaign by the CSU. The bill introduced new public sector management, or managerialist rather than bureaucratic modes of operation, with pay determination decentralised to departmental level. It also reduced employment security, removed promotion appeal processes and increased short-term contracts.13 At its peak the campaign saw one of the largest mass protest marches ever in Wellington on 16 February 1988, estimated at between 13,000 and 20,000 workers. Mass stopwork meetings were held by nurses, and kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers, and the CSU organised a one-day national strike against the bill on 14 March 1988. This was the biggest state sector strike in New Zealand’s history, affecting government departments, hospitals, courts, broadcasting, universities and kindergartens, but it did not prevent the passing of the legislation.14

During the 1980s the FOL consolidated organisationally. This was assisted by two trends. First, the growing concentration of employers themselves in the New Zealand Employers Federation (NZEF) motivated greater consolidation, although by that time the political influence of the Business Roundtable, a ‘top 30 club’ of employers, was also growing.15 Second, from the late 1970s co-operation between the FOL and the CSU grew. Both organisations faced similar legislative problems with government, especially wage restraint policies and
restrictions on union activities, and they faced similar economic difficulties with growing unemployment and redundancies. Each organisation also experienced leadership attitude changes which facilitated a process of moving together. Tom Skinner made way for Knox as president of the FOL in 1979, for example, and Ken Douglas became FOL secretary.

In October 1987 the CTU was formed, covering private and state sector unions. The original impetus came from the PSA in 1981. It proved a ‘protracted and difficult process’ because of different traditions between public and private sector unionism and lingering hostility in some private sector manual unions to ‘non-traditional’ state sector unions. Another issue proved to be specific representation for women and Maori. The CTU organising committee proposed to the new organisation’s Constitutional and Policy Conference that this representation be on an advisory basis without voting rights. However, women and Maori gained a narrow majority in favour of representation with voting rights at all levels of the new organisation. As Peter Brosnan et al commented, ‘the conflict showed up sharply the issue of whether the primary basis of representation within unions
should be class and union membership or also gender and race’. The final resolution recognised important shifts within the politics of social movements generally.

The new CTU was a significant achievement of consolidation and representativeness. The CTU represented over 80 percent of all unionists, blue and white-collar, public and private sector. Some newly affiliated white-collar private sector unions, such as the Bank Officers, had not previously been members of either major peak body. The new body had equal numbers of white and blue-collar unionists.

Sonja Davies and Jim Knox after Davies had been elected FOL vice-president at the federation’s 1983 annual conference. Davies became the first woman member of the FOL national executive in 1978. She was a driving force behind the Working Women’s Charter, which was adopted by the FOL in 1980. She comfortably defeated the national secretaries of the engineers and carpenters unions — Ernie Ball and Ashley Russ — to win the vice-presidency and become the first woman to be elected an officer of the FOL. Unity (11 May 1983) reported: ‘Stormy applause swept many sections of the Wellington Town Hall when it was announced that Shop Employees Union official Sonja Davies had been elected …’. She told the conference she hoped her example would encourage other women in the trade unions. Davies remained FOL vice-president until 1987 when she was elected as the Labour MP for Pencarrow. She retired from parliament in 1993. She was a union official for 20 years and worked for the Clerical Workers Union, the Food Processing Union, the Public Service Association and the Shop Employees Union. Davies was a founder of the Working Women’s Council, a member and deputy chair of the Nelson Hospital Board and a Nelson city councillor. She was a founder and the first president of the New Zealand Childcare Association.

Sonja Davies collection, ATL PAColl-933-4-5-159
Initially, a bloc of manual unions did not join the CTU. These included the seafarers, watersiders, electricians and timber workers unions, the National Union of Railway Workers and sections of the storemen and packers, all in declining areas of employment. With the exception of the right-wing electricians, these unions formed the short-lived Transport, Maritime and General Workers’ Federation. By 1990 or soon thereafter, however, most of these unions had affiliated with the CTU.

As successor to the New Zealand Federation of Labour, the new CTU continued the strategy of mass campaign mobilisation. In November 1988 it organised mass rallies for award pay increases. These involved 12,000 workers in Auckland, 4000 in Wellington and 3000 in Christchurch. In March 1990 the CTU sponsored
rallies against import tariff reductions, with thousands of workers participating in Manukau and in Wellington outside parliament. The CTU also organised further mass protests against the Employment Contracts Bill in 1991, although a special CTU conference voted against a one-day general strike. Over 100,000 protesters took to the streets on 4 April during a CTU-organised week of action, and on 30 April about 60,000 workers joined street marches and protest rallies.

A critical contributor to the FOI’s campaign mobilisations and general agency of mobilisation were its district councils, known as trades councils. Some in

Clerical Workers Union members employed at Otago Hospital leading a march through Dunedin during the unprecedented national public hospital strike on 14 February 1989. The strike followed a breakdown in negotiations between the public hospital unions and the State Services Commission (SSC) and the Labour government’s refusal to intervene in the dispute. The strike involved some 35,000 members of the Nurses Association, the Public Service Association, the Hotel Workers Federation, the Clerical Workers Union and the Local Bodies Officers Union. Hospitals had sent many patients home and they coped on the day with the help of volunteers. A further 48-hour strike was due to take place in the following weeks, but the SSC hurriedly dropped its initial proposal to offset wage increases against cuts in penal and overtime payments. Union negotiators, led by CTU secretary Ron Burgess, won agreement from the employers for no cuts in existing working conditions, a genuine pay offer, no redundancies in the current financial year and union involvement in health effectiveness studies.

Peter Franks collection
the major cities have long histories from the 19th century and have played a substantial role in industrial relations. While there are only two published studies, there have been several research essays and on their role. Prior to the formation of the CTU there were 21 district trades councils, operating as the FOL’s regional bodies. They were each represented, together with the FOL executive, on the FOL national council, which met quarterly to act as a consultative body and liaise between the national and regional union leaderships. District councils were formed in regions with at least five FOL affiliates with a combined membership of at least 3000. District councils played an important role in co-ordinating unions in the main cities and provincial towns, and in campaign mobilisations such as in the early 1980s, the FOL worked through these bodies. The Working Women’s Charter was also promoted principally by the district councils. The larger ones, such as Auckland, Canterbury and Wellington, had disputes committees, which assisted member unions in major disputes and often acted as mediators with employers. The Auckland Trades Council was an important power base for the two FOL presidents of the era examined here. Both Skinner (FOL president 1963–79) and Knox (FOL secretary 1969–79, president 1979–88) were senior officers of the Auckland Trades Council. Skinner, originally a Plumbers Union official, was Auckland Trades Council president from 1954–76, and Knox, originally a waterside unionist, was Auckland Trades Council secretary from 1966–69.

The FOL was increasingly influenced by the larger unions. This was not necessarily reflected on its national executive, although this was expanded slightly in 1971. The largest affiliate was the New Zealand Amalgamated Engineering Union, which was second in size only to the PSA, with about 40,000 members in 1987. Other larger affiliates included the Clerical Workers, Hotel and Restaurant Workers, Drivers, Shop Employees, Meat Workers, Labourers, Carpenters, Clothing Trades Employees and Timber Workers, each with more than 10,000 members at the beginning of this period. These unions together accounted for 60 percent of FOL membership in 1971. Originally, the FOL’s delegate entitlements for national conferences was skewed towards the numerous smaller unions because of the upper limit on the number of delegates based on union membership. This limit grew from 10 to 20 between 1943 and 1966, but was subsequently abolished altogether.

Agent of exchange with employers
Agency of exchange with employers could occur at the level of the individual employer or with the peak organisations of employers corresponding with the FOL. Structural coupling did not occur at either level. Direct negotiation by the FOL
with employers was unusual, particularly at the individual level. It was required that affiliated unions would invite the FOL/CTU to intervene at this level. Even at the peak level, no structured relationship such as regular framework bargaining with the NZEF developed. The CSU enjoyed a more significant role with the State Services Coordinating Committee in negotiating general wages and conditions, amounting to a structural coupling in the public sector. However the FOL did have an important role as an agent of exchange with employers in this period.

On an individual employer level the FOL was most likely to be called in by a union involved in an intractable dispute, especially if it also involved the government. During the late 1970s and early 1980s this occurred more frequently because there were so many major disputes. For example, the Mangere Bridge dispute of 1977–80 over an improved redundancy agreement led to the lock-out of the entire workforce and long-term picketing, and involved the government in cutting unemployment benefits to locked-out employees and terminating the contract. The FOL eventually negotiated an improved agreement with the new contractor in 1980. In 1981 disputes within a week of each other involving Ravensdown meat workers (over a dismissal) and Air New Zealand employees (above-award negotiations) led to picketing. The pickets were arrested in each case. An industry-wide strike of meat workers and sympathy action by other unionists led to a settlement and withdrawal of charges against Ravensdown
The Air New Zealand dispute led to stoppages by transport, waterfront and manufacturing workers throughout the Auckland region, but eventually, in exchange for a return to work, the FOL was able to bring the government to the table to discuss changes to legislation affecting picketers.21

At a central level successful exchange partly depends upon employers’ organisational articulation. The employers’ peak organisation, the NZEF, became more cohesive in the 1970s and 1980s, which assisted the exchange process with the FOL and its successor, the CTU. The exchange relationship developed momentum as the FOL’s structural coupling with the Arbitration Court declined in this period (see next section). The court’s nil general wage order of 1968 led to mass industrial action led by the FOL, as we have seen, and a negotiated joint submission from the FOL and the Employers Federation for a five percent
increase. Under these circumstances, the court had little option but to accept because the workers’ and employers’ representatives on the court outvoted the judge. More importantly, it led to a period of co-operation between the NZEF and FOL, and of tripartite consensus. A further FOL/NZEF agreement directly influenced 1969 legislation prioritising the cost of living as a criterion in general wage orders of the court. Another peak level agreement in 1969 over ordinary holiday rates of pay being based on average weekly earnings was subsequently inserted into all awards. By the 1980s, however, the NZEF was disillusioned with the arbitration system and supported the flexibility of enterprise bargaining. At this time and until the mid-1980s, the NZEF supported this approach with a corporatist framework favoured by the FOL, in which the two peak bodies were recognised as the representatives of the employers and the workers. As we shall see, this framework did not eventuate, in part because of the growing influence of another employer organisation, the free market-oriented Business Roundtable, which was anti-corporatist and anti-union.

