

generalizations not based on all aspects, including chance elements, in a situation'. Further, it is an encouragement 'to look again at particular events or wider episodes in order to test or amend the received wisdom'. Salutory words. In these terms, Gardner's is a cautionary tale, but one delivered in a characteristically dryly entertaining style. On reflection, that is what might have been expected from perhaps New Zealand's most undersung, and modest, historical master craftsman.

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*The Red Feds: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism and the New Zealand Federation of Labour 1908-1913.* By Erik Olssen. Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1988. 312pp. NZ price: \$60.00.

OVER THE LAST decade, New Zealand trade unions have entered a period of major crisis. It is therefore ironic that during these years New Zealand labour history has flowered as never before. And among the conferences held, and books, articles, and union and community histories which have appeared it is Erik Olssen's *Red Feds* which stands out as the most sustained and important contribution to the literature.

Olssen's achievement is manifold. He skilfully weaves together a mixture of political events, union history, more general processes of union development, shifts of population and economic power, and thus gives a new social context, meaning, and importance to various aspects of the legal and institutional framework of industrial relations in New Zealand which have hitherto tended to dominate accounts of this period by labour historians. Out of the discourse of the central actors of his story — the miners, shearers, labourers, flax workers, and seamen — he confidently restores a vocabulary of class into the centre of New Zealand historiography.

Moreover, Olssen reshapes and redefines our historical understanding of the origins of the Labour party, first noting the growth in union membership which gave the party a solid mass base, making New Zealand by 1913 the third highest country in the world in the density of its union membership. But his major argument rests on the effect of the industrial struggles of 1912 and 1913 in developing class consciousness among New Zealand's urban workers: indeed, he writes explicitly of the making of a working class. The shift from industrial to political action after 1913 was not, as conventionally described, a recognition of the folly of direct action, for without the experience of industrial organization and struggle the preconditions for the political successes to come would have been established.

The book takes us into a world few New Zealanders would otherwise imagine could have existed here: the role of the IWW, much more important and crucial in this brief but central episode in New Zealand history than hitherto acknowledged; gun battles between strikers and 'specials' in the streets; the afternoon of 20 October 1913 when striking workers virtually controlled the streets of Wellington and, according to the editor of *Truth*, could and should have marched on parliament and seized power! Yet while some parts of the story encourage reader involvement in the texture of events, there is also much excessive narrative detail elsewhere which discourages deep immersion. And while Olssen acknowledges the international dimension of unionization, labour unrest, work-

ers' migration, and revolutionary ideology, the book fails fully and explicitly to take advantage of many of the insights that can be gained from the literature of comparative labour history and the theories it has tested and generated. But despite such caveats, Olssen's *Red Feds* is a major achievement, and has become without question one of the key texts of New Zealand history.

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*Culture and the Labour Movement. Essays in New Zealand Labour History.* Edited by John E. Martin and Kerry Taylor. The Dunmore Press, with the assistance of the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs and the Trade Union History Project, Palmerston North, 1991. 316pp. NZ price: \$30.00.

THIS COLLECTION contains 19 of the papers given at a labour history conference in Wellington on 20-21 October 1990, sponsored by the Trade Union History Project, Historical Branch and the Public Service Investment Society. The conference coincided with the centenary of this country's first Labour Day and was New Zealand's largest and most diverse gathering of labour historians and activists to date. Now, thanks to the commendable decision to publish most of the papers, they are available to a wider public. The title of the book comes from the theme of the conference and is indicative of the progress New Zealand labour history has made over the last decade, from its narrow preoccupations with the concerns of mostly Pakeha men in the organized labour movement to a much wider interest in all aspects of working people's lives. The impact of the new social history has been profound here.

The range of papers reflect, to quote the editors' engaging introduction, 'the many ways that the labour movement reproduces and communicates its ideas, values and experiences over time, including oral, visual and printed forms, festivals and demonstrations, and the experience of work and its associated cultural forms, patterns of association and community.' Indeed, this book itself is a valuable contribution to that process.

Ripples of international debates and reflections on recent developments in labour history are contained in the keynote addresses by Alun Howkins from Britain and Lenore Layman from Australia. A strong trans-Tasman element is evident in several other papers. This international dimension is a sign of a new maturity in New Zealand labour history's outlook. But criticism is levelled in some areas too. Maori labour activists Tom Murray, Nora Rameka and Joe Tepania, in collaboration with Kerry Taylor, identify the serious neglect of Maori participation in the labour history of Aotearoa. Their challenge remains to be answered. Rae Frances argues eloquently for the continued application of gender analysis and makes practical suggestions as to how this can be done. The ground is not yet won and she warns against the complacent acceptance of recent calls for a return to more institutional labour history. Other papers by activists, academics and professional historians examine political ideologies and organization of the working class; analyse struggle on the job for control of the labour process; evaluate art and literature of the intellectual left; interpret icons of the labour movement; probe the relationship between education and children's labour; and discuss the lives of working-class figures of the past. In the final paper Bert Roth charts the development of Labour Day, not into an expression of working-class solidarity, but into just another holiday.