

A Political Struggle

CHRISTCHURCH LABOUR POLITICS 1905-1913

THE TRANSITION of working-class Christchurch from a radical Liberal citadel to a Labour Party stronghold has been rightly identified by a few historians as of considerable significance in the history of the labour movement in this country. Even so, the popular (and journalistic, if not academic) image seems still to be that the Labour Party was born on the coalfields of the West Coast, or at least that it was largely the offspring of the Red Federation of Labour. The Federation was never particularly strong in Christchurch, and yet the city was by 1914 recognized as 'the home of militant anti-militarism and socialist activity.'¹ The non-Red Fed unionists and their political struggles were of equal importance to the rise of the Labour Party and the 'making' of the working class in New Zealand. A few years back Libby Plumridge suggested as much, in an essay which focused on the ways in which Labour's political organization became 'a focus of working-class community, one of the institutions of working-class culture'.² The importance of this process should not be underestimated, but, fundamentally, political labour's organizations in Christchurch arose from trade unions, in response to political issues and the growing conviction among workers that bourgeois parties could no longer be trusted with the defence and advance of workers' interests.

Erik Olssen suggested in 1987 that 'by 1911, in Dunedin, Christchurch, and Wellington [Labour's] electoral base had been established'. He attributes this, not to ideological debates, nor to 'the activities of the Liberal Government and the Arbitration Court', but to 'deeper social processes'. According to Olssen, the 'decisive [process] was unionisation'; that is, there was a clear correlation between a high level of unionization and the success of independent labour parties. Particularly, he points to the 'rapid unionisation of the unskilled' after 1900. Olssen also suggests that changes in the definitions and shop-floor control

Note: I wish to record the heavy debt this article, and the thesis out of which it grew, owe to the work of and/or discussions with Libby Plumridge, Melanie Nolan, Erik Olssen and, particularly, Len Richardson.

1 *Maoriland Worker*, 12 August 1914, p.12.

2 Libby Plumridge, 'The Necessary but not Sufficient Condition: Christchurch Labour and Working Class Culture', *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 19, 2 (1985), p.130. See also her 'Labour in Christchurch: Community and Consciousness, 1914-1919', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979.

of work were important factors in the radicalization of unionists before 1914.³ Certainly Christchurch was one of the most industrialized cities in New Zealand at the turn of the century.⁴ Probably as a result, Christchurch was well advanced in terms of union membership, with 12.35% of the population in unions by 1910. This was an increase of 250% in ten years.⁵

While social processes are important to understanding the rise of Labour, it is well to recall E.P. Thompson's insistence that the working class 'was present at its own making'.⁶ Workers in Christchurch were not passive objects of social change; the Labour Party emerged in Christchurch as a result of working-class political struggles and campaigns. Moreover, the role played by the skilled workers of Christchurch in the development of the Labour Party has until now been relatively unappreciated.⁷ Given the early strength, approaching dominance, of Christchurch in the political labour movement, the origins of the Labour Party in Christchurch are of considerable importance for the origins of the movement as a whole. If Olssen stresses the importance of the Red Feds, and Plumridge emphasizes the cultural, this article attempts to reassert the importance of political struggles and to highlight the actions of the workers, particularly the skilled, of Christchurch.

To some extent, the rise of Christchurch labour built on a strong radical-liberal tradition in Christchurch politics. Since 1890, the city had returned a number of left Liberal Members of the House of Representatives, in the persons of William Tanner, Harry Ell, Harry Davey, William Pember Reeves, George Laurensen, and T. E. Taylor. Tanner (a bootmaker) and Ell and Davey (in the printing trades) had been trade unionists in the 1880s, and their election reflected the strong alliance between Trades Hall and the Liberal Party that began in 1890 and lasted until 1905.⁸ As elsewhere, this alliance was at least in part a reflection of the political weakness of organized labour after the defeat of the Maritime Strike in

3 Erik Olssen, 'The Origins of the Labour Party: A Reconsideration', NZJH, 21, 1 (1987), pp.82-85, 90-94.

4 For the extent of industrialization, see Joan P. Morrison, 'The Evolution of a City', MA Thesis, Canterbury University College, 1944, pp.187-8. Recent research by this author suggests that the wealthy in Canterbury (defined by deceased estates of 10,000 pounds value and over) were a larger group than elsewhere in the South Island. 'Wealth and Power in the South Island 1890-1914', PhD thesis, University of Otago, forthcoming.

Changes in the labour process, and the political aspects thereof, are topics on which much work needs to be done in the New Zealand context, but they have been briefly surveyed by Erik Olssen in *A History of Otago*, Dunedin, 1984, pp.102-14. I have elsewhere discussed the issue as it applied to Christchurch, in 'Workers' Control and the Rise of Political Labour, Christchurch 1905-1914', in John E. Martin and Kerry Taylor, eds, *Culture and the Labour Movement: Essays in New Zealand Labour History*, Palmerston North, 1991, and in my 'Working Class Politics in Christchurch, 1905-1914', MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1986, ch. 2.

5 Olssen, 'Origins', pp. 83-86.

6 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 2nd edn, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.9.

7 Olssen, 'Origins', pp.93-94 briefly discusses changes in the workplaces of the skilled.

8 Tanner was elected for Heathcote in 1890; Harry Ell had been active in the Knights of Labour in the 1880s and was returned for Christchurch City in 1899; Davey had been Father of the Chapel at the *Lyttelton Times* before winning election in 1902 for Christchurch East.

1890, but Canterbury's Liberal organizations aimed, among other things, 'to encourage suitable working-class candidates and unionists . . . to represent labour in politics through unionism'.⁹ After the passage of the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act in 1894, unionism quickly revived in Christchurch and by 1900 most skilled trades were organized.

With its significant industrial base, the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council was in 1905 one of the largest and strongest in the country. The contest within the Trades Council over political strategy was a long and bitter one. Until well after 1905 a very significant block of unions remained loyal to the Liberal Party. These unions, such as the Stonemasons and the Carpenters, were mostly highly skilled 'craft' unions, under little threat from changing technology. They were opposed by other unions, some unskilled, but many skilled although vulnerable to mechanization. The metal trades were a particular example, and it is perhaps no coincidence that two of the most prominent advocates of a socialist platform in the Trades Council were the young railways moulder James Thorn and the tinsmith Jack McCullough.

As long as the Liberal faction dominated, Trades Hall confined its political activity to taking part in local Liberal organizations. Christchurch's Liberal parliamentarians usually agreed with the Trades Council on electoral platforms.¹⁰ On some issues — particularly tariff protection and the like — the Trades and Labour Council (TLC) and local Liberals even combined with employers to lobby the government.¹¹ Yet the identity of interest between manufacturing employers and Trades Hall was more apparent than real. Employers in some industries were mounting a major campaign for control of the production process, and had won some major successes in the Arbitration Court in gaining approval for the 'American' system of scientific management. This system stressed piecework and other productivity-indexed systems of payment, time and motion division of tasks, and the elimination of any union controls in the workplace.¹² Metal trades workers were among those most affected by the

9 See Melanie Nolan, 'Jack McCullough: Workers' Representative on the Arbitration Court', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1985. In the course of the 1890s Reeves and others founded the Progressive Liberal Association, to the left of the official Canterbury Liberal Association. Some of Reeves' associates also had a strong prohibitionist agenda in forming the PLA; see David Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals*, Auckland, 1988, pp.111-12.