Agent of exchange with the state

The FOL’s agency of exchange with the state was traditionally shaped by the New Zealand system of compulsory state arbitration and the centralised wage determination system that it engendered. Structural coupling occurred at this level as well with one of the main political actors in the state apparatus, the New Zealand Labour Party. Both couplings were weakened in this period, however. The FOL also conducted exchange relations with National governments through lobbying. Its industrial action was designed frequently to strengthen its hand for lobbying with government, and this strategy persisted throughout the period.

For almost a century, from the 1894 Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act to the 1991 Employment Contracts Act, New Zealand industrial relations operated within a ‘state corporatist’ framework, which created a structural coupling between the state and unions. The arbitration system that was established in 1894 privileged unions in its proceedings, so long as they registered. From 1936 to 1991 unions prospered under a regime of compulsory unionism, except for one brief
period in 1983–85. This system forced employers to recognise registered unions. Unions were also protected from competition among themselves for members, although this system shaped a fragmented union movement because numerous small, weak organisations were able to survive.54

The arbitration system specifically coupled the FOL with the state. The FOL enjoyed a major role in the presentation of union submissions to the Arbitration Court for across-the-board wage increases through cost of living increases and general wage orders (GWOS) for the periods 1969–74 and 1977–79.55 In performing this role, the FOL “helped create an egalitarian wage structure which was a key part of the Welfare State”.56 From 1968 to the instigation of the 1982–84 wage freeze, the FOL was involved in 13 cases before wage tribunals for general wage increases.57 Although the FOL itself was not registered under the Act, it
made 20 submissions in the name of an affiliate, usually the Carpenters Union. In addition, the Registrar of Unions consulted with the FOL over demarcation disputes.

From the 1960s the role of the arbitration system came under growing pressure, and as a result the traditional form of structural coupling between the FOL and the state weakened. This was indicated by a growing wages drift in the 1960s and 1970s, and reinforced by government action and the Arbitration Court’s narrow interpretation of ‘industrial matters’ which defined its jurisdiction. The government increasingly intervened directly in wage determination in an attempt to implement incomes policy. The most dramatic instances were the wage freezes of 1976 and 1982–84, but these were only part of a series of legislation enacted in the 1970s, some of which temporarily placed general wage determination in the hands of new tribunals, the Remuneration Authority of 1971–72, the Wages Tribunal of 1973–74 and the Industrial Commission of 1974–78.

Tom Scott captured FOL opposition to the fourth Labour government’s economic policies in this Auckland Star cartoon (11 May 1985). While welcoming Labour’s industrial relations, social and foreign policies, the FOL and the CSU were shocked by its free-market economic policies and the speed with which they were introduced. FOL president Jim Knox was resolute in criticising these policies. Unions wanted a Labour government; he told the 1986 FOL conference, but this mindless purism, this ideological straitjacket, this market madness, it is tearing our country apart.

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Nevertheless, a degree of structural coupling remained. Union strategy relied upon the arbitration system for the spread of improvements in conditions; strong unions gained improvements such as long service leave and three weeks annual leave through direct bargaining with employers, and then the court was used to spread these conditions to weaker unions through the award system. Additionally, the government consulted the FOL and NZEF over its implementation of incomes policy, even if agreement was not always reached.

The FOL’s leadership from the 1960s to the 1980s was intent on propping up the arbitration system as it came under pressure. Skinner in particular was concerned that widespread direct bargaining would destroy the arbitration system and the protection it gave to weak unions. But FOL actions appeared ambiguous at times. In 1961 the FOL adopted a policy of supporting direct negotiations between unions and employers. Pat Walsh describes the decision as being ‘of immense significance’ in opening up debate on the future of the arbitration system, but it did not lead to a withdrawal from arbitration or a move to direct negotiations by most unions. The 1961 decision was mainly adopted as part of the FOL’s successful campaign to defeat the new National government’s policy of voluntary unionism. The FOL’s response to the nil wage order of the Arbitration Court was another example. Despite the stopwork meetings and protests, and the growth in second-tier bargaining driven by relativities that followed the nil wage order, Walsh notes that ‘the energies of the FOL, the NZEF and the government were directed not at exploring the possibilities of creating new bargaining structures but at restoring the authority of the Arbitration Court and the predominance of the arbitration system over second-tier bargaining.”

Another important form of exchange with the state occurs through lobbying over legislation and policy. Generally speaking, this occurred on largely an ad hoc basis rather than as a result of structural coupling, which would require that the FOL was systematically consulted as a key social partner, influential in decision-making. The range of legislation over which the FOL was consulted was extensive in this period, including legislation on Equal Pay (1972), Industrial Relations (1973), Holidays (1974, which introduced a third week’s annual leave), Human Rights (1977), Maternity Leave (1980), Parental Leave (1987) and Employment Equity (1990). It is notable that gradual achievement of the planks of the Working Women’s Charter was dependent largely on this legislative programme.

As the list of legislation above indicates, consultation and impact on decision-making normally were more likely to occur under the Labour governments of 1972–75 and 1984–87. This was due in part to the structural coupling which
occurred as a result of the affiliation of many unions, although not the FOL itself, with the Labour Party. A formal link between the FOL and the Labour Party existed in the Joint Council of Labour, but it met infrequently after 1967. This reflected a loosening of the links between unions and the party. The number of unions affiliated to the party declined, and the number of Labour ministers with a union background declined from 10 of 13 in 1935, to 6 of 20 in 1972, and 2 of 22 in 1984.63

Examples of FOL influence on the 1972–75 Labour government included the non-wage issues addressed in the legislation noted above for this period, and the instances of direct government determination of GWOS after receiving submissions from the FOL and Employers Federation. The FOL was particularly influential
in the 1973 Industrial Relations Act, which enabled enterprise bargaining and abolished strike penalties. The 1973 Act largely adopted a draft prepared jointly by the FOL and NZEF, notwithstanding ‘severe reservations by Department of Labour officials.’

This was an instance of corporatism according to Pat Walsh, designed to maintain a centralised arbitration system.

Exchange relations also existed with the National governments of 1967–72 and 1975–84, on a regular but mainly informal level. The autobiography of Tom Skinner, FOL president 1963–79, characterises his relationship with Prime Minister Robert Muldoon in a chapter entitled ‘Rob here, Tom’, which depicts the standard introduction to telephone conversations between the two who conveniently lived close to each other in Auckland. Regular consultation, however, did not prevent the government from embarking on policies strongly opposed by the FOL, such as the 1976 punitive legislation against ‘political strikes’ over non-industrial matters and strikes ‘against the public interest’. In what Pat Walsh characterises as a brief second wave of corporatism, the government initiated tripartite discussions in 1977 with the FOL and NZEF over wage determination.

In 1960 and 1976 National governments introduced legislation aimed at getting rid of compulsory unionism. Strong union and employer opposition meant the legislation was watered down with the result that compulsory unionism continued.

Other instances of exchange with National governments occurred after mobilisation of unionists. As Peter Franks notes, Skinner’s style as FOL president was to use industrial action to build pressure for a settlement and then manoeuvre with government as well as employers and unions to reach an acceptable compromise. The response to the 1968 nil wage order was an example of this strategy. Another occurred following the National government’s election on an anti-union platform in 1975, when the FOL led a campaign of industrial action against government wage controls. In this case Skinner gained dilution of the abolition of compulsory unionism and amendments to wage regulations allowing the Industrial Commission to approve increases in ‘exceptional circumstances’.

Despite NZEF opposition, the Commission allowed increases under exceptional circumstances in two key industries to flow through the system. Soon afterwards, the government withdrew wage controls for a brief period. The 1979 general strike over government intervention in a wage settlement was another instance.

The strategy of industrial pressure for political impact continued after Skinner’s retirement under the leadership of Knox and Douglas. Examples included the
national campaign against widespread strikes over prosecution of Air New Zealand picketers in 1981, which forced the government to negotiate with the FOL over changes to the law. Perhaps the most successful instance of this strategy occurred with the Kinleith paper workers’ wage dispute in 1980. After a seven-week strike with widespread union support, the employer agreed to an increase, but the government issued regulations under the Remuneration Act to set wages at a lower rate. The Kinleith workers continued their strike, which was then led by the FOL. After a month the government revoked its regulations to accept the original settlement and then repealed the Remuneration Act. This amounted to a considerable victory for the FOL.73

However, as Franks argues, ‘Kinleith was the high point of union opposition to Muldoon and public sympathy for unions’.74 The picketing disputes in early 1981 were followed by a large anti-union ‘Kiwis care’ demonstration in Auckland, and in 1982 Muldoon introduced another wage freeze. This time the government succeeded in containing wage increases. The FOL’s campaign against the wage freeze failed, because of wide public support for the freeze as it successfully reduced inflation, because of substantial cuts in income tax particularly benefiting the higher-paid who were in the strongest position to take action against the freeze but who lacked incentive, and because of the economic circumstances of rising unemployment and redundancies, unlike in 1968 and 1976. At the 1984 FOL conference the Engineers complained that they and the Meat Workers lacked support from other unions in the industrial campaign against the wage freeze.75 Nevertheless, the FOL campaign contributed to Labour’s electoral victory in 1984, although during the election campaign Knox came under widespread criticism within the labour movement for his class struggle rhetoric.
Under the Labour government of 1984–87 the FOL/Labour Party link loosened further because of a divergence in policy as the government came under the influence of free market economics. Roger Douglas, Labour’s Minister of Finance, led the move towards deregulation of the economy and extensive privatisation, which contributed to major job losses. Mark Bray and David Neilson claim that the government demonstrated ‘a lack of commitment … to the union movement.’ On the other hand, the ‘fragile relationship’ between unions and the government contributed to social and industrial relations policy being largely removed from the free marketeers’ influence because of the government’s need to retain working class electoral support.

