



# **COUNTERFUTURES**

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Left thought & practice Aotearoa

# The Independent Left Press and the Rise and Fall of Mass Dissent in Aotearoa since the 1970s

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**L**EFTIST PUBLICATIONS ARE inextricably linked to the ebb and flow of struggle in society. During an era of relatively high dissidence – the 1970s and to a lesser extent the 1980s – a vibrant leftist press flourished in Aotearoa. The independent left produced many of the left’s most prominent and longest-lasting publications. It performed an indispensable role within the left – acting as a forum for debate, and publishing a wealth

of information and investigative research. As protest has largely dwindled since the early 1990s, and society has generally lurched to the right under the generalised commodification and enclosures of neoliberalism, the left has wilted. The quality and quantity of independent socialist magazines has generally diminished. As such this article is somewhat of a lament for an independent left – and the left in general – that has seemingly almost vanished, and with it almost all of its publications.

A dearth of material has been published about left-wing publications in Aotearoa since the 1970s.<sup>2</sup> This is a consequence of how the left here ‘has not received the scholarship it deserves’.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, leftist magazines overseas of the same era have been subject to several lengthy studies and histories.<sup>4</sup> These studies have often taken the form of intellectual histories or biographies, and have tended to view their subjects in isolation from the rest of society.<sup>5</sup> The danger here is to focus narrowly on abstract ideas and the theoretical development of well-known authors – normally white males – and to overlook the broader context in

1 I would like to thank the two referees of this article for their helpful comments.

2 See Dylan Taylor and Sandra Grey, ‘From class-struggle to neoliberal narratives’, *New Zealand Sociology* 29/3, 2014, pp. 69-88; Bert Roth, ‘A history of socialist newspapers in New Zealand,’ *Socialist Action*, 7 May 1976; and Murray Horton, ‘Obituary: *Monthly Review*’, *Foreign Control Watchdog* 84, May 1997, pp. 74-6.

3 Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor, ‘Introduction: Bringing the Left Back in’, in *On the Left*, Dunedin 2002, p. 11.

4 See for example Duncan Thompson, *Pessimism of the Intellect?*, Monmouth 2007; Susan Watkins, ‘Editorial: shifting sands,’ *New Left Review*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, 61, Jan./Feb. 2010, pp. 5-27; and Lin Chun, *The British New Left*, Edinburgh 1993. As Dorothy Thompson notes, Chun’s book is effectively a history of *New Left Review*. Dorothy Thompson, ‘On the trail of the New Left’, *New Left Review* 215, Jan./Feb. 1996, p. 94.

5 See for instance Robert W. McChesney, ‘The *Monthly Review* Story: 1949-1984’, *MR Zine*, accessed 15 Aug 2015, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2007/mcchesney060507.html>; and Christopher Phelps, ‘Introduction: A Socialist Magazine in the American Century’, *Monthly Review*, 51/1 1999. Cf. Watkins’ excellent in-depth context setting and how this has affected *New Left Review* (Watkins, ‘Editorial’), and also Wayne Hope’s contextual review of the media in Aotearoa (including brief mentions of ‘oppositional’ leftist media) in ‘New Thoughts on the Public Sphere in Aotearoa New Zealand’, in Martin Hirst, Sean Phelan & Verica Rupar, eds., *Scooped*, Auckland 2012, pp. 27-47.

which publications appeared, and to neglect how changes in the leftist press are linked to transformations in capitalist society. Indeed, much literature about the left becomes bogged down in charting internal disputes and positions, rather than seeing how those disputes were influenced by society (and sometimes vice versa). Therefore this article places importance on delineating the wider context, especially the level and types of dissent, in which independent socialist magazines emerged.

While magazines often do not capture the complexity, energy and spirit of struggles, and are often distant from them, nonetheless they can reveal important trends within movements. Hence by outlining the major independent socialist magazines in Aotearoa since the 1970s,<sup>6</sup> such as the *New Zealand Monthly Review* (NZMR, 1960-1996), *The Republican* (1974-1996), *Race Gender Class* (1985-1992), *New Zealand Political Review* (NZPR, 1992-2005), and a variety of other publications, this article aims to highlight some major debates and transformations within the left. It also functions as a very broad, sweeping overview of the rise and fall of the left, and protest generally, since the late 1960s. I consider that strikes and other forms of workplace dissent are a vital part of protest. They ought to be included in studies of protest movements in order to draw a more accurate picture of dissent in society.<sup>7</sup> Because this article surveys a lengthy period of history, many broad generalisations about the left, dissent and societal trends have had to be made.

One trend within the left was that leftists put *most* of their energy into activism rather than writing, into endeavouring to change society rather than interpreting it. Given its activist focus, the broad left has generally suffered from a paucity of coherent in-depth theory and analysis, or more importantly, attempts to combine in-depth theory with practice. For instance, several independent socialist magazines, such as *NZMR*, were news and comment magazines, and contained few theoretical pieces. This was ironic given *NZMR* was founded and often run by intellectuals.

6 While I think the term ‘independent socialist’ is a more accurate one than ‘independent left’ I have used the terms interchangeably in this article.

