

FIGHTING WAR



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FIGHTING WAR

*Anarchists, Wobblies & the
New Zealand State 1905-1925*

Jared Davidson

In July 1913, a 23-year old Christchurch cabinet-maker, Passive Resisters Union member and anarchist named Syd Kingsford penned a stinging letter in the local *Evening Post*. “Not content with robbing my class of the major portion of its product,” wrote Kingsford,

the robber class has the colossal impudence to demand that the sons of the robbed workers shall don a uniform, shoulder a rifle, and be prepared to defend the possessions of the robbers... What does it matter to me if the robbers sometimes fall out and quarrel over the division of the spoil wrung from the workers? The point is that I am robbed with impartiality by the capitalist class, no matter what country I am in, or what nation I happen to belong to. To me, no country is so superior to another that I want to get shot in its defence. I prefer to work for the time when national barriers will be thrown down, and the workers united for the purpose of evading a system of society which causes war.¹

As this lengthy quote makes clear, Kingsford believed war was a product of capital accumulation, power in the hands of a few, and the nation state. This position was shared by other anarchists, as well as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, also known as the Wobblies)—a revolutionary union organisation with a small but influential presence in New Zealand. Indeed, Kingsford was the literature secretary of the Christchurch branch, and helped to distribute IWW newspapers such as the Australian *Direct Action*, which in October 1914 argued: “Workers, you have nothing to gain by volunteering to fight the battles of your masters.”²

There is no doubt that such a position was a minority one in New Zealand, both before and during the First World War, and its influence

on events is difficult to quantify. However I believe that such a stance was a major concern of those in power. Fearful of wartime industrial unrest and in order to avoid a repeat of the 1912 and 1913 strikes, the National Coalition government used the pretext of war conditions to suppress any hint of labour militancy. As a visible expression of such militancy, the actions of anarchists and Wobblies were scrutinised by the state, leading to sedition charges, jail time, or deportation from the country.

Fighting War looks at some of this working class radicalism and the reaction to it by the state. Much of this activity was centred on the distribution of radical literature—‘mental dynamite’ in the form of penny pamphlets, newspapers, and other ephemera. Ports and postboxes became the battleground for an intense cultural struggle—a struggle that questioned the war, the nature of work, and authority itself. This battle for minds had material results. Intense state surveillance and a raft of legislation not only determined who could read what, but who would be considered a legitimate resident of the so-called ‘workers paradise’ that was New Zealand.

The Industrial Workers of the World

Arguably, the most militant of the pre-war labour organisations in New Zealand was the IWW. Formed in Chicago in 1905 by a conglomerate of socialists, unionists, Marxists and anarchists, its founders were disenchanted by the craft nature of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its exclusive membership criteria. Instead, the IWW sought to organise all workers, especially the so-called ‘unskilled’ neglected by the AFL. As well as being open to workers of any gender or colour, the IWW promoted the ‘One Big Union,’ a fighting union that—through the solidarity of workers organised along class lines instead of trade, and the tactical use of the strike weapon—would abolish the wage system. Its widely quoted preamble stated:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, and abolish the wage system.³

Although the IWW initially promoted both industrial and political action, it split in 1908 over the rejection parliamentary politics. For the Chicago IWW, the political arena was controlled by capital and therefore the place to make change in society was the workplace. As one New Zealand wobbly argued, “Parliament is a mirror reflecting conditions outside. When your face is dirty, do you wash the mirror?”⁴

The IWW advocated building a new world in the shell of the old, which meant how the union conducted its struggles was just as important as the outcome. As a result, direct democracy and the curbing of power in the hands of a few was core to the organisation. “The IWW considered a reliance on leadership as fostering dependence amongst the working class,” notes Stuart Moriarty-Patten.⁵ New Zealand Wobblies decried the local labour movement as “cursed and hampered by leaders.” Instead, “active, intelligent workers [should] determine to do their own thinking... to fight on all occasions for complete control by the rank and file and against sheep-like following of leaders.”⁶

As a result the IWW was much more than a simple union movement. As well as fighting for better conditions and shorter hours, the IWW fostered education, internationalism, and a radical working class counterculture through the influential use of song and graphics. Although not without its faults, the appeal of the IWW made it social and cultural movement on an international scale.

The IWW and Anarchism in New Zealand

New Zealand’s first IWW local was formed in Wellington in 1907, and by 1912 other locals were formed in Christchurch and Auckland—both of which received official charters from the IWW headquarters in Chicago. Informal groups sprung up in industrial towns such as Huntly, Waihi, and Denniston, and the cultural norms and tactics championed by the Wobblies—such as the general strike, sabotage, and the go-slow—soon spiced the local discourse. The rally-cry of ‘a fair day’s wage’ was

More DIRECT ACTION and less politics is the Watchword. DIRECT ACTION is the true Tactic for Labour.



VOL. I. No. 8.

AUCKLAND, SEPT. 1st., 1913.

(Published at 2 P.M. for the Issue of the following day.)

ONE PENNY.

A MONTHLY ADVOCATE OF DIRECT ACTION.

Solidarity Seaman win help of Shipowners and Watermen

Belgian Seaman win help of Shipowners and Watermen

All boats carrying explosives into Auckland must transfer them before being allowed to berth at the wharves. The "Delphic" of the Shaw, Saville Co., laid at Brown's wharf to have some explosives discharged. In the agreement between the shipowners and the waterfront workers all cargo must be worked by the members of the A.W.W.U. In the case of the "Delphic" the shipowners tried to break the agreement, and in so doing brought about a fine display of solidarity.

The sailors, when ordered to handle the cargo, made a stand, but then again refused, and came ashore in a body to see the Secretary of the Seaman's Union, who told them they would have to do it—they couldn't get out of it.

When the sailors got back to ship they were informed that every one of them was fined, and their wages docked 21/8/2 per man, for use of motor-launch to and from ship, and for wages paid for working of cargo.

The sailors came to the waterfront workers (who were in meeting assembled), and stated their case. At once the whole thing was taken up with enthusiasm.