Pat Walsh observes that the 1987 Labour Relations Act was a major area of policy in which the free marketeers in the Labour government were unsuccessful. The Act represented an attempt by the Labour government, in consultation with the FOL, to achieve a new structural coupling through a contradictory compromise. On the one hand, the Act acknowledged a perceived need for greater flexibility in attempting to encourage more decentralised bargaining through industry and enterprise agreements reflecting productivity, profitability and labour market conditions in individual firms. Employees could only be covered by one set of negotiations, resulting in an award or enterprise agreement but not both, in an attempt to prevent ‘second tier bargaining’, thus mirroring public sector legislation in 1986 and 1988. On the other hand, the 1987 Act retained much of the existing system, including the processes of conciliation and arbitration (although no longer compulsory), national awards, the Tripartite Wage Conference, ‘blanket coverage’ (i.e. of all employers and employees in the relevant industry or trade), privileged recognition for unions and their role as the sole representatives of employees in the workplace, and compulsory unionism (through either negotiation or membership ballots if employers desired). The Act failed in its aim of encouraging greater incidence of industry and enterprise bargaining because unions brought back under their national awards most of the enterprise agreements initially allowed under the 1973 Industrial Relations Act.

However, the 1987 Act did more successfully encourage union amalgamation by setting a new minimum membership of 1000. Since this affected two-thirds of registered unions, the measure had a major impact on restructuring the union movement on more of a strategic industrial basis, as set out in the CTU’s policy of Strategies for Change.

The FOL/CTU policy of strategic unionism formed part of a wider corporatist strategy, similar to that pursued by the ACTU in Australia in its 1983 Accord with the Australian Labor Party. The 1984–90 Labour governments in New Zealand
included a corporatist faction, and there were early indications of the government adopting the corporatist strategy favoured by the FOL, particularly with the 1984 Economic Summit Conference. This strategy was rejected by the NZEF and by the Labour government, however, for its first five years, in favour of free market policies. The main exception was in the sphere of health and safety, where a tripartite advisory council produced a paper in 1988 identifying the problems with the traditional system. Discussions on a more general tripartite compact began in 1989 while David Lange was still prime minister, but despite CTU endorsement, the NZEF’s opposition persisted and it was not implemented. The Labour governments under Geoffrey Palmer and Mike Moore between August 1989 and October 1990 did follow a corporatist approach by stepping up discussions on a compact, introducing health and safety and pay equity legislation, and negotiating the Growth Agreement with the CTU, which smothered the final wage round under the arbitration system in 1990. In October 1990 Labour lost power to a National government, which soon deregulated labour relations. These events represented a failure for corporatist strategy, and the attempted renewal of structural coupling with the state.

Agent of regulation

The FOL’s power over its member unions was formally weak, a situation shared by peak union bodies in all Anglo-Saxon countries where individual unions had a prior existence and choose to affiliate to the peak body. The FOL lacked real power to direct affiliates, or a large central fund over which it had discretionary control, such as the strike funds controlled by LO, the peak trade union body in Sweden, which give it considerable authority over disputes. During this era, as previously, the organisation also was run ‘on a shoestring’, which constrained power for achieving its ends.

Capitation fees were set at very low levels. Despite capitation fee increases in the 1970s and 1980s the FOL failed to seek adequate resources from its member unions. In 1971 fees were raised from 20 to 30 cents, which increased to $1 in 1981, after which it was indexed. Twenty percent of this fee went to the district councils, although it had previously been a lower figure.

FOL resources, therefore, were limited. The secretary-treasurer was initially the only full-time officer, but was joined by the president in 1971. Apart from office assistance, the FOL employed only one full-time support staff member in this period, a research officer. Indeed, the FOL relied heavily on the CSU for research. The CSU’s largest affiliates were better resourced than those of the FOL, and the PSA played a particularly important role in providing research support for the whole union movement in the 1970s and 1980s.
FOL powers were greatest in the industrial arena, although even here they were based on acknowledged authority rather than formal powers. Demarcation disputes were an important indicator because it was considered bad form to take them outside the movement. Unions involved in demarcation disputes may have handed them over to the FOL which then had full powers for settlement. As already noted, the Registrar of Unions also sought direction from the FOL in these issues. Demarcation disputes occurred less frequently in this period than previously because of union amalgamations, although a critical demarcation dispute led to the disaffiliation of the Storemen and Packers in 1971, as noted previously.

In industrial disputes generally, the FOL executive had power to step in if it considered that other organisations might be affected, or it could be asked for support and invited to play a role. Major disputes of this kind increased in frequency in the late 1970s and early 1980s, leading Roth and Hammond to refer to the FOL’s ‘growing unity and prestige’.88

The FOL’s power for achieving its ends in this era was evident at an industrial and political level, and the two were intertwined. Examples already discussed include the successful 1979 general strike; the 1980 Kinleith strike, when FOL support forced the government to withdraw its opposition to a wage increase; as well as the FOL’s intervention in the Ravensdown and Air New Zealand strikes, which led to the withdrawal of charges against picketers. Other major instances were the mass campaign mobilisations, which occurred throughout the 1980s. Skinner’s strategy of industrial mobilisation to build pressure for political ends was a classic case. To a large extent, however, this relied upon — and was intended to maintain — a structural coupling with the state through the arbitration system. By the 1980s, this structural coupling with the state was declining, and FOL power for achieving its ends was consequently weakened.

As an agent of social regulation the FOL’s role gathered some momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. At one level it was evident in the mass campaign mobilisations of 1976 and the early 1980s, when the FOL exhibited an educational intent over national economic strategy and broader political issues, including nuclear ships in New Zealand waters.89 The FOL’s early opposition to the Vietnam War was important in encouraging the Labour Party to take a firmer stand than its leadership desired. However, it was individual unions such as the Seafarers and Watersiders, rather than the FOL, who were active in the actual anti-war campaign. Similarly, during the 1981 protests against the Springbok rugby tour the FOL resolved to oppose the tour, consistent with its previous anti-apartheid opposition, but it was left to unions to implement action at the local level. Apart
from anything else, FOL delegates were aware that many unionists supported the tour.\footnote{At the leadership level during the 1980s the FOL began to address issues of specific concern to Maori and Pacific Island workers, particularly in the context of their particular vulnerability to an economic downturn, with the formation of an advisory committee for the national executive. In the case of women, I have noted the (eventual) adoption of the Working Women's Charter and entry of key women into FOL leadership positions from the early 1980s, but much of the important work in this sphere occurred at the trades council level with the formation of various women's sub-committees. In 1983 the FOL's research officer discussed the importance of an educative role for unions concerning women in the workplace and violence against women.\footnote{There were internal difficulties in structurally dealing with Maori and women's representation in the formation of the CTU.} In these areas, therefore, the FOL moved cautiously into the area of social regulation. In some of these cases it is possible to detect a New Zealand national consciousness underlying the issue, notably with nuclear ships. However, the diversity of union attitudes in wider social issues was always a constraint and the FOL leadership was careful not to move too quickly for its constituent unions.

Conclusions

The formation of the CTU in 1987 represented a major organisational consolidation of New Zealand peak unionism with a greater degree of unity and coverage of unionists than ever before. This significantly expanded the national peak union body's agency of mobilisation. In the two decades preceding 1987 the FOL had also built a substantial degree of collective movement power through its mass campaign mobilisations and its cautiously emerging role as an agent of social regulation. As a result, in this period it achieved significant successes as an agent of exchange with employers and the state. Traditionally the FOL relied extensively on its structural coupling with the state through the arbitration system, and this largely compensated for its own weaknesses as an agent of regulation. The FOL's overarching objective remained the maintenance of this coupling.

Nevertheless, significant weaknesses underlay organisational consolidation and enhancement of movement, as a result of changing structural and political circumstances, as well as strategic choices of the leadership. The structural coupling with the state underwritten by the arbitration system diminished as that system was weakened, and a loosening of the link with the Labour Party also occurred. Growing exchange relations with the Employers Federation partially began to compensate for this. However, those relations stopped short
of a structural coupling, and the NZEF was increasingly outflanked on the right by a more hostile free-market-oriented Business Roundtable. The opportunity for a structural coupling through a corporatist strategy finally faded in the 1980s when it was rejected by both the NZEF and the Labour government. In this context, the collective movement power built through mass campaign mobilisations was effectively an illusion, because it was strategically designed to maintain the structural coupling with the state that was already crumbling, and as a consequence the main support base for union membership was also about to be swept aside. When the CTU faced the 1991 Employment Contracts Act it was already in a weakened state. Soon afterwards, the new CTU's position could be characterised as more comprehensive organisation of fewer workers, as union membership dramatically declined.

Notes

1 I gratefully acknowledge the extensive assistance from Peter Franks in revising an earlier draft of this chapter.
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UNIONS

New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
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YES!

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CHAPTER SIX

Trade unionists recall the transition from the Federation of Labour to the Council of Trade Unions, 1987

An edited transcript of a panel discussion between Ken Douglas, Syd Keepa, Martha Coleman, Mike Sweeney and Dave Morgan. Professor Richard S Hill, who chaired the panel, introduced each speaker and asked them to begin by sharing a reminiscence of their experience of the transition from FOL to the CTU around 1987.

