‘The Public Have Had a Gutsful and So Have We’:

THE ALIENATION OF ORGANIZED LABOUR IN NEW ZEALAND,
1968–1975

Figure 1: Bill Andersen (front row, third from right) at the demonstration that followed his release from Mount Eden prison on 3 July 1974.

In April 1974 an Auckland ship owner, Leo Dromgoole, secured an injunction against the Northern Drivers’ Union (NDU) ordering the union to cease interfering with oil deliveries to the MV Motunui. The Motunui had replaced the Manu-Wai as the main Waiheke Island commuter vessel following the latter vessel’s grounding as part of a long-running manning dispute between Dromgoole and the Auckland branch of the Seamen’s Union.1 The NDU’s involvement in the dispute reflected its solidarity with the Seamen’s Union, and in response to the injunction the union ignored the ruling and maintained its industrial action. As a result, on 1 July 1974 the union’s secretary, Bill
Andersen, was arrested and incarcerated in Mount Eden Prison. News of Andersen’s arrest quickly spread across the city and over the following two days 20,000 workers participated in protest stoppages that cost the city 1.6 million dollars in lost wages. In the wake of this overwhelming pressure, and following a compromise negotiated by the Federation of Labour’s president, Tom Skinner, Andersen was released from prison. Upon his release, he was joined by 10,000 workers in a victory march up Auckland’s Queen Street. Responding to this public demonstration of union solidarity, the Labour Prime Minister Norman Kirk expressed his frustration. On behalf of the government he stated: ‘To put it mildly the public have had a gutsful, and so have we.’

The stoppages held in response to Andersen’s incarceration were described by the labour historian Bert Roth as ‘the greatest display of class solidarity in New Zealand history’. Few other commentators shared Roth’s enthusiasm. In the week following the incident, political cartoons, newspaper editorials, letters to the editor and statements from politicians echoed Kirk’s annoyance at the disruption organized labour had caused the community. A Herald editorial suggested that ‘Public impatience with organised demonstration and disruption is almost certainly running high. ... too often, as was clearly demonstrated last week, direct action is taken without any real consideration of the hardship and inconvenience inflicted on the community at large’. The [Christchurch] Press similarly juxtaposed the actions of trade unions with the interests of the public. On 4 July 1974 the paper’s editor asserted: ‘no community can tolerate the notion that a particular group can damage another party and also be the sole judge of the merits of its action. That would leave every member of the community, including union members, without any legal protection against the actions of the privileged group.’ Meanwhile, the leader of the opposition, Jack Marshall, warned that ‘if the trade unions are going to defy the law, they are going to hold the rest of the country to ransom. Their actions will bring chaos and anarchy to the social system.’

In calling attention to the perceived threat organized labour posed to society, the commentary that followed the injunction dispute was consistent with earlier denunciations of recalcitrant unionism. A brief economic recession in the late 1960s, followed by the loss of union confidence in the arbitration court as a result of the 1968 nil wage order, heralded a marked increase in industrial disruption. Amidst rising industrial unrest, media and political depictions of organized labour routinely divided the movement into two camps: responsible unions and militant unions. According to this imagery, responsible unions worked in co-operation with the state and employers, protecting their members’ rights but doing so with the nation’s
interests at heart. Militant unions, meanwhile, focused on their own interests with scant regard for the nation’s law, economy and the public. During the injunction dispute of mid-1974, however, political and media commentators downplayed the responsible/militant divide. Instead, they contrasted the trade union movement generally with the interests of the nation and the public, and between mid-1974 and late 1975 this imagery became increasingly prominent.

This discursive shift in the representation of organized labour reflected a reconsideration of national interest imagery that was informed by economic decline. During the post-war economic boom, labour, capital and the state operated in a broadly co-operative environment – referred to by some as the historic compromise – in which their individual interests were met by a collective focus on expanding the nation’s economy. Within this Keynesian economic framework, and amidst sustained economic growth, representations of organized labour aligned the dominant current of the movement with national interests. In late 1973 and early 1974, however, the post-war golden weather came to an end. A dramatic increase in the price of oil tipped the global economy into a recession unprecedented since the Great Depression. New Zealand’s wool and meat boom collapsed, while import prices jumped sharply. Between June 1973 and June 1974, oil expenditure rose from $96.4 million, or 7.1% of all imports, to $203.4 million, or 10.1% of all imports. These factors led to a 9.7% increase in export receipts for the year ending March 1974, and a 38.2% increase in import prices for the same period. As Pat Walsh has explained, this situation, ‘coupled with a large deficit on invisible transactions, led to an extraordinary decline of 23 percent in New Zealand’s terms of trade [that year]’.

As the sun set on the post-war economic boom, the conflicting interests of labour and capital were brought to the fore. These tensions undermined the historic compromise and, in light of the state and commercial media’s structural bias towards capital, resulted in a representational shift that increasingly alienated organized labour from so-called national interests. In capitalist economies the state plays a central role in mediating between the interests of labour and capital; however, the state is not a neutral umpire. As Walsh has explained, ‘States in capitalist societies share to varying degrees responsibility for the efficient management of the capitalist economy. Failure in this task jeopardises the government’s electoral prospects and, usually more immediately, as tax revenues decline, its abilities to finance its activities.’ The state’s interaction with capital and labour is thus underpinned by its own self-preservation. This self-interest creates a structural bias towards capital: though of little relevance during periods of economic prosperity, it rises to
prominence when capital accumulation is under threat.\textsuperscript{17} It is important to note, however, that this bias does not favour specific capitalists. Rather, it aligns the state’s interests with conditions favourable to the accumulation of capital generally, and it is this distinction that ‘lends so much credence to the ... claim that the state represents the “public interest” or “national interest”’.\textsuperscript{18}