On the following morning August 7th—the local Executive were out early on the job; they stated the whole affair to the men, who, like one, dispersed today. The manager boasted that he would get substitutes, and notified the engineer to keep up steam; then he got another shock for the engineers staff replied: "Get a pound of steam do you get there for us backing labour." There was SOLIDARITY per excellence. It has always been said that anything is entered into the log-book it cannot be erased; but Solidarity in this case broke the rule, for at 2 o'clock that day the entry was erased, and the log-book signed by three waterfront workers, the Captain, and the Shipping Master, and was duly stamped.

The shipowners had certainly bumped up against a rock, and felt the power of working-class solidarity, coupled with quick action, unhampered by centralized officialism.—W.M.

The trade unions foster a sense of selfishness which allows a mass of workers to be gathered against another mass of workers in the same industry.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS.—The address of the Secretary for the N.Z. Administration is now: The National Buildings, Wellesley St. W., Auckland.

"Five minutes to clear out."

New Chums in "God's Own"

In a letter—too long to print in full—sent to the Industrial Union, a fellow-worker from "Hesse" tells how he got a meeting, along with 400 others who had sought the use/land in quest of a little more freedom, and according to the good things of life, landed in Auckland in July, only to be quickly disillusioned upon hitting up the real thing.

These two working men had seen all sorts of adorning advertisements and listened to glowing lectures boasting up New Zealand as a great and glorious land for the workers. They had swapped the fare together and hoped to be able to send for wives and children, but when they landed in Auckland they could get no work, though they chased round for jobs.

After this first rebuff they pulled themselves together and decided to try the country, but as funds were low they were obliged to visit an uncle, with three brass balls and a bouzouque nose to get the means of travel. They took the Main Trunk and got off at what seemed a likely place—Husky.

An individual named Fletcher was hunted up by work applied for. He being questioned as to whether they were "Arbitrationists" or "Federationists," they, of course, didn't know. (How many new arrivals could answer such a question?) They did know, however, that they were good unionists, and that was their doom. Sentence was delivered: "Five minutes to clear out of it."

The two then went to Kaitake, and, having no luck there, and being penniless as well as hungry, they were obliged to sleep on the grass in pouring rain. They were eventually treated well by some Waiwahi New Zealanders, and after spending some time looking for work, and being warned not to go near Waihi, they went South.

The question may be asked: How can the workers bring to allow whole districts to be dominated by the able element who, at the best of the present mass-cesses, can dictate in this style. It is fairly well-known that discrimination has been carried out, and men have had to break up their families, and so the result of the treatment of the workers and the organization of others. It seems that such and such a district must be adapted to suit the needs of the workers.

When are the N.Z. workers going to start treating workers alike?

Union Labels

Union labels have been the subject of much discussion at union meetings and conferences all over these colonies.

One union secretary recently read a lengthy paper on the merits of the union label to the boycott of non-union-made commodities and "entitled" the American Federation of Labour as a splendid example (!) of what the union label can do for the worker. He did not tell of the "hunted flow label" and other exposures printed in American Labour papers.

From a craft unionist standpoint the craft union label may appear to have some value, in obtaining out non-union labour, but now-a-days it is a craft unionist who is not affiliated, directly or indirectly, with the rest of organized labour in industry, and hardly a craft federation not affiliated in some way with the rest of organized labour in the country. "We are rapidly approaching the time when Industrial Unionism must supersede craft unionism and craft federation. At best a craft label can only have temporary value; it is not sufficient to ensure the expense of labour as a whole; in the last analysis at the expense of the so-called craftsman themselves. There is very little about craft union labels."

There is but one kind of label that can be seriously considered—



—the Universal Label of the INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD.

The struggles of labour take on more and more of a class character. Every strike, of consequence, depends, to some degree, on the support of workers in other industries and other countries; the nearer the industry or the industry the greater the dependence. The material conditions of the workers in one industry, as in our country, are very sensitive to change taking place in other industries and countries. If labour is displaced in one industry it flows to other industries and other countries. Sections of the Working Class cannot advance far ahead of the rest of the class. The introduction of labour-saving machinery in England, America, China, and other countries, under conditions here, not only indirectly through commodity competition, but also directly through importation of labour and immigration. Strikes are lost through lack of inter-industry or international support. "Class" conditions are compelling us to think as a class. The introduction of labour-saving machinery is a CLASS UNION LABEL.

It is not a matter of class union labels, but of class union labels. It is not a matter of class union labels, but of class union labels. It is not a matter of class union labels, but of class union labels.

Get cheap subscribers for the INDUSTRIAL UNIONIST.

Te Pakanga Nui

Te Pakanga Nui

Ke hepu kaitiaki tenei ki te koutou, ara, ki nga kaimahi katoa ki mahi at koutou ki te take o whakawhanga nei te nga kaimahi o te ao. Ke hepu nei nga kaimahi katoa ki mahi at koutou ki te take o whakawhanga nei te nga kaimahi o te ao. Ke hepu nei nga kaimahi katoa ki mahi at koutou ki te take o whakawhanga nei te nga kaimahi o te ao.

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I.W.W. Convention

I.W.W. Convention

TO ALL MEMBERS. It has been resolved by the local unions of the Australian section of the Industrial Workers of the World to hold their Convention next October. Adelaide (South Australia) had Melbourne having been postponed.

Members of local unions are requested to meet for a week with local secretaries, and members of large unions, Gen. Sec. Tracy, 18 Wakefield Street, Adelaide, in order to record their votes.

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Industrial Unionist, paper of the NZ I.W.W. National Library of New Zealand

dropped for 'abolish the wage system,' 'fellow-worker' replaced 'comrade'; and for a period, the New Zealand Federation Of Labor (FOL) adopted the IWW's revolutionary preamble.

Pamphlets and newspapers of the IWW had a wide circulation in New Zealand. According to the Secretary of the Waihi branch of the New Zealand Socialist Party (NZSP), imported IWW anti-militarist pamphlets were "finding a ready sale" in 1911.⁷ *Chunks of IWWism* and *Industrial Unionism*, two locally produced pamphlets, sold in quantities of 3,000 and 1,000 copies each, while the *Industrial Unionist*, newspaper of the New Zealand IWW, reached a circulation of 4,000. These figures do not indicate their true readership however, as workers shared their copies or would read the columns out loud in groups.

