

community' (p.45), or as J.G. Coates believed, 'the surest safeguard against future immorality' (pp.164-5). Not surprisingly, the majority of ex-nuptial babies stayed with their kin (often their mothers), even at the height of faith in an adoption system which at the beginning of the 1970s preserved the anonymity of mother and child.

Such evidence points to the value of this book. While there is more to be done in interpreting 'child welfare' more broadly to cover the health of the 'normal' child as well as social work services for the 'at-risk' child, in addition to income-support schemes, Bronwyn Dalley has fulfilled a difficult commission and at the same time thrown new light on how New Zealand treated its young.

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She Dared to Speak: Connie Birchfield's Story. By Maureen Birchfield. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1998. 215 pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 1-877133-53-1.

Never a White Flag: The Memoirs of Jock Barnes, Waterfront Leader. Edited by Tom Bramble. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1998. 256 pp. NZ price: \$29.95. ISBN 0-86473-344-5.

IN RECENT YEARS there has been considerable reflection and re-evaluation within the academic sub-discipline of labour history. Some writers have questioned the future of labour history and predicted the death of the genre. While the jury may still be out on the long-term future of labour history the publication of *She Dared to Speak* and *Never a White Flag*, in close proximity, seems to buck the trend. They both make a welcome addition to the literature on labour history. That they are biographical studies is even more pleasing. *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* has recently made a valuable contribution by telling the life stories of many important — and one must concede often relatively minor — labour movement figures, yet biographical studies remain a weakness in New Zealand labour history. While there are a handful of exceptions, most significant labour figures await in-depth study, and fewer still have attempted to tell their own story.

These two books, and their subjects, share a number of characteristics. Most obviously the books explore the lives of labour movement figures at the radical end of the spectrum. Connie Birchfield was one of the most important figures in the Communist Party of New Zealand from the mid-1930s until 1957 when she was expelled from the party, a victim of the bitter internal debate over the Soviet invasion of Hungary. Jock Barnes needs no introduction: he was the personification of the militant labour movement in the immediate post-war era.

The two subjects are also similar in that they were expressive and passionate about their chosen cause. This manifested itself in various ways, most obviously in colourful and highly successful soap-box oratory. One could also suggest that Birchfield and Barnes shared a naive reading of the political landscape at crucial moments, exhibiting a tendency to stare defeat in the eye when tactical withdrawal may have been more advisable. I think here of Barnes's uncompromising no-surrender perspective during the 1951 lock-out, a position still very much reflected in this volume. Time and distance have done nothing to shatter his self-confidence. Could it be he is even more convinced of the correctness of his position? On the night that Labour swept to victory in 1935 Connie Birchfield similarly refused to concede an inch and reasserted her belief that the Labour party had nothing to offer the New Zealand working class, despite her campaign on this platform securing a mere 70 votes compared to Bob

Sample's 7730 in the contest for the Wellington East seat. While this can be read as admirable, as it is in *She Dared to Speak*, with greater perspective the policy of condemning Labour was surely a grave misreading of the political landscape of that time.

Each of these books experienced a very long gestation period. Birchfield began work on her project in the late 1970s; however the all-too-familiar diversions of employment and family commitments intervened. So too, one suspects, did the significant difficulty of telling the story of a parent while they are still alive. The Barnes memoirs were completed in 1987 and they circulated around the labour movement for years before the editor of this volume, Tom Bramble, got to work on preparing them for publication. Whether the delay was the result of political manoeuvring in Wellington as Barnes implies, or his own unwillingness to temper some of the more colourful prose is debatable. What is uncontested is that the publication is welcome: both books have lively and interesting stories to tell.

Maureen Birchfield and Tom Bramble share a close and intense engagement with the people they write about. Birchfield, despite being the daughter of her subject, deals with this better than Bramble. By using elements of her own recollections, in addition to a significant quantity of archival research and oral history, she adds a valuable perspective and insight to her mother's story. While clearly very close to her mother and to her father, Albert, who at times is as much the subject of this book as Connie, there is enough distance, reflection and self-awareness to prevent her reliving old battles and justifying the past. On this front Bramble is less successful. As an editor he has done a good job at presenting what was an unwieldy draft into a manageable and very readable text. There are also useful additions to assist the reader such as chronologies and a discussion of previous literature on the waterfront lock-out. There is, however, a tendency to relive old battles again. Bramble apparently feels the need to defend Barnes against the wrongdoings of previous commentators. He is also keen to demonstrate the continued relevance of the uncompromising militant perspective and tactics which characterized the approach of Barnes, the suggestion being that with more backbone and less compromise in the late 1980s-early 1990s the CTU could have resisted the labour reforms which have done so much to undermine the place of organized labour in New Zealand. Readers can obviously make up their own minds on this count.

I once attempted to interview Connie Birchfield. At the time she was about 89 years of age and still had a lively and captivating personality. Sadly for me her memory was poor: all she could remember was her childhood and some incidents which had occurred to her the day before. Her experiences in the Communist Party were seemingly lost to herself and certainly to this reviewer. *She Dared to Speak* provides the detail of a life story which I thought was lost. In the process it provides valuable new material from which to deepen our understanding of mid-twentieth-century radicalism and crucial moments in the making of the labour movement. The same can be said of *Never a White Flag*. Whatever one thinks of the tactics of Barnes and the sometimes irritating self-importance which comes through in this volume, his significance cannot be denied, nor his right to put his perspective across.

While some may now be questioning the relevance of labour history in the new millennium, these two books indicate there are still many interesting stories to be told and significant issues to be explored.

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