

# THE HOME FRONT

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The Impact of the Great War on Everyday New Zealanders 1914-1918

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# PREFACE

**H**ome Fires Burning seeks to give a historical account of the relationship between New Zealand society and its war effort from 1914 to 1918. It weaves together various strands, including domestic politics, international diplomacy, social and cultural reactions and the economic record, to present contemporary perspectives of the war. Modern clichés have often declared the conflict ‘senseless’ and not about anything, but New Zealanders loudly and clearly said just the opposite. For them the war meant the defence of the British Empire and the moral relationship, economic security and defence guarantee it represented to New Zealand; the defeat and punishment of German aggression; the protection of small nations, as exemplified by Belgium; the protection of democratic governance against autocratic militarism; and the aspiration that victory would bring a better world. There were also, of course, those who criticised, condemned or resisted the war effort. In some ways the New Zealand society that entered and endured the war belongs to a vanished age. In other ways, however, it is often curiously or strikingly familiar to early twenty-first-century New Zealanders. Historian Paul Baker once suggested that wartime New Zealand ‘was populated by heroes and cowards and drunkards and liars and idealists and a huge number of ordinary people struggling to cope with the inexplicable and relentless horrors of war’.<sup>1</sup> These temperaments were certainly apparent in the country’s displays of idealism, pettiness, politicking, convictions and sacrifices.



INTRODUCTION  
**NEW ZEALAND  
BEFORE 1914**

**T**he manner in which New Zealand approached the Great War reflected the nature of a society born of the explosive pace of nineteenth-century developments.

Foremost among these was the rapid transformation in the country's demography. In 1840, the non-Māori population stood at under 1000. By 1881 this had ballooned to 500,9100.. High immigration and birth rates then caused the settler population to more than double, to 1,002,679 in 1910. In 1914 it was estimated at just under 1.1 million.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of arrivals came from the British Isles, though there were some notable streams from western, central and southern Europe and parts of Asia.

This expansion imposed enormous impacts upon Māori, already undergoing a cultural transformation brought about by European technologies, goods and ideas. Some of these developments proved devastating, particularly the acquisition of firearms that resulted in, potentially, 20,000–30,000 Māori deaths during the intertribal Musket Wars between 1807 and 1845.<sup>3</sup> Introduced diseases and displacement also ensured that the Māori population likely fell from some 100,000–120,000 in 1800 to about 41,000 by the start of the 1890s.<sup>4</sup> Settlers' efforts to acquire and develop property led to a rapid alienation of Māori land, both voluntarily and, in many cases, under pressure. These dynamics, and questions of sovereignty, fuelled the outbreak of a series of localised conflicts in the 1840s that escalated during the 1860s, with major clashes in the Waikato, Taranaki and the Bay of Plenty. Known collectively as the New Zealand Wars, these battles between Māori and the Crown are estimated to have killed 2154 anti-government Māori and 745 British imperial and colonial troops and kūpapa (Māori fighting for the Crown). In the aftermath, Māori lost even more land to confiscation.<sup>5</sup> In 1914, these actions, still in living memory, remained a source of bitterness.

By 1911 New Zealand's urban population had overtaken the rural and just under a third of the population lived in the four urban centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.<sup>6</sup> Forty-nine per cent, however, lived in small towns and rural areas.<sup>7</sup> Despite some vestiges of a rougher frontier existence, cities and towns rapidly acquired modern amenities

and more genteel features: parks, halls, theatres, galleries, museums and libraries.<sup>8</sup> There had been mammoth efforts, too, to develop facilities and infrastructure, notably in the 1870s under Julius Vogel's public works scheme.<sup>9</sup> Over 400 miles of railroad were under construction each year between 1873 and 1876 and the 700 miles of telegraphic line of 1866 had expanded to 2985 miles in 1875. In 1877 this network was integrated into the wider imperial system, allowing rapid communication across the world and distant events to become local news.<sup>10</sup> The press flourished too. As one visitor observed, the newspaper '[has] a very high place in New Zealand. Everyone reads it, and there are few people ignorant or old-fashioned enough not to be interested in the news.'<sup>11</sup>

From the early decades of the colony, economic activity was heavily centred around land clearance, farming, small-scale manufacturing, construction and extractive industries – notably mining (gold and coal), timber milling and gum digging.<sup>12</sup> By 1914, nearly half the male workforce was still worked on the land, notably in agricultural activity. The advent of refrigerated shipping in the early 1880s had underpinned an economy heavily invested in long-distance international trade with the British market and New Zealand's exports to Britain, largely meat, dairy products and wool, grown from 37 per cent in 1861 to 79 per cent in 1913.<sup>13</sup> This economy also employed large numbers of men in the processing and transportation industries, including freezing works and waterfront work, as well as in mining the coal used for shipping and to heat homes and businesses. However, the white collar sector was also growing as work became more specialised and secondary education expanded. Many men had jobs as clerks, shop assistants, factory workers, on the railway, as public servants and within the professions. The number of women drawing an income rose steadily between 1881 and 1911 as undertaking paid work between leaving school and marriage became common.<sup>14</sup> Labour was also becoming increasingly unionised. In 1900 there were 175 registered unions with a total membership of 17,989; in 1900 there were 403, with 73,991 members.<sup>15</sup> By 1919 New Zealand was among the most unionised nations in the world.<sup>16</sup>