10 Some months before the 1905 election, local Liberal MHRs addressed the Trades Council and endorsed its Fighting Platform on virtually all issues except taxation: Canterbury Trades Council Minutes (TLC), 25 February, 17 and 21 June 1905. All union minute-book references are to volumes held in the University of Canterbury Library.

11 TLC, Minutes, 3 June 1905, 24 March, 7 April 1906; Lyttelton Times (LT), 1 July 1905.

12 Metal trades workers had begun to experience pressure on skill levels and job control through these means and through new technology, but the process had occurred in the boot trades during the 1890s with 'artisans being replaced by machinery ever moving forward towards automatic perfection' and employers taking advantage of this to drive wages down. Boot trade workers fought long and hard to maintain their position, and employers retaliated with victimization. See 'Reports of the Department of Labour' in *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), and minute-books of the Operative Bootmakers Union, passim, 1896-1903. See also the Book of Awards, vols 1, p.200; 2, p.191; 3, p.506; 4, p.185. The issue is more fully discussed in my 'Workers' Control and the Rise of Political Labour', and in my MA thesis, ch.2.

employers' campaign, and were vocal in their opposition. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, for instance, described productivity payments as 'the forerunner of absolute sweating, the direct means of robbing the worker of that share of the production of his labour that he has a right to expect'. Such payments, they held, lowered the standard of work and divided workers against each other.¹³ Clearly, 'Americanisation' threatened the security of the formally skilled, and drove them to seek common cause with the unskilled.

Some workers came early to the view that arbitration alone would not protect them from employers' designs.¹⁴ The capture of state power was necessary, and the alliance with the Liberals could not, by its nature, achieve this. Even as a reformist party, the Liberals were less satisfactory to workers than once they had been. Crucially, the Seddon Government refused to pass further labour legislation, particularly compulsory preference, which unionists regarded as an essential if real power in the workplace was to be achieved.¹⁵

Such considerations were behind the formation of the Christchurch Political Labour League in 1905.¹⁶ The Political Labour League (PLL) functioned more as an organizing committee than as a mass party, although its membership did reach some hundreds. Early in 1905 its affiliated unions included the Tinsmiths, Blacksmiths, Farriers, Operative Bootmakers, Traction Engine Drivers, Metalworkers' Assistants, Coachworkers, Furniture Trades, Engineers, and General Labourers. By 1907 the Moulders and the Tailoresses had also affiliated.¹⁷

Liberals inside and outside the TLC strenuously opposed the formation of the Christchurch PLL. At the League's inaugural meeting, Harry Ell MP mentioned that there were 'many members in the House who had never turned their back on a labour measure'. The *Lyttelton Times*, the mouthpiece of Canterbury Liberalism, feared the division of the 'progressive' vote and condemned the caucus pledge in the League's constitution (by which PLL members of Parliament would vote as a bloc in accordance with caucus decisions) as 'tyrannical'. The newspaper asserted that the League was attempting to 'introduce the direct conflict of capital and labour' into Parliament, and warned that in Australia the 'effect of the political rise of Labour has been to harden the ranks of the capitalists'. The PLL responded by asserting that the 'broad democratic front'

13 See LT, 30 January 1906, p.2; 30 April 1907, p.2; 7 May 1907, p.6; 14 May 1907, p.3.

14 The Arbitration Court had allowed piecework and bonus systems in the Moulders Award in 1902, and even before 1900 had stated that employers were to have the fullest control over machinery and the labour process in the bootmaking industry. *Book of Awards*, vol. 3, p.492, and vol. 1, p.203.

15 e.g. LT, 2 May 1905, p.4; for economic policy see e.g. LT, 14 October 1905, p.4.

16 LT, 29 January 1905, pp.6, 9. The Canterbury TLC was following the resolution of the 1904 national conference of TLCs. This was not the first attempt by socialists at Trades Hall to establish an independent party. They had attempted in 1899 to get the TLC to sponsor an independent labour party. They were unsuccessful in that attempt but did win Trades Council sponsorship for the Christchurch Socialist Party in 1901; see Melanie Nolan, 'Jack McCullough', pp. 23-27.

17 There is no complete list of affiliations to the PLL. I have compiled this one from union minute-books and the *Lyttelton Times*.

preferred by the *Lyttelton Times* was only of much use to the workers if they were 'the controlling body in the alliance'.¹⁸

Seeking to control the 'progressive alliance' was the point on which the PLL initially differed from left Liberals; its fighting platform was practically indistinguishable from that of the left-wing Liberals. Yet the League had little choice but to contest the election in working-class electorates, which was precisely where the left Liberals were strongest.¹⁹ In Christchurch, therefore, the PLL contested Avon (held by W.W. Tanner), Christchurch South (Ell), and Riccarton, held by the mainstream Liberal, George Witty. The League had also intended to fight T.H. Davey's Christchurch East seat, but the prospective candidate refused to attack Davey and had, in fact, served as his electorate chairman. The Socialist Party therefore ran their secretary, the tailor Fred Cooke, in that seat. The PLL's most effective campaign was in Christchurch South, where James Thorn accused the Government of 'propitiating Conservatives in the matter of Crown Lands, catering for wool kings and lawyers'.²⁰ The Liberals had on their side Seddon's enormous popularity, and they used it to the full, campaigning on the government's record in public works, social security, land settlement, and the standard of living. Given the relative prosperity of the times, Thorn did well to secure 1102 votes to Ell's 3660 — a narrow third and the League's highest figure across the country. None of the other PLL or Socialist candidates in Christchurch received more than 102 votes.²¹

The low PLL vote in 1905 belied the workers' growing disillusionment with Liberalism. The 1906 conference of Trades Councils openly criticized industrial and economic policy, as well as recent judgments of the Arbitration Court. The Christchurch PLL was also of a mind to move beyond the left Liberal agenda. It successfully moved at the 1906 League conference for the 'collective ownership and control by the people of the land and other means of livelihood'.²² The Christchurch Socialist Party campaigned for similar objectives; a very crowded May Day gathering was held in 1906 at which was preached 'international Socialism... public ownership and democratic control of all means of life'.²³ The Christchurch PLL was urged by affiliated unions to participate in the 1907 municipal elections. It combined with metal and furniture trades unions, and the General Labourers and Tailoresses, for the purpose. The opening meeting in Cathedral Square drew 'a considerable audience' and frequent applause. Four candidates were selected, and one, Dan Sullivan of the Furniture Trades Union,

18 LT, 25 January 1905, pp.6, 9; 8 February 1905, p.8; editorials of 25 and 30 January and 8, 9 February 1905, and letter by John Rigg, 9 February 1909. See also Canterbury Trades Council Minutes throughout 1905.