The distribution of cheap printed propaganda was vital to the spread of IWW ideas and tactics. Their wide circulation in New Zealand was thanks in part to anarchists like the Latvian-born Jewish tailor, Philip Josephs, who spread the gospel of revolutionary class struggle from 1904 onwards.

Anarchists like Josephs believed that hierarchical social relations were unjust, as they ensured that wealth, property and power remained in the hands of the few while the rest of society had no access to such benefits. The focus of much anarchist agitation therefore was capitalism and the state. These would be replaced by self-determined, voluntary associations in both the workplace and the community, bound together by the balance of individual freedom and collective responsibility. Far from advocating disorder, anarchists believed in a new social order organised from the bottom up.

After his arrival from Glasgow, Josephs distributed these ideas via a steady stream of international anarchist literature from his tailor shop in Wellington, and played an influential role in the working class counterculture of the day. A key player in the formative years of the NZSP, Josephs spoke publicly on anarchism religion, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and later, during the Great Strike of 1913. In Wellington he worked with anti-militarists, unionists, and especially the IWW, while keeping up a steady mail-order network of anarchist newspapers across the country.



Philip Josephs c.1903. *Private collection*

During that year Josephs also founded one of the first anarchist groups in New Zealand. This was the Wellington Freedom Group, which was formed in July at Josephs' tailor shop. The Freedom Group was active in promoting anarchism via the soapbox, discussion nights, and radical literature. Meanwhile, in 1913 another anarchist group was also active in Auckland—working closely with the IWW and distributing 'No Gods, No Masters' posters around the city.

These groups were the culmination of work by Josephs and other radicals around New Zealand. Anarchists like Wyatt Jones, Len Wilson, Fay MacMasters, Carl Mumme, J Sweeney and Syd Kingsford were active in the wider labour movement, imparting revolutionary ideas, tactics, and influence. Although often missing from the indices of New Zealand labour histories, Erik Olssen notes that anarchism was “more influential than most have realised.”⁸ Their efforts ensured a revolutionary syndicalist perspective was heard within New Zealand labour circles before and during the First World War. This also included activity within and alongside the wider anti-militarist movement.

Anti-Militarism and Pre-War Resistance to Compulsory Military Training

Although there was some resistance to the Boer or South African War, New Zealand anti-militarism grew out of opposition to the Defence Act of 1909. This Act “represented New Zealand's attempt to re-organise its defence forces along the lines agreed to at the Imperial Naval and Military Conference held in London in July and August of that year.”⁹ It made registration and military training compulsory for males between fourteen and thirty years of age, and enabled magistrates to deal out a considerable amount of punishment to those who did not.

As well as more temperate church groups who aimed “to appeal to the middle class by focusing on issues around the militarization of youth and society in general,” syndicalists rejected compulsory military training (CMT).¹⁰ But they rejected militarism for decidedly anti-capitalist reasons. The FOL viewed CMT as “a weapon of capitalist imperialism” which could be used against the interests of workers and the working class itself, both “domestically and internationally.”¹¹

Syd Kingsford, Philip Josepfs, Carl Mumme—alongside a number of Wobblies and syndicalists—were at the forefront of the anti-militarist struggle before the First World War. Not yet organised into specifically anarchist collectives, they were active in larger organizations like the FOL, the NZSP, the Passive Resisters Union (PRU) and other groups.

Writing from his tailor-shop-cum-radical bookshop in 1911, Josepfs decried CMT and conscription as a capitalist weapon and a form of state oppression. As well as filling his shop with anti-militarist material, he used the pages of the FOL's newspaper, the *Maoriland Worker*, to put forward an anarchist position on militarism in its New Zealand form. In "The General Strike As a Weapon Against Conscription," Josepfs analysed the arguments for and against CMT, and urged the militant miners' unions to call a general strike. As well as challenging conscription, a general strike would also target "that section who monopolise the nation's wealth, and thereby deny the masses of their original rights to the wealth they created." "Many will say such actions would be too harsh," Josepfs added. "What have the Government done by passing such an Act? The Government have ignored you. They forced conscription on you suddenly, and if they have the right to commit such a harsh act, it is also right for the workers to do exactly as their opponents have done to them."¹² True to his internationalism, Josepfs made it clear that "the deprivation of the workers' wealth and rights exist in every country alike. Our enemies are not abroad. They exist in our midst."¹³

The call for a general strike was not a fanciful one. Despite labour laws that outlawed strikes in return for union recognition, workers across New Zealand had been challenging the state and employers with wildcat strikes since 1906. Likewise, anti-militarism was strong in mining towns where branches of the NZSP and the IWW existed. Josepfs was well placed to gauge the mood of the day. His bookshop, national and transnational postal contacts, and his role of secretary of the Wellington Anti-militarist League placed him amongst a vibrant network of syndicalists, anarchists, and pacifists, ensuring Josepfs was on the pulse of anti-militarism.

The apex of this resistance was the South Island city of Christchurch, where groups such as the Anti-Militarist League, the National Peace Council (NPC), and the militant PRU conducted anti-militarist agitation

in the form of stickers, pamphlets, mass open-air meetings, and civil disobedience. Pledged to “resist coercion, conscription, and compulsory military training under all circumstances, and in defiance of all pains and penalties,” the PRU confronted military drills nightly in an attempt to persuade their fellow workers to refuse training.¹⁴ Barracks would be found plastered with stickers declaring “The military strike is now on!” while verbal tactics were employed to great ends. Their lively paper, *Repeal*, also aided the fight, featuring scathing satire and anti-militarist articles (including writing by Christchurch anarchist and regular soapboxer, Wyatt Jones). True to their pledge, PRU members refused all cooperation with the state. When prosecuted, they ignoring fines: when jailed, they refused orders and staged successful hunger strikes.