Constitutionally, in 1914, the country remained subordinate to British authority in various ways. London's Colonial Office remained the major point of contact, notably in managing foreign affairs, and a local representative of the Crown was present in the figure of the governor. When war broke out, this post was held by Arthur William de Brito Savile Foljambe, the second Earl of Liverpool.<sup>17</sup> London had long recognised, however, the difficulty of direct rule over the settler populations. In what may seem like a paradox, imperial rule came with effective self-governance and a democratic franchise far more advanced than in Britain.<sup>18</sup> In 1852 New Zealand was granted responsible government, with an elected House of Representatives and an upper Legislative Council, though there was a significant degree of governance and development at provincial level. In 1876 the provinces were abolished and a central government was established in Wellington, which had been the capital since 1865. This government was elected under an increasingly widening franchise that was extended to Māori males in 1867, to all men in 1879 – since 1852 a minority of European men had been excluded, as had all Māori – and, in a global first, to all women in 1893.<sup>19</sup>

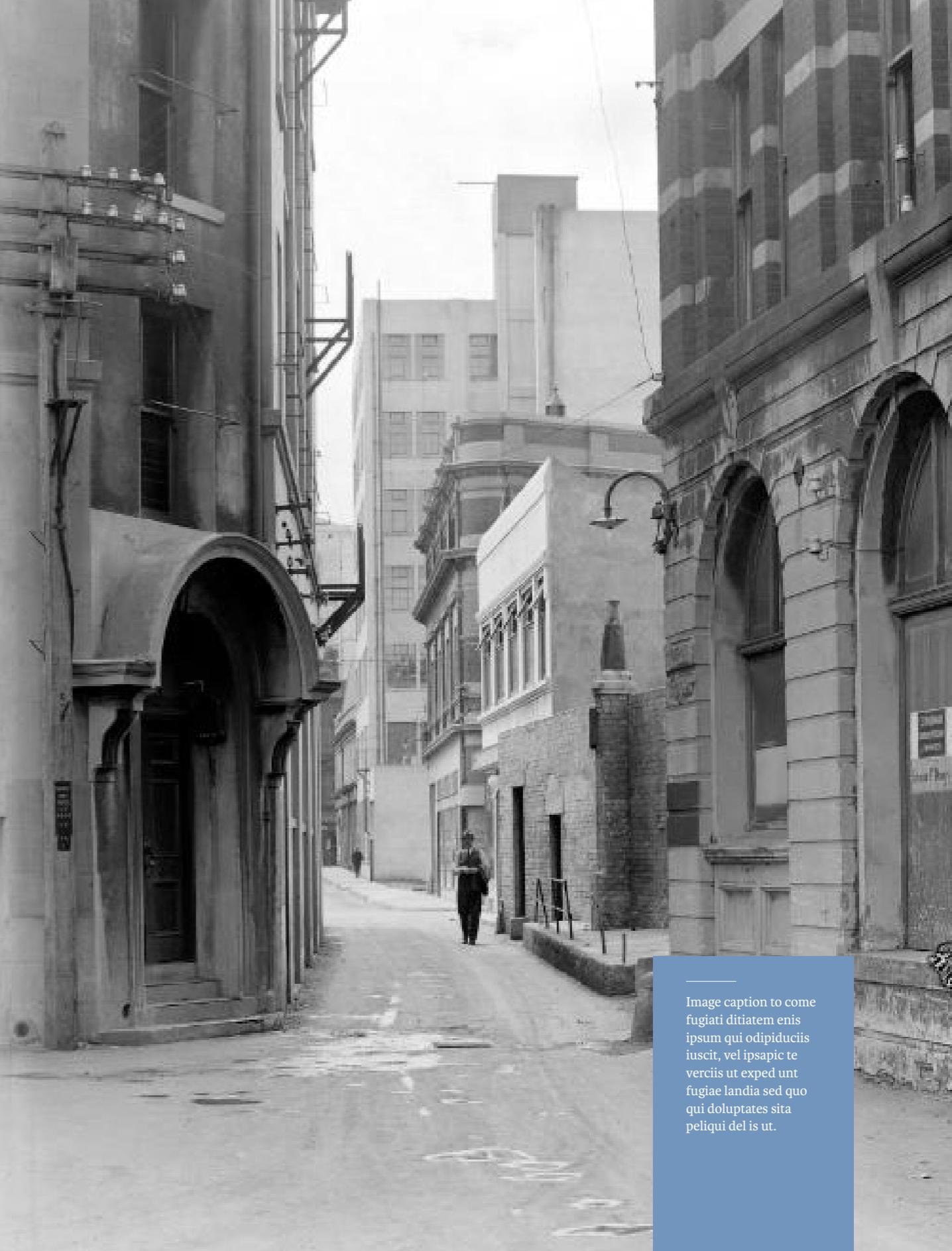


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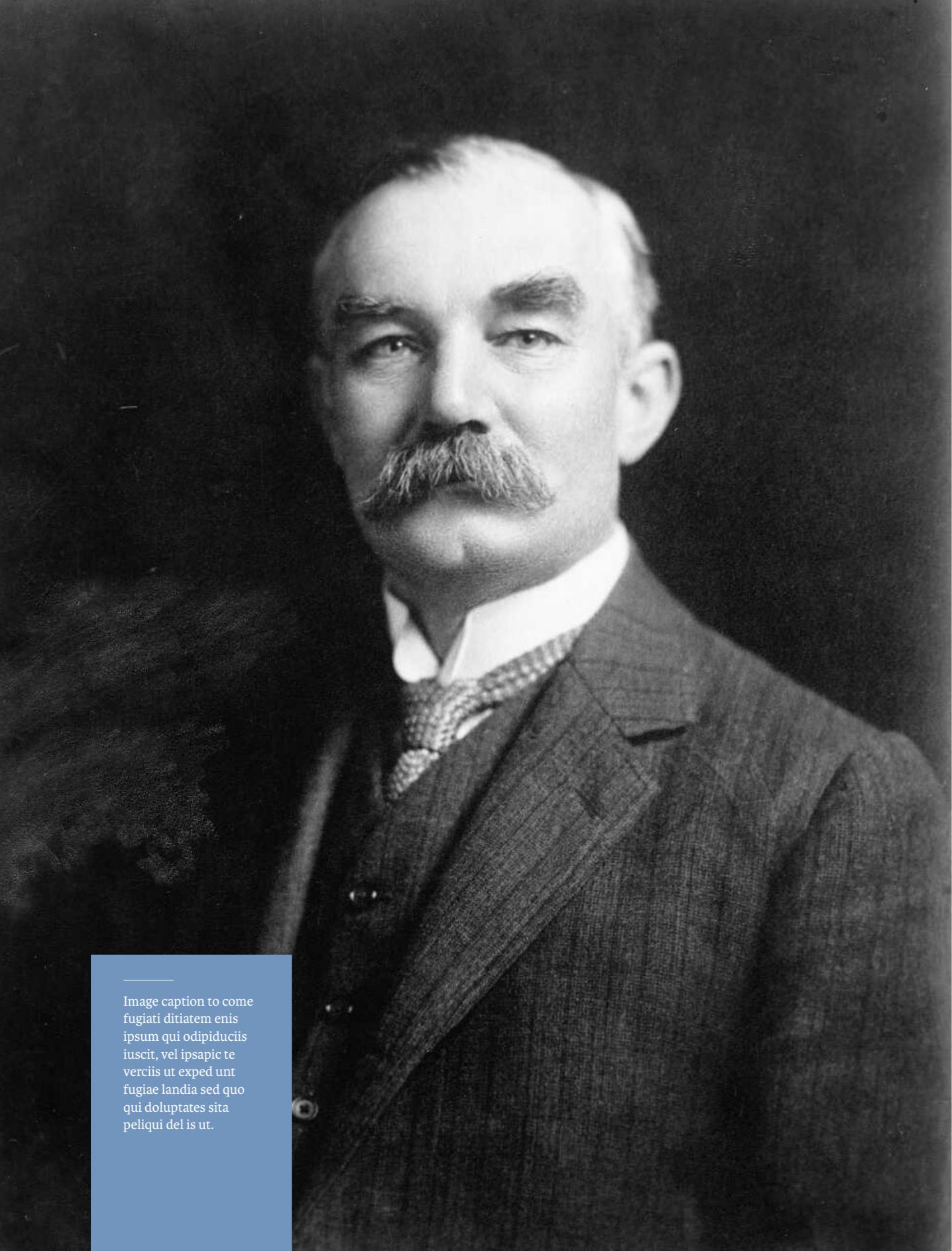


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The air of general optimism about a modern age of unprecedented material and moral progress was expressed and celebrated in the New Zealand Exhibition held in Christchurch over the summer of 1906–07. As the official booklet proclaimed, this event showcased ‘a wild country made fit for civilised men’: ‘Men still living saw New Zealand when not a European town or village stood upon its shores, except one or two rowdy bay-townships, where whaling ships came for three main “supplies” of the rough old whaling days – wood, water and temporary Maori wives.’<sup>20</sup>

