

‘Our Motto, No Compromise’:

THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS AND FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF NEW ZEALAND¹

ON 9 APRIL 1921 a small group of people met in Wellington’s Socialist Hall to form the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ). The hall had been a focal point of the left wing in Wellington for more than a decade. With the establishment of the new revolutionary organization the building was renamed the Communist Hall, symbolizing that the party saw itself embarking on a new path. In continuing to use the old hall, however, it had self-consciously maintained a connection with previous left-wing traditions. This was not simply wishful thinking, for the newly established CPNZ did bring together elements of three revolutionary traditions which had emerged from within the New Zealand Socialist Party (NZSP) during the period 1910 to 1913.

The CPNZ is the most important and longest standing organization of the New Zealand left. Yet the party’s history has been relatively neglected and misinterpreted. Historians have repeatedly suggested that the New Zealand Marxian Association (NZMA), which represented one of the three revolutionary traditions, was the dominant force in the formation of the CPNZ. Gordon Watson, a prominent communist intellectual during the 1930s, first claimed that the CPNZ grew ‘out of the Marxian Association’.² Another influential account, also originating within the communist tradition, argues that the NZMA was the ‘direct forerunner’ of the CPNZ.³ These two accounts have served as the basis for the continuing acceptance of the proposition that the NZMA was the crucial contributor to the CPNZ. Two subsequent generations of historians have accepted this. Joseph Powell, in his influential thesis on the early years of the party, relied heavily on Watson as his authority, while Sid Scott’s widely read autobiographical account relied on Andy Barras to bolster his failing memory.⁴ Bert Roth also accepted the conventional position, arguing that the NZMA ‘was transformed into the N.Z. Communist Party’.⁵ All other sources, whether they be

1 I would like to thank Malcolm McKinnon, Phyllis Herda and Erik Olssen for commenting on earlier drafts of this article and to acknowledge similar help from the late Bert Roth.

2 Gordon Watson, ‘Pages in N.Z. Communist History’, *New Zealand Labour Review* (NZLR) (October 1952), p.20.

3 Andy Barras, ‘Origins of the New Zealand Communist Party’, NZLR, (December 1949), p.28.

4 J.R. Powell, ‘The History of a Working Class Party’, MA thesis, Victoria College, Wellington, 1949, p.5; Sid Scott, *Rebel in a Wrong Cause*, Auckland, 1960, pp.39-40.

5 Bert Roth, ‘The October Revolution and New Zealand Labour’, *Political Science* (PS), XIII (September 1961), p.54. The same view was maintained in his other writings on the CPNZ.

academic or from the communist political tradition, portray the same basic account, usually citing one or more of these accounts as their authority.⁶

The received version distorts the origins and foundation of the CPNZ. While not irrelevant, the NZMA was by no means as central as suggested by these accounts. Another revolutionary tradition, which had an affinity with the socialist theories of Daniel De Leon, was a more influential force in the regrouping of the political left into a Communist Party. The syndicalist tradition, first embodied in the Industrial Workers of the World, also enjoyed some influence. Given the importance of the CPNZ, both within the labour movement and in defining the meaning of 'left' in New Zealand's politics, it is important to understand its origins and its relationship to the traditions which shaped it.

The intellectual origins of the CPNZ can only be understood by analysing the various ideologies which existed within the New Zealand Socialist Party (NZSP). From the beginning, this organization, established in 1901, included people of several persuasions, but between 1906 and 1913 the ideological diversity of the early years took on a new dimension. Along with a diverse range of reformism there emerged a greater range of revolutionary positions.⁷ Until 1911 the revolutionaries, who dominated the party, worked together to combat the reformists, but as a more acute awareness of ideological differences developed they began competing with each other. Three ideological perspectives emerged in this period which later fed into the communist movement.

The first attached equal weight to the twin pillars of revolutionary politics and industrial unionism. This general viewpoint was by far the most significant within the NZSP during this period and was later the central influence in the early Communist Party. This perspective roughly equated with the two-wings theory of the American Daniel De Leon.⁸ Some New Zealand socialists, such as those who were members of the Wellington branch of the Socialist Labor Party of Australia, were direct and self-conscious followers of De Leon. When this group collapsed in 1907 many of its members entered the Wellington branch of the Socialist Party and sought to win it to De Leonism.⁹ The Socialist Federation of

6 See Josephine Milburn, 'Socialism and Social Reform in Twentieth Century New Zealand', PS, XII (September 1960), p.170; Patrick O'Farrell, *Harry Holland: Militant Socialist*, Canberra, 1964, pp.109-110, 115; Barry Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence*, Auckland, 1980, p.146. The New Zealand Communist movement fragmented during the 1960s, yet all the fragments accept the same version of the origins of their tradition. The Socialist Unity Party republished the articles by Watson and Barras in their theoretical journal, *Socialist Politics*, and put the same line in their booklet *Communism in New Zealand: an illustrated history*, Auckland, 1986. The Communist Party of New Zealand reprinted the Barras account in 1971 and relied on the other accounts in its October 1981 special edition of the *People's Voice* devoted to Party history. The Workers Communist League, in a series on communist history, also put the conventional line: see *Unity*, March 1981.

7 The best accounts of the early socialist movement, including the NZSP, are Valerie Smith, "'Gospel of Hope" or "Gospel of Plunder": Socialism from the mid 1890s up to and including the Blackball Strike of 1908', BA Hons research essay, Massey University, 1976; Bert Roth, 'The New Zealand Socialist Party', PS, IX (March 1957), pp.51-60.

8 L.G. Seretan, *Daniel De Leon: The Odyssey of an American Marxist*, Cambridge, Mass, 1979, esp. chs 5-8.

9 H.J. Hatcher to Secretary of the Socialist Labor Party of Australia, 15 October 1907, Socialist Labor Party of Australia Papers, MS 2576/5, National Library of Australia.