Ken Douglas ONZ is New Zealand’s best-known contemporary trade union leader. He was elected president of the Wellington Drivers Union in 1959 at the age of 24; after a year in the position he became the union’s organiser from 1959 to 1965 and was elected secretary (1963–79) after the sudden death of Chip Bailey.1 Douglas later became president of the New Zealand Drivers Federation in 1970 and secretary of the Wellington District Council of the FOL. He had described the FOL as a ‘cancerous growth in the Trade Union movement’ in 1956 but the Drivers re-affiliated to the FOL in 1959. After several unsuccessful attempts, Douglas was elected to the FOL national executive in May 1977.2 When Tom Skinner retired as FOL president in 1979, Jim Knox replaced him. In turn, Douglas was elected as FOL secretary (1979–87). Knox and Douglas represented a shift to the left; indeed Douglas was the first communist to be elected to a leadership position in the FOL.

Douglas had joined the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ) in 1960, having worked in the CPNZ-supported ‘No Maoris No Tour’ campaign against the exclusion of Maori from the All Black tour of South Africa. Douglas became a member of the Socialist Unity Party (SUP), which was formed in 1966 when a number of members left the CPNZ in opposition to its militant Maoist line. The SUP included many of the CPNZ’s trade union activists and supported the Soviet Union. Douglas became chairman of the SUP in the 1970s and 1980s and stood for parliament on occasion, never gaining more than 100 votes in the Porirua electorate.
Knox firmly supported the formation of the CTU and did not stand for office after its formation in 1988. Ken Douglas was elected unopposed as CTU president and held that office until he retired in 1999. Douglas is a Porirua city councillor (since 1998), chairman of Healthcare New Zealand Ltd, deputy chairman of the Asia New Zealand Foundation and a director of the New Zealand Rugby Union. Other positions he has held recently include deputy chairman and a director of New Zealand Post, a director of Air New Zealand, deputy chairman and a member of the Capital and Coast District Health Board and chair of Positively Wellington Business (the region’s economic development agency, now Grow Wellington). He was a director of New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (and its various predecessors) for over 20 years.

Douglas was prominent in the international trade union movement. He was president of the Asia-Pacific Regional Organisation of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and was on the executive board of ICFTU. He was president of the International Centre for Trade Union Rights and served as a substitute worker representative on the International Labour Organisation’s governing body. He was also an advisor to government delegations at World Trade Organisation ministerial conferences in Singapore and Seattle.

Ken Douglas: The CTU really grew out of the particular features of the changes associated with economic developments in the 1970s and 1980s. The only major point that has not been raised in the seminar presentations is, in my view, the very significant impact that Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973 had on New Zealand and the relative vulnerability that New Zealand suffered as a consequence of not addressing that particular issue for quite a long time.
So at the end of the 1970s relationships with the Combined State Unions were deliberately fostered and developed in a more positive way. It is an open secret that Tom Skinner was quite hostile to a close relationship between the FOL and the CSU. The reason? He was probably a bit intimidated by the intellectual capability of the leadership of the CSU at that time. The relationship between the FOL and the CSU took quite a dramatic turn because of the Electricity Department dispute in 1983 when the Muldoon government introduced a Public Service Withdrawal of Recognition Bill which threatened deregistration of the Public Service Association.\(^3\) The direct involvement of Jim Knox and the FOL in support of the PSA in that dispute led to an increased confidence in the PSA and a number of the other state unions about the relationship of the CSU with the FOL. And I think, from memory, that the PSA had about four unsuccessful goes at having a membership ballot about direct affiliation to the FOL.\(^4\) That led in the early 1980s to some quite considered discussion between the leaderships of the FOL and the CSU about how this issue might be more specifically addressed. Finally an agreement was established, whereby the matter would be raised formally by the PSA at a conference after an address that I’d been asked to make on behalf of the FOL about the establishment of a working party to bring a new peak organisation into being.\(^5\)

Regrets? It took too long. That was the typical Federation of Labour way — we wanted to polish every word and turn it inside out and back to front again. An opportunity was lost and I do agree with the summation of the last presenter, Professor Ray Markey, that this delay cost us significantly in combating the economic changes that were then unleashed by Rogernomics and Ruthanasia,\(^6\) the neo-liberal economic reforms between 1984 and 1999.

Richard Hill: Thank you, Ken. I wonder if you could just elaborate a little more for us on why the need to form the CTU and the major tensions inside the very early years of it?

Ken Douglas: I don’t think there were essentially any tensions inside the CTU. The tensions arose out of the perception of what the new peak body was going to do. There was fundamentally no argument at the increased role of the state and state workers. Their position had undergone a fundamental change in respect to the influences of wage setting. Previously they had been directed at internal relativities and driven to create an orderly career framework across all the agencies of the state. The injunction that they should look internally for relativities created a circumstance where the external unions, the private sector unions, then saw the opportunity to claim a backward relativity with the state becoming a leader in wage increases. So the decline in effective negotiating
capability by the private sector unions was being replaced by the increased importance of the role of the state unions were playing.

Syd Keepa, Ngati Awa, Ngati Maru and Ngai Tuhoe, worked in the forestry industry for 37 years. He is Apiha Maori (Maori officer) and an organiser for the National Distribution Union (NDU) and is based in Auckland. In 2010 he was elected vice-president Maori of the Council of Trade Unions.

In 2001 Keepa and NDU president Bill Andersen were arrested by the police for trying to enter a Carter Holt Harvey timber plant in South Auckland during a strike. This became a test case about the right of unions to access workplaces. The Court of Appeal found that the company had acted unlawfully in trying to exclude Keepa and Andersen.

Keepa is the convenor of Te Runanga o Nga Kaimahi Maori o Aotearoa, Te Kauae Kaimahi (the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions) national representative body of 60,000 unionised Maori workers. The runanga meets quarterly prior to CTU National Affiliates Council meetings. Smaller work groups also meet in between the main hui to progress tasks in the annual work plan. A priority area is working with the CTU and its officers to implement Treaty of Waitangi-based change within the CTU. The runanga also supports CTU officials whenever possible during formal engagements. As well as representing the views of Maori workers within the national union body, the CTU runanga has a crucial role as a Treaty partner, working in conjunction with CTU officers and staff to ensure the rights and responsibilities of a partnership relationship are met. Both partners regard the ongoing development of this relationship as vital to ensuring a solid foundation for the future success of the CTU and its member unions.

SYD KEEPA: Kia ora koutou katoa. Just a little background on myself. I spent 37 years as a rank-and-filer and 15 years of that as a delegate,
before I capitulated to becoming a paid union official. My brief would probably be that I’m talking more about involvement in trade unions than involvement in the FOJ and the CTU. I started work when FP Walsh was in his last year as president of the FOJ [1963], and I started in the forestry industry so I guess from a starting point of view I didn’t have that much interest. I was a union member, but didn’t have that much interest in what was going on in the FOJ executive. All I knew was that when Walsh farted it was on the front page of the Herald. I didn’t get involved in it until my first strike, and that happened in Australia, comrades, when I worked on the Sydney Opera House in 1971.

We went on strike, and that’s where I got involved in trade unions.

But I wanted to be involved in trade unions from a worker’s point of view rather than a paid official’s point of view because I thought that I could make real structural changes from within the trade union movement. We tried it in my own union first, the Drivers. Here I want to acknowledge the importance of those who went before and their contribution to making unionism relevant to Maori. I acknowledge here people like Steve Watene, 1951 lockout veteran, who toured tribal districts on behalf of the New Zealand Waterside Workers Union during the 1951 lockout to discourage Maori from volunteering as strike-breakers. I recognise the work of Matt Rata, railway worker and official in the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS). I acknowledge Te Whata Zac [Anzac] Wallace and other Maori union activists involved in the trade union ‘green ban’ on Bastion Point in 1978 and the Mangere Bridge dispute (1977–79), the longest dispute in New Zealand’s industrial history. Tama (Tom) Poata was an important activist as secretary of the Maori Organisation on Human Rights (MOOH), Wellington Drivers Union executive member and a communist. Chuckie Hewetson was the one-time president of the Auckland Trades Council. And of course Joe Te Pania and to a certain extent Tame Iti who is pretty well-known in the newspapers these days.

Joe Te Pania was really important for the formation of the CTU runanga. He was a driver with the Wellington firm Gintys in the early 1980s and close to Jackson Smith. In 1983 the FOJ established a Maori and Pacific Island Advisory Committee. The first convener was Jackson Smith, secretary of the Wellington Drivers Union. The first secretary was Syd Jackson, who’d been a freezing worker and timber worker and became secretary of the Auckland Clerical Workers Union. Like a number of other Wellington drivers on the executive such as Jackson Smith, Richie Gillespie and Tom Poata, Te Pania became active politically and joined the SUP. In 1990 he took up the position
of Maori educator for the Trade Union Education Authority (TUEA). The Labour government had set up a task force which included Jackson Smith, Mike Law, who had been an anti-apartheid leader, and Maryan Street, who was an organiser for the Post-Primary Teachers Association. The task force’s work resulted in TUEA (1985–93). Te Pania was a central figure in establishing runanga linking unions to the Maori community.19

So I’ll just talk about why Maori congregate to unions. The reality is that we come from background of tupu kotahi and collectivism, and we see unions as a tool of getting better pay and conditions. However, unions have repaid that loyalty to Maori and over the years we’ve been trying very hard to get structural change, both at local and national level. In 1986 there was a hui, Nga Kaimahi Maori, in Rotorua where over 400 Maori delegates discussed a separate Maori structure but resolved to seek better Maori input into existing unions.20 Anyway, we barred all Pakeha reporters from coming down there and I think you were there, Ken? You and your other FOL fellas were the only Pakeha there. From that hui we looked at what we could change in the trade unions — that is structural changes. We had a follow-up hui at Waahi marae at Huntly. Then we went around our stopwork meetings talking about structures in terms of recognising kaupapa Maori and indigenous frameworks. I tell you what, it wasn’t an easy job to do, but we’re still doing it now. We’re still trying to get there. We’re nearly there. We’ve got relationships with the Council of Trade Unions now. The runanga has a biennial hui, ‘Mauri Mahi — Mauri Ora’ on Te Ara Taumata: Maori leadership/organising, targeting Maori organisers and delegates and an ongoing two-day course based on Matauranga Maori concepts (Maori models of organising). We need to do a lot more.