The interests of commercial media outlets are similarly conflated with the interests of capital. In a phenomenon largely overlooked by local scholars – who have paid greater attention to media bias in the realms of race and gender\textsuperscript{19} – the commercial imperatives of New Zealand’s major dailies informed their representations of the social world.\textsuperscript{20} As a \textit{Herald} editorial from the early 1980s explained, the Newspaper Publishers Association of New Zealand bore ‘an uncommon, if not unique, dual responsibility. On the one hand, they are the guardians of a democratically free and independent press, and on the other they are required to ensure they maintain commercially successful businesses ... The New Zealand press is run by a variety of companies, large and small, competing with one another for advertising and to be first with the news.’\textsuperscript{21} The primary revenue flow of commercial media entities was not derived from the sale of their product to the consumer, but through the sale of their consumers’ attention to businesses via advertising.\textsuperscript{22} When economic decline impacted their clients’ abilities to purchase advertising space, commercial media outlets suffered. This reality linked the interests of commercial media with a return to conditions favourable for capital accumulation. In noting this structural bias, it is not my intention to suggest that the industry was a capitalistic monolith. Any industry containing a newspaper as quirky and unique as the \textit{Truth} could never be described as monolithic.\textsuperscript{23} Rather, the structural bias is noted to highlight that concepts such as national interests or public interests – which regularly graced the pages of the major dailies – reflected the operation of societal power.

With these theoretical touchstones in mind, this article seeks to analyze the changing representations of organized labour between 1968 and 1975. This analysis will outline the shift in representations of trade unionism, from a movement whose dominant current was aligned with the national interests, to a movement that was increasingly alienated from broader societal concerns. To date, scholarly engagement with the labour movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s characterizes the period as an upturn in working-class activity as the numerical strength of unions, along with their industrial audacity, grew.\textsuperscript{24} Although this narrative is evident in the sources discussed below, it is a longer-term view of the period – as employed by Pat Walsh and John Martin – that primarily concerns this article. According to Walsh and Martin, the late 1960s and early 1970s marked the beginning of a transitional
phase between two industrial relations models.\textsuperscript{25} The 1968 nil wage order is presented as the beginning of the end for arbitration as the decision marked the onset of a drawn-out search for a new regulatory regime.\textsuperscript{26} According to Walsh, this search culminated in 1991 with the Employment Contracts Act, which replaced a Keynesian industrial relations framework – arbitration – with an individualized bargaining system that reflected the priorities of the new economic order.\textsuperscript{27}

The changing representations of trade unionism discussed below are best understood within the context of shifting economic orthodoxies. During the period in question, the Keynesian economic system faltered as the cooperative relationship between labour, capital and the state began to break down. Despite numerous efforts to counter this trend, the ascendancy of the Keynesian model was never re-established and the final nail in its coffin came in the form of neo-liberalism. This new economic model, which was introduced throughout the 1980s and 1990s, enshrined the primacy of capital and diminished the historically forged relationship between the state and the citizenry that had been established ‘upon collective mechanisms of redistribution, provision of employment and security through welfare benefits’.\textsuperscript{28} Moreover, organized labour – which had played a key role in the Keynesian model’s redistributive mechanisms\textsuperscript{29} – was dramatically marginalized under the new economic regime.\textsuperscript{30} Between 1985 and 1995, the movement’s numerical strength was almost halved, with union membership falling from 683,006 to 363,200.\textsuperscript{31}

While the movement’s tangible decline reflected the impact of neo-liberal economic and political change, its marginalization rested upon imagery that had emerged during the preceding period. As the Keynesian economic model faltered, national interest imagery was divorced from the collective interests of the historic compromise and, in line with the state and commercial media’s structural bias, was increasingly aligned with the interests of capital. In turn, a representational divide emerged that alienated organized labour from the interests of the nation, and throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s this imagery was entrenched. In March 1981, for example, in one of the largest political demonstrations in the nation’s history, tens of thousands of people marched down Auckland’s Queen Street as part of the Kiwis Care Rally. This protest march was sparked by a picketing dispute at the Auckland airport and reflected a massive display of public nationalism. Returned servicemen wore their medals, thousands of people carried New Zealand flags, and the marchers sung the national anthem while denouncing trade unions and their leaders as thorns in the side of national unity.\textsuperscript{32} During the onset of neo-liberal change, meanwhile, imagery that contrasted organized labour with national
interests was central to the rhetoric employed by proponents of the new economic model.\textsuperscript{33} It was only when trade unions acquiesced to economic change that they were applauded for adopting a ‘national interest approach’.\textsuperscript{34} Accordingly, this article seeks to analyze changing representations of trade unionism during the late 1960s and early 1970s with an eye to the long-term implications of this discursive shift. The representational change discussed below reflected a reorientation of national interest imagery that prioritized the interests of capital to the detriment of labour. This imagery was subsequently employed by proponents of neo-liberal change to legitimize the introduction of an economic model that enshrined the primacy of capital and marginalized the trade union movement.

A consensus exists amongst New Zealand labour historians that the mid to late 1960s represented a major turning point in the history of post-war organized labour.\textsuperscript{35} The 15 or so years following the 1951 waterfront lockout have been described as a period of ‘industrial quiescence’ characterized by the re-establishment of the historic compromise and industrial peace.\textsuperscript{36} Sustained economic growth, coupled with redistributive mechanisms that satisfied the expectations of most unionists, kept industrial disputes at historically low levels. By the mid-1960s, however, cracks in this compromise had started to form. A small number of trade unions – recognizing the strength of their bargaining position in light of labour shortages and the nation’s sustained economic growth – began to circumvent the wage-fixing elements of the arbitration system to engage directly with employers. This development brought about an increase in industrial disputes as annual working days lost to industrial stoppages rose to above 100,000 for the first time since 1951.\textsuperscript{37} This increased industrial pressure was matched by an increase in over-award payments, from 8% in 1947 to 30% in 1965.\textsuperscript{38}

Despite such benefits, only a handful of unions initially circumvented the arbitration system. This situation changed in 1968 when the arbitration court handed down a nil wage order and unwittingly opened the flood gates to free bargaining.\textsuperscript{39} In abiding by its brief to consider the nation’s economic health when making its decisions, the court announced the nil award in light of the economic recession of 1967–1968.\textsuperscript{40} The announcement was met with outrage from trade unions, who were concerned with the impact the award would have on the purchasing power of their members, and apprehension from employers, who feared that the decision would promote industrial turmoil.\textsuperscript{41} Accordingly, the Federation of Labour (FOL) and the New Zealand Employers’ Federation (NZEF) submitted a joint application to replace the nil award with a 5% general wage increase. The submission was ultimately successful; however, the damage done to organized labour’s confidence in
the court proved more difficult to overturn. As Dean Parker – a playwright and founding member of the New Zealand Writers’ Guild – explained, the nil wage order ‘showed [people] the power that the government and the courts had in stopping [them] from getting what they thought was their due in terms of wage increases’. The loss of union confidence in the court saw ‘the already significant movement towards free bargaining [become] a flood’.