However, the militant resistance of the PRU and Josephs’ advocacy of the general strike sometimes clashed with the conciliatory stance of their Christian cohorts. Writing again in the *Maoriland Worker*, Josephs lamented that, “the meetings held to protest against the Act are a little too respectable. Nothing will be gained by such methods. You want to show your direct power against the governing classes, in order to make them realise the danger in passing such laws in the future.”¹⁵

Yet despite disagreements over methods, anarchists remained active in the broader campaign. It was beginning to have some effect: in some regions military drilling was in a shambles thanks to constant PRU disruption and well-organised anti-militarist agitation. In Christchurch during 1911 only 25% of those eligible for CMT turned up. A year later, after the first 12 months of CMT, 3,187 youths were prosecuted for refusing to parade—by 1913 this number increased to 7,030. Anti-militarism also permeated further into the wider labour movement: in 1913 the FOL (now the United Federation of Labour) took steps to adopt the Hardie-Vaillant resolution that called for a general strike in the event of war.

As resistance grew the New Zealand government stepped up its prosecutions, targeting prominent syndicalists and anti-militarists. In February 1914 alone over 400 prosecutions were initiated in Christchurch. Had the refusal to drill, pay fines, or perform military duties in detention continued, it is possible that CMT in New Zealand may have broken down and forced the government to abolish the Defence Act altogether.

However, the outbreak of the First World War changed the situation dramatically.

The Outbreak of War

On the outbreak of war the anarchist and IWW position was fragmented and weak; partly due to the defeat of the 1913 Great Strike, but also because of the intense jingoistic mood of the day. Protests like that of unionist Paddy Webb, who at an August meeting in Auckland's Globe Theatre decried war as pitting worker against worker, were overshadowed by the moment, the media, and years of creeping militarism. Many of the IWW's leading members had fled New Zealand to escape prosecution, but there were still IWW locals in Auckland, Wellington, Denniston and Christchurch. Wobblies continued to soapbox on street corners across the country and were active in the workplace, especially on the waterfront.

Yet times were tough for those openly against capitalism. Radicals found themselves up against a wartime government itching to prove its loyalty to the British Empire. The National Coalition of William Massey and Joseph Ward took measures to clamp down on any non-conformist activity it deemed seditious, using the pretence of war conditions to muzzle dissent—whether it was opposition to conscription (in the form of the 1916 Military Service Act), or challenging economic conditions. Numerous war regulations empowered the executive branch of the Coalition government to regulate without reference to Parliament, and before long a number of these were directed at the IWW.

Richard Hill notes that these regulations, initially used for military purposes, “gradually increased in severity and in political rather than military significance.”¹⁶ In 1916 war regulations were unleashed on socialist speakers and strikes in industries deemed essential to the war effort. Rather tellingly, those convicted of publishing information deemed valuable to the enemy were fined a maximum of £10, while anyone who publicly criticised the actions of the New Zealand government was fined £100 or received twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

Not surprisingly, anarchists and especially Wobblies were targeted due to their advocacy of direct action in the workplace, the fostering of an

oppositional working class counterculture, and their radical critique of capitalism. New Zealand's Crown Prosecutor "repeatedly stressed the distinction between sincere objectors... and 'parasites,' 'anarchists,' and other IWW types."¹⁷ As a result, a number of Wobblies were arrested and given maximum jail time during the war.

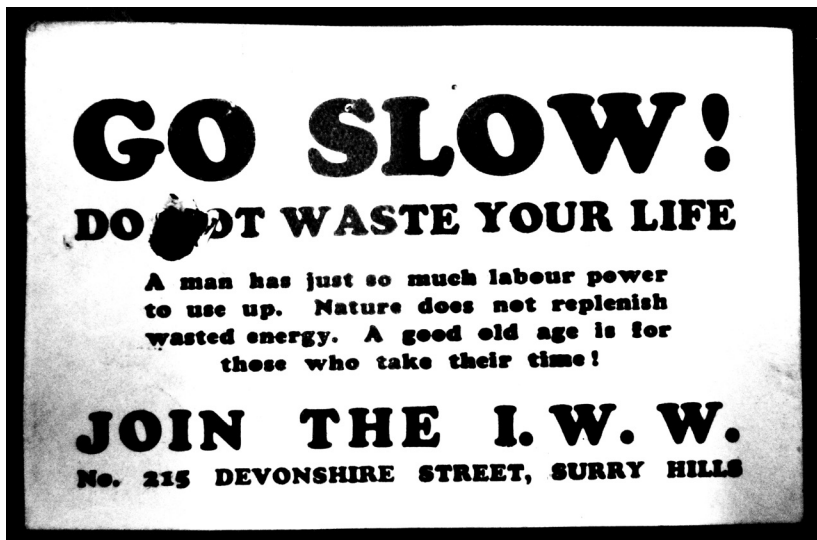
Wobblies had been scapegoats for all kinds of scrupulous activity before 1914, but in wartime the press found new ways to discredit the IWW. Hysterical headlines were quick to dub Wobblies as "Hirelings of the Huns" or "German-born children of the devil," and any union radicalism was tarred with the IWW brush.

In one bizarre article, 'The Critic' responded to an auctioneer's listing of 'famous IWW hens' in the *Manawatu Evening Standard* with: "IWW hens? If these belong to the order of 'I Wont Work' they will probably get it where the Square Deal would like to give it to their human prototypes—in the neck!"¹⁸ When the shipping vessel *Port Kembla* struck a German mine off the coast of Farewell Spit in 1917, one writer in the *Ashburton Guardian* put it down to pro-German sabotage, stating: "this Dominion is not by any means free of the noxious IWW element... this type of human being should be put out of existence on the first evidence of abnormality."¹⁹

Wobblies also became the favourite target of New Zealand's most prominent cartoonist of the day, William Blomfield. Many of his newspaper covers and drawings during the 1915-25 period depicted the IWW in a dark light—as crazed extremists or German provocateurs, or lazy workers. Cartoonists tended to convey the issues (and fears) of the day in order to stay relevant, so Blomfield shedding so much ink on the IWW may indicate that their influence was much larger than previously recognised.

IWW Propaganda and the Go-Slow

Ironically, this scare mongering by the press publicised IWW methods such as the go-slow far more than Wobblies could ever have done on their own. Indeed, employers and the government were especially alarmed by the go-slow—working at a slow pace to reduce production and hurting



125 of these stickers were seized by customs in 1927. C1 Box 161 36/959/101-120, Archives New Zealand

the boss (all while on the job and receiving a wage). Put to good use by watersiders, miners, drivers, and tramway men during the war, the go-slow was abhorred as a significant threat to the established economic order.