Also growing through the nineteenth century had been a sense of New Zealand identity. As French geographer and economist André Siegfried, who visited in 1904, later noted, ‘in many respects New Zealand is still, in the proper sense of the word, a colony, in other ways she is already a nation, whose national beauties and whose history, with its crises of tragedy and romance, have already stirred in her citizens a real love of her.’<sup>21</sup> From the 1870s the country had often been described as ‘Maoriland’, a term evoking ‘a world of saccharine fantasy’ and Victorian literary forms including stout-hearted pioneers, fierce Māori warriors and dusky Māori maidens.<sup>22</sup> Into the twentieth century, a laundered memory of pioneering audacity and self-reliance was still regarded as an exemplary model for national and masculine character.<sup>23</sup> Competing with this, however, was New Zealand’s growing distinction as a centre of advanced social reforms: women’s suffrage in 1893, the establishment of industrial arbitration in 1894, which was said to make New Zealand a ‘land without strikes’, and the 1898 introduction of old age pensions. This reputation was greatly boosted by a series of visiting international observers, like Siegfried, who described the country as the ‘birthplace of the twentieth century’, the ‘political brain of the modern world’ or the ‘social laboratory from which the world should learn much’.<sup>24</sup>

This developing identity has also helped to give New Zealand a sense of its own distinct destiny, including its 1901 decision not to become the seventh state in the newly constituted Commonwealth of Australia.<sup>25</sup> That year, too, of the country’s ambitions to acquire an empire in the Pacific gained some ground when the Colonial Office assented to New Zealand administering the Cook Islands, previously a British protectorate.<sup>26</sup> Alongside this sense of national distinction, though, ran an increasing orientation towards and identity with the British Empire and in 1907 the country was proclaimed a British dominion rather than a colony. This new status brought no constitutional change but complemented conceptions of progress and a sense of an ongoing relationship with the the empire. In Siegfried’s words, a ‘thousand signs’ made it apparent that ‘it is London which is the capital for New Zealanders and that they derive thence their ideas, their fashions, and their watchwords’.<sup>27</sup> This closeness was underwritten by a transnational infrastructure that carried New Zealand produce to the British market, and Siegfried’s ‘ideas, fashions and watchwords’ back to New Zealand media and consumers. (In 1913 60 per cent of imports came from Britain).<sup>28</sup>