Australasia, to which the NZSP was affiliated, was another source of this ideological current.¹⁰ Overseas socialists who came to New Zealand and spent time as lecturers and organizers also fed the De Leonite trend. During 1912 the NZSP had in its employment four overseas speakers, three of whom were strongly influenced by the ideas of De Leon.¹¹

Pamphlets imported from the United States were another major source of these ideas. Most of the literature from the United States, including the popular pamphlets of Eugene Debs, championed the two wings of political and industrial action.¹² Equally important were the ideas of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), founded in the United States during 1905 and which initially espoused the two-wings theory. Many members of the NZSP were supportive of the ideas of the IWW (whose members were known as Wobblies) and that affinity was solidly cemented when the 1908 NZSP conference adopted the preamble of the IWW.¹³

The second strain of revolutionary ideology took only one of the two wings, industrial unionism, and placed it at the centre of the struggle for socialism. Supporters of this trend were hostile to political action, arguing that only by direct action at the point of production could socialism be won by the working class. There is evidence of this perspective within the NZSP at its 1908 conference, where a resolution against political action was defeated. This ideological current was invigorated when the IWW split in the United States, the majority favouring a more purely syndicalist perspective and rejecting the two-wings theory. The movement split into a direct-actionist Chicago IWW and a smaller De Leonite IWW.¹⁴ News of the split encouraged those in New Zealand who favoured industrial unionism over politics to begin organizing. From about 1911 the term IWW was used in New Zealand exclusively to denote the champions of direct action who shunned politics.

Some of those who advocated direct action tried to capture the NZSP. During 1911 some of the Wellington members sought a repudiation of political action.¹⁵ A few months later the editor of the Auckland branch newspaper, *Social Democrat*, advocated the establishment of an IWW which would have nothing to do with politics, a view which was quite widely held within the Auckland

10 Erik Olssen, *The Red Feds: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism and the New Zealand Federation of Labour 1908-1914*, Auckland, 1988, p.18, and Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921*, Sydney, 1979, pp.55-58.

11 They were H.M. Fitzgerald, Harry Scott Bennett and Harry Holland; see *Maoriland Worker* (MW), 28 June, 19 July 1912. On the De Leonite connection see Olssen, *Red Feds*, pp.16, 18, 113, 132.

12 Seretan, *Daniel De Leon*, p.122, suggests a considerable convergence of opinion between Debs and De Leon after a period where they had differed significantly. See also Nick Salvatore, *Eugene Debs: Citizen and Socialist*, Urbana, 1982, p.207.

13 *Commonweal* (CW), May 1908.

14 Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: a history of the Industrial Workers of the World*, Chicago, 1969, pp.138-40.

15 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 17 October 1911, Gerald Griffin Papers (GG), Acc 85-43, 2/18, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington.

branch.¹⁶ Other activists were aware of the contradiction in promoting an anti-political stance from within a political party and broke with the NZSP. The first of these splits came in Christchurch during October 1910 when several branch members established an IWW Club, which later transformed itself into a 'Local Recruiting Union of the IWW'.¹⁷ More spectacular, and successful, was the IWW which developed in Auckland, the immediate impetus for which came from five North American Wobblies who arrived in Auckland in late 1911. Within a few months they had established a local branch of the IWW and succeeded in winning to their cause a number of members of the Socialist Party, including branch secretary Tom Barker, an English-born tramwayman.¹⁸

The third significant revolutionary group which emerged from within the NZSP took the opposite view from the IWW. About 1910 a tendency emphasizing a purely political orientation emerged. This group followed the 'impossibilist' theories of the Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB).¹⁹ The SPGB opposed 'palliatives' and declared war on all other political parties, which it believed represented the interests of the 'master class'. For the SPGB and its New Zealand supporters, revolution would come when the workers had educated themselves to a position of class consciousness and an understanding of Marxist theory; in effect the revolution would be achieved by a class-conscious working class via the ballot box.²⁰

The first New Zealand advocate of these views was Ray Tune, an English immigrant, who joined the NZSP during 1910 and later ran the Wellington branch's economics class.²¹ Tune was a regular contributor to the pages of the *Maoriland Worker*, under the pseudonym 'The Clarion Scout', where he argued that the future class struggle would be essentially political. Those favouring industrial action over political were 'erroneous in the extreme'. Industrial unionism, he argued, 'acts well as a means of defence against further depredations . . . but as a means of offence it falls short of efficiency'. What was needed instead was revolutionary political action, leading to the return of 'class-conscious Marxian Socialists' to parliament.²²

The establishment of these separate groups devoted to particular ideologies, a process begun in 1910 with the establishment of the IWW groups, precipitated a general crisis for the NZSP. The crisis culminated in late 1913 with the effective dissolution of the party as a national organization, leaving three separate

16 Olssen, *Red Feds*, pp.117, 118, 129.

17 MW, 26 January, 23 June 1911. See also 'Student', 'Anarcho-Syndicalism in the N.Z. Labour Movement', NZLR (May 1950), pp.26-28.

18 MW, 19 April 1912. See also Eric Fry ed., *Tom Barker and the IWW*, Canberra, 1965, pp.10-11.

19 C. Tsuzuki, 'The "Impossibilist Revolt" in Britain', *International Review of Social History* (IRSH), I (1956), p.389; Robert Barltrop, *The Monument: the Story of the Socialist Party of Great Britain*, London, 1975, pp.1-9.

20 Declaration of Principles of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, in Barltrop, pp.9-10.

21 CW, May 1910, MW, 20 April 1911; Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 27 November 1912, GG, 2/18, ATL.

22 MW, 2 June 1911.

'impossibilist' groups, elements of which would later coalesce to form the Communist Party.

The IWW flourished, particularly in the north, amidst the industrial ferment of the period 1912-13. In the wake of the defeat of the strike at Waihi, however, their message that direct action was the only road to victory rankled with many of the Red Fed leaders who rediscovered their interest in political action.²³ An official repudiation of the IWW appeared in the *Maoriland Worker*. The IWW were unrepentant, however, affirming their views on the efficacy of strikes and stepping up their propaganda to this end.²⁴ Their most potent weapon was a newly established newspaper, the *Industrial Unionist*.

Joining the fray in October 1912 was a new organization, the Petone Marxian Club, which adopted the objectives and principles of the SPGB and devoted themselves 'exclusively for the discussion of Marxism'.²⁵ The prime mover in the group was initially Ray Tune, who in the same month led a Petone team in a debate against representatives of the Wellington Socialist Party branch on the topic of 'Direct Action v Political Action'. Tune enunciated a pure version of the SPGB position, attacking direct actionists as 'mentally incapable of comprehending what is meant by Revolutionary politics'. Only by understanding Marx could the workers move ahead. According to the Petone Marxists it was essential that political candidates were themselves workers, that they knew 'the first volume of *Capital* from A to Z' and had but 'one plank on their platform, and that is Revolution'.²⁶ By the end of 1912 the Club, which possessed only a handful of members and appears to have been a reconstituted branch of the NZSP, had abandoned the party as lost to the fantasy world of industrial unionism.