19 LT, 28 February 1905, p.7; PLL Minutes (in E J Howard Papers, Hocken Library) 7 February, 9 March 1905; LT, 1905: 24 March, p.2; 26 April, p.4; 20 April, p.5; 27 April, p.9; 6 June, p.2; 5 July, p.7; 14 July, p.3; 28 July, p.7.

20 LT, 14 October 1905, p.8.

21 The League contested eleven seats and won a total of 4367 votes. Thorn's comment is LT, 14 October 1905, p.8. See LT October-December 1905, *passim*, for the campaign; also Barry S. Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence*, Auckland, 1980, p.18.

22 LT, 4 May 1906, p.6.

23 LT, 2 May 1906, p.6.

missed a seat in the Sydenham ward by only 30 votes.²⁴ Christchurch workers did not wait upon the Red Federation before mounting independent and socialist political campaigns.

The arbitration system was increasingly a focus of the discontent that provoked labour's mobilization. Three major disputes in 1907-08 highlighted this discontent. In 1907 slaughtermen at many works struck over pay and job control issues. The strike, fought by the rank and file against the advice of union officials, was a resounding success. In 1907-08 the Canterbury Farm Labourers' Union with a membership of 1400, petitioned the Arbitration Court for an award and was refused, on the basis, as the Court put it, of the magnitude of the interests involved. Union meetings protested against the judgment and called for the replacement of the President of the Court. Some speakers went further and called for 'class conscious political action' to replace the Court and capitalism with it. And in 1908 the Blackball miners staged their now legendary strike.²⁵ Support for the strikers among Christchurch unions extended across divisions of skill and 'respectability'; the Boilermakers, for instance, who took their role as a mutual aid society and protector of craft standards very seriously, stood alongside unions such as the Drivers.²⁶

Most unions still saw certain advantages in the arbitration system: wages had risen, legal recognition was ensured, and unions could thus exert some job-control in numbers of apprentices and under-rate workers. Many unionists' qualified support of the system was overshadowed by their strenuous protests at its administration.²⁷

The government responded to increased union militancy with amendments to the arbitration law. The amending bill reduced certain union rights, proposed heavy penalties for striking, and restricted the holding of union office to workers in the trade. The Liberals in the Trades Council, led by the Stonemasons' John Barr, publicly supported the bill and were severely criticized by Jack McCullough and other socialists. The Trades Council's campaign against the 'employers' bill' culminated in a very large public meeting in Cathedral Square. The

24 LT, 2 May 1906, p.6; 1907 18 January, 2; 23 January, p.9; 11 February, p.4; 1 April, p.9; 6 April, p.4; 25 April, p.7.

25 For the slaughtermen's strike, see my 'Workers' Control and Political Labour', and LT, February-March 1907, *passim*. The Blackball strike is discussed in Erik Olssen, *The Red Feds*, Auckland, 1988, ch.1. The Farm Labourers' dispute is discussed in B.J.G. Thompson, 'The Canterbury Farm Labourers' Dispute, 1907-1908', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1967. James Holt, *Compulsory Arbitration*, Auckland, 1987, pp.87-88, says in New Zealand that this decision saved the system from abolition. Unionists could have been forgiven for wondering what use the system was if such decisions were made. Jack McCullough, the Workers' Representative on the Court, strenuously and publicly dissented from the decision and threatened privately to 'bust up the Court'. Melanie Nolan, 'Jack McCullough', p.79.

26 Unions that gave financial assistance included the Boilermakers, Drivers, Engineers, Furniture Trades, Tailoresses and Pressers, Moulders, Tailors, Tramway Workers, and Freezers. See the relevant union minute-books and LT late March-early April 1908.

27 The reports of unions' attitudes to arbitration occurred in various issues of the *Lyttleton Times* between April and early July, 1907; the newspaper had responded to the Slaughtermen's strike by conducting an extensive survey of union opinion on the arbitration system.

Farmers' Union, perhaps sensing the government's lack of sympathy for socialist unionism (and anticipating the Arbitration Court), petitioned for the exclusion of farm labourers from the coverage of the Act.²⁸ The 1907 bill was dropped in the face of union protest.

The 1908 version was little different, although it removed some restrictions on union officeholding; even Liberal unionists protested against the 1908 proposals at first.²⁹ The Employers' Association called for a law banning financial aid to strikers, and regarded the 1908 amendments as the 'last try' for arbitration, which they saw as under threat from 'revolutionary socialism'.³⁰ Employers had been much encouraged by the result of the Farm Labourers' case, and the Court followed this decision up with a new clause in awards providing for the suspension of an entire award in the event of a strike by any workers covered by it.³¹

The changed temper of Christchurch workers was demonstrated in the 1908 election. There was still a Liberal element at Trades Hall: in mid-November seven union presidents signed a manifesto (apparently on their own initiative), extolling the radical virtues of the 'Liberal-Labour Government'.³² The PLL and the Christchurch Socialist Party co-operated in the election, and made significant gains. James Thorn doubled his 1905 vote in Christchurch South, taking 2221, but Ell took an absolute majority with 3480. Dan Sullivan got 679 votes in Avon, but Tanner was forced to a second ballot and defeated by another Liberal, George Russell. The Socialist Party's Fred Cooke won a respectable 504 in Christchurch East, but an independent, James McCombs, received 1851; Davey was returned with 3476. If the Labour vote had increased significantly, the Employers Association took great comfort from its perception that 'the House, as now elected, was less radical in its views than any Parliament for many years past'.³³

A successor to the PLL was initiated in July 1909 by the Canterbury Drivers Union. Sixty people attended a public meeting, and unanimously resolved that 'the time has arrived for the establishment of a political party to be called the New Zealand Labour Party'. Despite its increased electoral support, the PLL was still in debt when it dissolved in February 1909.³⁴ The new party clearly aimed to become a mass party rather than a political committee, which was a necessary advance on the PLL structure. The Labour Party's MPs would take office only

28 LT generally, 10-24 September 1907 and 14 October 1907, p.3.

29 The legislation is discussed in Holt, ch.3; for the union reaction in Christchurch, see LT, all of September 1907, 14 October, p.3; all of July 1908; TLC, Minutes, 1, 22 August 1908, 3 October 1908.

30 LT, 30 July 1908, p.9.

31 LT, 9 September 1908, p.5. The clause was first inserted in the Canterbury Shearers award, over the objection of Jack McCullough, and amounted to effective deregistration.