New Zealand’s defence and economic reliance on Britain, and its sometimes brazenly stated expectations that the empire should work for its benefit, could, cynically, be seen as sufficient explanation for such attachment to the Mother Country. Certainly, trade with Britain underwrote a standard of living claimed, by the turn of the twentieth century, as among the

highest in the world, and New Zealand's regional defence was guaranteed through the Royal Navy, overwhelmingly funded by British taxpayers.<sup>29</sup> But cynicism alone cannot, of course, explain the strength of the moral relationship, and the hardships New Zealand endured to sustain and honour it. New Zealanders, overwhelmingly, saw themselves as distinct, perhaps superior, Britons who, as part of a global empire, were entitled to British cultural achievements, prestige and preference.<sup>30</sup> One observer summarised New Zealanders' sense of loyalty to 'Home', as the UK was habitually dubbed though the proportion of the population born there had dropped to near a fifth by 1911, as 'stupid, irrational and, in some melancholy way, satisfying to the heart. It has the texture of family relationships which can be full of internal bitterness but united against the outside world, that can be relied upon beyond ordinary friendship in times of sickness and death.'<sup>31</sup>

Another strand within the country's identity derived from ideas of racial harmony. Even the New Zealand Wars were interpreted to fit this narrative. In April 1914 some 5000 people, including a small number of Māori and Pākehā veterans, gathered to recognise the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Ōrākau. A speech proclaimed that this most famous encounter of the Waikato war marked 'the final acceptance of the British mana by a heroic and warlike native people' and as laying the ground for 'a just and generous reciprocity which is everywhere regarded as an example to the civilised world'.<sup>32</sup> Proponents of the mythology of racial harmony and progress could point to decades of considerable intermarriage and of economic and cultural engagement. By 1912, too, more Māori were attending public schools than native schools, a professional class of Māori schoolteachers, clergymen, nurses, solicitors and doctors had emerged and Māori leaders such as Āpirana Ngata, Māui Pōmare, Sir James Carroll, Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck) and Paraire Tomoana – typically grouped together as the Young Māori Party – worked as members of Parliament to improve Māori health, living and social standards.<sup>33</sup> Carroll had been the first Māori to win a general rather than a Māori seat, the first to enter Cabinet and the first to serve as acting prime minister, in 1909 and 1911.

The racial situation was not so clear-cut. Some iwi, bitter



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about land confiscation and resentful of European authority, found autonomy in physical isolation, economic self-sufficiency and the enduring authority of tribal institutions. The Kingitanga movement, based in Waikato, had arisen in the nineteenth century with the ambition of bringing Maori under a unified sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> Although pan-tribal legitimacy and independence had proved unobtainable, the movement held significant authority across the central North Island and within the tribes of Waikato, Maniapoto and Ngāti Haua. At the time of the Ōrākau commemoration, Te Rata, the fourth Māori king, was drawing up plans to travel to Britain and lay grievances before the British monarch as a partner under the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>35</sup>

Significant parts of Tuhoe, and some of Ngāti Awa and Whakatōhea, who followed the leadership of Tuhoe prophet Rua Kēnana.<sup>36</sup> By 1914 Rua had built a reputation with claims that a vision declared him to be the prophet foreseen by the New Zealand Wars guerrilla leader Te Kooti, that he was the second son of God and the brother of Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup> In 1907 Rua and his Iharaia (Israelites) relocated to the settlement of Maungapōhatu, cleared from some 2000 acres of dense bush deep in Te Urewera.<sup>38</sup> There was great curiosity about the Māori messiah and his 'new Jerusalem'. Critics denounced him as a fraud, the Ringatū church, in which he had begun his religious life, dubbed him a heretic and the Anglican church regarded him as an obstacle to proselytisation. Official eyes noted his threatened defiance of the dog tax (regarded by many Māori as unjust), the 1907 Tohunga Suppression Act and his involvement in sly-grogging.<sup>39</sup> Others admired him as a reforming figure and praised the cleanliness and industriousness of his followers.<sup>40</sup> Rua's charisma and compelling physical presence were also commonly remarked upon.<sup>41</sup>

There was a moral dimension to progress. The retreat of frontier conditions was accompanied, between 1880 and 1910, by dramatic declines in rates of violence, crime and public drunkenness.<sup>42</sup> This partly reflected new social regulation and what has been termed a moral crusade to raise the physical, mental and moral condition of the population.<sup>43</sup> Such campaigns were spearheaded by secular progressives and the Protestant middle class. Although New Zealand had no state church, the voice of Christianity was influential. In early 1914, for example, planning for the December centenary of missionary Samuel Marsden's first New Zealand sermon called for a recognition of 'his magnificent services in the cause of Christianity, civilisation, and colonisation'.<sup>44</sup> The progressive drive was manifested in various causes – the campaign for the female franchise and that for temperance; efforts to curb of sexual impropriety and censor 'offensive' material; attempts to improve public hygiene; the offering of health services for mothers and babies, especially via the Plunket Society; the promotion of eugenics; and the restriction of non-white immigration. In 1914 the two great campaigns were efforts to introduce biblical instruction to the school syllabus and lobbying to restrict or prohibit alcohol. Temperance reformers achieved some successes. Thanks to 1893 legislation, licensed premises in a constituency could be enacted by a 60 per cent vote and various areas consequently went 'dry'. In 1911 a referendum showed that 56 per cent of the population favoured national prohibition, just short of the three-fifths required.