From late 1912 the New Zealand labour movement debated a series of unity proposals, which led to the establishment of a new political party, the Social Democratic Party, and a new union organization, the United Federation of Labour. The unity debate precipitated a serious rift within the NZSP, culminating in a third impossibilist revolt, centring on the Wellington branch of the party. The NZSP had been consistently hostile to any unity proposals,²⁷ a position reinforced at the 1912 NZSP conference, which adopted a manifesto specifically stating the party would 'not enter into any endorsements, fusions, bargains, or mutual understandings whatsoever with any other party which shall in any way compromise our principles'.²⁸ The conference resolved that any unity could only be 'effective if based upon the revolutionary Marxian conception of the class

23 Olssen, *Red Feds*, p.164.

24 MW, 13 December 1912. See also F.H. [Frank Hanlon], *Industrial Unionism: Aim, Form and Tactics of a Workers Union on I.W.W. Lines*, Auckland, 1913, and A.H. [A. Holdsworth], *Chunks of I.W.W.ism*, Auckland, 1913.

25 Minutes of the Petone Marxian Club, 21 October, 18 November 1912, Bert Roth Collection (BR), Auckland.

26 MW, 1 November 1912. Olssen in *Red Feds* p.170 suggests 'Clarion Scout' [i.e. Tune] was putting forward a De Leonist position. In fact Tune stated that Petone Marxists would not vote for people such as De Leon or La Monte.

27 MW, 20 November 1911.

28 'Manifesto of the New Zealand Socialist Party', GG, 3/2, ATL.

struggle'.²⁹

By the beginning of 1913, however, many leading figures in the Socialist Party and the Federation of Labour were of a view that unity was desirable and began trying to achieve an acceptable compromise.³⁰ There was considerable discussion of the unity proposals within the party. The national secretary, Fred Cooke, toured the country discussing the issues with the branches.³¹ The national conference, planned for Easter 1913, was re-scheduled to coincide with a second unity conference in July, to allow more time for discussion.³² It was only in the Wellington branch that a serious and sustained challenge to the unity proposals emerged. Most of the uncompromising 'left' critics within the NZSP in Auckland and Christchurch had earlier broken with the party and joined IWW groups, whereas in Wellington they had generally remained within the party.

There were therefore three broad positions within the Wellington branch in 1913. The first was sympathetic to the IWW and saw the unity proposals as a sell-out on two counts. First they strengthened political action and second they avoided the centrality of revolutionary industrial action.³³ There was a tense struggle within the branch between pro-political and anti-political factions. In March Bob Ross and Harry Holland, two of the leading intellectuals in the NZSP, initiated a move to have members who were opposed to political action expelled, but it was easily defeated, indicating the strength of the more radical views.³⁴ The second group was in fact led by Ross and Holland, who favoured the unity proposals, and they reflected the dominant position within the NZSP nationally. They were willing to compromise their position as revolutionaries for the sake of unity, and they were prepared to accept both arbitration and traditional political methods, two of the key points at issue.³⁵ A third position, taken by the majority of the branch, was to maintain an uncompromising revolutionary position based on both political and industrial action. Advocates of this perspective would only accept unity on the basis of a 'revolutionary watchword' which had at its core a rejection of arbitration and the promotion of revolutionary industrial unionism and strike action. The majority position was unambiguous: 'we do not support any other body . . . not out for revolution. Our Motto, No Compromise.'³⁶

This decision was more than the product of a few dominating individuals like Robert Hogg.³⁷ It had its roots in a revolutionary sub-culture which had developed in the city since the turn of the century. Erik Olssen has made a convincing

29 'Report of the Fifth Annual Conference of the New Zealand Socialist Party', New Zealand Socialist Party Records (NZSP), MS 62, University of Canterbury Library (UCL), Christchurch.

30 MW, 14 February, 11 April 1913.

31 MW, 10, 24 January, 21 February 1913.

32 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 14 March 1913, GG, 2/18, ATL.

33 See Bert Roth, 'New Zealand Wobblies', *Here and Now* (March 1952), pp.6-7.

34 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 26 February, 6 March 1913, GG, 2/18, ATL.

35 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 6, 12 March 1913, *ibid*.

36 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 12, 14 March 1913, *ibid*.

37 A view forwarded by Roth, 'The New Zealand Socialist Party', p.59. Hogg was a Scottish immigrant who worked as a journalist in Wellington.

case for the emergence of regionally distinct working-class cultures and sub-cultures.³⁸ Wellington was the first city to develop such a revolutionary sub-culture. A small but relatively stable core of revolutionaries fostered its development, which rested upon a number of factors. The reading and, more importantly, the production of socialist newspapers were fundamental. Wellington had a socialist newspaper continuously from 1903 and for a time two revolutionary socialist papers, *Commonweal* and the *Maoriland Worker*, were published in the city and produced by members of the branch.³⁹ Frequenting radical bookshops and reading radical literature were also important in building the sub-culture. Paul Joseph's bookshop, specializing in anarchist and socialist literature, was a central part of the Wellington scene, while the branch itself also sold literature. The literature secretary and librarian were among the most responsible and important positions within the branch. There also existed a world of hotels and boarding houses where one's politics as much as one's class was important. For example, Otto England, for a time vice-president of the branch, owned an inner-city hotel which was frequented by radicals.⁴⁰

Perhaps most importantly, the Socialist Party branch provided a relatively stable institutional base for this sub-culture. The Wellington branch was the first in the country and the only one with an uninterrupted existence from its foundation. It had its own premises, having opened its first hall at 35a Cuba Street during 1904. From about 1907 a new hall at 55a Manners Street was used, then in 1910 the famous hall at 80 Manners Street came into use. The possession of a physical space was important socially as well as politically: in addition to the meetings, dances, teas and euchre evenings were among the weekly events. The development and persistence of such a culture is crucial in explaining the history of Wellington as a centre for 'ultra-leftism'. It is indicative that those most prominent in pushing the unity scheme, Holland and Ross, were recent arrivals to New Zealand and the Wellington branch. Even though they were of national prominence the two men stood outside the social and political dynamics of the branch, and as a consequence were readily defeated.⁴¹

The 1913 NZSP national conference met in Wellington at the same time as the second unity conference. By then the positions within the NZSP were settled: the majority of the party nationally favoured unity, most of the Wellington members bitterly opposed it. To emphasize their uncompromising position the Wellington socialists held a public meeting to coincide with a crucial session of the unity conference. They refused to accede to requests to cancel it, forcing the NZSP conference to disassociate themselves from the branch.⁴² After the conferences the national executive of the NZSP sought the views of branches on the matter

38 In particular see *A History of Otago*, Dunedin, 1984, ch.8, and *Red Feds*, especially chs 4-8.

39 *Commonweal* eventually merged with the *Maoriland Worker*.