I would also like to acknowledge the FOL’s staunch opposition to the Springbok tour. I acknowledge the anti-nuclear policies. I just wondered why that wasn’t translated over to Maori issues? There has been some action by unions, individual unions, such as over the New Zealand Steel ironsand mining operation at Waiuku. The other one was in 1978, and I’m talking about Takaparawha or Bastion Point where the Northern Drivers Union put on a green ban. A coalition of local Ngati Whatua, the Auckland Trades Council, Socialist Action, the Socialist Unity Party and the Citizens Association for Racial Equality set up an encampment in protest at the Muldoon government’s plans to put a housing development on Ngati Whatua land. In April 1977 Lands and Survey Department employees refused to pull down the encampment. A green ban was placed upon subsequent construction at the site to support local iwi. Bill Andersen was secretary of the Northern Drivers Union and
he went around stopwork meetings to get support for putting on that green ban at Bastion Point. That wasn't an easy environment; he almost got locked up! He sold it to union members because it was against big business. The occupation of Bastion Point lasted for 506 days before the police pulled it down and arrested the occupants in May 1978. Now those two issues were pretty hard because particularly the one at Waiuku affected workers as well, and Maori didn't want those iron sands to be mined. I acknowledge the trade union movement for this partnership.

And just to cap it off, unions need Maori and Maori need unions. Kia ora.

Richard Hill: You've really answered the question I was going to ask about the transition of the Fol to the CTU: my understanding was that the CTU actually had some kind of structured approach to the Treaty of Waitangi which possibly the Fol didn't? Was there a kind of immediate change or was it, as you imply, a long, long struggle?

Syd Keeka: It required a lot of korero and a bit of struggle. Not only between those Maori that were part of the CTU and Fol at that time but also the leadership of the CTU and the Fol. But the changes started in 1986 and we've come to a point now where we've got that relationship with the national affiliates council which is working quite well, and we've got a certain amount of autonomy. I guess one of my proudest moments was the fact that the Council of Trade Unions’ member unions went into the submission on the Foreshore and Seabed bill. The government argued that the country’s foreshore and seabed were owned by the Crown. There was much Maori protest leading up to the bill being passed. In September 2003 the CTU National Affiliates Council supported a resolution with one abstention calling for ‘adequate time and appropriate processes to ensure that informed discussion with respect and integrity can take place between whanau, hapu and iwi and the government which ensures a principled and just outcome, and that any legislation foreshadowed by the government discussion paper not be further considered until the process is complete, and further that CTU affiliates take all possible steps to ensure that informed discussion takes place. So that was a defining moment for me because at that point in time we were ‘just about there’.

Martha Coleman became active in politics in the late 1970s, working on the Victoria University student’s association newspaper, Salient, and in the women’s movement through the Abortion Rights Campaign and in the Working Women’s Alliance. Coleman subsequently played a significant role in the paid parental leave
and pay equity campaigns. In 1979 she became an organiser for the Wellington (later Central) Clerical Workers Union, where she joined other prominent woman unionists including Therese O’Connell, Elizabeth Tenet and Christine Gillespie. In 1986 several union officials, including Coleman, joined with other women’s activists in forming the Coalition for Equal Value Equal Pay (cevep). She became the assistant national secretary of the Clerical Workers Union and was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to study equal pay in 1988 in England, Ireland and Canada. In 1990 she became a pay equity adviser to the Employment Equity Office, which was abolished by the incoming National government. Coleman subsequently worked as a researcher for the Trade Union Research Unit at Ruskin College in Oxford, UK, where she worked on a number of equal pay cases.

After returning from the UK in 1993, Coleman studied law at Victoria University. She has worked as an adjunct lecturer at the university’s law school and has taught both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in labour law and anti-discrimination law and is co-author of Butterworths Student Companion Guide to Employment Law. In 1999 she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to study for a masters degree at Yale Law School. She took a position in the human rights team of the Crown Law Office in 2002 and is a Crown Counsel. In her personal capacity, Coleman is an ‘expert advisor’ to the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women and is active in the Wellington Women Lawyers Association.

Martha Coleman: Kia ora. Thanks for the opportunity to be here. I have to confess I am a stand in for Therese O’Connell who was not able to be here
today. What I’m going to say are my views, but I know they’re shared by Therese and are also shared by the other women I worked with in the clerical union during the 1970s and 1980s. What I’d like to talk about today is why we saw women’s structures as being important. I don’t want to focus on the issue of under-representation, which I think has already been dealt with, particularly by earlier speakers. What I’d rather like to talk about is more in terms of the issues that we felt were important to be raised but which weren’t taken up by the trade union movement, and why that was.

I’d first like to say that it’s our perception that we were actually not valued in the clerical union at that time. By the late 1970s, and certainly by 1980, there was a critical mass of women. We were all pretty stroppy I have to say. But there was a dismissive attitude towards us, and the classic attitude of some male trade unionists was to dismiss us as middle-class even though, I mean I was, but many weren’t, but they still had that label. We were dismissed as university-educated, which I was, but others weren’t but they still had that label. And we were dismissed as feminists. That was certainly true, we were definitely all feminists. But we were also really staunch trade unionists and we cared deeply, as did the people we worked with, about getting a better deal for New Zealand workers. The perception we had was that we were not valued, neither was the work that we did, and the fact was that we were ignored.

One example of this is that trade union movement has now embraced the Organising Model, but that had been embraced in the clerical union by 1980, and I bet you that’s a fact that most people in this room did not know. While we were dismissed as being middle class and our members not being real unionists we in fact engaged in campaign organising throughout the 1980s. We did not stop in 1984. We were actively involved in all the Federation of Labour campaigns, for example the General Strike and the Kinleith dispute. We adopted a model of organising which was that we had a rule that we would visit every work site at least once a year. Now that might not sound a lot to you, but in those days we had something like thousands and thousands of work sites. The average number of members per work site for us was two. So that was quite a big deal. What would happen is that all six or eight of us organisers would go to an area for two weeks. In advance, our administrators would have set up appointments for each of us — about six or eight meetings a day. We would be doing press releases and things like that in the towns when we were there and we would go there not just to say ‘Hi I’m Martha from the clerical union’ but we’d go there to say ‘Hi I’m Martha from the clerical union and I want to talk with you about this really important issue.’
So we always took the opportunity when we went to those meetings to raise issues that were either current through the Federation of Labour or to raise issues that we saw as being important for our members. There were two classic campaigns that I remember at that time. The first was the ‘Value Office Workers Campaign’ that we ran out of a commitment that our union took in 1984 to raise the issue of equal pay for work of equal value. Despite the 1972 Equal Pay Act, women had never got equal pay for work of equal value. In promoting the ‘Value Office Workers Campaign’ that we ran over several years, we made videos which we gave to members, we had buttons, we had badges, we had stickers, and as I said we would always do press releases and sometimes public meetings. Also in that time, unlike a number of other unions, we never engaged in concessionary bargaining. Again, that is not something that people associate with the Clerical Workers Union who were kind of written off as being ‘namby-pambies’. For a whole year we campaigned politically and industrially around a refusal to settle our award because we would not agree to a concession with regard to part-time work. The employers wanted to scrap Clause 13 of the award which classified anybody who worked over 30 hours a week as a full-time worker. The employers’ demand meant that people working 36–37 hours a week would effectively be doing a full-time job but would be classified as part-time and would not get the full weekly wage. That campaign was launched by Jocelyn Fish, who was the president of the National Council of Women. So that’s the other arm of political organising which is to know that you have to harness community support to engage politically.

I’ll just say one other thing. Did you know that the longest multi-employer dispute in the motor industry, which in New Zealand has a history for industrial action, was actually a strike by clerical workers of equal pay here in Wellington which closed down the industry for over a month in 1985? Now again, it’s the invisibility of what we did and what we were saying and that’s why we said we’re not being recognised. We think that part of the way to change that is to have women’s structures which would give us a greater voice.

Richard Hill: Thank you Martha. I think you’ve given a really good impression of what it felt like to be women in the movement at the time, and you’ve stressed the importance of structures both inside the movement and across the movement. I note that you were one of the founders of the Coalition for Equal Value Equal Pay and one of the first convenors on the women’s committee of the CTU. Could you just, perhaps, explain for us the relationship between the two sets of structures, both inside the movement and outside of it and how they interacted?
MARTHA COLEMAN: I think it would be interesting to hear the responses of my male colleagues because I do want to stress that this is a perception that we had, but we nonetheless had a tremendous amount of respect for the work of our fellow trade unionists, even those who we felt treated us in that way, and I simply don't want that to be lost. But I do think that there was a view, and as I have said we were young, stroppy feminists, there was a view that our issues weren't being taken up. So, for example, we raised quite contentious things at FOL conferences. The Clerical Workers Union put forward remits about sexual harassment. Of course there was the famous pornography remit at the 1984 FOL conference, which was passed after a heated debate and it was rumoured that several unions, including the Engineers Union, didn't vote.

Pay equity was a big issue for us, and at that time it wasn't really embraced by the trade union movement as a whole. Again we were organising for it in a similar way that we'd organised within the union, in fact my union bankrolled CEVEP to the tune of about $30,000, which 20 years ago was a huge amount of money, and we worked with as many organisations as we could. There was also the Council for Equal Pay and Opportunity, which was revived by Margaret Long and others. This was one of the organisations that had been set up to campaign for the 1972 Act and so that was revived and we worked closely with it. But my view is that the trade union movement didn't really come on board with this issue until Margaret Wilson got hold of it. It was clear that it was going to go somewhere within the Labour government and it is my view that at the point that it became obvious that the legislation was going to be passed, the union movement saw an opportunity to say, 'well okay, if we're going to have it, we're going to monopolise this legislation and we only want a role for unions under it.' They fought bitterly against the right of individual women to take claims — it was going to be a union-only business that claims for pay equity could happen — to the point, actually, where two members of the national executive, when that was being passed at the CTU, voted against their own policy on that issue. So it was an issue of reluctance. That that's probably a reflection of the time that, even by 1990, within the broader trade union movement in New Zealand there wasn't the commitment to women's issues that certainly someone like myself would have liked to have seen.