There was opposition to these campaigns, which followed some social faultlines. One of

these was class. The editor of *N.Z. Truth*, a leading populist newspaper directed at workers, denounced reformers, notably prohibitionists, as puritanical 'wowsers' and 'gospel-grinding gasbags'.<sup>45</sup> Moral campaigns could also, however, divide the Protestant majority from the Catholic minority (some 13 per cent of the population), since most Catholics came from working-class backgrounds and had different attitudes to alcohol and gambling. The fact that the overwhelming majority of New Zealand Catholics were of Irish heritage sometimes constituted another faultline: Protestant–Catholic antagonism had a notable history in New Zealand. There had been a 'comic opera "Fenian Riot" on the West Coast in 1868 and Timaru and Christchurch witnessed clashes between Orangeman and Catholics in 1879'.<sup>46</sup> As the new century approached, much of the most significant Catholic–Protestant conflict centred on the education system.<sup>47</sup> Fearing that non-sectarian religious instruction could become Protestant proselytisation, the New Zealand Catholic Federation laboured to establish their own schooling system and campaigned for state funding. Their insistence that state schools should remain strictly secular, to accommodate the number of Catholic children who could not be placed in Catholic schools, raised ire and accusations of hypocrisy, especially from Protestant groups campaigning for biblical instruction in state classrooms.<sup>48</sup> A series of political–cultural issues added to the antagonism. Catholics were rumoured to be overrepresented or specially favoured in the public service, though official investigation suggested that this understanding was 'unsupported by facts'.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Vatican's 1908 *Ne Temere* decree, which ruled that interfaith marriages were invalid unless a Catholic priest was present, was seen as both as papal intrusion into civil law and as an accusation of illegitimacy and bastardry. The great question of Home Rule for Ireland had some resonance, too. Orange groups organised anti-Home Rule meetings in several centres in 1906 and in May 1914 one newspaper was captioning pictures of British troops arriving in Ulster as 'Under The Shadow of Civil War'.<sup>50</sup>

Interdenominational relations were, however, largely defined by well-tempered discontent, with polite society asserting that old world quarrels should not be replicated in the new and that attacking an individual's religion was unseemly, if not bigotry.<sup>51</sup> For example, Auckland's Catholic bishop, Henry Cleary, diligently sought to cultivate interdenominational goodwill and has been described as 'the most eminent supporter of an integrationist line'.<sup>52</sup> By 1914 teachers in Catholic religious orders had free rail travel and Catholic pupils were permitted to compete for state secondary scholarships and, if successful, accept them at Catholic schools.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, many Catholics, too, were loyal to the empire and proud of Ireland's contribution to British achievements and heritage.

**T**here were also notable and sometimes volatile political developments. Between 1893 and 1906 the scene had been dominated by the figure of Richard Seddon, whose nickname, 'King Dick', hinted at his centrality in New Zealand politics as the Liberal Party he headed blazed a trail of reforming legislation. An English migrant, Seddon had come from a varied background, including mining on the Australian and New Zealand goldfields, running stores and hotels, working as a lay litigant representing miners and serving as mayor of Kumara.<sup>54</sup>

Though opponents derided his common background, Seddon was in tune with an age of mass politics and turned a homespun manner to his advantage. He possessed immense skill in handling crowds, creating an impression of boisterous friendliness and pragmatism. Barrel chested, almost 6 feet tall and weighing not far off 300 pounds, he physically embodied his larger than life persona. Despite a robust constitution, by the turn of the twentieth century his health was deteriorating and he developed a heart condition. He died 10 June 1906 while returning from a visit to Australia. His legend remained a potent force for some time as later politicians presented themselves as heirs to his humanitarian programmes and populist style of leadership.

Stepping into the vacuum Seddon left, and presented as the Liberals' great hope, was Sir Joseph Ward. Born 1856 in Melbourne to an Irish Catholic family, Ward had emigrated to New Zealand early in his life. An urbane technocrat, he had a debonair style that was apparent in his affinity for cigars and gadgetry, his practice of waxing the ends of his moustache – which, he was wont to worship 'with the rapt devotion of a Hindoo contemplating the problems of Nirvana' – and habitual smart dress; cartoonist David Low considered that Ward 'always dressed as though he had a lunch engagement at Downing Street'.<sup>55</sup> In 1883 he had married Theresa De Smidt, a noted beauty with a keen business acumen who was an important source of psychological support; the couple had five children.<sup>56</sup> By the turn of the century, despite sectarian sneers over Ward's Catholicism and personal humiliation over his involvement in the Colonial Bank's bankruptcy during the 1890s, he had built a notable career straddling business and politics, with a reputation as a 'financial wizard'.<sup>57</sup> Ward skilfully aligned his expertise with a formidable capacity for work. In the words of his biographer, 'It is probably not too much to say that no other politician in our history has had a greater impact on so many aspects of the country's development'.<sup>58</sup> His belief in progress was complemented by 'one of the brightest and sunniest natures that man was ever blest with. Hope, hope, bright beautiful hope is through him warp and woof'.<sup>59</sup>

This positivity would be tested as the political landscape shifted. Under Seddon, the Liberals had governed on a broad base of urban and rural support. In the early years of the new century, however, and notably after Seddon's death, this consensus and dynamism appeared unsteady and in the 1908 general election the Liberal Party effectively offered no policy largely out of fear of the centrifugal forces on its left and right flanks. On the left, the future of the Liberals' traditional cooperation with the labour movement, the so called 'Lib-Lab alliance' came under growing scrutiny as working people became increasingly politicised. This was part of an international surge in socialist movements, often drawing influence or inspiration from communist, anarchist, syndicalist traditions elsewhere as well as from organisations like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The labour movement was intensely divided, however, over objectives and tactics. Many, and especially the older generation, the craft unions and the skilled workers, embodied an ethos that was 'sentimental rather than intellectual, Christian rather than Marxist, anti-poverty rather than anti-capitalist'.<sup>60</sup> Such moderates tended to be more concerned with local conditions, to favour piecemeal reforms and some continuation of the alliance with the Liberals. The more militant elements, particularly within the maritime