32 The presidents were of the Painters, Aerated Water Workers, Carpenters, Furniture Trades, Coachworkers, Typographers, Butchers, and Quarrymen. The election campaign is covered in the *Lyttelton Times* October to 18 November 1908. See also Gustafson, p.19.

33 LT, 9 December 1908, p.5.

34 LT, 4 December 1908, p.9; 2 February 1909, p.1; Jack McCullough, letter to Robert Breen, 1 December 1908; J.A. McCullough Papers, Canterbury Museum. McCullough supported the PLL extensively from his own pocket.

in a Labour Ministry, and would not enter a government formed by any other party. The first Christchurch branch of the new party was in Christchurch South, and remained closely associated with the Drivers Union, whose secretary, Hiram Hunter, was a leading advocate of independent political organization.³⁵

Considerable work was put into promoting the party in Christchurch during 1910. David McLaren, elected in 1908 as PLL Member of Parliament for Wellington East, spent some weeks conducting meetings in factories and public halls. Three hundred watersiders at Lyttelton heard McLaren and voted to form a branch. Railway workers were less enthusiastic. Thirty attended a lunch-time meeting and gave him a polite hearing but passed no resolution. By the end of June there were 250 members in the Christchurch South branch, and there were branches in Kaiapoi and Christchurch East, as well as Lyttelton.³⁶

The Trades Council gave the Labour Party an implicit blessing in a strongly-worded manifesto, issued at the end of 1909. The manifesto was, in fact, prompted by the government's decision to allow the purchase of leasehold Crown land — an issue as dear to left Liberals as to socialists. The Council declared that 'the parting of the ways between Labour and Liberalism has come in no unmistakable manner, and from this out, we stand by ourselves'. Two months later, when the Trades Councils held their national conference and discussed the establishment of the New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP) on a national basis, the Canterbury Council urged a platform of political reform and the nationalization of land and banking.³⁷ Socialists had been elected in force to the Trades Council's executive in mid-1909, and the Council was now firmly committed to independent labour politics.³⁸

The thinking of a growing number of unionists was perhaps summed up by the painter and former TLC president, Alfred Hart, when he wrote that the power of the employers had grown so great that there was no alternative to striking for improved pay and conditions:

lately the workers have found to their sorrow that the Arbitration Court operates in favour of the employers, and now the unions, or most of them, are afraid to go near it The only bright gleam of hope is the fact that the Shearers' and Miners' Federations are out for reform. The Labour Party is coming on in leaps and bounds. The Trades Councils and

35 LT, 17 July 1909, p.2; H. Roth, 'New Zealand's First Labour Party', *Here & Now*, October 1952, p.12.

36 LT, 14 February 1910, p.7; 19 March, p.10; 23 March, p.2. Railway workers were perhaps isolated from the rest of the labour movement by the terms of their agreement with the Government, which had guaranteed recognition of the union and the shopfloor hierarchy in return for staying out of labour federations; see Erik Olssen and Jeremy Brecher, 'New Zealand and United States Labour Movements: the View from the Workshop Floor', in Jock Phillips, ed., *New Worlds? the Comparative History of New Zealand and the United States*, Wellington, 1987.

37 TLC, Minutes, 10 July 1909, 11 December 1909, 5 February 1910. For the 1909 policy, see Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals*, pp.299-301.

38 Whereas in 1905 leading officeholders had been drawn from skilled craft unions, in 1910 the Council's president was the Labourers' Ted Howard, and his deputies were the bootmaker Bob Whiting and the furniture worker Dan Sullivan. The secretary, James Young, represented the Tramway Workers, and his assistant was another labourer.

the progressive unions have found that suggestions [to the Government] in regard to industrial problems are a sheer waste of time, and are now out to secure the parliamentary machinery.³⁹

The Labour Party did not grow only in response to workers' industrial concerns. Anti-militarist protest was of crucial importance in labour's political development. This protest was provoked in the first instance by the Cabinet's decision, in mid-1909, to furnish a state-of-the-art battleship — a dreadnought — for the English Navy. Alfred Hart called the gift a 'delirious farce' and said the two million pounds should have been used for domestic economic and social reform. Hart noted that Sir Joseph Ward 'had, of late, been taking particular pains to voice the urgent necessity of retrenchment, and had, indeed, practically demonstrated his intentions in this direction by starting with the workers'. There had recently been a wave of redundancies at the Addington Railway Workshops.⁴⁰ James Thorn condemned 'the poltroonery in us which permits a Cabinet of jingoes without consulting us to pawn our country to play the Imperial game'. There were large meetings both for and against, which often became rowdy.⁴¹ Compulsory military training followed hard on the heels of the Dreadnought, with a sustained campaign to mould or reinforce public opinion in favour of conscription, including a speaking campaign by Robert McNab (a former Defence Minister) which received large attendances, and the official visit of General Kitchener early in 1910.

Labour's opposition was based on varying considerations. For some, militarism was opposed as one of the oppressive outgrowths of capitalism; for others, simple humanitarian grounds were more important; some simply opposed compulsion. The issue remained important, and most of all because it provided a clear point on which to gain the support of many left Liberals.⁴²

The NZLP's membership in the Christchurch area was close to 1000 by September 1910, two months after its national establishment. Some hundreds of people attended various functions, and the range was such as to appeal to both sexes; a progressive euchre and dancing evening, for example, was attended by 240 people. The party platform received considerable publicity through the Trades Council's column in the *Lyttelton Times*. The Canterbury General committee of the party appointed as organizer Harry Campbell, who had worked as a navy and agitator in railway works around the country. Campbell set to work industriously, reporting that 'wherever he had addressed meetings of workers he had found that there was an almost unanimous opinion that neither of the two existing political parties was of much use to the workers, and that their only chance lay in organising a strong Labour Party and returning men of their

39 LT, 22 October 1910, p.6.

40 LT, 1909 23 March, p.7; 24 March, p.7; 1 April, p.8. Hart was referring particularly to numerous redundancies at the Addington Railway Workshops.

41 LT, 24 March 1909, p.8; and more generally LT late March-mid April 1909.

42 LT, 1 Apr 1909, p.6; 7 May, p.6; 25 May, p.12; 21 February 1910, pp.6, 7. See also R.L. Weitzel, 'Pacifists and Anti-Militarists in New Zealand, 1909-1914', NZJH, 7, 2, 1973.

own class to Parliament'.⁴³ Campbell, however, was sacked in November; his militant views almost certainly clashed with the more cautious line of the Christchurch hierarchy. The main issue was whether to open the party to ex-Liberals, and the dispute reflected a struggle which did serious damage to the Canterbury Trades Council in 1910-12, where the majority faction wanted labour to lead a broad-based socialist party that would enlist the support of others besides manual workers. The minority (who became politically aligned with the Socialist Party) believed that this would lead to a dilution of radical purpose; they advocated a smaller party based on trade unions and open only to workers.⁴⁴

The controversy was conducted (often bitterly) in public halls, on soapboxes, and through the columns of the *Lyttelton Times*. The anti-NZLP faction, led by the labourer Ted Howard, concentrated much of their attack on the arbitration system and the NZLP's support of it. They also implied that militant industrial unionism alone would realize socialist aims, and tended to dismiss electoral organization. Dan Sullivan, of the Furniture Trades Union, became Howard's chief antagonist; he warned that 'industrial unionism is fraught with tremendous possibilities of evil to the cause of labour . . . start out to overturn the capitalist system by the use of physical strength, and the employers will retaliate with a similar weapon'.⁴⁵ It was a dispute not resolved until 1913.