Mike Sweeney was a ship's engineer from Merseyside who visited New Zealand and decided to emigrate. He became a fitters' delegate at the Auckland Regional Council and became active in the Engineers Union. He was appointed as a union organiser in Auckland in 1973 and was elected as Auckland district secretary in
1991. He stepped down from that role in 2006 to be a senior industrial officer, and retired from the union in 2009.

By that time the Engineers had amalgamated with the Printing, Packaging and Media Union to become the Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union (EPMU), New Zealand’s largest private-sector union representing around 50,000 workers across a range of industries (including manufacturing, aviation, postal services, forestry and timber processing, mining, printing and media). Sweeney gained broad experience as an advocate in numerous industrial negotiations. As an activist in a union at the forefront of promoting industry training development and skill formation, Sweeney was instrumental, in conjunction with management at Norske Skog, Kawerau, in the introduction of the Kawerau Education Training Trust. He was a member of the Workplace Productivity Reference Group representing the CTU, served on the Refrigeration Apprenticeship Committee for 20 years, and was a workers’ member of the Labour Court from 1988 to 1990.

Mike Sweeney: Kia ora, comrades. This is a perspective from the old Engineers Union, going back to the late 1960s and early 1970s when I was involved.
The Engineers Union was seen as slightly an oddity inside the FOL in the sense that we were a national union with rank and file governance. There were no elected, paid officials, apart from the secretary. We had a budget with an imprest account. The idea of some unions was, you got the money in, and you spent it. We actually saved some and that was seen as corrupt as you didn't save workers' money in those days, you spent it. We disestablished union officials — as a nice way of sacking people — and that was seen again as not the right thing to do. Well, that just about brought the whole trade union movement to a state of anxiety. We had secret ballots for strike action. Of course we supported negotiated outcomes rather than the old workers' struggle model and that again was seen as not the right way and not the kosher way of doing it in those days. Of course in negotiated agreements, like big paper mills or steel mills, there were probably 14 unions. And you can imagine 14 unions trying to resolve conflict with the employer when the Engineers Union stood out, especially if there was strike action and we had to have a secret ballot, or when it came to the recommendations to the workers, we could recommend what other unions couldn't. So it caused a lot of strain in the sense that we stood out as being slightly odd and not quite in the mainstream.

The other thing was that we started to promote an education department. We hired a full time educator. We hired researchers, we hired lawyers. We set up a health and safety centre in Auckland. We could do this because we were very large and that meant we had a lot of money. We had a lot of arrogance about us, so again that was probably the reason we were treated as an oddity from the perspective of other very small unions and there were lots of them in those days.

And of course when the transition was coming between the FOL and the new CTU we worked very well in the public sector through either the aircraft industry or the health industry. So it wasn't as though we were as alien towards the Combined State Unions as others were. And all I could say is that the transition from the FOL into the CTU actually suited the Engineers Union. It was a transition that was a very soft landing for us. We felt very connected with it.

I must say it was a lot of fun in the FOL; a lot more fun probably than the CTU is. Just earlier Martha talked about Therese O’Connell and of course any sexist remark that was made from the podium at an FOL conference (and there were plenty of them), you used to get a card from Therese and it said 'This card is chemically treated and your balls will drop off in 20 minutes.' This is just to give you some idea of the difficulty that women were having in those days.
When I first arrived I was told (in an enlightened moment) that there were only three types in the Engineers Union: Micks, Mugs and Masons. That gives you an idea how factionised it was too, because the Engineers Union was very anti-communist. We fought successfully to keep two communists out of the Auckland executive. The factionalism in the processes that determined policy in those days was quite distinct. Rex Jones and I were taken to the Russian Embassy for drinks rather than the American Embassy where we were expected to have gone. It gives you some idea of what the Engineers Union was, the difficulties of large versus small, structured versus not structured, appointed versus elected. That was the history that I was brought up in and all I can say is that the CTU is the right place for the Engineers Union. Thank you.

Richard Hill: Thanks Mike. I stopped reading out parts of your CV when I suddenly realised that one of them would make a very good question. You were a workers’ representative on the Labour Court in the late 1980s. I wondered, you’re in quite a good position to assess the effects of the new structures on the way that resulted in gains or otherwise for workers. I wonder if you could comment on that?

Mike Sweeney: The Labour Relations Act 1987 was the biggest mistake we ever made because we didn’t disestablish compulsory unionism. We had the opportunity of doing it when the Labour Relations Act was brought in and of course we clung to it like the proverbial and, unfortunately, I think it was the biggest mistake we ever made. Being a member of the court was quite interesting because a lot of the judges, although they had labour law to relate to, because some of the cases were presented so badly by the trade union movement, would just establish law when they were making their decisions. They were quite liberal towards unionists. It was quite an interesting situation where the smaller the union that came and the more they battled from a rank-and-file perspective, the more that the courts (even with the employers’ representatives) seemed to be able to recognise that it played a very important role in democracy. Unfortunately the Labour Relations Act didn’t last that long, but that was something that really was a good feature of labour relations at that time.

Dave Morgan had just left school and was 16 when he joined the BHP coastal vessel Iron Monarch in his home port of Adelaide in 1957. He joined the Seamen’s Union of Australia where he gained a working-class political education. Morgan joined the Communist Party of Australia in 1959 and was elected union delegate
on his second ship. He arrived in New Zealand on Christmas Eve 1963 and started work in Wellington. He worked on the Wellington wharf, gained his Able Bodied Seaman’s Certificate and worked on the Canterbury Shipping Co vessel *Breeze*. He was elected secretary of the Lyttelton Branch of the New Zealand Seamens Union and was elected national president in 1973, a position he held until 1998. Morgan and many in the union were involved in the campaigns against the Vietnam War, against New Zealand’s sporting ties with apartheid South Africa, nuclear-powered ships and against foreign bases in New Zealand.

The sale of the Shipping Corporation under the fourth Labour government was a major blow to the union. The New Zealand Seafarers Union (formed after the amalgamation between the Seamen and the Cooks & Stewards) also opposed the formation of the CTU in 1987. The Seafarers and Watersiders argued that joining with the state unions was a move to the right and would dilute the FOL’s militancy, and they walked out after the 1986 FOL conference voted overwhelmingly in favour of forming the CTU. The Seafarers and others later formed the Trade Union Federation (TUF), which brought together a number of smaller and in some cases more militant unions, with Morgan as the first president. The Seafarers opposed the Employment Contracts Act (ECA) in 1991, pointing to the fact that one in six New Zealanders, or half a million people, protested against it in the week leading up to its enactment. They thought there should have been an initial strike and blamed the lack of leadership from the CTU and the Labour Party for the Act becoming law. After talks between them, TUF merged with the CTU in 2000. The Seafarers Union and the Waterfront Workers Union amalgamated in 2002 to form Maritime Union of New Zealand. Morgan served as joint national president of the Maritime Union during the transition period until 2003. He spent 2004 working part time with the union, and formally retired in November 2004.

For many years Morgan was the New Zealand Maritime representative on the Fair Practices Committee of the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) as well as other roles. In 2006 the ITF congress recognised him and other long-time activists as valued campaigners. Morgan served on the Marine Council, the New Zealand Shipping Industry Training Board and the board of the Pacific Forum Line. He was a member of the shipping industry review team that made strategic recommendations to the Minister of Transport in 2000. Morgan is currently deputy chairman of Maritime New Zealand and a trustee of the Seafarers Scholarship Trust.

DAVE MORGAN: Greetings everybody. I never expected to agree with the Engineers Union is such a public place. But, as I recall, and Ken (Douglas) will have a
memory of this as well, it was the Seafarers and the Carpenters in the person of Ashley Russ who argued on the national executive of the Federation of Labour that we ought not to hand the government back a stick to hit us with.  We argued that the Muldoon model of voluntary unionism was okay and that, in fact things had happened then, for instance the decline of membership in the clerical union (you heard Martha Coleman talk here on that) and the pendulum was swinging back and we made a mistake. I agree with the assessment made by brother Sweeney.

The Seafarers Union was always very loyal to the FOL, although we argued ferociously within it. My predecessor Bill Martin took a remit into the FOL conference in the early 1970s and came out with a resolution that we opposed nuclear power in all its forms. Later on in that decade, again within the FOL, a group of seafarer unionists at the port of Wellington, took action against the aircraft carrier USS America. In 1976 seamen, wharfies and harbour workers in the Wellington Waterfront Unions Committee took FOL policy into the
workplace and into history when they refused to assist the nuclear-armed and powered **USS Truxtun** in Wellington Harbour and refused to work while the ship remained in Wellington (and I acknowledge here today Ray Fergus from the Wellington Watersiders Union and Jim Woods from the Seamens Union). I always boast on their behalf, when I get an opportunity such as this, that this was a group of workers that changed the face of the western alliance. Now some of you have heard me say that before and you can argue about it if you like, but the anti-nuclear policy became the law of New Zealand and we were kicked out of **ANZUS** [Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty] and so we did in fact change the Western alliance. We could have only done that within the ranks of the Federation of Labour because, if we're honest, such an overt political stance in the **CSU** context was absolutely impossible, forbidden. Even the expression of political preferences was frowned upon.