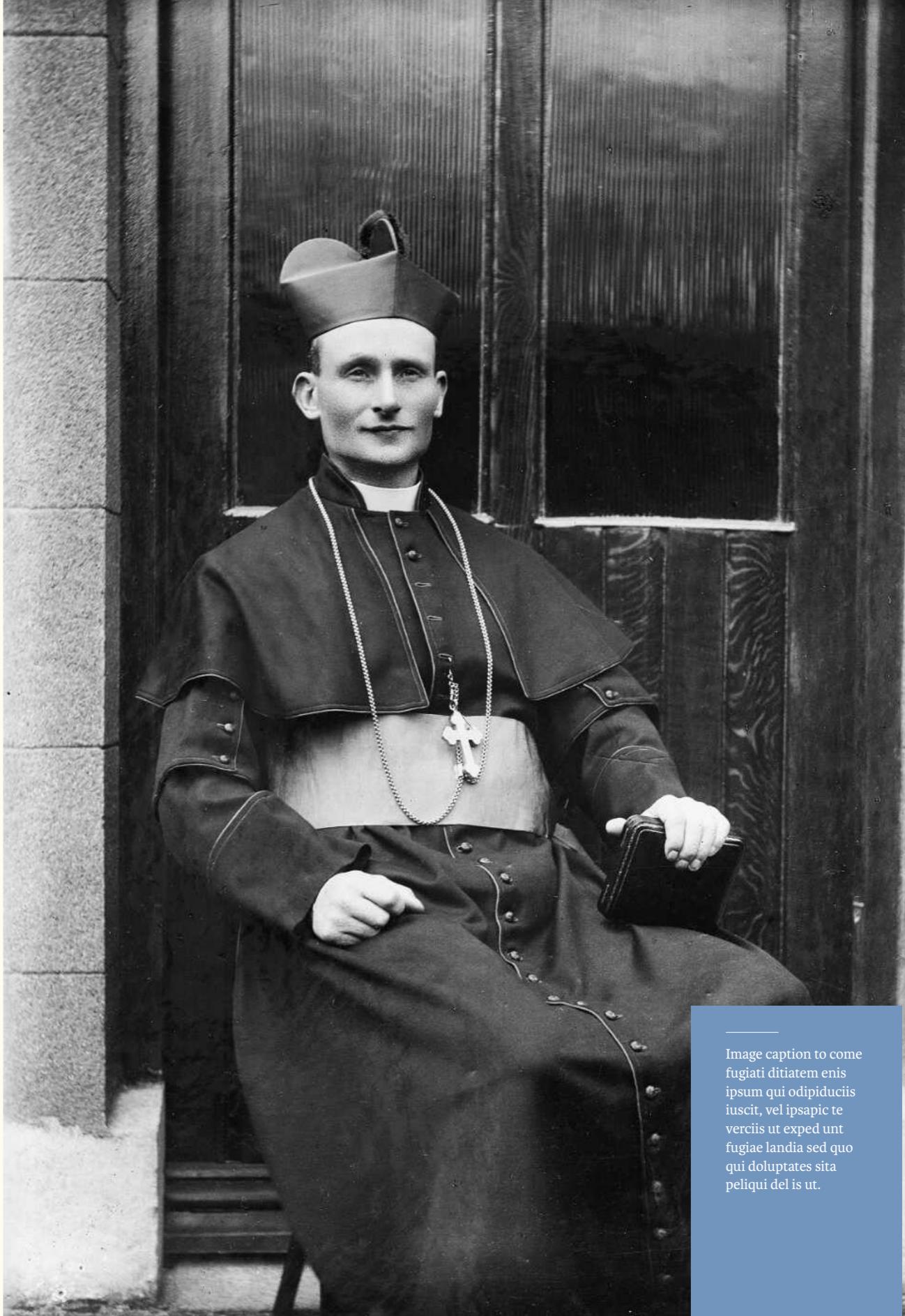


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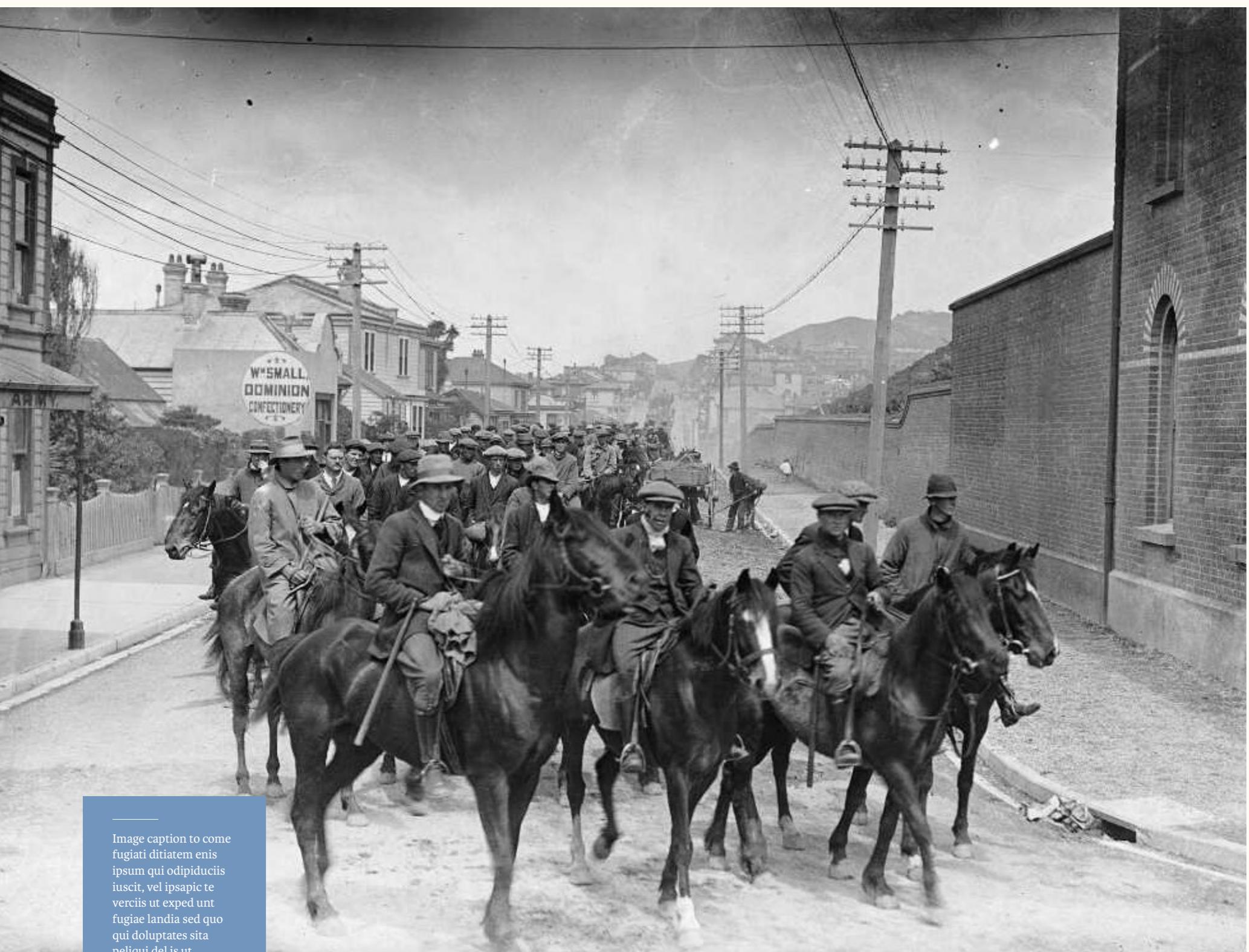