40 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 19 July 1911, GG, 2/18, ATL, and Fry, *Tom Barker*, p.12.

41 Ross and his supporters had earlier been defeated when they stood for office in the branch; Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 18 December 1912, 15 January 1913, GG, 2/18, ATL.

42 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 18 June 1913, *ibid.*, and Minutes of the June 1913 New Zealand Socialist Party Conference, NZSP, MS 65, UCL.

of joining the Social Democratic Party, which had been established at the unity conference. All but the Wellington branch eventually joined.⁴³ The staunchly impossibilist Wellington branch wrote to the national officers of the NZSP suggesting that in assisting the formation of a new political party they had gone against the principles of the party manifesto, and in the process wrecked the party.⁴⁴ As Olssen suggested, within the basis of the unity agreement there was no room for the IWW or the impossibilism of the Wellington socialists.⁴⁵ Undeterred, both groups, along with the Petone Marxists, set about getting on with their own separate lives.

While the ink on the unity agreement was still wet further industrial defeats confronted those excited by their achievement. Many of the revolutionaries who chose to remain outside the 'unified labour movement' were also active in the great strike of 1913. The Petone Marxian Club, however, remained true to their belief that those seeking change via strike action were wasting their energies. While the group's minutes record two nights of discussion on the strike, members of the club took no part; they continued fine tuning their knowledge of Marxism before quietly disbanding six weeks later.⁴⁶ Not until after the war would the many adherents of the principles of the SPGB again have an organizational focus.

In contrast to the Marxian Club, the IWW, centred in Auckland, was keen to be in on the action during the strike. Their organization was in good heart. The August issue of *Industrial Unionist* reported that in the previous six months over 100 out-door meetings had been held, the circulation of the paper was as high as 4000, and the first two locally produced leaflets had sold in their thousands. During the strike the paper was published almost every second day. Tom Barker, the key figure in the IWW, was one of the most active public speakers in favour of the strike.⁴⁷ However, the bubble burst, and in the wake of the failure of the strike the IWW, like its Petone counterpart, collapsed.⁴⁸ The collapse was partly self-destruction but the powerful hand of the state also had a significant part to play. The arrest of Barker and several other Wobblies on charges of sedition was a major blow to an organization so dependent on propagandists.⁴⁹ Attempts to resuscitate the *Industrial Unionist*, with the assistance of the Wellington Socialist Party, were unsuccessful, and Barker along with several leading Wobblies left for Australia to continue the struggle.⁵⁰

43 The bulk of the branches dissolved and the members joined newly-formed branches of the SDP. In Christchurch the Socialist Party members kept their branch going, and affiliated as the Socialist Party; see NZSP Cash Book, North Canterbury LRC Records, 3(C), UCL.

44 Minutes, Wellington Branch, NZSP, 12 September 1913, GG, 2/18, ATL.

45 Olssen, *Red Feds*, p.168.

46 Minutes, Petone Marxian Club, 10, 17 November 1913, BR. The last recorded meeting is January 1914. The exact reason for disbanding is not clear.

47 Roth, 'New Zealand Wobblies', p.7, and Fry, *Tom Barker*, pp.12-15.

48 *Solidarity*, 4 July 1914, reference in BR.

49 Fry, *Tom Barker*, p.13.

50 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 25 February 1914, GG, 2/18, ATL, and Fry, *Tom Barker*, p.15.

The Wobbly tradition was hard to kill. By August 1914 IWW groups were again reported to exist in Auckland and Wellington and by September the number had doubled with the addition of groups in Christchurch and Denniston.⁵¹ Like most radicals the IWW groups experienced a difficult and precarious existence during the war. Their opposition to the war meant that police raids and prosecutions were not uncommon, mail was censored and later all IWW literature was banned.⁵² Wobblies were active in Wellington on a free-speech campaign with the assistance of the Wellington Socialist Party, yet they were never the force of old.⁵³ *Direct Action* reported the existence of groups periodically until 1916 when they appear to have finally died out as an organization. After the war activists with attitudes akin to those of the IWW would again have a place within the New Zealand labour movement, many within the CPNZ.

Several historians have suggested that the New Zealand revolutionary left died by a self-inflicted wound in the context of the upheavals of 1912-13. G.D.H. Cole argued that 'The [New Zealand] Left . . . helped to wreck itself by its own extremism'.⁵⁴ Roth also concluded that the impossibilist policies of the party were such that 'even its own members revolted', the implication being that reformist rather than revolutionary politics was the 'New Zealand way' to socialism, a lesson learned the hard way during the conflict.⁵⁵ This tendency is in some respects the result of a widely accepted paradigm of New Zealand labour history which sees almost everything before 1935 as the pre-history of that great watershed, the election of the first Labour government. This paradigm diminishes the ability of historians to treat the subjects in their own terms. Roth, for example, saw the NZSP as important because it contributed to the 'important historical step', the formation of the New Zealand Labour Party.⁵⁶ This 'Labourist-Whig' theory has led to the history of the revolutionary left being relatively neglected and misunderstood. Roth suggested that while the Wellington Socialist Party (WSP) survived the turmoil of 1913 it was to 'peter out during the First World War'.⁵⁷ This is incorrect; the group survived through the war and into the subsequent decade, only dissolving when it became the main component of the CPNZ.

The newly independent Wellington Socialist Party was very active in the general strike and some members, such as Lou Glover and Jim Roberts of the

51 *Direct Action* (DA), 1, 8 August, 15 September 1914.

52 On police actions see, DA, 23 October 1915. Leo Woods, a Wobbly since 1913, served 18 months for opposing conscription; see 'Why I am a Communist', hand-written manuscript, 1968, in possession of Jack Locke. Former Australian wobblies were also targeted; see MW, 31 January 1917. On the censorship of mail see, John Anderson, 'Military Censorship in World War I: Its Use and Abuse in New Zealand', MA thesis, Victoria University, Wellington, 1952, p.223. On the banning of IWW literature see Anderson, pp.239-40.