Yet political necessity could encourage co-operation. Christchurch labour had significant electoral success in the 1911 municipal elections. A united labour front was formed, comprising the NZLP and a number of unions including the General Labourers and Drivers. These two unions had had a long dispute with the City Council, which refused to recognize the right of Council workers to be represented by union officials. Council labourers and drivers had also been unsuccessfully seeking a wage rise. On two occasions, labourers and others had demonstrated in their hundreds outside the Council chambers; Tommy Taylor, a sitting Councillor and the city's best-known left Liberal, had publicly endorsed the workers' cause. Their attempts to negotiate rejected, the unions declared their intention of organizing to return sympathetic councillors.⁴⁶ The election was of added importance since for the first time all residents of municipalities were entitled to vote, the effect of the property qualification being thus reduced. Months were spent enrolling voters. The labour front endorsed Tommy Taylor

43 LT, 16 September 1910, p.4; 23 August 1910, p.6; 18 August 1910, p.6.

44 LT, 28 November 1910, p.8; 3 December, p.6; 6 December, p.3; also H. Roth, 'The New Zealand Socialist Party', *Political Science*, 8, 1956. Initially, the dispute was over a clause in the party constitution which allowed any sitting MP who joined the NZLP to be renominated for his seat without opposition. This was obviously a carrot held out to the left Liberals, but Campbell believed that the party should have no dealings with them. The majority faction within the Trades Council included Hiram Hunter (secretary of the Drivers Union), Dan Sullivan, and Jack McCullough; the minority was centered on the Shearers and General Labourers' Unions and leant toward the Red Federation of Labour.

45 See generally LT, December 1910-January 1911 for the ongoing debate.

46 LT, 19 April 1910, p.6; 20 April, pp.6, 9; 3 May, p.9; 5 July, p.3.

for the mayoralty; he won by a significant plurality.⁴⁷ Labour took all four seats in the working-class Sydenham ward by an overwhelming majority, and one seat in the more mixed Linwood ward. As well, Bob Whiting, of the Bootmakers' Union, topped the poll for the borough council in largely working-class Spreydon. An 'enormous and decidedly pro-labour crowd' watched the results in the Square; many had come in from Sydenham by tram. Taylor had high hopes of his labour allies, but unfortunately they were in a minority. Four months after the election, Taylor died suddenly and the Council replaced him with a conservative. Despite this setback, the potential of Labour's electoral base had been graphically indicated.

The 1911 general election demonstrated further gains for Labour, but was fraught with acrimonious debate. The NZLP's efforts were co-ordinated nationwide by 'Professor' Walter Thomas Mills, the American propagandist. Originally contracted to do a simple lecture-tour, Mills quickly became influential in the NZLP organization; 'with promiscuous enthusiasm [he] wooed Single Taxers, Prohibitionists, women, and Christians'.⁴⁸ It was this that initially caused the Socialist Party and Red Federation to become disenchanted with Mills. Perhaps with some justification, they believed that Mills ignored socialist fundamentals. But Mills could draw the crowds, and was a significant figure in the Labour Party's campaign.⁴⁹

The NZLP campaign stressed opposition to conscription, reform of the arbitration system, nationalization of monopolies, increased income tax, a Right to Work Act, and the end to sales of Crown land. The Christchurch Liberals, while maintaining their left-wing stance, again campaigned more or less on their own and the Government's record.⁵⁰ Labour made some major gains. In Christchurch East, Hiram Hunter of the Drivers Union took 2315 votes, only 42 behind T.H. Davey. The poll was led by Dr Henry Thacker, a flamboyant Independent Liberal, with 2462 votes. Had Fred Cooke's 408 Socialist Party votes gone to Hunter, the runoff (which Davey won) would have been between Hunter and one of the Liberals. Ell managed a first-ballot victory but was less than 600 ahead of the bootmaker Whiting. Ted Howard took 535 votes as Socialist Party candidate; together, he and Whiting got 1500 more votes than James Thorn had in 1908. In this electorate, too, the Socialist-NZLP fight may have allowed the Liberals to hold on. In semi-rural Riccarton, Dan Sullivan took 1500 votes; this was third behind a Reform candidate's 2000 and George Witty's 3000 votes. In Avon the NZLP result (802) was low, but still better than in 1908.

47 Taylor was neither a worker nor a unionist; his endorsement by the labour front was clearly a reflection of NZLP attitudes rather than those of the Socialist Party.

48 Erik Olssen, 'W.T. Mills, E.J.B. Allen, J.A. Lee, and Socialism in New Zealand', NZJH, 19, 2 (1985), p. 116.

49 In a pamphlet inspired by Mills, the NZLP claimed that land reform was the most important social issue, and this because 'the use of land is practically the only opportunity the man of small means has whereby he shall not have to labour directly under the rule of others'. These views did not differ from New Zealand liberalism, and in failing to refer to the class struggle drew much Red Fed ire. But Mills was able to draw the crowds, and was instrumental in establishing or strengthening NZLP branches. NZLP pamphlet, in J.T. Paul papers, Hocken Library, University of Otago, 982/26.

50 For the election see LT, November-mid December 1911.

James McCombs, as an independent and prohibitionist labour candidate, took most of labour's potential votes, with 2787 to George Russell's 2999, and was the only labour candidate to get to a second ballot in Christchurch; he finished then only 300 behind Russell.⁵¹ The left Liberals had held on in Christchurch, but labour had knocked some very large holes in Liberal majorities. But there was also a warning for labour. Socialist candidates in Christchurch South and Christchurch East had been strong enough to take a crucial margin away from the NZLP. A parliamentarist approach was clearly preferred by workers, but it should not be forgotten, as one historian has noted, that the NZLP was 'well to the left of any other labour party in the English-speaking world'.⁵² The dispute was much more about tactics than aims.