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and mining industries, favoured radical action to confront what they saw as an unjust status quo. They sought the creation of large unions able to force direct action and reject state arbitration, 'labour's leg-iron', and to raise worker solidarity across industries. To such ends, the Federation of Labour, later the United Federation of Labour, its members nicknamed the 'Red Feds', was founded in 1909.

Among the Red Feds a number of activists who soon became prominent national labour leaders. All originated from humble backgrounds, had cut their political teeth in more radical scenes, mostly within the Australian labour movement, and had arrived in New Zealand in the decade before 1914. Henry (Harry) Holland, for example, had come to New Zealand from New South Wales in 1912, aged 44, to work as an organiser for the Federation of Labour and as an editor for its newspaper, the *Maoriland Worker*. Slightly built and radiating an air of sincere intensity which a contemporary described as 'Napoleonesque', Holland was given to bellicose rhetoric accented with Marxist doctrine.<sup>61</sup> Equally bellicose was Robert (Bob) Semple, who had arrived from Victoria in 1904 to work on the coal fields and soon became involved in union organisation and, later, was a full-time organiser for the Federation of Labour. The 'outstanding personality in the militant union movement', he has been described as a 'spell-binding, apocalyptic evangelist of theatrical extravagance, emotional rather than logical, completely egotistical, vicious in his criticism of others but very sensitive to comments about himself, a coiner of unforgettable abuse not a deep political thinker'.<sup>62</sup> His lean build, sharp features and boxing experience lent him an air of pugnaciousness.

Another Victorian immigrant turned New Zealand labour leader was Patrick (Paddy) Webb, genial and prematurely bald, affectionately described as 'a likable little urchin'.<sup>63</sup> Webb had arrived in country in 1905 and found work in the mines while making his mark in union affairs. Though he opposed a more

aggressive industrial policy, he was prominent in attacks on the arbitration system, notably in the 1908 'tucker-time strike' in which he and six other miners were sacked for taking a 30 rather than the prescribed 15 minutes for lunch. The resulting strike by the Blackball Coal-miners' Union knowingly breached arbitration agreements and refused to pay the resulting fine, signalling its willingness to challenge the system.<sup>64</sup> Webb became the inaugural president of the Federation of Labour. Another rising talent was Peter Fraser, who arrived in New Zealand in 1911, aged 26, from Scotland, to work on the Auckland waterfront. Lanky, with thinning hair and thick spectacles, Fraser possessed a studious air and an austere manner. Like his fellow Red Feds, he was soon involved, and increasingly influential, in the labour movement, becoming an executive member of the Federation of Labour. His incisive and tireless work and quick and cutting wit made him an effective soap-box lecturer with a mantra of 'educate, agitate, organise'.<sup>65</sup> He identified himself as a 'revolutionary socialist', noting 'Any working class movement that is not revolutionary is reactionary. It must be either for the perpetuation or the abolition of the present Capitalist system.' He was also explicit that the revolution had to be won by democracy, 'the slowest, the least picturesque, the most ponderous, but still the only sure method of social transformation'.<sup>66</sup>

Efforts to develop a political labour party were inspired by similar organisations in Britain and Australia. A series of minor and often fractious parties formed on the left of the Liberals and in 1911 four MPs were endorsed by various labour groupings; in 1913 by-elections two more, including Webb, joined them. This grouping ranged from Wellington South MP Alfred Hindmarsh, remembered as pleasant, cultured and suspicious of socialist militants, to Grey Lynn MP John Payne, an inflammatory if not a demagogic presence. In January and July 1913, two unity conferences led to the founding of the Social Democratic Party. The Red Feds had a notable presence within the second conference, at which Holland called for the 'abolishment of the wage system' and submitted a revolutionary preamble to be added to the new party's constitution: 'The working-class and the employing-class have nothing in common. There can be no peace between them 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 in life... It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism.'<sup>67</sup>