53 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 16 October 1915, GG, 2/20, ATL. At the time the IWW in Wellington were operating under the name of the Industrial Club.

54 G.D.H. Cole, *A History of Socialist Thought: The Second International, 1889-1914*, Vol. III, part II, London, 1956, p.908.

55 Roth, 'The New Zealand Socialist Party', p.59.

56 *ibid.*, p.51.

57 *ibid.*, p.59.

Watersiders' Union, were among the strike leaders.⁵⁸ Unlike their 'impossibilist' colleagues they managed this without jeopardizing their future as an organization. In fact, early in 1914 the Wellingtonians made an attempt to revive a national organization separate from the SDP but the political differences proved irreconcilable and instead they set about revising their rules to adjust to the new situation.⁵⁹ Their policy of waging class war 'upon a basis of Revolutionary Industrial and Political Action' was again affirmed.⁶⁰ However, war would be the dominant issue for the next four years.

The war had a somewhat contradictory effect on the revolutionary left in New Zealand. Some groups, such as the IWW, struggled to survive under the increased scrutiny of the state. Yet the war also fostered greater co-operation between socialists. The co-operation between the WSP and the SDP in the struggle against conscription is an example.⁶¹ Several members of the old Petone Marxian Club joined up with the Wellington group during the war, presumably a sign of a shared opposition to it.⁶² There were, however, limits to this co-operation. For example, another attempt by the WSP to re-establish a national Socialist Party foundered on ideological differences.⁶³

The war also brought new areas of disunity. Those who showed any support for it were given very short shrift.⁶⁴ Later the WSP experienced a serious rupture which saw two leading figures, Roberts and Glover, leave the party having been declared traitors to the working class by their former comrades. The conflict centred on the belief that the Watersiders, in which they were leading figures, had reneged on an agreement to support striking miners.⁶⁵ A few months later the ousted members attempted to take over the party but were easily defeated.⁶⁶ The break with the WSP prompted Roberts and his associates to adopt an increasingly hostile attitude to political action and initiate what Olssen described as a second wave of syndicalism.⁶⁷

The war also dispersed socialists from the cities to the conscription-exempt West Coast mining industry. The West Coast's tradition of socialist and Marxist

58 The Wellington Socialists had a considerable influence in the union movement. On the union connections see Olssen, *Red Feds*, pp.82-83.

59 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 14, 21 February 1914, GG, 2/18, ATL.

60 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 6 May 1914, *ibid.*

61 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 26 August, 27 September 1914, *ibid.* See also MW, 10, 24 January 1917.

62 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 6 January 1915, 23 September 1917, GG, 2/18 and 2/20, ATL. Even before the war a member of the Petone group had been engaged to run an economics class for the Wellington socialists; see Minutes, 7 February 1914.

63 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 11 March 1916, 24 February 1918, GG, 2/19, ATL.

64 Minutes, Wellington Branch Socialist Party, 12, 15 August 1918, GG, 2/18, ATL.

65 Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland, 1988, pp.160-1; Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 12, 15 July 1917, GG, 2/19, ATL; 'Minutes of the NZ Waterside Workers' Federation Conference, December 1917', Jim Roberts Papers, B 13, Victoria University, Wellington; M. Slade, 'Industrial Unionism in New Zealand, 1916-1925: a Study of the Transport Workers Advisory Board and the Alliance of Labour', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1983, pp.13-14.

66 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 9 September 1917, GG, 2/20, ATL.

67 Olssen, *Red Feds*, p.222.

study groups⁶⁸ was bolstered by the war and the Marxist class at Millerton was reported to have over 50 members in 1917.⁶⁹ Several members of the Petone Marxian Club were active in Marxist groups on the Coast during the war, building on connections which had been made before the war.⁷⁰ It has been suggested that the influx of city socialists gave a new momentum to the West Coast movement but other accounts suggest the 'city boys' were the ones being radicalized.⁷¹ In this period most of those who labelled themselves Marxists or Marxians were adherents to the philosophy of the Socialist Party of Great Britain.⁷² This point was clearly demonstrated with the establishment of a New Zealand Marxian Association (NZMA) at a conference in Christchurch late in December 1918. The declaration and principles of the NZMA were a direct copy of those of the SPGB.⁷³ The delegates at the conference decided against establishing a socialist party, preferring a more education-centred Marxian Association.⁷⁴ The delegates, about a dozen in total, were mostly representatives of various West Coast groups, several being former members of the Petone Marxian Club, while others had been members of the Socialist Party of Canada which adhered to the SPGB philosophy.⁷⁵ Groups associated with the NZMA were established in several areas, including Petone, where the old group had revived some time prior to the formation of the NZMA.⁷⁶

The New Zealand political landscape was made and remade many times in the first decades of this century as ideological currents merged, fractured and coalesced.⁷⁷ The revolutionary left was equally fluid. 'We have grown used to welcoming these organisations', Ted Howard declared on hearing of the formation of the New Zealand Marxian Association at a conference in Christchurch over the Christmas 1918.⁷⁸ However, an era of greater stability followed the war. The formation of the Communist Party of New Zealand in 1921 was part of a process which saw the political labour movement essentially polarized into two camps, Labour and Communist, by the late twenties.

The foundation of the CPNZ will always remain shrouded in a degree of mystery. No direct record of the event survives — the minutes have long since been lost and no reports appeared in the media at the time. It is certain, however,

68 See Patrick O'Farrell, 'Politics and Coal: The Socialist Vanguard, 1904-1908', in P. May, ed., *Miners and Militants: Politics in Westland, 1865-1918*, Christchurch, 1975, pp.101-27.

69 MW, 12 December 1917.

70 Minutes, Petone Marxian Club, 29 September 1913, BR.

71 Roth, 'The October Revolution', p.49. For the later view see, Jim Dyer, interviewed by Ian Powell, 9 June 1977, transcript in my possession.

72 Barras, p.28.

73 N.Z. Marxian Association, *Rules and Contribution Book*, Wellington, 1919. For the SPGB see Bartrop, p.9-10.

74 Minutes, Marxian Students' Conference, 28 December 1918, GG, 3/2, ATL.

75 MW, 8 January 1919 and Barras, p.28. On the SPC connection with the SPGB see Peter Campbell, 'Making Socialists: Bill Pritchard, the Socialist Party of Canada and the Third International', *Labor/Le Travailleur*, XXX (Fall 1992), p.47.