“It is the most serious problem that we face at the present time,” wrote Defence Minister James Allen to Massey in January 1917. “[Alexander] Herdman has been taking evidence on behalf of the Police about going-slow... as far as Defence is concerned, if any man is proved to be going slow’ [before a military Service Board] we shall cancel his exemption... we cannot possibly allow this fatal practice to get hold in New Zealand or else the nation is doomed.”²⁰ Not only did these tactics threaten war profits and the government’s lucrative commandeer with Britain (a deal that saw 90% of the country’s exports go directly to Britain); the go-slow had the potential to question the work ethic central to the wage system itself. As a result, War Regulations of 16 February 1917 included going slow in the category of seditious strikes.

Authorities were also dismayed at the volume of IWW ephemera still finding its way around the country. Bearing such lines as “Fast workers

die young” or “Go Slow! Do Not Waste your Life,” IWW stickers peeked out from walls and lampposts across New Zealand. In a cheeky swipe at conscription, one sticker was stuck in the middle of a National Registration poster. As late as 1927, Wellington customs found 125 of these stickers in the baggage of a SS *Maheno* seaman named Evans.

Another ‘silent agitator’ that caused uproar was a satirical poster by ex-New Zealand Wobbly Tom Barker. ‘To Arms!’ called on “Capitalists, Parsons, Politicians, Landlords, Newspaper Editors and other Stay-At-Home Patriots” to replace the workers in the trenches. Four copies were “smuggled across the Tasman... and pasted up outside the Supreme Court in Wellington,” causing the judge to suspend the court until the offending posters were removed.²¹

Anti-war pamphlets were also making their rounds. *War and the Workers* was a pocket-sized booklet printed by the Auckland IWW that implored workers not to become “hired murderers.” Sold from their Swanson Street office, the booklet insisted, “Those who own the country [should] do the fighting! Let the workers remain home and enjoy what they produce.”²²

After being distributed at the Buckle Street Drill Hall in Wellington, the booklet was forwarded to Solicitor-General John Salmond. Salmond urged for war regulations to be extended so that immediate powers would be available to punish those responsible for such mischievous publications.

In Parliament MP John Hornsby also raised concerns about IWW ephemera, decrying the “circulation in this country of pamphlets of a particularly obnoxious and deplorable nature.”²³ Hornsby asked whether immediate steps would be taken to prevent the circulation of such “harmful publications.”²⁴ The resulting Order in Council of 20 September 1915 specifically prohibited “the importation into New Zealand of the newspapers called *Direct Action* and *Solidarity*, and all other printed matter published by or on behalf of the society known as ‘The Industrial Workers of the World.’”²⁵

Direct Action was a lively newspaper published by the Australian IWW that found its way to New Zealand via seamen crossing the Tasman, or by

mail. Two months after the Order of Council was in place, the Post and Telegraph Department reported the withholding of “14 single copies [of] *Direct Action*; 2 bundles [of] *Direct Action*,” as well as “6 bundles [of] *Solidarity*.”²⁶ A number of these copies were then used by Police to chase up New Zealand subscribers listed in its columns. In December 1915 detectives in Auckland, Napier and Wellington hunted for a subscriber listed as Erickson. At first they thought he was a Wellington socialist named Frederickson, but soon concluded he was in fact Carl Erickson, a casual labourer and friend of Wellington anarchist Philip Josephs (who was also a *Direct Action* subscriber). The Police report noted that both men had donated to the Barker Defence Fund, set up after Tom Barker was convicted for publishing an anti-war cartoon in *Direct Action*.

The military also used a 1915 edition of *Direct Action* to investigate the Workers’ University Direct Action Group set up by Auckland Wobblies. According to *Direct Action*, lessons dealt with “economics, biology, physiology, Social Democrat fallacies, State Ownership ie State Capitalism fakes, Law and Authority Bluff, the anarchist doctrines of ‘Total Abstention’” and “scientific sabotage, the most potent weapon of the intelligent militant minority.”²⁷ After their Queen Street landlord forced the workers’ university to disband, its members were lucky to escape imprisonment (if they did at all).

One radical who was not let off the hook was 1913 striker Charles Johnson. Johnson was arrested in 1917 and found to have “an enormous amount of IWW literature” in his possession, including three copies of *Direct Action*. Johnson asked to be let off with a fine; the magistrate replied, “Oh, I can’t let you off with a fine in these conditions.”²⁸ He was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

Censorship of Correspondence

As well as the suppression of IWW publications, war regulations also made it illegal to “incite, encourage, advice or advocate violence, lawlessness and disorder, or express any seditious intention.”²⁹ What exactly constituted a seditious intention was interpreted broadly by the state, and included the contents of private correspondence.



JOHNSON, CHARLES JOHN OR CHARLES.

P.G. 18/460.

F.P. Class $\frac{5}{17}$ $\frac{U}{U}$ $\frac{11}{11}$ 18?

Police mugshot of Charles Johnson. P12, Archives New Zealand

Both Customs and the Post and Telegraph Department had a number of censors working within their ranks, the latter including the Deputy Chief Censor, William Tanner. But it was the military that managed censorship during the War. Tanner and other censors located across the country answered directly to Colonel Charles Gibbon, who was both Chief Censor and Chief of the General Staff of the New Zealand Military Forces. Postal censors were mostly officers of the Post Office and worked in the same building “as a matter of convenience”, but censors acted “under the instructions of the Military censor.”³⁰

“During the course of the late war,” wrote Tanner, it was necessary

to examine secretly the correspondence of certain persons who were supposed to be disaffected, and who were working to defeat the efforts of the New Zealand Government in meeting its obligations regarding the war by advocating [the] ‘go slow’ or inciting to resist the Military Service Act.³¹

Instructed to “suppress whatever was of a seditious or treasonable nature,” Tanner believed his work “gave the Police the necessary opening... to break up the organisations whilst still in the act of formation.”³²

One of those under Tanner’s watchful gaze was Philip Josephs. After letters to the anarchist Emma Goldman were spotted in October 1915, Josephs was arrested and “detained all day in the cooler until 4 o’clock in the afternoon,” when he was released without being charged.³³ While Josephs was in police custody, two detectives searched his shop in Cuba Street and took possession of all books and papers on anarchism. They then repeated their search at his Khandallah home.