7 See Michael Biggs, ‘Has protest increased since the 1970s?’, *British Journal of Sociology* 66/1, 2015, pp. 141-62.

In contrast, its namesake in the US, the *Monthly Review*, was more theoretically and academically inclined.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, some independent socialist publications attempted to address the gap in theory, especially the Marxist journals *The Republican*, *Red Papers* (1976-79), and *Revolution* (1997-2006), and the more eclectic *Race Gender Class*. Yet these publications often lacked the richness, variety, robust debates and innovations of theoretical journals overseas, such as the *New Left Review* and *Capital & Class* in the UK.

The above theoretical publications made valuable original contributions to discussions of Aotearoa's society, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, however. They illustrated another crucial theme: how socialism was re-evaluated under the challenge of the women's liberation and Māori self-determination movements. Except for *Race Gender Class*, male Pākehā socialists dominated independent left publications. Some publications eschewed a narrow class analysis, such as *The Republican* and especially *Race Gender Class*. While others, such as *NZMR* (in the 1990s), *New Zealand Political Review* and *Revolution* re-asserted the centrality of class, and discerned a 'retreat from class' in the broad activist left during, ironically, a period of a major assault by the capitalist class. These publications became highly critical of the 'political correctness' of identity politics.

The final key trend and tension explored in this paper is that the radical and independent left's relationship with the dominant leftist ideology – social democracy – was largely *ambiguous*. As Bruce Jesson – who single-handedly produced *The Republican* – argued, a crucial weakness of the radical left was that although it was nominally independent of the Labour Party, in practice was largely tied to it (at least until the mid-1980s), and 'critically supported' it.<sup>9</sup> For example, *NZMR* was established as an 'independent and socialist publication' and thus critiqued persistently the Labour Party's ongoing rightward drift since the 1960s. Yet it often functioned – especially during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – as a magazine that aimed to push the Labour Party leftward.

8 See McChesney, 'The *Monthly Review* story' and Phelps, 'Introduction'.

9 Bruce Jesson, 'The lost causes', *The Republican* 36, July 1981, p. 9.

After 1984, much of the independent and radical left itself shifted rightwards in order to occupy the social democratic vacuum left by Labour's momentous swing to the right. They did this in order to gain popularity and to thwart neoliberalism. Hence many formed or supported various parties such as the New Labour Party, the Alliance (although more of a diverse coalition with a social democratic flavour) and Mana. This represented a major transformation for many independent socialists: formerly they were critics of social democracy and the state, but ended up defending social democracy and the state against neoliberalism.<sup>10</sup> For example *The Republican* drifted from being an innovative, independent Marxist paper in the 1970s and 1980s to one that was aligned to the Alliance in the 1990s. As such, the independent left has almost ceased to exist.

This article proceeds by firstly defining the independent left and explaining which publications of the broader left have not been examined. The article then examines two rough time periods: the 1970s and 1980s, which generally was a fruitful period for leftist publishing in Aotearoa; and then the more grim times since the 1990s. I mainly concentrate on the 1970s and 1980s as these decades witnessed much social ferment. Moreover, this period saw a fundamental structural metamorphosis in capital that is associated with neoliberalism and globalisation. Finally, many current themes and debates – over theories such as intersectionality (the theory that different forms of oppression are intertwined) and identity politics – originated in these decades, and were generally debated in greater depth than today.

### *Defining Independent Socialism and Exclusions*

This piece explores 'independent leftist' publications, whose audience Jesson defined as 'all those people with radical sympathies who don't belong to a traditional communist group'<sup>11</sup> (by 'traditional communist' Jesson presumably meant Leninist). Yet Jesson's definition is inadequate because it does not capture, crucially, the independent left's autonomy from not only Leninist parties but also

10 Peter Lee, 'Thoughts among the ruins', in Andrew Sharp ed., *Bruce Jesson To Build a Nation*, Auckland 2005, pp. 357-8.

11 Jesson, 'The lost causes', p. 3.

from the Labour Party – and any other party. Further, it ignores the independent left's support for socialism.

However, given that the independent left was itself vague (it was also scattered, inchoate and disorganised), it defined socialism vaguely. For the purposes of this article, I see socialism as more of a variegated *movement* than an abstract idea or programme, a movement that is constantly changing according to transformations in society. In terms of ideas, I believe socialism is a broad term, encompassing social democracy, Marxism (in its many different varieties), syndicalism and anarchism (apart from individualist anarchism and liberal anarchism). Socialism is not some static, archaic idea that emphasises the sole importance of class – for example, it includes socialist varieties of feminism and environmentalism, and adaptations around the world to suit different conditions, such as the indigenous socialism and Marxism promoted in many Latin American countries. Moreover, it is misleading to define socialism as purely statist, and involving some form of representative democracy, market, wage-system, and nationalisation. This unfairly excludes many forms of Marxism and anarchism from socialism that seek the socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange through direct democracy and without the state, the market and the wage-system.<sup>12</sup>

Further, it is impossible to capture the complexity, concerns and transformations of independent left publications since the 1970s; nor have I read every single issue or every paper that was produced. While nobody can be genuinely non-sectarian or 'objective' when studying the left, I have attempted to be broad-based and consider the variety of concerns of the independent left.