The temperature of debate increased after the 1911 election, in Christchurch and nationally.⁵³ At its national conference in April 1912, the Socialist Party — the Christchurch branch of which was the largest in the country — adopted as the means towards the socialization of the means of production, distribution, and exchange a threefold platform of (in order of necessary priority) education, industrial organization, and political organization. The party further resolved that the unity of the Labour movement 'can only be effected and effective if based upon the revolutionary Marxian conception of the class struggle'.⁵⁴ The NZLP eschewed such language. At the April 1912 conference of Trades Councils, the NZLP was transformed, in accordance with W.T. Mills' Unity scheme, into the United Labour Party (ULP). A lengthy objective envisaged that 'the means of production, distribution, and exchange (insofar as they constitute in private hands instruments of oppression and exploitation) shall be socially owned and operated without profit and for the common good of all'.⁵⁵

The ULP in Christchurch devoted much energy to seeking union affiliations, but had limited success, despite the fact that its organizers were able and respected unionists. Those involved in the formation of the ULP had varying

51 LT, 8 December 1911, p.7; 15 December 1911, p.16.

52 Olssen, 'Origins of the Labour Party', p.89; Gustafson, pp.39-44; The strong preference for the NZLP was probably due to a number of factors. Libby Plumridge has suggested that the Christchurch working class was demographically fairly stable; many were settled and aspired to home ownership, and therefore preferred the gradualist approach of the NZLP. Perhaps also the Socialists did not appear to have a clear parliamentary programme: their emphasis was on the Red Feds' direct action philosophies and as a voting choice, they may have been largely a protest vote. The NZLP clearly intended to become a mass party. Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch', pp.23-32.

53 The divisions were informed by a wide knowledge of radical and socialist thought from Europe and the United States. Dan Sullivan often discussed in populist vein the clash of interests between monopolists and consumers, rather than that between workers and capitalist ownership in itself. He linked this analysis to a political programme which relied exclusively on parliamentary action, quoting in support of this position European socialists such as Bernstein and Jaurès. LT, 2 March 1912, p.12; 26 March 1912, p.2.

54 Proceedings of 1912 Socialist Party conference, Socialist Party papers, University of Canterbury Library. 110 of the 429 national membership were in the Christchurch branch; the next largest branches were Auckland with 66 and Runanga with 50.

55 Handbill in J.T. Paul papers, 982/18; H. Roth, 'Buying a Labour Party: Fowlds, Mills, and the ULP', *Political Science*, 20, 1968.

motives. George Fowlds, a wealthy Auckland draper who had resigned from Ward's cabinet, may have hoped to use the Labour movement as a vehicle for his own ideas on land tenure. The views of some right-wing unionists such as John Thomas Paul of Dunedin were expressed by the ULP platform.⁵⁶ Others, however — particularly Jack McCullough of Christchurch and the Dunedin gunsmith Arthur McCarthy — adopted the ULP as the best available alternative to the Red Fed line, about which they had serious tactical reservations.⁵⁷

The worst conflict between the Red Feds and the ULP was, not surprisingly, over the strikes at Waihi and Reefton. The attitude of the Federation's trade union opponents reflected both an analysis that direct action could not work and, perhaps, a fear of alienating left Liberals. Trades Councils in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch refused to give any aid to the strikes. Many individual unions in Christchurch were rather more sympathetic and made donations to the strikers. Dan Sullivan, who conducted the Canterbury TLC's column in the *Lyttelton Times*, criticized the Waihi strike as evidence of the Red Federation's violent and barbaric intent. The Federation responded vigorously, pointing out that the strikers had acted with exemplary orderliness and discipline; Ted Howard castigated Sullivan as one of a number of 'paid servants of the master class'.⁵⁸ The ULP's attitude was that 'the American system of warfare is not suitable in a country where the working-man's vote is of the same value as that of the managing director of the Waihi mines . . . we are now running the risk of losing laws that have greatly improved the position of many of our workers'.⁵⁹ Fowlds and Mills led the ULP executive to refuse any protest against the jailing of picketers; these two had wanted to publish an outright condemnation of the strike but Jack McCullough and his allies deflected this.⁶⁰

The defeat of the strikers had a profound effect on the Labour movement in Canterbury. Dan Sullivan made no comment, although a few days earlier he had said of a similar though less bloody defeat at Huntly that the Federation's 'ignominious surrender . . . may be taken as the measure of its strength, and incidentally as an indication of the value of the workers' "economic power". J.T. Paul, however, wrote lengthily and insensitively of the stupidity of the strike and the alleged outrages committed by the Federation.⁶¹ The general reaction among working people was a massive contrast to that of the ULP hierarchy; a

56 Paul, born in Victoria in 1874, migrated to New Zealand as a youth. A typographer by trade, he was for many years the most important figure in the Otago Trades Council. He was a prominent advocate of the PLL when it was established, but, of conservative (religious and teetotal) disposition and courted by Seddon, became much less radical and only wholeheartedly embraced Labour when the demise of the Liberals was obvious. See Gustafson, chs 1-2.

57 Roth, 'Buying a Labour Party'; these conclusions are also supported by correspondence in the Arthur McCarthy papers, Hocken Library. See also LT, 30 April 1912, p.2; and Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement 1897-1912*, New York, 1968, p.180. See also the correspondence in folders II, IV, and V of the McCarthy papers; TLC, 25 April 1912; Minutes of the Furniture Trades Union, 11 December 1912, Tailoring Trades Union, 10 December 1912; LT, 23 June 1912, p.7.

58 LT, 17 August 1912, p.16; 20 August, p.8; 24 September, p. 4.

59 *Maoriland Worker* (MW), 19 July 1912, p.8; 26 July, p.9; 9 August, p.4.

60 Telegram by Jack McCullough, quoted in H. Roth, 'Buying a Labour Party', p.30.

61 LT, 2 November 1912, p.16; 23 November, p.16.

wave of grief and horror swept the city and thousands were unable to get into the hall to hear Bob Semple a few days after Black Tuesday, the day the strikers were run out of Waihi. Only five or six students opposed the motion condemning 'the most atrocious and lawless acts'; after the meeting the students were chased around the town with sticks. Numerous unions passed resolutions condemning the government and calling for a public inquiry.⁶²

The Red Feds' response to the defeat at Waihi was an invitation to all trade unions to a Unity Conference in January 1913. Some in the ULP were hostile; Dan Sullivan compared the Federation's invitation to that of the spider to the fly and claimed little interest among unions.⁶³ A few days later, however, the *Lyttelton Times* reported that the Federation's efforts looked set to 'meet with a good deal of success'. Bob Semple and Ted Howard addressed a large meeting the week before the conference opened.⁶⁴

The conference opened with 79 organizations represented, of which 27 were from Christchurch. Obviously, the predictions of the ULP leaders had not been realized.⁶⁵ John Petterd, an old member of the Canterbury Typographical Association, summed up the situation in a letter to the Dunedin socialist, Arthur McCarthy. Unity, wrote Petterd, 'is a movement of the rank and file, as workers, as men, we have too long been separated — our aims are identical, our hopes, our dangers, the same — we have wasted valuable years fighting amongst ourselves — and our *would-be leaders* are to a great extent to blame — the rank-and-file want to see these differences swept away — want to feel that the workingclass movement is a *forward* movement.'⁶⁶ Petterd might also have added that the rank and file seemed to prefer a more left-wing platform than that adopted by the ULP. The Conference established a United Federation of Labour with virtually the same structure as the Red Federation, and a Social Democratic Party (SDP) with the objective of 'the socialisation of the collectively used means of production, distribution, and exchange'. Dan Sullivan, a sudden convert to the cause, reported long and hearty cheering at the conference when the decision to unite was made. The new organizations were to be submitted to a reconvened conference in July for final approval.⁶⁷ Unity Committees were established in the various cities, in co-operation with the national committee, to prepare for the second conference. Sullivan's report to the Canterbury TLC was received 'with eulogistic thanks', and the Council endorsed the conference's decisions.⁶⁸ The enthusiasm was widespread; Semple and Mills addressed a packed and enthusi-