As well as holding a considerable stash of anarchist literature, it appears Josephs’ shop had been the Wellington Local of the IWW. Police found “a number of unused official IWW membership books, rubber stamps, and other gear used in connection with that constitution,” as well as IWW correspondence, pamphlets and papers.³⁴

One such correspondent was Syd Kingsford. Two Police reports show that after the raid he was put under surveillance, while the chief military censor, Colonel Gibbon, made sure his correspondence was also censored. Another was J Sweeny, a Blenheim-based labourer who was writing to Josephs to order anarchist newspapers. In a letter that never reached its destination, Sweeny asked Josephs to “remember me to the Direct Action Rebels in Wellington,” indicating there were still Wobblies active in the capital at that time. With typical Wobbly flair, Sweeney signed his letter: “Yours for Direct Action. No Political Dope.”³⁵

Other censored letters written by an Auckland Wobbly named William Bell give a sense of the level of surveillance put in place by the state. “The Johns and military pimps are on the look out for the correspondence of men known in our movement,” wrote Bell, who was trying to secure a dummy address “for the purposes of ordering leaflets without an imprint for secret distribution at this end of New Zealand.”³⁶ Also mentioned in Bell’s letter was “a private meeting of picked trusted militants” due to take place at his bach, confirming that Auckland Wobblies were still active in mid-1917, albeit discreetly.³⁷ Obviously Bell was not discreet enough. He was arrested and sentenced to eleven months imprisonment.

(During his hearing, Bell provoked laughter in the courtroom. When the magistrate, referring to a comment in Bell's letter, asked him what a 'snide-sneak' was, Bell replied: "A man who plays both ways. We have plenty in the Labor movement, unfortunately").³⁸

Seditious Soapboxing

The introduction of conscription in August 1916 and subsequent opposition to it by parts of the labour movement saw the War Regulations move from targeting the written word to the spoken word. This was not surprising, given that Defence Minister James Allen had earlier noted: "We are right for conscription and it is only the fear of what might happen in Labour circles that prevents it being adopted here."³⁹

'Rabid Orator' and past Committee member of the Wellington IWW, Joseph Herbert Jones, was imprisoned for sedition in January 1917 after soapboxing to 500 people in Dixon Street, Wellington. "I want the working class to say to the masters," said Jones, "we don't want war. We won't go to the war."⁴⁰ During his court appearance Jones read a long and 'inflammatory' poem that received applause from onlookers in the court. The judge was not impressed, nor did he share Jones' view that all he had done was defend the interests of his fellow-workers. He was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment with hard labour.

Another radical to be jailed for 12 months was William Parker, a watersider who told a Wellington crowd in 1917 that the only way to stop conscription was with a general strike. In 1919 Parker was in court again, having distributed locally produced flyers promoting the go-slow, the lockout of the oppressors, and building a new society in the shell of the old. After amusing the large crowd of watersiders in the back of the court by "verbally annihilating His Worship", Parker was sentenced to 12 months for 'IWWism'.⁴¹

The Case of Carl Mumme

Probably the most extreme recorded repression against an anarchist during the First World War was the case of Wellington cabinet-maker and unionist, Carl Mumme. Born in Germany, Mumme was secretary



Carl Mumme with two of his sons, c.1911. *Private collection*

of the Furniture Workers' Union in 1897 and a founding member of the NZSP. He was a staunch anti-militarist involved in various Wellington campaigns, and also represented the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners on the Wellington branch of the FOL. In 1913 he joined the anarchist Freedom Group and gave a number of key lectures.

Despite being naturalized in 1896 and having spent close to twenty years in the New Zealand, Carl was arrested in May 1916 and shipped out to the detention camp at Matiu Somes Island. Carl's wife Margaret and their five children (the youngest being two years old) were not told of his arrest—it took two days for them to find out what had happened.

Carl's anti-militarist and anarchist beliefs ensured a stormy relationship with the camp commandant, Dugald Matheson. After refusing to address Matheson as 'Sir' and for alluding to mistreatment in letters to his wife, Carl was repeatedly punished for insubordination. This included forced exercise, bread and water rations for 21 days, confinement to concrete cells with no shoes or socks, and abuse from guards. Expressing his "utter contempt for a man who is an open enemy of all Governments" Matheson wrote in one report that, although no evidence of conduct hostile to the camp could be proved, Mumme was "an infidel a social democratic agitator and an active anti-militarist... posing as a martyr."⁴²

Despite sureties from prominent unionists and desperate letters from his near-destitute wife, Mumme remained in detention for the rest of the war, and after—his freedom blocked by police and military command. "Mumme is a Socialist apparently of the revolutionary type [and] is exactly the type of man who should be deported," wrote one chief detective.⁴³ While never deported, Mumme was not released from internment until 13 October 1919—close to a full year after Armistice.

As well as internment, the deportation of radicals from New Zealand became another way of silencing dissent, and was used on numerous occasions. In 1917 MP Vernon Reed asked in Parliament whether Massey had considered the provisions of the Unlawful Associations Amendment Bill introduced in Australia, "aiming at the destruction of the IWW and kindred institutions, and providing for the deportation of undesirables; and whether he will introduce into Parliament a measure having similar

objects?”⁴⁴ In reply, Premier Massey stated that such a law was under consideration. The result was the 1919 Undesirable Immigrants Exclusion Act, which merely formalised what was already covered under the war regulations. A number of Wobblies were deported from New Zealand under these regulations.