The normalization of free bargaining heralded a dramatic change in the nation’s industrial relations landscape. The late 1960s and early 1970s have been described by Walsh as ‘a remarkable period of second-tier bargaining driven by relativities’, as unions operating outside of the arbitration system sought to maintain wage ‘relativity linkages’ with one another. This situation sparked a marked increase in levels of industrial disputes, which – despite numerous state initiatives to curb the trend, including the National government’s introduction of statutory wage controls in 1971 – was sustained into the 1970s. During the initial turn to free bargaining in the mid-1960s, days lost to industrial stoppages rose from 99,095 in 1966 to 139,490 in 1967. In 1970 and 1973, however, 277,348 and 271,706 days were lost respectively. The overall number of disputes also increased. Between 1965 and 1968 the number of annual disputes ranged from between 89 and 153. The average number of annual disputes between 1970 and 1974 was 325.

As was the case during the initial turn to free bargaining, the circumvention of the arbitration system’s wage-fixing elements benefited the nation’s workforce. Between 1955 and 1966, as the productive output of each worker rose by 50%, real wages rose by only 2%. Between 1969 and 1973, however, organized labour won wage increases of 24% in real terms.

In the midst of this tumultuous industrial relations landscape, representations of organized labour split the movement into two distinct camps: militant unions and responsible unions. The central component of this division was an industrial body’s perceived relationship with national interests. As conflict between employers and unions became more commonplace, industrial unrest was presented as a major threat to the economy. In December 1970, the president of the Wellington Employers’ Association said that ‘there was no doubt that the prevailing industrial disruption was seriously impeding the country’s growth and development’. A Herald editorial expressed similar concerns: ‘New Zealand faces no problem more important than the deterioration in industrial relations. The round of large wage increases threatens serious consequences to export industries. ... In much the same way, strikes that hinder exports, or undue wage increases that make exports harder to sell, will ultimately leave everyone poorer.’
Figure 2: The actions of militant unions were often contrasted with the interests of the public. 


National interests were similarly conflated with the public’s interests. As industrial unrest increased, strike activity was presented as a menace to the general public. A Gordon Minhinnick cartoon of 1970 presents this imagery (Figure 2). The cartoon depicts the forward packs of two rugby teams about to engage in a scrum. One team is labelled ‘Direct Action’, while the other, donning the nation’s trademark black rugby kit and silver fern logo, is represented by a front row of government ministers and a Goliath labelled ‘Fed-up Public’. With industrial activity thus presented, unions that employed direct action to secure gains from their employers were contrasted with broader societal interests and labelled as militants. Conversely, those industrial bodies that sought to quell turmoil and return harmony to the industrial scene were aligned with national interests and presented as responsible.

The division of the trade union movement into moderate and militant camps has a long pedigree in New Zealand’s labour history. The image of responsible unionism evident at this time, however, arose during the preceding decades when the dominant current of organized labour was embedded within the state apparatus. During World War Two, ‘FOL leaders were involved in government affairs to an unprecedented degree, culminating in their involvement in the tripartite Economic Stabilisation Commission and
the appointment of the FOL president to the position of Minister of National Service. ⁵⁷ This relationship was further entrenched during the post-war period as the arbitration system, which ‘coupled the FOL with the state’, was strengthened amidst sustained economic growth. ⁵⁸ Within the arbitration system the FOL played a central role in the process of wage regulation, and according to Francis Castles this arrangement was a primary component of the welfare state’s redistributive mechanisms. ⁵⁹ In this context, the FOL demonstrated its allegiance to the state-sanctioned industrial relations model when it played an instrumental role in the defeat of the Waterside Workers’ Union during the 1951 lockout. ⁶⁰ Following this dispute, and under the dominant leadership of Fintan Patrick Walsh, the FOL executive consolidated its control of the organization via constitutional change, thus further empowering those who supported close ties with the state. ⁶¹ In light of this record, the post-war period saw the FOL establish a reputation as the ‘responsible workers’ leader’. ⁶²

The pressure placed upon the arbitration system in the late 1960s began to weaken the structural relationship between the FOL and the state; however, the organization maintained its ‘responsible’ moniker. ⁶³ A central component of this imagery was the calming influence the organization had on industrial disputes. As days lost to strike activity increased, the FOL was depicted as an industrial organization whose ‘good offices’ and ‘good sense’ could be called on to bring industrial relations back to an even keel. ⁶⁴ The body’s role in this regard was so commonplace that one journalist likened the FOL to a fire service putting out ‘bush fires here, there and everywhere’, while another described the body’s involvement in industrial disputes as ‘the escape valve of Federation of Labour intervention’. ⁶⁵ With industrial unrest being framed as a threat to the nation, the FOL’s calming role saw the body directly aligned with the nation’s interests. An article in the Listener from February 1970 noted that: ‘The Federation of Labour … has played an increasingly important role in the settlement of industrial disputes while at the same time continuing to exert strong pressure for policies which industrial labour regards as important. Whether the resources of the Federation are adequate for the demands made on it is open to question: but it cannot be questioned that the power that the FOL does exercise is used with a great sense of responsibility and for the general good of New Zealand.’ ⁶⁶