In reaction, on the Liberals' right flank, another movement coalesced into the Reform Party in 1909. Identifying itself with a vision of New Zealand as a property-owning, meritocratic democracy, Reform claimed to offer honest, efficient and fair government for all classes; its position was one of 'reinvented conservatism', advocating property rights, self-reliance and economic independence against socialism.<sup>68</sup> Reform's major support base lay in rural New Zealand.<sup>69</sup> This support hardened as trust in the Liberals was eroded over perceived concessions to the Red Feds and over land. Most farmers strongly favoured freehold tenure over schemes in which the state would maintain ownership of Crown land and lease it to tenants. Reform championed freeholding: 'serfs of the Crown or every man his own landlord'.<sup>70</sup>

Having won the 1894 Waitemata by-election, and become increasingly prominent within the Reform faction,<sup>71</sup> William Massey was formally announced as leader of the Reform Party in 1909.<sup>72</sup> Born in 1856 in the small Irish town of Limavady in Ulster, Massey had travelled to



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New Zealand, aged 14, to work on his father's farm in West Tamaki. In 1882 he married his neighbour's daughter, Christina Paul, with whom he had seven children, two of whom died in infancy.<sup>73</sup> Christina Massey would later replicate her keen involvement in Auckland women's, charitable and community groups at a national level.<sup>74</sup> Massey fell short in many areas of gentlemanly refinement. His penmanship destroyed nibs, his choice of attire was described as failing 'to appeal to the tailors of Wellington' and his efforts at shaving could leave on his chin 'a gruesome patchwork of sticking plaster'.<sup>75</sup> He was, though, no uncultivated rustic. His parliamentary speeches made familiar use of biblical and Shakespearean quotes and books, notably Victorian poets and novelists, were cherished in his household.<sup>76</sup> Like Seddon before him, he turned down a knighthood to preserve a common touch. Indeed 'Farmer Bill' often presented himself as representing New Zealand's bold-hearted, plain-spoken rural aspect. He habitually peppered his stump speeches with references to 'fellow sons of the soil' and burnished a political legend that he was on a haystack when an invitation to stand for a seat was hoisted to him on a pitchfork.<sup>77</sup> His bluff, tenacious and often combative political style was matched by a staunch readiness to confront those he considered to be transgressing legal and social boundaries. When he received death threats during labour unrest he refused to deviate from his habit of early morning and late night walks to and from Parliament, though he did elect to carry a revolver.<sup>78</sup>

In the pre-war years New Zealand's reputation as the 'land without strikes' was decidedly challenged. Between 1894 and 1905 there were no strikes by registered unions; in 1906 there was one; by the end of 1911 there had been another 41.<sup>79</sup> Events came to a head after the inconclusive results of the 1911 general election when Liberal defections allowed Reform, in 1912, to form a government and end the Liberals' long reign. In toasting the new prime minister, Ward ambiguously wished Massey as long a time in office as he deserved. Massey retorted by wishing the same for the Liberals in opposition, adding that he thought that would be a considerable measure.<sup>80</sup> The exchange was not untypical of Massey and Ward's interactions.<sup>81</sup> Ward considered Massey a 'political parvenu' and 'little more than an uncultivated bigot' while Massey made some sport of pricking Ward's ego in parliamentary debate.<sup>82</sup> Religion played a part. Massey was a former Orange Lodge grand master, and Reform's campaigning had alleged that Ward was using his office to favour his fellow Catholics.<sup>83</sup> In their devotion to the British Empire, though, the differences between the two men 'were perhaps measurable only in micromillimeters'.<sup>84</sup> Massey saw the empire as possessing a divine purpose; Ward has been described as 'the perfect lay spokesman' for the Catholic social elite's conceptions of the 'Anglo-Celtic Empire' and as turning 'the identification of Catholics with Imperialism into almost an art form'.<sup>85</sup>

Once in power, Reform attempted to restore harmony by confronting Red Fed industrial action and driving unions back into the arbitration system. In November 1912 the Coromandel gold-mining town of Waihi proved a flashpoint after more police were sent in to deal with a major strike that had started in May. When violence broke out, unionist Fredrick Evans was killed. Though the strike was soon broken, Holland soon proclaimed Waihi 'but a skirmish of the advance guard in the great class war'.<sup>86</sup> The following year certainly saw a greater scale of

unrest unleashed. The Great Strike of 1913 was actually a series of industrial actions between mid-October 1913 and mid-January 1914.<sup>87</sup> The origins lay in disputes at a Huntly coal mine and on the Wellington waterfront but escalated to a general strike that ultimately involved some 14,000 strikers in a number of centres, though concentrated in mining and waterside areas.<sup>88</sup> Facing port closures that would leave their produce unshipped and valueless, the Farmers' Union helped to organise rural volunteers as police specials, dubbed 'Massey's Cossacks' by labour activists. The government was prepared to deploy the military if necessary and Wellington was described as 'an armed camp' in which the 'sinister sound of massed hoofbeats' signalled the movement of hundreds of specials into the city.<sup>89</sup> The pitched street battles and serious riots that followed constituted the most disruptive episode of civil unrest in modern New Zealand history. By the end of 1913 the strike had largely broken, with most unions agreeing to return to work under the arbitration system, enmity between Reform and militant labour had been entrenched. Webb proclaimed that 'Massey has got to go', and even unionists who had opposed the strike were disquieted by the way in which it had been routed.<sup>90</sup> Labour, however, was in general disarray as various militants lost their positions and Holland, Semple and Fraser were among those charged with inciting violence. Holland was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment, but Semple and Fraser were released, seemingly in an effort to reduce tensions. Perhaps most significantly, the strike left many socialist and labour leaders reassessing the merits of direct action over the need to build institutional power.