Wobblies not already in jail were kept under close surveillance during the later years of the war. In October 1918 the Defence Department had their eyes on Nita aka Lila Freeman, a female Wobbly active in Wellington. Correspondence of an anti-conscriptionist and ‘seditious’ nature between Nita and a fellow Wobbly named ‘Don’ was discovered by the military censor, which sparked further surveillance. ‘Don’ had been giving classes on political economy and socialism in Blackball, and it was hoped ascertaining their identities would lead to arrests: “in all probability the woman will be arrested on some charge at an early date,” noted the file.⁴⁵

Although it appears Nita Freeman was never arrested, by the war’s end at least 287 people had been charged with sedition or disloyalty—208 were convicted and 71 sent to prison. That radical syndicalists such as Wobblies and anarchists made up the numbers is hardly surprising, considering the similar treatment handed out to their comrades internationally. Indeed, like other countries across the globe, the New Zealand state attempted to use wartime conditions to cement its hold over militant labour. Although further comparative research is needed, some writers have argued New Zealand was a leader in using military means for political ends. Per capita, the New Zealand charges were far greater than Britain, where 422 people of a population of over 42 million were convicted or jailed for sedition under the Defence of the Realm Regulations. (However arrests for sedition in Britain were actually lower, as this figure included offences such as evading censorship, spreading false war news, or using fraudulent passports). John Anderson noted: “the English government was more tolerant of criticism than the Massey administration, and did not readily initiate prosecutions for sedition.”⁴⁶ And in the words of Scottish anarchist Guy Aldred, “of all British Dominions, for scientifically suppressing revolutionary thought the New Zealand Government is the worst.”⁴⁷

The Post-War Struggle

Despite the cease of hostilities in Europe, surveillance of anarchists and the IWW did not end with the First World War. Industrial unrest and social revolution immediately after the war's end was a deeply entrenched concern for the New Zealand Government. The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, coupled with unrest around the globe in 1918-1919, was seen as potential source of increased revolutionary activity in New Zealand. Bolshevism would now compete with the IWW for the state's attention, and for the title of New Zealand's favourite scapegoat.

As well as international upheavals such as mutinous soldiers, police strikes and the downfall of various regimes, the cost of living and dissatisfied returned servicemen were also seen as catalysts to major unrest. The government passed a range of anti-firearms laws, and watched closely the rhetoric of political parties like the New Zealand Labour Party and the Communist Party of New Zealand.

The state also kept tabs on the second wave of syndicalist organisations, such as the Alliance of Labour and the One Big Union Council. Formed in 1919 to promote class solidarity between watersiders, seamen, miners' and railway workers, the Alliance of Labour was decried by the Reform government as nothing less than the IWW in disguise. Indeed, their promotion of direct action and rejection of parliamentary politics saw them align with the IWW, causing the Employers Federation to lament the "lawless tendency on the part of Extreme labour."⁴⁸ In the end however, the Alliance failed to live up to its revolutionary rhetoric.

In Auckland around 1920 Wobblies like Bill Murdoch, George Phillips and Leo Woods helped to form the One Big Union Council. Leo Woods had sat on the Thames strike committee during the 1913 Great Strike, and in 1917 was thrown into what he called "one of Massey's concentration camps, Kiangarooa Prison Camp," for 18 months.⁴⁹ After his release, Woods became the literary secretary of the One Big Union Council and was delegated to smuggle banned literature from Sydney. He would go on to help found the Communist Party in 1921. The secretary of the Council was former wartime-secretary of the Auckland IWW, George Phillips, who, like Woods, had been jailed for refusing to be conscripted.



Post-war cartoon by William Blomfield. *NZ Observer*, 13 December 1919, National Library of New Zealand

For those in power monitoring these developments, the possibility of a general strike seemed imminent. Recorded industrial disputes had risen from 8 in 1915 to 75 in 1921. As a result, Prime Minister Massey urged his Reform party faithful to “secure good men to stem the tide of Anarchy and Bolshevism.” This radical tide, complained Massey, “is worse than folly... the matter must be taken in hand and stopped.”⁵⁰

Massey’s red baiting had significant support from a number of high profile allies. The Protestant Political Association, led by the vehement Reverend Howard Elliot, vowed to oppose “Bolshevism and ‘IWWism’ in every shape and form.”⁵¹ Also active was the New Zealand Welfare League, formed in July 1919 for the express purpose of curbing the activities of revolutionary labour, IWW doctrines, and Bolshevism. The League’s active press campaign featured large format newspaper articles on the

IWW and their “criminal” attitudes towards work, property, and state authority.

The red scare whipped up by conservative interests allowed the state to extend its wartime grip into peacetime. Tanner was kept on as censor in July 1919 by Defence Minister Allen, who wrote to Massey that, “a good deal of valuable information comes to the government through the medium of the censor, and it was thought wise not to lose this information.”⁵² The war regulations that created Tanner’s job were also extended under the War Regulations Continuance Act of 1920 (which was not repealed until 1947).

Other forms of surveillance continued apace. In his history of the New Zealand Police Force, Graham Dunstall notes that in January 1919, Police Commissioner John O’Donovan sent a confidential memo to officers across New Zealand:

In the view that considerable industrial and other unrest is reported from other countries and may extend to this Dominion it is necessary that special precautions be taken to keep in touch with the movements and actions of persons of revolutionary tendencies who are already here, or who may arrive.⁵³

Meetings of radicals continued to be attended by police and fortnightly reports were sent to Police Headquarters. Detectives in each district systemised this work by compiling an index of individuals and amassed boxes of detailed files.

The Wobblies remained a perceived threat well into the 1920s. In September 1920 Commissioner O’Donovan sent a nationwide memo giving the names IWW prisoners about to be released in Sydney, warning detectives to be on the look out in case they arrived in New Zealand. Also under surveillance was another Australian Wobbly, John B Williams, who was in New Zealand to form branches of the One Big Union (OBU). Numerous police reports tracked his progress around the country, noting that a branch had been formed in Auckland in May 1920 (its secretary was Andrew O’Neill, secretary of the General Labourers Union). In Christchurch Williams addressed a meeting attended by police, who were

concerned at his comments that “he was in New Zealand to form ‘One Big Union’ and behind the movement were the IWW men recently liberated in New South Wales.”⁵⁴

A year later police focus turned to the formation of the Communist Party in Wellington—yet Wobblies still warranted extra attention. When founding communist Andy Barras addressed a meeting at the Socialist Hall on 27 March 1921, police noted that a member of the IWW had questioned parts of his speech. “If a communist member was elected” noted the Wobbly, “what guarantee was there that he would not jump the fence and go to the side that was prepared to pay him most?”⁵⁵