The FOL’s pacifying influence on industrial unrest was evident in the 1970 Auckland Boilermakers’ Dispute. On 23 September 1970, following sustained industrial activity on four work sites, the government informed the Boilermakers’ Union that unless all members returned to work within 24 hours and agreed to abide by the relevant award rulings, the union would be
deregistered: a punishment that represented the Minister of Labour’s ultimate disciplinary power under the arbitration system. In the face of this threat, the union handed control of the dispute to the FOL. The calming effect of this move was immediate. A *Herald* editorial presented the FOL’s involvement as synonymous with the dispute’s inevitable, and reasonable, conclusion: ‘The union’s passing of the dispute to the Federation of Labour and the Government’s suspension of the action show that rational considerations can still prevail. Good sense should help to provide a settlement based on fair negotiation and acceptance of properly constituted agreements.’ The *Press*, meanwhile, noted that the FOL’s involvement had ‘stayed the Government’s hand’ in regards to the deregistration threat. The paper then recounted the comments made by the Associate Minister of Labour, Daniel Riddiford, upon hearing of the FOL’s intervention: ‘Riddiford confirmed that he had been in touch with Mr Skinner and the Government had agreed to suspend its threat. “The Government believes that the FOL will be successful in getting the men to return to work”, Mr Riddiford said. No time limit has been set but he believed that “a responsible body such as the FOL will use all reasonable speed in this matter”.’

The FOL’s alignment with national interests was further solidified by the body’s position on direct action. By encouraging its affiliates to employ peaceful tactics instead of strike activity, the FOL was applauded for its responsible stance. In 1969, the *Herald* editor praised Skinner for his position on the issue: ‘Once he has fired off some ritual salvos at traditional bogymen [sic], the president of the Federation of Labour, Mr Skinner, is often worth hearing. …. Addressing the Federation of Labour conference, Mr Skinner warned workers that strikes should be regarded as a last resort. Strikes, he said, upset the whole economy and everyone was a loser. Lost production was never regained and good relationships were destroyed by bitterness.’ This position was similarly commended in May 1973 when Skinner stated that ‘if the community as a whole is hurt [by trade union activity], then we are hurt as much or more than anyone else’. A *Press* editorial presented Skinner’s position as a model of good sense and responsibility: ‘He has emphasised a fact which some unionists – like other groups in society – sometimes forget; that they are citizens first, and their role as unionists is secondary. In short he urges workers to use their industrial power and their democratic freedoms with responsibility.’
Standing in stark contrast to this responsible image of organized labour were militant unions. A 1973 Minhinnick cartoon presents this divide (Figure 3). The cartoon depicts ‘militant unions’ mugging ‘industry’ with a bludgeon labelled ‘strike’. ‘Militant unions’ is interrupted in the act by Skinner, who is quoted directly: ‘Workers should not take industrial action if matters can be resolved by negotiation.’ ‘Militant unions’ attempts a defence: ‘But I am negotiating – I told him “your money or else!”’ Such belligerence was central to representations of militant unions. The disruption they caused was presented as wholly avoidable, underpinned by self-interest and directly at odds with the nation’s economic concerns. A Herald editorial from 1969 described the Wainui dispute – which arose from a disagreement over union coverage boundaries between the Engineers’ and the Seamen’s Unions – as follows: ‘The Wainui dispute has been a thoroughly sad case of industrial breakdown – sad because it was absurdly trivial, sad because a display of reason could have ended it quickly, and saddest of all because it caused serious damage to New Zealand’s export drive. The seamen could or would see no further than an alleged threat to the machinery of their hiring. For such a domestic squabble they were apparently perfectly content to throttle the trade
on which depends, in considerable measure, the prosperity of their fellow unionists and of everyone else in the country. Skinner also contributed to this imagery. Contrasting the actions of some elements of organized labour against the nation’s economic interests, in 1973 he blamed ‘ill-advised and disruptive’ industrial activity for damaging the economy, ‘raising prices and taxes and lowering living standards’. He presented this disruption as totally avoidable: ‘Those who have the interests of New Zealand at heart would want to avoid this – and by responsible action they can avoid it.

Along with this alleged disregard for the economy, the actions of militant unions were contrasted with the interests of the general public. For example, militant unions were regularly accused of using innocent bystanders as bargaining chips in industrial disputes. An editorial reflecting on industrial unrest in the late 1960s suggested that unions ‘know perfectly well that the community at large is damaged by their actions, yet they choose to bypass conciliation, ordered debate and arbitration to secure their own ends by holding an innocent majority to ransom’. In other instances, by employing what the American media historian Christopher R. Martin has described as a consumerist frame – which focuses on the impact of industrial activity on price, quality and the availability of goods and services – the media presented industrial action as an attack on the public, rather than employers. Commenting on a Drivers’ Union dispute which disrupted oil deliveries in the lead-up to Christmas, one editorial opined: ‘On the eve of Christmas a few men choose to disrupt the lives of thousands.’ A few months later, discussing the increase of industrial activity generally, another editorial commented that ‘the general public ... feels irritated and resentful at continual threats of being deprived of goods and services’.

In rationalizing the divide between responsible and militant unions, political and media coverage often pointed to the involvement of communists in some trade unions. For example, in 1968 the Minister of Labour, Thomas Shand, claimed that there was ‘disquieting evidence of Communist Party activity in the building and construction industry’ and noted ‘the situation is explosive and could lead to ... a loss of some of our newly-won export markets’. In the following year, Skinner warned unionists to be ‘alert for Communist elements within their ranks’, blaming such elements for prolonging the Waihi dispute. In 1970, the Wellington businessman Sir Clifford Plimmer – noting that the upturn in industrial unrest was not confined to New Zealand alone – claimed that ‘the almost worldwide industrial turmoil seems to possess elements of a planned attack on the capitalist system’, while in 1971, the new Minister of Labour, Jack Marshall, suggested that “Red Guard” Communist elements in some trade unions [were responsible]
for much of New Zealand [sic] industrial unrest’.  