76 Minutes, Petone Marxian Club, BR. There are several loose sheets in the book from this period.

77 Len Richardson, 'Parties and Political Change', in G. Rice, ed., *Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed., Auckland, 1992, pp. 210-14.

78 MW, 8 January 1919.

that the foundation meeting took place at the Wellington Socialist Hall on the evening of Saturday 9 April 1921, following discussions in Wellington over Easter weekend.⁷⁹ The precise nature of the discussion and debate is obscure but the delegates had before them the constitution of the Communist Party of Australia and a draft manifesto and constitution drawn up over the previous few months by members of the Wellington Socialist Party.⁸⁰

While the details of the formative meetings remain uncertain, the broader process of the foundation of the CPNZ is clearer. The process has been discussed by several historians. A consensus exists which is centred on two broad propositions: first, that the new party was a fairly direct response to the Russian revolution and, second, that the New Zealand Marxian Association and the socialist tradition which it represented was the principal ideological current contributing to the new organization. It is argued here that both propositions have been greatly overstated.

The October revolution is portrayed by historians as having a quite dramatic and unambiguous impact on the New Zealand left. Patrick O'Farrell has suggested that the labour movements of Australia and New Zealand, before the Russian revolution, were 'cautious and self-sufficient, resistant to both dreams and doctrines'.⁸¹ O'Farrell also implied that the revolution intensified a generational conflict within the New Zealand labour movement. Others have also insisted on the centrality of the revolution. Gordon Watson, a leading intellectual within the CPNZ during the 1930s, suggested that 'The Russian Revolution exercised an enormous influence', prompting a movement whereby the 'most revolutionary elements' formed the Communist Party.⁸² Roth has been even more forthright in his views, suggesting that the 'main effect of the October Revolution in New Zealand was . . . to cause a split in the labour movement and to lead to the establishment of a separate Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party on the Russian model'.⁸³

One cannot deny that the revolution had an impact on the psyche of many New Zealanders. Both O'Farrell and Roth have ably demonstrated the response of leading figures within the Labour Party to it. Daily newspapers maintained a steady stream of horror stories about the alleged atrocities of Bolshevism and warned of the dangers from local radicals.⁸⁴ Political surveillance was intensified

79 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 2 April 1921, GG, 2/20, ATL. Various incorrect dates have been suggested by previous commentators. Barras, p.29, suggests it was Christmas 1920. Alex Galbraith in his memoirs suggests late 1921; see Alex Galbraith, 'Unpublished Memoirs', in possession of Doug Galbraith. On another occasion he suggested late 1920 or early 1921; *Workers Weekly*, 6 August 1937.

80 Edward Beardsley to the Secretary CPA, n.d. (1923?), Bollinger Papers (BP), MS 2151/442, ATL and Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 15 January, 5 March 1921, GG, 2/20, ATL.

81 Patrick O'Farrell, 'The Russian Revolution and the Labour Movements of Australia and New Zealand', IRSH, VIII (1963), p.177.

82 Watson, p.20.

83 Roth, 'The October Revolution', pp.54-55.

84 *Press*, 18 March, 2 May, 26 December 1918, 23 March, 10 June 1919. See also Fiona Weightman, 'The Impact of the October 1917 Russian Revolution on New Zealand Political Debate — focusing on the 1918 Wellington North by-election', BA Hons research essay, Victoria University, Wellington, 1986, pp.44-50.

immediately after the war and both the New Zealand Police and Army began systematically monitoring political radicals, including 'persons using their influence to establish Bolshevism'.⁸⁵ But what of the impact of the revolution on New Zealand's revolutionary left?

O'Farrell has claimed that the New Zealand Marxian Association was established to encourage a sympathetic attitude to the Russian revolution, yet there is no reference to it in the minutes of the foundation conference.⁸⁶ Some members of the NZMA did conceive of it as a precursor to the formation of a political party, but this was to be modelled on the SPGB rather than on Bolshevik lines.⁸⁷ The NZMA, particularly through the activity of its first secretary, Tom Feary, a young New Zealand-born miner, did play an important role in bringing radical literature into New Zealand. During 1919 Feary twice journeyed to North America to secure literature which had to be smuggled into the country as war regulations remained in operation.⁸⁸ Among other things, Feary brought back with him copies of John Reed's classic, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (1919), and a pamphlet by Lenin, *Soviets at Work* (1919).⁸⁹ The NZMA studied the Bolshevik 'Declaration of Rights' and other Russian literature, which they also sold.⁹⁰ Feary believed that there was a general appreciation of the revolution amongst the New Zealand working class, yet he admitted the impact was slight.⁹¹ The literature was used by the NZMA for its own educational purposes, not as a guide to political action. It certainly did not stimulate the NZMA to form a political party, as has been commonly asserted.⁹² By September 1920 Feary was beginning to despair at the rate of progress of the NZMA. 'Its members plod along mostly individually', he complained, and the organization lacked good speakers, teachers and even literature.⁹³

If previous commentators had better understood the particular theoretical position of the SPGB, and the strength of the NZMA's commitment to it, they may have been less inclined to suggest such a central role for the revolution in the life of the NZMA. The SPGB was at best a critical supporter of the October revolution. They welcomed it as a step towards the emancipation of the Russian working class but they did not see it as the beginning of the socialist reconstruction of Russia.⁹⁴ In effect the NZMA used the Russian revolution to lambast the

85 Brigadier G.S. Richardson, Army GHQ to Lt Col Smythe, 28 August 1919, AD 2 16/11, Army Department, National Archives (NA), Wellington. The Police established their system with the same *modus operandi*; see Commissioner of Police to Inspector of Police, Greymouth, 10 September 1920, CH 74, Police Department, NA, Christchurch.

86 O'Farrell, *Harry Holland*, pp.109-10, and Minutes, Marxian Students' Conference, 28 December 1918, GG, 3/2, ATL.

87 *International Socialist* (IS), 23 August, 22 November 1919.

88 T.W.F. [Tom Feary], 'Some Marxist Pioneers in New Zealand', NZLR (March 1956), p.20.

89 The latter was republished in New Zealand.

90 See, Petone Marxian Class Receipts and Expenditure Account, 1918, in Minutes, Petone Marxian Class, BR advertisement in MW, 25 February 1920.