62 LT, 18 November 1912, p.7; MW, 29 November, p.7.

63 LT, 14 December 1912, p.16; MW, 17 January 1913, p.7.

64 LT, 3 January 1913, p.5; 13 January, p.5.

65 The historian of the Red Feds suggests that the Federation hierarchy was in part prompted to seek unity by a desire to outflank the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) element in the Federation; the IWW, although small, became very aggressive in and around Auckland after Waihi and blamed the Federation leadership for the defeat. Olssen, *Red Feds*, pp.163-4.

66 Petterd to McCarthy, 2 May 1913, McCarthy papers, folder VIII.

67 The progress of the Unity Conference itself has been discussed elsewhere. See Olssen, *Red Feds*, ch.13.

68 LT, 27 January 1913, p.8; TLC, 30 January 1913.

astic theatre a few weeks after the conference. The *Red Flag* was sung, the Prime Minister, William Massey, was booed, and a resolution endorsing the decisions of the Unity Conference was carried unanimously.⁶⁹ Workers had another opportunity to show their feelings about Massey when the man himself addressed a public meeting. Cheers were given for the Waihi strikers; the *Red Flag* sung when Massey mentioned land policy, and the customary motion of thanks and confidence heavily defeated. A week later the Social Democrats again crowded the theatre out when Dan Sullivan, Ted Howard, Paddy Webb, and the veteran socialist tailor Fred Cooke denounced the Prime Minister at length.⁷⁰

Behind the heckling and street politics was a good deal of hard work by the Christchurch Unity Committee: individual unions were canvassed, and pamphlets and newspaper articles written. Meetings were held on the wharves, at factories, and for the general public. The progress of the Unity Campaign in Christchurch was closely linked to that against militarism; many activists in one were heavily involved in the other. The SDP had been established in Christchurch some months before it was formally inaugurated by the July Unity Congress; most ULP branches simply changed over. Municipal elections in April were fought by the SDP, which openly declared itself to be 'standing in the interests of the working class'. A long and thorough campaign was mounted to get the vote out; the position was maintained on the city council with the four Sydenham seats and one from Linwood. SDP candidates won the mayoralty in the boroughs of Woolston and Riccarton and Bob Whiting had already succeeded to the Spreydon mayoralty. The SDP in Christchurch was already a mass party.⁷¹

The July Unity Congress opened with 391 delegates present, of whom 66 came from Christchurch. The only major skilled group not represented from the city was the carpenters; both carpenters unions were still aligned to the Liberal Party. The constitutions of the SDP and of the United Federation of Labour were ratified overwhelmingly, although in the case of the latter with some reduction of syndicalist content.⁷² Some ULP members met in Wellington a few days after the Congress had finished and declared their intention to keep that party going. They aimed 'by constant revision and improvement of the existing conditions of society to advance the well-being of the people as a whole and not merely the sectional interests of a class'. The leading lights were the ex-watersider and bootmaker David McLaren of Wellington and J.T. Paul of Dunedin.⁷³

The ULP rump had little support in Christchurch. Bob Whiting was the only prominent Christchurch unionist who continued to support the ULP, and one branch voted to remain separate. McLaren visited the city at the end of July, and reported to Paul that many former ULP unions had 'lost heart' as far as that organization was concerned, but he was optimistic that the new organizations

69 LT, 3 February 1913, p.8.

70 LT, 12 March 1913, p.9; 17 March, p.9; MW, 21 March 1913, p.3.

71 See LT, generally March-May 1913.

72 Olssen, *Red Feds*, pp.171-4.

73 LT, 12 July 1913, p.14; McCarthy Papers, folder X, which suggests that McLaren's enthusiasm for the ULP was of recent origin and that he had done no work for the party before the Unity Congress and had not even answered mail despite being on the national executive.

would gain little support. Two days later, Bob Semple demonstrated the futility of McLaren's hopes. Semple addressed the Trades Council and 'convinced the men who had fought him for years, and a resolution was carried unanimously; that delegates would do their utmost to induce their Unions to join the UF of Labour . . . Everybody seems to be carried away with Semple's utterances on that night, and if the present feeling keeps up, they will capture a large number of the Unions here.'⁷⁴

A meeting of Unity Congress delegates, representing most of the important unions in Christchurch, repudiated the attempt to keep the ULP going, and claimed that Paul had pledged to support the Congress decisions. There was much controversy over whether Paul had made such a pledge; Bob Whiting reported to Paul that the issue 'was the talk of the town all yesterday and last night. As I went through the Town I found small groups discussing the question, and some of the men stated to me that they believed you would admit having made the pledge.'⁷⁵ Such a level of interest in labour's political affairs was unprecedented. Jack McCullough was severely critical of his old friend McLaren. McCullough, like many others in the ULP, had been enthusiastic enough about the party when it was formed, but recognized the imperative of unity after Waihi.⁷⁶ As Dan Sullivan put it, 'the great mass of the workers who support our movement . . . want the concrete reality of a powerful movement, which they can support with confidence in its capacity to fight their battles industrially and politically'.⁷⁷ The SDP quickly achieved far more strength in Christchurch than did the UFL; there remained a strong bias towards parliamentary action and unions were generally slow to affiliate to the Federation despite the enthusiastic reception given to Semple and other national leaders. The strength of the UFL was concentrated in the same sectors as the old Red Federation. Thus, when the employers moved against the UFL in October 1913 it was relatively weak.⁷⁸

Waihi had indicated the lengths to which employers and the Massey government were prepared to go in order to break militant unionism. Early in 1913 the New Zealand Employers' Federation established a Defence Fund to 'Combat Socialism, Syndicalism, and Anarchy'. A secret meeting at the Christchurch Chamber of Commerce planned in August to form a reserve force of strikebreakers.⁷⁹ The Labour Disputes Investigation Act was passed in September 1913 and closely reflected the employers' agenda; it effectively outlawed industrial unionism, provided heavier penalties for unions than for employers, and widened the definition of a strike to include refusing to enter a new contract. Large

74 Whiting to Paul, 3 August 1913, J.T. Paul Papers, Hocken Library, 982/359

75 *ibid.*, 11 August 1913.