A number of communists operated in the trade union movement during this period, and some of the most active trade union officials were outspoken communists. These political ideologues sought to replace capitalism with an alternative economic system and periods of industrial unrest naturally encouraged greater activity on their part. However, to imply, as contemporary commentators did, that the upturn in industrial activity was somehow of their making, overstates their influence. As the staunchly communist secretary of the Northern Drivers’ Union, Bill Andersen, tried to explain: ‘While the workers are conditioned by what we [union officials] say, we couldn’t have any action if they didn’t want it.’ Many of the unions that took part in industrial activity had little or no connection to communist officials, and some of them had long been considered moderate by outside observers. That is not to say that communists did not have an influence on promoting activity that they considered beneficial to their political philosophies. Rather, it is to say that the increased activity of communists was a symptom, rather than a cause, of the broader increase in industrial unrest. It is beyond the confines of the nation, with a view to finding ‘the world’s place in New Zealand’, that the reasons underpinning the industrial unrest are located.

In the post-war period, the industrial relations systems of numerous countries operated within a Keynesian economic model. Sustained economic growth solidified confidence in Keynesian economic proscriptions as capital, the state and labour operated within a largely co-operative environment. A central element to the success of this arrangement was a trade union movement that worked within the industrial relations framework, ensuring that their members benefited from economic growth, industrial harmony was maintained and the nation’s economic viability was protected. The form of these Keynesian industrial relations systems varied from country to country. In Australia, an arbitration system similar to New Zealand’s oversaw industrial developments; in the United Kingdom, this role was served primarily by Joint Industrial Councils; and in the United States of America (USA) an informal arrangement, referred to by some as ‘the New Deal formula of industrial relations’, served to align the interests of labour with capital. Despite their variations, the systems all operated to administer benefits to the nation’s wage earners in line with economic growth.

These systems could satisfy the demands of labour and capital during periods of economic health; however, when the post-war economic boom briefly faltered in the late 1960s, the Keynesian industrial relations systems faced pressure. During this time, global economic growth slowed and the rate of inflation rose. In response to this situation, workers sought to maintain
the value of their wage by placing greater demands on their respective industrial relations systems. In light of the economic uncertainty, however, these systems struggled with the dual demands of re-establishing economic profitability and satisfying workers’ expectations. Ultimately, these conflicting demands created tensions that broke post-war industrial stability, as an increasing number of workers circumvented formal industrial relations systems and engaged directly with their employers. This development, in turn, sparked ‘a long revival of industrial militancy’ in numerous countries around the globe.

In his history of Australian trade unionism, Tom Bramble describes the period 1968 to 1974 as a ‘flood tide’ in the history of unionism. Bramble explains that ‘strike days trebled from two million in 1972 to more than six million in 1974, and strikes continued to build trade unionism. Union membership, which had risen by 300,000 between 1969 and 1972, rose by a further 300,000 between 1972 and 1975, with union coverage increasing to its highest rate in more than a decade.’ British labour historians John McIlroy and Alan Campbell describe a similar phenomenon. They suggest that it was in the years following 1968, ‘as the [British] state attempted with limited success to use trade unions as an instrument of increasingly deflationary economic management, that the fortunes of the unions reached their meridian – numerically and, more arguably, in terms of power’. A similar situation transpired in the USA. In the late 1960s, a massive spike in industrial disputes saw days lost to stoppages rise to levels unseen since the early 1950s. This spike marked the onset of a wave of industrial unrest that continued into the early 1970s.

When viewed alongside other national contexts, the increase of industrial unrest in late 1960s and early 1970s New Zealand can be understood as a local response to global economic change. As the foundations of the Keynesian system were shaken by economic decline, the industrial relations landscape underwent significant change and unrest was increasingly normalized. This change was framed in terms of a split within organized labour, as militant unions, motivated by their political ideologies, operated to secure greater rewards for their members, while responsible unions actively sought to defend the nation’s interests. This imagery was maintained into the 1970s as a return to economic growth helped to sustain direct bargaining between employers and unions, despite numerous government efforts to curb the trend. As already noted, however, this return to economic profitability was short-lived. In late 1973 the global economy entered a period of sustained economic uncertainty, and once again global economic decline impacted New Zealand’s industrial relations environment. On this occasion it heralded
a reconsideration of the state and the commercial media’s representations of organized labour, as the responsible/militant divide gave way to imagery that contrasted organized labour with national interests.

In the midst of economic decline, the Industrial Relations Act (IRA) 1973 became law. The Act – which represented the collective efforts of the state, the FOL and the NZEF – introduced the most significant structural change to industrial law since 1894. By incorporating elements of free bargaining into the legislative framework, the law sought to legitimize some developments arising from the decline of arbitration, while re-establishing centralized control lost in the wake of the nil wage order. It was the law’s removal of strike penalties, however, that proved to have the most immediate impact on the industrial arena. Strikes had been illegal in New Zealand since the passage of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1894, though few prosecutions had been brought against recalcitrant unions in the years leading up to 1973. Nevertheless, the removal of strike penalties met stiff resistance from some employers as the Act came into effect amidst widespread economic uncertainty and following a year when over 250,000 work days were lost to industrial activity. Accordingly, some employers looked for another tool to use as a coercive mechanism in the industrial arena and they found this in the form of the common law device of injunctions.

In the immediate wake of the IRA’s enactment in March 1974, an employer threatened two unions with an injunction notice to bring their industrial activity to an end. As far as the unions were concerned, however, injunctions were unilateral, unfair and worked in the employer’s favour. Bert Roth summed up this view when he noted that injunctions can ‘decide the outcome of [a] dispute by putting an end to a strike and forcing the union into a weak bargaining position. Such interim injunctions are therefore a valuable weapon in the hands of the employer.’ Accordingly, the unions met the employer’s threat with vocal opposition. The Seamen’s and Northern Drivers’ Unions – against whom the threat was made – released a leaflet outlining what was at stake: ‘Mr Dromgoole has announced that he will be asking the Court on May 21 for writs of sequestration and attachment against unions and their secretaries. This means that the secretaries can be arrested and held indefinitely and that all the property of the two unions can be seized. Injunctions can be used in this way to destroy every principle of the whole trade union movement. The only protection we have lies in the same solidarity which the employers are threatening to destroy with the injunction process.’