These are the conditions which we took into consideration when we did not join the **CTU**. We were loyal to the **FOL** until the very last meeting when it was put into demise. As an **FOL** national executive member of the day I brought down minority reports to conferences that we ought not to do this. We saw nothing wrong with two organisations; they were working closely together and could continue to do so. I've had no idea of the international status of that until Ray Markey, ten minutes ago, informed me that it's quite a common thing for there to be a lot of peak organisations in any given country. He made it clear to me that it's an old Anglo-Saxon desire to 'all to live under the same roof'. So, those were some of the arguments that we advanced that we ought not to amalgamate the two. And it wasn't really an amalgamation either, what's more. I have recently had that confirmed when David Thorp, the former president of the **PSA**, spoke at the funeral of one of his colleagues.\(^5\) He confirmed that every union in the Combined State Unions, or every organisation I should say in the **CSU** in the year prior to the big debate in 1987 about amalgamation of the two organisations had rejected the prospect of affiliation to the Federation of Labour. They declined to have the word 'Labour' at the head of any organisation that might be formed. They're all here now and they may or may not agree with me but that's what happened.

Remember that we fought alongside the Federation of Labour for many years, along with others, to bring about great social change: opposition to apartheid and sporting contacts with apartheid South Africa, nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War. I should say the opposition to apartheid was very vital to us, and I've already mentioned the nuclear issue. Seafarers took a leading
role in that, they trailed their coat in front of the state and said: ‘Come and get us because we were inside the FOL’. And that’s the simple fact of things.

And so I think it’s natural enough to say that we opposed the formation of the CTU and more than anything, we opposed the winding up of the Federation of Labour. We could not see why it was completely necessary and in fact since then I think that we’ve probably been justified in a couple of cases. The CTU is a fine organisation. But I don’t know, maybe it’s my age or something like that, but I often quote a good Aussie battler Henry Lawson’s poem ‘I’m too old to rat’. I did it at the CTU conference, which was an occasion where I thought I’d add some humour. And I’m quite proud of the moment as well. Ross Wilson had announced that I’d retired and that I was in the room and there was a standing ovation for me. It was a little bit wry, I wondered why they would do that when I had in fact been the first president of the New Zealand Trade Union Federation (TU), which was set up I guess in opposition to the CTU.

Richard Hill: Dave, I wonder if you could briefly talk about the relationship between the Trade Union Federation and the CTU?

Dave Morgan: Yes, well, for instance, we were the affiliate to the Federation of Labour, and therefore when international matters were put before the FOL in respect of the maritime industry, for instance, we were the affiliate of consultation. We risked losing that and that was when the New Zealand Merchant Service Guild, who had never ever been in the FOL, had joined the CTU and they would have become the affiliate of consultation and we weren’t about to concede that position to the ships’ officers.

That was our approach and attitude at the time that the CTU was formed and that’s the reason we were loyal to the last minute. The moment we walked out of the FOL conference in 1987 on the day that the resolution for the formation of the CTU was carried, we walked out of there alongside the Watersiders because we opposed the resolution. We came back the next day and stayed until the end, fighting all the way against the formation of the CTU.

But ultimately the amalgamations that took place among unions due to political change in the country made it apparent that the Trade Union Federation was not going to survive. There was no real growth there apart from the first ones to join and, ultimately, a change of government — the election of the Clark Labour government in 1999 — had an effect on that too from the Seafarers’ point of view. All TUf unions joined the CTU as individual organisations after a negotiation had taken place. And I acknowledge
Maxine Gay here as the TUF secretary, and then as the ultimate president who conducted those negotiations with Ross Wilson and others. Those two individuals more than anyone brought the two groups together. There were guarantees even, there were changes, there were policies adopted. It was a win-win situation altogether.

We fought the formation of the CTU — but *viva* the CTU.

Notes


3 In 2006 a two-hour documentary was shown on New Zealand’s TV One about Douglas’s life, entitled ‘Ken Douglas, Traitor or Visionary’ (*Top Shelf Productions Ltd*). See also David Grant, *Man for All Seasons: The life and times of Ken Douglas*, Auckland, Random House, 2010.

4 Britain entered the EEC in 1973. It was renamed the European Community in 1993.


7 In 1982 a working party was established to discuss the formation of a new central trade union organisation to replace the FOL and the CU.

8 Rogernomics’ refers to the Lange Labour government’s economic policies under finance minister Roger Douglas. ‘Ruthanasia’ refers to the Bolger National government’s economic policies under finance minister Ruth Richardson.

9 Gordon (Bill) Harold Andersen (1924–2003), seaman, watersider, 1951 lockout committee member, and driver. In 1953 he was elected to the Northern Drivers Union executive, in 1954 he became an organiser, and in 1957 he was elected secretary of the union. He was president of the Socialist Unity Party (1966–90) and later the Socialist Party of Aotearoa (1990–2005). In 1986 the Drivers Union amalgamated into the Northern Distribution Union which later became the National Distribution Union. Andersen was the union’s president until his death in 2005.

10 The Sydney Opera House’s construction from 1959 to 1973 involved 10,000 workers. In 1971, 38,000 New South Wales building workers were involved in a general strike. The 19-day strike started at the Sydney Opera House after 210 building workers demanded just workers’ compensation for their injured workmates.


13 Matiu Rata (1934–97) became a merchant seaman plying Pacific routes as a teenager before gaining an Able Seaman’s Certificate and becoming a member of the Seamen’s Union. He worked in various jobs as a truck driver, storeman, farm and forestry labourer and spray painter (1954–63) before joining the New Zealand Railways and being elected to the executive of the ASR at the Ohahu railway workshops. He was a trade union
organiser before winning the Northern Māori electorate for the Labour Party in 1963. He was minister of Māori affairs in the third Labour government (1972–75). In 1979 he resigned from parliament and the Labour Party and formed the Mana Motuhake party as a new political voice for Māori. He stood unsuccessfully as Mana Motuhake candidate in the subsequent by-election.

14 See the 1982 film documentary by Merata Mita, The Bridge: The Story of Men in Dispute.
16 'Pacific Island' was dropped from the name in 1985, and the committee focused solely on Māori concerns.
17 Sydney Keepa Jackson (1939–2007) was a prominent Māori rights activist and trade unionist. A graduate of Auckland University, he was a founder of Nga Tamatoa and advocate of te reo Māori. Jackson became a field officer for the Auckland (later Northern) Clerical Workers Union in 1974 and was elected secretary in 1979. He resigned in 1989. He continued working as an advocate for workers and was instrumental in developing Māori health services. He was chief executive of Tūrūki Healthcare in Mangere when he died.
18 Michael Law was a leader of HART (Halt All Racist Tours) and the Wellington Committee on Vietnam. He was a PSA organiser in Wellington. He subsequently became a senior lecturer in labour studies at the University of Waikato. Maryan Street is a Labour list MP. She was Minister of Housing and Minister for Accident Compensation 2007–8. Before her election to parliament in 2005 she was the employment relations portfolio manager for District Health Boards New Zealand, a senior lecturer in industrial relations at the University of Auckland and an organiser for the Post-Primary Teachers Association (PPTA).
19 Joe Te Pania worked for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (1993–95) and then joined Nga Toa Awhina, the PSA runanga. He was subsequently chairman of the Maraeroa marae in Porirua.
20 Thereafter, several unions established separate Māori structures, for instance, the PSA’s Nga Toa Awhina Runanga in 1987.
21 Therese O’Connell’s appointment as an organiser for the Wellington Clerical Workers Union in 1975 opened the door for the appointment of a number of other women, all of whom had a big impact on the clerical workers and the union movement as a whole. She was followed by Elizabeth Tennet (1977) and Christine Gillespie (1978). Others including Sharn Riggs, Marian Cadman, Viv Walker and Nanette Cormack became organisers in the 1980s. Tennet and Gillespie later became secretaries of the Central Clerical Workers Union. In December 1988, the union established a three-person elected secretariat to lead its work. Gillespie was elected industrial secretary, Cadman administration secretary and O’Connell women’s rights secretary. O’Connell was convener of the FOJ Women’s Advisory Committee and represented union women on the FOJ national executive (as a non-voting member) and the CTU executive (as a full member). After 12 years working with refugee communities as head of the Wellington English as a Second Language Home Tutor Service, she returned to her home town of New Plymouth in 2004 to look after her elderly parents. She now works at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery and represents consumers on the Electricity and Gas Complaints Commission. Tennet was Labour MP for Island Bay 1987–96; she is now the chief executive of Textiles New Zealand. Gillespie left the union in 1990 to move to Nelson; she is now a registered psychotherapist and counsellor based in Richmond.
23 The FOJ called a 24-hour general strike on 20 September 1979 after the Muldoon government used the Remuneration Act
to cut back the settlement in the General Drivers Award. The drivers’ payment was later restored by the Arbitration Court. See Bert Roth and Janny Hammond, *Toil and Trouble: The Struggle for a Better Life in New Zealand*, Auckland, Methuen New Zealand, 1981, p 168.


27 The Employment Equity Act 1990 provided for pay equity, equal employment and the establishment of the Employment Equity Office. The incoming National government repealed the legislation just three months after its enactment. A Pay and Employment Equity Unit was finally (re-)established in 2004 to implement the Pay and Employment Equity Plan of Action in the public service. See Prue Hyman, ‘Equal pay for women after the Employment Contracts Act: legislation and practice – the emperor with no clothes?’, *New Zealand Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol 18, no 1, April 1993, pp 44–57.

28 Margaret Long (née Brand), was active in the RSA Women’s Committee and the Wellington Section Women’s Sub-committee 1956–59. See Margaret Corner, *No Easy Victory: Towards equal pay in the government service 1890–1960*, Wellington, NZ Public Service Association, 1988.


30 A specialist industrial relations court has been in existence in New Zealand since 1894 when the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act was passed. There was the Court of Arbitration 1894–1973; the Industrial Court 1973–78 under the Industrial Relations Act 1973; the Arbitration Court 1978–87 under the Industrial Relations Amendment Act 1977 and the Labour Court 1987–91 under the Labour Relations Act 1987. The State Sector Act 1988 extended the court’s jurisdiction to include the public sector. All these courts had a bench comprising a judge together with a workers’ and an employers’ representative. Since 1991, the Employment Court has been made up of three to four judges, one of whom is the chief judge.