76 McCullough to McCarthy, 1 June 1913, McCarthy folder III. McCullough believed that 'The sort of "tripe" dished up by Mac is the stuff that has convinced so many honest workers that the most effective way to destroy the usefulness of a Labour man is to put him into Parliament', and he wished 'to the Lord it were possible to force Mac into his former position of having to hang round the wharf waiting for an hour or two's work' in order to remind him of old beliefs.

77 LT, 2 August 1913, p.6.

78 LT, 28 July 1913, p.11; and generally through August 1913. See also Olssen, *Red Feds*, pp.173-4.

79 LT, 7 February 1913, p.4; 30 April, p.4; 8 August, p.5.

protest meetings were held in Christchurch by unions and the SDP.⁸⁰ The great strike began the following month in the Huntly mines and on the Wellington waterfront; it spread by way of sympathy strikes to other centres.⁸¹

In Christchurch only the Lyttelton watersiders actually went out. But most unions in the city actively supported the strikers. The General Labourers put themselves in the hands of the local strike committee and voted a levy of 5% of wages. The largest meeting of drivers ever held in the city made a voluntary levy and banned goods consigned to or from the wharves. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers unanimously resolved on financial support; the Moulders and Boilermakers voted levies of one and two shillings a week respectively. The Tailoresses and Pressers voted sympathy, £10, and a levy of a shilling a week; the (mostly male) Tailoring Trades Union voted to give all funds in its possession over £100. The Operative Bootmakers voted by 268 to 50 to donate £150, and when several members of the union accepted employment as special constables they were 'written to intimating that we condemn their conduct as being subversive of the principles of unionism'. Even the oldest of craft unions, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, voted a voluntary levy of a shilling after being addressed by Ted Howard.⁸² In the face of such solidarity it was little surprise that the Chief Justice moved to outlaw unions contributing financially to others' strikes.

The day before strikebreakers started at Lyttelton the Waterside Workers' Union issued a manifesto which related the strike to years of dissatisfaction with the Arbitration Court and the Liberals. The union asked, 'if arbitration fails workers in matters upon which politicians are diffident to legislate, is it any wonder that confidence in the scheme is supplanted by criticism? And when arbitration fails, what other means can be adopted to protect the workers' interests but the strike, particularly when a Government is in power whose only effort at labour legislation has been along the lines of coercion and repression?' The manifesto ended with an

appeal to the workers to be loyal to their class and to show their reprobation of a Government whose law and order is a semi-military display of batons and firearms, and whose whole attitude towards a constitutional and peacefully-conducted strike has been destitute of any sense of moral purpose in the world and empty of any understanding of the facts of the workers' lives.

A response to this appeal will ensure victory, and, what is essential to greatness in any country, an independent and self-reliant working class.⁸³

80 LT, 16 September 1913, p.5; 20 September, p.16; 29 September, p.5; 6 October, p.8; 11 October, p.9. The ban on refusing to enter new contracts was aimed at the tactic successfully employed by the shearers in 1910 when despite the Court refusing to award 20 shillings a hundred, the union refused to accept contracts at less than that. See LT, 11 June 1910, p.9; 21 June, p.9; 8 July, p.5.

81 The strike is dealt with in Olssen, *Red Feds*, chs 14-16.

82 Minutes of General Labourers Union, 11 November 1913; Operative Bootmakers, 26 November 1913; Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, 18 November 1913; and of other unions during November 1913 as cited.

83 LT, 18 November 1913, pp.10, 11.

Public meetings in support of the strike were continuing; Paddy Webb drew 5000 in the city at the end of November.⁸⁴ The Lyttelton by-election in December 1913 was widely seen as a referendum on the strike, and on the government's handling of it.

The Lyttelton seat had become vacant on the death of the incumbent, George Laurenson. Laurenson had been one of the more left-wing of the Liberal Party and had never been opposed by a Labour candidate. On his death he was eulogized as 'amongst the few men in Parliament who at the present time were brave enough to stand up on a platform on behalf of Labour'. A thousand striking watersiders led his cortege to the grave in Wellington.⁸⁵ The SDP selected as its candidate the prohibitionist, draper, and former left Liberal, McCombs.⁸⁶ The Reform candidate opened his campaign in Woolston, home of the country's first and largest SDP branch. The hall was overcrowded, and not friendly. A particular grievance was the early closing of the rolls and consequent disenfranchisement of many potential SDP voters. The North Canterbury organizer for the Farmers Union, David Jones, was present and was booed. The meeting closed early with only four people dissenting from a vote of no confidence in Reform. McCombs also drew large crowds, including 4000 at a meeting in the city on a Saturday evening, speaking not only on the strike but also the SDP platform generally, which advocated reform of the Arbitration Court with compulsory preference and a minimum wage, nationalization of certain industries, taxation reform, the repeal of conscription, and the introduction of proportional representation. Much of the campaign's publicity work was done by the Women's Social Democratic Committee, directed by Elizabeth Taylor (widow of Tommy Taylor) who must have reinforced McCombs' own appeal to erstwhile left Liberals.⁸⁷ The Liberal candidate, brother of the deceased, enjoyed friendly meetings but no votes of confidence. He also had little support from the Liberal Party generally; no national figures spoke in his support and the party was either taking the seat for granted or resigned to losing to the SDP.

The Liberal party was the real casualty of the first ballot with less than a thousand votes, with 1560 for Reform and 2075 for the SDP. In the second ballot McCombs won by 200, but Reform increased its vote by almost a thousand. Clearly many former Liberals had gone to Reform. The Liberal party's demise, and the eventual unity between skilled unionists, the unskilled, and erstwhile radical Liberals, which took shape across the country during World War One, were foreshadowed.⁸⁸ McCombs himself personified the way in which former left Liberals could base themselves in the labour movement and appeal across

84 LT, 1 December 1913, p.7; 2 December, p.7; 3 December, p.9.

85 LT, 20 November 1913, p.2; 24 November, p.5. Possibly even without the strike the Social Democrats would have been well placed to inherit Lyttelton; as well as the port town it contained other working-class areas such as Woolston.

86 Plumridge, pp.139-42. Candidate selection was by a poll of all party members in the electorate.

87 The point is made by Plumridge, p.140; for the campaign generally see LT, 27 November-10 December 1913.

88 LT, 17 December 1913, p.8; MW, 24 December 1913.

class lines from a socialist platform. The labour front's coalition with Tommy Taylor in 1911 had presaged McCombs' victory and highlighted the mixture of populist radicalism and socialism that produced results for labour in Christchurch. Both these landmark victories were clearly related to political issues and industrial conflict; in both cases aggression from employers and the state compelled labour unity, and in both cases unity preceded a measure of electoral success. Politically, Christchurch workers by 1914 were thinking overwhelmingly in terms of class. The working-class culture out of which the SDP arose was a highly politicized one, and this mass politicization was the response of workers to issues of workplace, municipal, and state power and the ways in which that power was used against them.

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