The unions’ stance received explicit approval from the FOL. In early May 1974, delegates at the FOL’s annual conference passed a resolution calling
on all affiliates to act against the enforcement of injunctions as and when the issue arose. By adopting this resolution the FOL aligned itself with two so-called militant unions, and, in turn, newspapers that had long lauded the body as responsible voiced their disquiet. The [Auckland] Star editorial of 10 May 1974, entitled ‘Bad for the Image’, applauded the decision made at the FOL conference for all unions ‘to refer any internal arguments to the FOL before resorting to industrial action’. The conference’s discussion of injunctions, however, received a markedly different response:

A parting shot as the conference ended could well cause fresh doubts about the willingness of the movement to abide by rules framed for the general good. ... The conference asked the Federation to request the Government to introduce legislation to ‘prevent employers taking out injunctions against unions, their members and officials.’ The implication of this is that the due processes of the law are acceptable to unionists up to a point. ... The impression has been given that an aspect of the law is resented by a special group for reasons of its own. And that doesn’t help the image the FOL had in mind.

A Herald editorial expressed similar concerns. Framing the injunction dispute as a matter of law and order, the FOL’s opposition to the legal device was contrasted with its responsible reputation: ‘The general tone of the conference seemed both thoughtful and responsible – with one notable exception. The conference is reported to have given “thunderous applause” to the idea of defying a Court injunction. ... Laws can be changed if the community sees a need. But while they exist it is disappointing, even depressing, to watch a widely representative, democratic and generally responsible body applauding an idea that they can, or should, be defied.’

When the injunction dispute came to a head in early July 1974 – following Bill Andersen’s incarceration – the responsible/militant trade union divide was eclipsed by representations of organized labour that contrasted the movement’s interests with those of the public and the nation. At the centre of this imagery was the prime minister, Norman Kirk. In the days following the initial stoppages, Kirk responded to the turmoil by warning organized labour that ‘the Government has a number of powers available which it would prefer not to use, but the public interest comes first’. Maintaining the division between the public and organized labour, on 8 July 1974 – the same day Skinner emphasized his belief in the necessity of the stoppages – Kirk called on all trade unionists to ‘recognise just how strong public opinion was over last week’s industrial stoppages’, and stated: ‘Trade Unions have a right to look after their members’ rates of pay and conditions ... but we were elected to govern. ... Unions had rights but part of the price of those rights was to use them responsibly.’
Kirk’s reaction to the stoppages, received with a chorus of support from editorials, political cartoons, letters to the editor and other politicians, was consistent with the condemnation of trade unions acting at odds with national interests. Accordingly, it could be argued that by contrasting broader societal interests with the interests of the trade union movement, the reaction to the injunction dispute reflected an instance when responsible elements of the movement aligned themselves with militant unions and thus shared in the scorn usually reserved for the latter. However, the bridging of the divide between responsible and militant unions was not a flash in the pan. Over the following months, the gulf that divided responsible and militant unions narrowed as the trade union movement was increasingly contrasted with national interests.

This change reflected a reconsideration of national interest imagery in light of economic decline. As the economy faltered, organized labour was brought face to face with an employer who adopted a tool that the vast majority of the trade union movement opposed. At another historical moment, the movement’s misgivings may have received a more favourable reception. Indeed, at the Labour Party annual conference of May 1974, delegates decided, by 369 votes to 161, that ‘the Industrial Relations Act should be amended to provide for the “protection” of unions and their members from injunctions during industrial disputes’. However, in the midst of economic decline, representations of the dispute were informed by the state and the commercial media’s structural bias towards capital. In turn, representations of organized labour alienated the movement from national interests. Over the following 18 months, amidst continued economic uncertainty, this representational shift became increasingly prominent.

Within a month of the injunction dispute the FOL was contrasted with national interests in a major industrial row. In protest at French nuclear testing in the Pacific, the FOL had placed a ban on the handling of French imports by members of its affiliates. Responding to criticisms from importers, the secretary of the FOL, Jim Knox, explained: ‘Anybody wishing to import French goods could write to the FOL stating why the ban should be lifted for his cargo. The Federation had a good look at each request, and dispensation was not granted easily.’ This position was presented by the Herald as the FOL’s abuse of its power in matters that should be left to the government. A Minhinnick cartoon presented Knox, cross-legged at the Prime Minister’s desk, sitting on top of ‘Prime Gutsful’ and stubbornly denying the requests of a weedy looking ‘N.Z. commerce’ (Figure 4). The Star, meanwhile, suggested that the FOL was unconcerned by the impact of its actions on others and accused the body of usurping the government’s authority to deal
with foreign relations: ‘But for the damage done to others the Federation cares not a jot. … Mr Kirk, supported by various other ministers, has taken a stronger line on industrial unrest recently. The Prime Minister joins the public in saying he has had a “gutsful” and declares he will not be forced to change industrial law at gunpoint. Is it not time for the elected representatives of the people to assert their right to decide how the country’s trade should be conducted?”

Figure 4: Within a month of the injunction dispute, the FOL was accused of abusing its power and usurping the government’s right to govern.

With the FOL’s actions susceptible to such condemnation, space opened for deeper criticism of trade unionism generally. In the months following the injunction dispute there was a marked increase in the denigration of unions in the media and the political arena. One issue that received considerable attention was the relationship between organized labour and democracy. In September 1974, the National opposition accused numerous unions of gangster-type activities, claiming to have evidence of intimidation, victimization, forgery, theft, threatened assault, financial malpractice, breaches of union rules and incorrect balloting procedures. Although no evidence of misconduct ever surfaced, such accusations long plagued the movement. In March 1975, a Malcolm Evans cartoon depicted three thugs – representing union officialdom – informing rank-and-file union members
that ‘on the count of three we’ll have spontaneous support for the resolution’ (Figure 5).\textsuperscript{121} Evans thus dismissed union democracy as little more than an autocratic farce.

Figure 5: Accusations of organized labour’s anti-democratic tendencies rose to the fore in the mid-1970s. 