33 Ashley Russ (1928–2000) was national secretary of the Carpenters Union and an executive member of the Federation of Labour.

34 In 1960 Muldoon and others in the National Party caucus had strongly favoured
voluntary unionism but the Prime Minister Keith Holyoake and Minister of Labour Tom Shand and others thwarted the move. Gustafson concludes: ‘Although Muldoon during his years in Parliament was not averse to attacking some unions and unionists publicly and suggested that voluntary unionism could be looked at again, he never thereafter put a high priority on it and only reluctantly in 1983 accepted voluntary unionism when it was forced through caucus by Jim Bolger.’ Barry Gustafson, *His Way: A Biography of Robert Muldoon*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 2000, p 75. The Muldoon National government made compulsory unionism illegal in 1983. However it retained the arbitration system of national awards and agreements. In contrast the Bolger National government abolished both compulsory unionism and the award system.


36 A version of Henry Lawson’s poem can be found at http://unionsong.com/u530.html


38 Maxine Gay started work as a clerical worker in a Napier textile factory. She joined the Clerical Workers Union in 1983 and became its Manawatu organiser. She was secretary of the Clothing, Laundry and Allied Workers Union and was general secretary and then president of the New Zealand Trade Union Federation 1997–2001. She is currently the Retail Sector secretary of the National Distribution Union.
APPENDIX ONE

**FOL officers and national executive members, 1937–88**

We have indicated the place of residence for those who lived outside Wellington. See note 12 (page 207) for a discussion of the Wellington residential requirement for executive members (but not the president and vice-president), which was removed in 1962.

**President**

1937–46  Angus McLagan (1891–1956) (Mineworkers)¹
1946–52  Alexander Wellington Croskery (1878–1952) (Shop Assistants)
1952–63  Fintan Patrick Walsh (1896–1963) (Seamen)²
1963–79  Thomas Edward Skinner (1909–91), Auckland³
1979–88  Walter James Knox (1919–91)⁴

**Vice-president**

1937–43  Richard Eddy (1882–1955) (New Zealand Workers Union)
1943–46  Alexander Croskery (see above)

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¹ He became a Member of the Legislative Council and Minister of Industrial Manpower in 1942, Labour MP for Riccarton 1946–56 and Minister of Labour 1947–49.
² Walsh was also president of the Wellington Clerical Workers and secretary of small unions of biscuit workers and fishermen in Wellington.
³ At various times Skinner was secretary of the Auckland Plumbers and of several small Auckland unions including the Musicians, Shipwrights, Fruit Preservers, Stonemasons and Glass Workers. He was founding secretary of the Airline Stewards and Hostesses. Skinner was Labour MP for Tamaki 1946–49 and was knighted in 1976. He continued to live in Auckland after his election as president.
⁴ Knox was a watersider and union activist who was unable to return to the Auckland waterfront after the 1951 lockout. He was a Drivers Union organiser and then became secretary of the Auckland Woolen Mills Employees and several small Auckland unions including the Brewers and Bottlers, Engine Drivers, Foremen Stevedores and Tally Clerks.
1946–47  Fintan Patrick Walsh (see above)  
1947–48  William Benedict Richards (1907–96), Dunedin (Tramways Workers)  
1948–52  Fintan Patrick Walsh (see above)  
1952–59  William Arthur Fox (1899–1994) (Cooks and Stewards)  
1959–63  Tom Skinner, Auckland (see note 2)  
1963–71  James Eric Napier (1903–81) (Watersiders)  
1971–80  James Alexander Boomer (1920–85) (Engineers)  
1983–87  Sonja Margaret Loveday Davies (1923–2005) (Shop Employees)  

Secretary-treasurer  
1937–44  Frederick Daniel Cornwell (1875–1948) (Painters and Decorators)  
1969–79  Jim Knox (see above)  
1979–88  Kenneth George Douglas (Drivers)  

National Executive  
1937–38  Ernest Edward Canham (died 1969) (Watersiders)  
1937–44  Fintan Patrick Walsh (see above)  
1938–42  James Roberts (1881–1967) (Watersiders)  
1942–43  Alexander Croskery (see above)  
1943–48  Francis Cornelius Allerby (1892–1969) (Drivers Federation)  
1944–52  Bill Fox (see above)  
1945–46  Tobias McGlinchy Hill (1915–77) (Watersiders)  

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5 Labour MP for Miramar 1954–66, Minister of Housing and Minister of Marine 1957–60.  
6 Workers’ member of the Arbitration Court 1980–81.  
7 Labour MP for Pencarrow 1987–93.  
8 After his election as secretary, Knox lived in Wellington.  
9 Roberts was president of the Labour Party 1937–50. Because of his influence in the labour movement he became known as the ‘Uncrowned King of New Zealand’.  
10 Workers’ member of the Arbitration Court 1947–59.
1946–77 Leonard Albert Hadley (1911–97)  
1946–57 & 1959–62  
  John Henry Thompson (died 1962) (Plumbers)  
1948–59 Peter Michael Butler (1901–95) (Labourers)  
1953–54 Ernest Bishop Newton (died 1967) (Clothing Workers)  
1956–63 James Napier (see above)  
1957–64 Francis Leslie Fenton (c.1906–98) (New Zealand Workers Union)  
1962–70 Walter Francis Mollineux (c.1906–71) (Carpenters)  
1963–69 Jim Knox, Auckland (see note 4)  
1964–65 Frank Lloyd Langley (died 1965), Christchurch (Carpenters)  
1968–79 Francis Bernard Thorn (1916–97) (Meat Workers, Clothing Workers)  
1969–73 William Martin (1923–2007) (Seafarers)  
1970–80 Jim Boomer (see above)  
1971–80 Ted Thompson (see above)  
1973–78 Sidney Ivan Wheatley (1911–84), Hamilton (Dairy Workers)  
1977–85 Wesley Raymond Cameron (1928–2006), Christchurch (Meat Workers)  
1977–79 Ken Douglas (see above)

11 Hadley was national secretary of the Plumbers Union for many years. He was also national secretary of several small unions including the Photo Engravers, Motion Picture Projectionists and Tobacco Workers. He was knighted in 1975.

12 Until 1962, executive members (but not the president or vice-president) were required to live in Wellington. This was on the grounds of cost and availability for FoI meetings and meetings with the government, government departments, employers and court cases. At the 1962 FoI conference, seven unions and the Otago Trades Council put forward remits to remove the Wellington residential requirement. This was carried by 153 votes to 127. New Zealand Federation of Labour, Minutes and Report of Proceedings of the 25th Annual Conference Held in the Trades Hall, Wellington, May 1, 2, 3, and 4, 1962, pp 88–9. Knox was the first executive member outside Wellington to be elected under the new rule which was important in widening the democratic and constitutional rights of affiliates. Most officers and executive members continued to live in Wellington.
1978–83  Sonja Davies (see above)
1979–81  William Jukes Anton (Labourers)
1981–87  Len Smith, Auckland (see above)
1981–83  Ernest William Joseph Ball (1936–) (Engineers)\(^{13}\)
          Gordon (Bill) Harold Andersen (1924–2005), Auckland (Drivers)
1983–85  Joyce Christina Hawe (Clothing Workers)
1983–87  Samuel Patrick Jennings (1926–95) (Watersiders)
1985–88  Rex Elliott Jones (Engineers)
1984–86  Robert James Campbell (Distribution Workers)
1985–88  David John Morgan (Seafarers)
1986–88  Michael Charles Jackson, Auckland (Distribution Workers)
1986–88  Richard John Barker (Hotel Workers, Service Workers)\(^{14}\)
1987–88  Hilary Megan Brown (1930–2007), Christchurch (Caretakers & Cleaners, Laundry Workers)

**National Executive observers**

1986–88  Therese Frances O’Connell (Clerical Workers)\(^{15}\)
1986–88  Thomas Kahiti Murray, Kawerau (Timber Workers)\(^{16}\)

\(^{13}\) Workers’ member of the Arbitration Court 1983–88.


\(^{15}\) The 1986 FOL conference voted by 126 to 114 in favour of changes to the FOL constitution to provide that the convenor of each district women’s and Maori committee be *ex officio* representatives on the executives of trades councils, that each committee have two representatives on the FOL national council and that the convenors of the FOL women’s advisory committee and Maori committee be entitled to attend the FOL national executive as observers with speaking rights but not voting rights. *FOL, Minutes and Report of the Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Annual Conference held in the Town Hall, Wellington, on May 6, 7, 8 and 9, 1986*, p 114. Therese O’Connell was convenor of the FOL Women’s Advisory Committee. Biographical details about her are included in Chapter 6.

\(^{16}\) Tom Murray was chair of the FOL Maori committee. As such he was the New Zealand workers’ adviser to the International Labour Conference and worked in the committee which started the discussion for a Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
APPENDIX TWO

Statistics for graphs in Chapter 1

Table 1: FOL affiliations data supporting Graph 1 (page 31)

Source: New Zealand Official Yearbooks

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New Zealand Census and New Zealand Yearbooks
Table 2: Disputes data supporting Graph 2 (page 35)

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New Zealand Census and New Zealand Yearbooks

Table 3: Wage and salary earners compared to members FOL supporting Graph 3 (page 45)

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About the contributors

Erik Olssen is Emeritus Professor and former head of the History Department, University of Otago, having taught New Zealand and American history for over 30 years. He is the author of over 60 books and papers including *The Red Feds: Revolutionary Unionism and the New Zealand Federation of Labour, 1908–1914* (1988), *Building the New World* (1995), the co-edited *Class, Gender and the Vote: Historical Perspectives from New Zealand* (2005) and the co-authored *Class and Occupation: The New Zealand Reality* (2005).

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and History (2004). He is a member of the editorial boards of Labour History, International Journal of Employment Studies, Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management, and Working USA.
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