91 IS, 22 November 1919.

92 Feary, p.20.

93 IS, 4 September 1920.

94 Barltrop, ch.7.

Labour Party. They believed that there was mileage to be made by labelling Labour as Mensheviks and claiming the high ground of Bolshevism for themselves.⁹⁵ Lenin's *State and Revolution* was useful ammunition in this process, although the detail of his critique of political processes under capitalism escaped most within the NZMA. The most significant early impact of the revolution was to give critics of labourism a new language with which to clearly demarcate themselves from the Labour tradition, but the use of the language of Bolshevism did not convey a particular ideology or practice until the end of the 1920s.

The Russian revolution confirmed the NZMA's belief that revolution rather than reform was the way forward to socialism, yet did not lead the organization to question its own long-standing tactics for achieving this end.⁹⁶ The preferred means to achieve socialism remained the raising of class-consciousness through propaganda and education; mass awareness of Marxism was still considered a fundamental precondition for a revolutionary party. Tom Feary neatly summed up the dominant position, specifically rejecting the ideas of De Leon and others theoretically close to Lenin. Instead he argued for a pure SPGB line, suggesting that an organization 'adapted for propaganda, unhindered by trade unions, and tending to class organisation alone is the revolutionary demand of the day'.⁹⁷ Feary and a few others in the NZMA would later move away from such a position and join the CPNZ when it was formed in 1921. The Russian revolution did play a part in this shift. Jim Dyer, then a young but very prominent speaker for the NZMA in Wellington, later claimed that he joined the Wellington Socialist Party, which championed the cause of communism, because of the revolution. This step did not occur until March 1921, however, more than three years after the revolution and the establishment of the NZMA.⁹⁸ The changes wrought by the revolution were slow in coming, though in retrospect they often seemed dramatic and sudden. More importantly, contrary to the view put forward by most commentators, by joining the CPNZ such individuals were rejecting rather than developing the NZMA tradition.

What then of the other key groups feeding into the Communist movement? Surely they were more profoundly and immediately impressed by the revolution? This may be the case, but if so they were peculiarly quiet about it. Until 26 September 1920 there was no debate, discussion nor even mention of the revolution in the minutes of the WSP. While it would be silly to suggest that the Wellington socialists were not interested in the revolution until this time, the lack of discussion counters suggestions of an immediate and dramatic impact. There was some general impact: as early as December 1918 Alex Galbraith, a New Zealand-born railwayman and later a founding member of the CPNZ in Napier, declared himself a Bolshevik while contesting the Manawatu seat on behalf of the Labour Party.⁹⁹ Yet Galbraith's rhetoric at this time was no more a statement

95 See the controversy between the NZMA and the NZLP in *Moses Baritz versus H. Holland*, Petone, 1920.

96 IS, 22 November 1919.

97 IS, 6 December 1919.

98 Dyer interview and Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 5 March 1921, GG, 2/20, ATL.

99 Roth, 'The October Revolution', p.49; Galbraith, pp.21-22.

of his actual politics than Bob Semple's oft-quoted claim to be a Bolshevik.¹⁰⁰

The suggestion of a rapid and profound change or transformation in the wake of the revolution is unsubstantiated and it greatly overstates the significance of the revolution as a catalyst for change and as a guide to action and organization. Sid Scott, a founding member of the CPNZ in Auckland, summed up the immediate legacy of the revolution in New Zealand, claiming that 'it was the turning point in my personal life, although I did not realise this at the time'.¹⁰¹ The significance of the revolution grew with the passing of time. As the communist tradition developed so too did the centrality of the revolution in the history of the party's origins.

Several factors help to explain the almost universal acceptance of the Marxian Association as the most significant tradition in the founding of the CPNZ. The first is the erroneous assumption that the WSP, and the ideological tradition it championed, had ceased to exist long before the establishment of the CPNZ. The evidence to suggest otherwise has only recently become available; it is therefore understandable that this view has persisted. The fact that the WSP struggled to survive after the war has added to the problem of its relative invisibility. The group faced desperate financial problems, an apathetic membership and lacked any kind of propaganda.¹⁰² To turn this situation around some members tried to bolster the party by a reorganization, and by rewriting its principles, and one did suggest that the party be wound up.¹⁰³ It is indicative of the state of the party that this motion lapsed at the next meeting due to the mover failing to turn up to support his own proposition.¹⁰⁴

Certainly the syndicalist tradition in New Zealand had been weakened by the demise of the IWW groups during the war. Yet some founding members of the CPNZ were from this tradition. Ken Baxter, a New Zealand-born printer active in the Auckland branch and subsequently in Dunedin, had belonged to the IWW in Australia.¹⁰⁵ Leo Woods, a founding member of the CPNZ who had been active in the Auckland IWW, remained committed to IWW principles after that organization collapsed and was later active in the post war movement for One Big Union (OBU). Other former Wobblies joined this campaign.¹⁰⁶ According to Woods most of the members of the OBU movement joined the Communist Party.¹⁰⁷

The establishment of the NZMA as a self-consciously national organization committed to socialist revolution is also important in explaining the attention it has been given by historians. The very existence of such an organization led many commentators to the conclusion that it was the precursor to the CPNZ. That

100 See Gustafson, p.147; Scott, p.28; Roth, 'The October Revolution', p.47.

101 Scott, p.18.

102 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 16 February, 26 September, 26 October 1920, GG, 2/20, ATL. The quorum for meeting was reduced from 9 to 7.

103 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 27 October 1918, *ibid*.

104 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 26 October, 9 November 1919, *ibid*.

105 Fry, *Tom Barker*, p.33.

106 MW, 28 July 1920.

107 Woods, 'Why I am a Communist'.

the sophisticated organization suggested by the Association's rules never came into being was ignored.¹⁰⁸ Significant sections of potential recruits never joined the NZMA, among them the group in Napier centred on former Red Feds Alex Galbraith and Bill Wood, a Scottish-born former miner.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, while Marxist study groups existed in Christchurch there is no evidence that they joined the NZMA. Even in Auckland there were problems, despite the fact that several early leaders of the NZMA, including Tom Feary and Andy Barras, a Scottish-born plumber, resided there from about 1920. The group they established, which later provided the basis of the Auckland branch of the Communist Party, was not a branch of the NZMA. Instead, after running a series of study groups, they set up what they called the Workers' School of Social Science (WSSS).¹¹⁰ This group had broader objectives than the NZMA, although it by no means completely rejected that tradition. The WSSS's formation outside the NZMA is a significant sign that the centrality of the Association has been overstated by historians. Even when there were no ideological differences the organization did not work efficiently. John Kirk, son of a former Mayor of Petone and secretary of the Association from late 1919, found it frustrating and difficult to keep in touch with members on the West Coast from his headquarters in Petone.¹¹¹ As an organization the NZMA never worked in practice as well as it did on paper.