On occasion, the anti-democratic image of the trade union movement moved beyond the unsubstantiated and into the realm of the hysterical. In the second half of 1974, grass roots anti-union groups sprung up throughout the country’s main centres promoting ill-defined political programmes that received newspaper coverage out of all proportion to their size.\textsuperscript{122} A front-page \textit{Herald} article from 15 November 1974 covered the proposed establishment of one such group. A handful of returned servicemen, seeking to defend western democracy in the face of trade unionism, were planning to establish a paramilitary organization. In the article, a former Director of Intelligence for the Royal New Zealand Air Force supported the establishment of such a patriotic group, seeing it as a timely initiative ‘in view of what is happening in the United Kingdom which indicates that trade unionism is the Achilles heel of democracy’.\textsuperscript{123} He added, ‘the weapon of trade unionism was sabotage which was used indiscriminately and without any sense of responsibility’.\textsuperscript{124} A former Regimental Sergeant-Major, meanwhile, sought to reassure those
who may have feared the establishment of a patriotic anti-union corps. ‘We are not fascists’, he explained, ‘we just love our country.’

Following the injunction dispute, the views and actions of organized labour were also contrasted with economic good sense. During the mid-1970s, ‘inflation’ and ‘the health of the economy’ consistently ranked as the top two replies to the *Herald*'s regular survey question, ‘What is the single most important problem facing New Zealand right now?’ In this context, trade union interests were framed as being at odds with the economic health of the nation. In December 1974, a *Herald* editorial dismissed Skinner’s economic proposals as naive and foolish:

> Mr Skinner advocates the maintenance of the purchasing power ‘of the work force’ ... in order to keep demand levels high. The implications are obvious. In spite of the economic lessons which have been so clearly spelled out in recent months, union preoccupations still seem generally to be concerned with gaining higher levels of remuneration, direct or indirect. No one should fail to appreciate that with his recommendation Mr Skinner would perpetuate, and even add to, inflation. In the context of today, sustaining demand by artificial means will inexorably add to the costs of living, and, later, lead to perhaps even worse levels of unemployment.

Union efforts to supplement their members’ incomes through additional allowances, meanwhile, were framed in a similar fashion. Such demands were contrasted with the nation’s economic interests and presented as evidence of union greed. A Peter Bromhead cartoon depicted a satirical travel company selling a time machine package to the nation’s workers (Figure 6). A poster in the company’s window advertised trips to the 1930s, suggesting that workers simply needed to demand their ‘$1.20 a day Travelling Allowance’ to get the opportunity to visit that decade. Minhinnick, meanwhile, framed union efforts to claim additional allowances as selfish – and dangerous – in the face of national and global economic decline (Figure 7). A contented figure labelled ‘unions’ is warmed by several heaters branded ‘transport allowance’, ‘maternity allowance’ and so on, while a blizzard – ‘world’s economies’ – rages outdoors. Behind ‘unions’, and unbeknownst to him, an overburdened power plug labelled ‘NZ industry’ bellows smoke.

This increase in union denigration was both fuelled and adopted by a number of politicians seeking to align themselves and their party with national interests. By far the most vocal of such opportunists was Robert Muldoon. Upon his appointment as leader of the National Party in late July 1974, Muldoon staked his election campaign on ‘a fair go for the decent bloke’ and often used organized labour as fodder for this political rhetoric. Within his first two weeks as leader, Muldoon had called for the disestablishment of compulsory unionism and attacked elements of trade unionism for rigging
Figure 6: Union demands were often linked to rising inflation, as seen in this 1975 Bromhead cartoon.

Source: Star, 26 April 1975, p.5.

Figure 7: In the mid-1970s, organized labour’s economic policy was presented as out of step with local and global economic realities.

ballots and intimidating members.\textsuperscript{131} Although Muldoon often tempered his language with reference to the responsible/militant union divide, the effect of his rhetoric was the promotion of imagery that divided the trade union movement from national interests. Within a month of Muldoon taking over as leader of the National Party, the FOL announced that it was withdrawing all co-operation from the Opposition. Skinner explained that in view of ‘the sort of irresponsible attacks the Opposition has been making on the trade union movement in the last few days I see no reason to have anything more to do with them’.\textsuperscript{132} In this context, Minhinnick began to present the relationship between National and organized labour as antagonistic, with many of his cartoons presenting Muldoon in the form of a dog – Bulldoon – and Skinner as a cat – Tomcat (Figure 8).\textsuperscript{133}

Figure 8: Minhinnick presented the antagonistic relationship between the National opposition and the FOL as a cat-and-dog affair.


In the lead-up to the November 1975 general election, the National Party embraced this antagonistic imagery and hinged its industrial relations policy on the division between organized labour and national interests. This imagery was most glaringly evident in an advert released in the days before the election, which, along with the ‘Dancing Cossacks’ advertisement, was produced by the American cartoon company Hanna-Barbera.\textsuperscript{134} The advert declared that under a National government, ‘the rights of everyone, unionists and non-
unionists alike will be respected’. Industrial relations were described as being close to anarchy in New Zealand, and blame for this was levelled at trade unions. The advert presented unionists as thugs, ridiculed strike activity as being caused by workers who ‘didn’t want to make their beds anymore’, and described some unions as being led by people ‘who import class prejudice and industrial anarchy’. The advert then presented unions as a threat to the nation, stating portentously: ‘They can close your business, take away your job or bring down our shaky economy and there’s nothing you or the Labour Government can do about it. Because the first thing the Labour Government did was to change the law to make these things ‘legal’. The first thing a new National Government is going to do is to make damned sure that you can do something about it.’

Unsurprisingly, the trade union movement responded to this advertisement with outrage. Tony Neary, the secretary of the North Island Electrical Workers’ Union and a long-time representative of conservative elements of organized labour, described the advert as defamatory and said that ‘it maliciously attacked trade unions and was designed to hold unions up to public ridicule and contempt’. Ironically – in light of earlier events – Neary then called on the FOL to ‘proceed immediately to the Supreme Court and seek an injunction restraining the National Party from further screenings of the obnoxious and defamatory advertisement’. Tom Skinner, meanwhile, suggested that the ‘commercial denigrated the FOL and its officers and insulted the intelligence of New Zealand’s wage and salary workers’. Referring to National’s labour spokesperson Peter Gordon, Skinner declared: ‘If by some mischance Mr Gordon ever became Minister of Labour, he can rest assured that there will be no cooperation from the FOL and his life will be one of constant confrontation to the detriment of the country. We would be put in an impossible position if we were ever asked to work with an individual who could take part in this type of propaganda designed for one purpose only – to down grade wage and salary earners and their organisations in New Zealand.’ Skinner subsequently explained that the above statement was in reference to Gordon only, and that it did not imply that the FOL would unilaterally refuse to work with a National government. Skinner, however, viewed this qualification as irrelevant, adding that ‘they won’t be the government anyway, so it doesn’t really matter’.

