

Globalisation and Labour in the Pacific: Re-evaluating the 1890 Maritime Strike

Symposium invitation

Organised by the Auckland Labour History Group and the Labour History Project
In association with the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and
the New Zealand Work & Labour Market Institute

AUT University, Auckland City, Thursday 4 November 2010



Labour History Project

"AN INJURY TO ONE IS A CONCERN TO ALL"

ASSLH

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History

AUT UNIVERSITY NZ WORK+LABOUR MARKET INSTITUTE

The 1890 Maritime Strike, one of the largest ever in Australia, also involved New Zealand and Fijian workers, and its impact reverberated throughout the Pacific Rim because of the global structure of capital and labour in the maritime industry. British, European and American employers, politicians and academics took an interest in the dispute, part of a strike wave sweeping Europe, North America and Australasia in 1889-94.

On 16 August 1890 members of the Mercantile Marine Officers' Association of Australasia went on strike over longstanding pay and conditions claims, complicated by employers' objection to their affiliation with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. Industrial action quickly spread to seamen, wharf labourers, then gas stockers, miners and shearers, involving over 60,000 workers throughout Australia. The Union Steam Ship Company's dominance of trans-Tasman shipping saw the dispute spread to New Zealand and wharf labourers in Fiji.

The dispute became a struggle over freedom of association. Fear gripped middle class hearts and colonial governments deployed troops, artillery and special constables in Sydney, Melbourne, Newcastle and other ports. In Melbourne military volunteers were exhorted by Colonel Tom Price to "*Fire low and lay them out*".

The eventual defeat of the strike in November 1890 was the turning point that led unions to form the Australian Labor Party and adopt a policy for compulsory state arbitration. The New South Wales Labour Defence Committee stated that "*the time has come when trade unionists must use the parliamentary machine that in the past has used them*". In New Zealand the strike was a key issue in the December 1890 general election, which led to the formation of the Liberal government and ultimately to state arbitration legislation in 1894.

Call for papers Due date for abstracts: 1 June 2010 to Ann Williamson at nzwalmi@aut.ac.nz
Papers are invited on the 1890 strike, its broader political and historical impact, the nature of Pacific Rim connections in the labour market and between labour organisations, lessons for contemporary labour relations in the maritime industry in the Pacific, and the impact of globalisation generally in Pacific Rim labour relations.

Refereed papers may be selected for publication in the *NZ Journal of Employment Relations* and/or for publication in a special book which will be published to mark the anniversary.

Attendance All welcome. Fee: \$40.

Information subject to change.