At this stage Wobblies were still seen as a threat alongside communists. A 1926 report on a Mauritius Wobbly and waterside worker Eugene De Langre noted, “he has come under my notice for more than a year, and although I am given to understand that he is not a member of the Communist Party, he is probably worse by the fact that he is a member of the IWW.”⁵⁶ De Langre had been promoting the go-slow to his fellow watersiders, and teaching “some young seamen outside the Wellington Shipping Office to sing revolutionary songs, the ‘Red Flag’ etc.”⁵⁷ When police raided his sleeping quarters and found over 50 copies of IWW newspapers and pamphlets, he was regarded as “one of the worst IWW members trading in this country. It is hoped the Customs Department will deal urgently with him.”⁵⁸

The surveillance of De Langre and the mention of Customs highlights the increased patrolling of New Zealand ports, and the targeting of literature and mail. One Wobbly to be caught in this post-war net was Henry Murphy, an Australian labourer based in Auckland. In April 1919 Murphy wrote to a fellow worker in Australia that military deserters were being picked up every day; detectives “run the rule” over passengers arriving by ship; and that two Wobblies, “Nugget and Scrotty,” had been “turned back.”⁵⁹ The letter was intercepted by a censor and handed to police. “Murphy appears to be a dangerous character of the IWW type,” noted the censor. “He is an admirer of the Bolsheviks and is gradually drifting towards anarchy, revolution and outrage... his hatred of work is one of the traits of the IWW character.”⁶⁰ Murphy was hauled before the court for failing to register as a reservist under the Military Service Act, where

he declared, “anti-militarists have done more for democracy than all the soldiers who went to Europe.”⁶¹ He was sentenced to 14 days hard labour and was due to be deported under the war regulations, but instead he agreed to leave New Zealand voluntarily.

Deporting ‘Undesirables’

Murphy’s ‘voluntary’ deportation foreshadowed a law change designed to further extend the state’s reach over radicalism. In November of that year, the Undesirable Immigrant Exclusion Act was passed into law. This Act gave the Attorney-General power to single-handedly deport anyone whom he deemed “disaffected or disloyal, or of such a character that his presence would be injurious to the peace, order, and good Government” of New Zealand.⁶² He could also prevent anyone landing in the country, which meant Customs and Police further cemented their wartime responsibilities of monitoring the harbours. However the Defence Department was kept in the loop by having copies of every alien identity certificate sent to them. The military would then match these certificates up to their own black list of “revolutionary agents” and “undesirables.”

According to Massey, the Undesirable Immigrant Exclusion Act would be used against those who favoured Bolshevism and the IWW. It was soon put to good effect. Two Wobblies named Nolan and McIntyre were prevented from landing in New Zealand and promptly sent on their way to Sydney—their fares paid by the government. But one Wobbly who wouldn’t go quietly was the Australian seaman and returned serviceman, Noel Lyons.

In May 1925 seamen on board the SS *Manuka* refused to leave Wellington until their food was improved. However as the Union Steamship Company made clear to reporters, the real issue was “the deliberate attempt to institute job control” via the go-slow.⁶³ Using the pretext of IWW literature and posters found on board the ship, Lyons was read the Undesirable Immigrant Exclusion Act and given 28 days to leave New Zealand. Instead, Lyons and the crew walked off their Sydney-bound vessel singing ‘Solidarity Forever,’ and convened a meeting at the Communist Hall.



Deportee Noel Lyons on arrival in Sydney, 1925. www.trove.nla.gov.au/work/184714486

300 people packed into the Manners Street Hall to hear Lyons speak about the 'ham and egg' strike. "I have been described as a paid agitator," argued Lyons, "but it is a well known fact that all who take an active part in attempting to better the condition of the worker... develop whiskers overnight, and appear as a Bolshevik." Despite resolutions of protest from numerous unions, Lyons was imprisoned for two weeks before being shipped to Australia. On his arrival Lyons made the most of what the *NZ Truth* called 'the new spasm of [the] IWW,' organising mass meetings and reviving the Sydney IWW. In January 1926 he was joined by the ex-Wellington watersider, Eugene De Langre.

The deportation of Lyons highlights how the authorities would pick and choose when someone was to be considered a New Zealander, a British subject, or foreign immigrant. The Reform government's loyalty to Empire and their making of the world 'safe for democracy' did not seem to contradict the deportation of British subjects. "New Zealand is more conservative than England," noted Lyons on his arrival in Sydney. "They regarded me as a foreigner... It is too funny for words. When I was on my way to France as an Australian soldier, they did not say I was an undesirable... But now, when I put up a bit of a fight for humanity, they turn me out of the country."⁶⁴

Conclusion

Noel Lyons was not the only radical to be deported in the post-war years, nor was he the first. But his case is indicative of the systematic surveillance put in place after the First World War, and the attitude of the New Zealand government towards anarchists and the IWW. Although their treatment pales in comparison to the violence and mass deportations inflicted on the American IWW, the National Coalition and Reform governments clearly felt threatened by such working class radicalism. Class struggle and revolution from below; the flouting of law; the go-slow and challenging the work ethic; such tactics not only hindered the war effort, they also called into question the social relationships needed for capitalism and the state to function. As a result, the Defence, Police, and Customs Departments, as well as scores of legislation, was used during the war to ensure anarchism and the IWW never regained its pre-war strength.

It is clear anarchism and the IWW formed but a tiny part of the working-class radicalism of the day. Likewise, the ‘anarchist’ and ‘IWW’ label was thrown about rather hysterically by the press, making the identification of Wobblies during the war even harder. However the actions of anarchists and Wobblies during 1905-1925, and the reaction to them by the state, indicates a discernible legacy of revolutionary syndicalist radicalism in New Zealand—one that reached well beyond the Great Strike of 1913. It also forms an important sub-narrative to New Zealand’s home front experience, and wider conscientious objections to the First World. While it is hard to measure their precise influence on the local movement, I hope the examples above help to question what Kerry Taylor has called the premature obituary of the IWW and revolutionary syndicalism in New Zealand.

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