Ultimately, Skinner’s assessment of National’s political chances turned out to be as offbeat as Hanna-Barbera’s dystopian fantasy of pro-Bolshevik Cossacks. The National Party became government and did so with a substantial victory which reversed the comprehensive majority that Labour had secured in 1972. In securing electoral victory, National’s platform tapped into
recent representations that contrasted the interests of organized labour with the interests of the nation. Between 1968 and early 1974, representations of organized labour split the movement between responsible and militant unions. This distinction aligned the majority of unions with the interests of the nation, while a pestilent minority were framed as selfish, greedy and unperturbed by broader societal concerns. From mid-1974, however, as the post-war boom faltered and tensions emerged between labour, capital and the state, the responsible/militant divide gave way to imagery that alienated the trade union movement from national interests.

This representational shift reflected the operation of societal power. Both the state and the commercial media were self-interested in the restoration of capital accumulation and this informed their representations of the social world. Rather than presenting the dominant current of trade unionism as a pressure valve for industrial tension, organized labour came to be framed as an obstacle to the re-establishment of the nation’s economic viability. Over the following years, this national interest / trade union divide deepened as the Keynesian economic system continued to falter and Muldoon continued to employ the imagery to great political effect. Throughout the late 1970s and the early 1980s Muldoon employed ‘red scare’ tactics and wedge politics against the trade union movement, creating a deeply antagonistic relationship that some unionists referred to as ‘the hatred campaign’. 144 The National Government’s sustained aggression, meanwhile, pushed organized labour closer to the Labour Party; the party which, in 1984, became government and placed the nation on the path of neo-liberal economic change. 145 It was at this time, as the neo-liberal orthodoxy replaced the Keynesian economic model, that organized labour’s alienation gave way to, and was used to legitimize, its marginalization. 146

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Appendix A
Industrial Activity, 1965–1985

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of disputes</th>
<th>Workers involved</th>
<th>Working days lost</th>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>15,267</td>
<td>21,814</td>
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<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>33,132</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
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<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>44,041</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>266</td>
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<td>1985</td>
<td>383</td>
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NOTES

The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions. Thanks, also, to Deborah Montgomerie, who supervised the thesis that this article is taken from.

1 H.J. Hansen, The Manu-Wai Affair, Auckland, 2009, pp.14–26. I’d like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback of an earlier draft. Thanks, also, to Deborah Montgomerie, who supervised the thesis that this article is taken from.


4 New Zealand Herald (NZH), 5 July 1974, p.4.

5 Roth, ‘An Injury to One’, p.3.

6 NZH, 8 July 1974, p.6.


8 Press, 5 July 1974, p.5.


13 Ibid., p.159.


15 Ibid., p.288.


18 Jessop, p.185.


32 Peter Harris, Kiwis Care Protest March, Recorded 3 March 1981, System ID 39888, Radio New Zealand Sound Archives / Ngā Taonga Kōrero; Star, 3 March 1981, p.1; NZH, 4 March 1981, p.1; Ryan Bodman, “The Public Have Had a Gutsful and So Have We”: The


42 Dean Parker, interviewed by Ryan Bodman, 19 December 2011.

43 Anderson, p.42.


46 Boston, pp.113–14.

47 Appendix A.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.


53 NZH, 1 December 1970, p.3.


56 See, for example, the movement’s split between ‘sane-labour’ and militant labour in the early twentieth century: *Fielding Star*, 16 August 1919, p.2; *Otago Daily Times*, 30 August 1919, p.10; *Grey River Argus*, 7 November 1919, p.3.


59 Castles.


64 NZH, 7 November 1969, p.6.


70 Ibid., p.2.

71 NZH, 16 April 1969, p.6.


74 NZH, 2 May 1973, p.6.

75 NZH, 5 December 1968, p.6.


77 Ibid., p.1.

78 NZH, 26 October 1968, p.8.


80 NZH, 18 December 1968, p.6.

81 Ibid., p.6; NZH, 28 February 1969, p.6.

82 NZH, 29 July 1969, p.3.


84 *Star*, 16 November 1970, p.3.

85 NZH, 22 March 1971, p.3.


87 Eldred-Grigg, p.220.


91 McAloon, p.33.

92 Ibid., p.33.

93 Ibid., p.33.


95 Ibid., p.70.


97 Brecher, p.312.
‘THE PUBLIC HAVE HAD A GUTSFUL AND SO HAVE WE’

98 Winslow, pp.1–35.
99 Boston, pp.94–114, 124–33.
100 McAloon, p.34.
103 Roth, ‘An Injury to One’, p.4.
104 Appendix A.
106 Roth, ‘An Injury to One’, p.4.
107 NZH, 10 May 1974, p.1.
110 Ibid., p.6.
111 NZH, 11 May 1974, p.6.
117 NZH, 26 July 1974, p.4.
118 Ibid., p.4.
121 NZH, 21 March 1975, p.6.
124 Ibid., p.1.
125 Ibid., p.1.
127 NZH, 5 December 1974, p.6.
128 *Star*, 26 April 1975, p.5.
129 NZH, 2 July 1975, p.6.
130 NZH, 27 July 1974, p.3.
133 NZH, 12 September 1974, p.6.
137 Ibid.
139 Ibid., p.14.
140 Press, 22 November 1975, p.16.
142 Press, 22 November 1975, p.16.
143 Trotter, pp.264–5.
144 Rod Prosser (Producer/Director), The Hatred Campaign [Documentary], Wellington, 1985.
146 Ibid., pp.81–89.