Given the parlous state of both the WSP and the NZMA it is not surprising that during 1920 they began co-operating with each other. Members of the two organizations were on reasonably good terms (several of the key figures in the NZMA had been members of the WSP a few years earlier).¹¹² In December 1919 the Association began using the Socialist Hall for study classes and, as a concession to their associates in revolution, only a nominal charge was made.¹¹³ In August 1920 the editor of the *Maoriland Worker* suggested that the Socialist Party, the New Zealand Workers' Union and the Marxian Association co-operate to establish a publishing company. While the proposition was received favourably more fundamental discussions were soon in the offing.¹¹⁴ At a special meeting on 24 October the secretary of the WSP reported that a general discussion had taken place concerning an amalgamation with the Marxian Association.¹¹⁵ Another meeting between the two organizations was held on 30 October and informal discussions continued. In the end they bore no fruit, but in early December a decision was made that the NZMA and the WSP should assist each other in matters of literature and propaganda where appropriate, although 'each party [was] to remain distinct and separate as before'.¹¹⁶

108 NZMA, *Rules and Contribution Book*, Wellington, 1919.

109 Galbraith, pp.31-32.

110 Feary to J. Kirk, Secretary of NZMA, 6 November 1920, GG, 4/19, ATL; *International Communist* (IC), 26 March 1921.

111 Feary to J. Kirk, 6 November 1920, GG, 4/19, ATL.

112 Minutes, Wellington Socialist Party, 23 September 1917, GG, 2/20, ATL.

113 *ibid.*, 28 December 1919.

114 *ibid.*, 8 August 1920. Nothing further seems to have come of the suggestion.

115 *ibid.*, 24 October 1920.

116 *ibid.*, n.d. ca 11 December 1920.

The nature of the disagreement between the two groups had become apparent. By 8 January 1921 the WSP was considering forming a Communist Party. A special meeting to discuss this was held on 15 January, when a committee was established to revise the party constitution and to formulate a programme on a 'Communitic Basis'.¹¹⁷ The NZMA was once again consulted and again no merger or accommodation was arrived at. The NZMA as an organization was clearly not interested in forming a Communist Party, although as a result of the discussions some activists quit the NZMA and joined the WSP.¹¹⁸

A remarkably similar process occurred in Christchurch. At the end of 1920 discussions took place between the Christchurch Socialist Party and a Marxian Study Group. On the suggestion of Ted Beardsley, secretary of the Christchurch Socialist Party, members of the study group joined the party. In early January 1921 George Winter, a New Zealand-born accountant and sometime member of both the WSP and the NZMA, visited Christchurch and lectured on Lenin's *State and Revolution*. After this meeting those present decided to transform the Christchurch Socialist Party into a Communist Party, which they proceeded to do in the first week of February. As part of this process Beardsley made contact with the WSP, which advised him that a meeting of 'communist tendencies' would be held in Wellington over Easter where the formation of a New Zealand Communist Party would be discussed.¹¹⁹

Similar communications took place over the first months of 1921 with other 'communist tendencies' and as a result delegates from a number of centres met over Easter to discuss establishing a new organization. From Christchurch the former WSP member Sid Fournier came, bringing with him the constitution of the Communist Party of Australia. Bill Wood came from the tiny Napier group.¹²⁰ In addition to the members of the WSP, a delegate from 'the West Coast' was also apparently present,¹²¹ as were two delegates from Auckland's Workers' School of Social Sciences, Ernie Staples and Hughie Campbell. The delegates were overwhelmingly in favour of forming a new organization, apparently only Campbell having any reservations.¹²² The Communist Party was formally established at the subsequent meeting in Wellington on 9 April. The national headquarters were established in Wellington, a reflection of the key role played by the WSP.¹²³ Other branches were established in Auckland, Christchurch and Napier over the subsequent months.¹²⁴

117 *ibid.*, 15 January 1921.

118 *ibid.*, 5 March 1921.

119 Edward Beardsley to the Secretary CPA, n.d. (1923?), BP, 442.

120 Galbraith, p.31.

121 Hughie Campbell to Sid Scott, 6 August 1958, RC. There is some reason for scepticism about this claim, given the later separatist tendencies on the West Coast.

122 *ibid.*

123 After the formation of the CPNZ the Wellington Socialist Party Branch simply renamed itself and essentially carried on as before, even using the same minute book, further emphasizing their crucial role in the foundation process and the link with past traditions.

124 Staples, Secretary, CPNZ Auckland Branch, to Secretary, Seamen's Union, 27 April 1921, RC; Minutes, Wellington Branch, Communist Party of New Zealand, 22 May 1921, GG, 2/20, ATL; Galbraith, p.32. There were also a few members at large unattached to branches. Minutes, Wellington Branch, Communist Party of New Zealand, 22 May, 11 June 1921, GG, 2/20, ATL.

Rather than a particular response to the Russian revolution, the formation of the CPNZ was a natural and not unexpected outcome of longer-term developments within the New Zealand labour movement. The three revolutionary traditions established in the previous two decades, which continued into the 'new' party with little alteration, all pre-dated the revolution. The NZMA represented only one of those traditions. The 'Bolshevization' of the CPNZ was an historical process discrete from the formation of the party. At its foundation, New Zealand's communists aligned themselves with the Bolsheviks emotionally but they were not Bolsheviks in terms of their political ideology or practice. Most of the groups were small, generally containing fewer than a dozen members. The Wellington branch was the only exception, being at least twice that size, although many of its members were inactive. Total party membership for the first few years fluctuated but remained below 50. While the task of building a national revolutionary movement had begun, the succeeding few years were spent consolidating the organization which remained small and fragile. The process of consolidation included the reconciliation of the different political traditions which had made up the party at its foundation; in short the process was about learning to be communists.

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