With such a focus on independent socialism, numerous vital publications of the broad activist left are outside the scope of this article. This includes the highly significant feminist, Māori, anti-racist, anti-war and anti-nuclear, LGBTQ (lesbian, bi-sexual,

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, New York 2012, pp. 219-24; Maurice Brinton, *For Workers' Power*, Oakland 2004, esp. pp. 153-62; and John Crump & Maximilien Rubel eds., *Non-Market Socialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, London 1987. A useful overview of unorthodox socialism is provided in Chamsy El-Ojeili, *From Left Communism to Post-Modernism*, Lanham 2003.

gay, trans-sexual and queer) and ecological press. Examples include the feminist magazine *Broadsheet* (1972-1997),<sup>13</sup> and Peace Movement Aotearoa's *Peacelink*, as well as a host of other publications such as *Treaty Times* and the queer feminist magazine *Bitches, Witches and Dykes*. Also, I do not cover the voluminous trade union press – including those produced by unemployed unions and organisations – and the multitude of single-issue publications such as *HART News*, *CARP Newsletter*, *GATT Watchdog*, *Foreign Control Watchdog* (although that publication often has a broad leftist focus), or *Peace Researcher*.

Similarly, the vigorous Leninist press of the period is also outside the purview of this paper. Leninist parties have often been dismissed as sectarian, 'vulgar Marxist', dogmatic and sterile.<sup>14</sup> Yet these parties produced an often lively and sometimes innovative press that was generally well distributed and sold to many workers (not just leftists), especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Major Leninist papers published included the Socialist Action League's *Socialist Action* (1969-1988), the Communist Party of New Zealand's (CPNZ) *People's Voice* (1939-91),<sup>15</sup> the Workers' Communist League's *Unity* (1978-1990), the Socialist Unity Party's *Tribune* (1966-c.1995), *Socialist Worker* (1994-2005),<sup>16</sup> *The Spark* (1991-2013),<sup>17</sup> and *Socialist Review* (1997-the present).<sup>18</sup> Additionally, a multitude of smaller Leninist publications have appeared.

13 For a collection of articles from *Broadsheet*, see Pat Rosier ed., *Broadsheet: Twenty Years of Broadsheet Magazine*, Auckland 1992.

14 See for example numerous articles in *The Republican* by Bruce Jesson such as 'One-dimensional Marxism: the politics of the Socialist Action League' 24, Sep. 1978, pp. 4-10; 'Political profile: the Workers Communist League' 42, Oct. 1982, pp. 4-10; and 'Boring the unions from within: a look at the Socialist Unity Party' 30, Nov. 1979, pp. 2, 10-16.

15 Although the *People's Voice* was renamed *Worker's Voice* in 1991 and continued until 1994.

16 This paper was originally produced by the Dunedin-based International Socialist Organisation before becoming the magazine of the nationwide Socialist Worker Organisation. In 2005, it was transformed into a journal called *Unity* (2005-2010) which differed from the earlier Workers' Communist League paper of the same name.

17 *The Spark* was renamed *Fightback* in 2013 and still continues to be published.

18 The dates for the print runs of publications in this article have been sourced from the New Zealand libraries catalogue (<http://nzlc.natlib.govt.nz/>). It is likely that some dates are inaccurate.



Furthermore, I do not examine the press of the anarchist and unorthodox (non-Leninist) Marxist (especially council communist and left communist) strains of socialism, which while independent from parties, were often tied to various formal organisations, however small. While more marginalised, denigrated and spasmodic than the Leninist press, and also lacking national organisations and thus widely distributed papers, this current produced a surprising array of magazines.<sup>19</sup>

### The Independent Socialist Press in Context: The 1970s and 1980s

A surprisingly diverse and vigorous leftist press flourished in Aotearoa during the long 1970s – that is, the period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. This reflected the times: the long 1970s was Aotearoa’s 1960s. That is, the period was a decade of dissent, culminating in the tumultuous Stop the Tour mobilisation of 1981.<sup>20</sup> Dissent in the workplace reinforced dissent in the community and vice versa. There was a major strike wave; and a remarkably broad series of protests against war, the nuclear bomb, worsening living conditions, apartheid, racism, the ongoing alienation of Māori land, sexism, homophobia, environmental degradation and so forth.

Two sparks of dissent can be discerned: the Vietnam War and the Arbitration Court’s nil wage order of 1968. Demonstrations against the Vietnam War, although only gaining mass support in the early 1970s, catalysed protest on other issues. New movements emerged, such as the ecology movement, and old ones re-emerged, such as Māori resistance to colonisation and the feminist movement. While protest was often dismissed as the preserve of ‘middle-class’ liberals,<sup>21</sup> it often involved many white and blue-collar workers, and also the unwaged wing of the working-class, especially students. After the Arbitration Court’s nil wage order of 1968, unions often

19 See Toby Boraman, *Rabble Rousers and Merry Pranksters*, Christchurch 2008.

20 In his survey of the 1970s, Thomas Borstelmann has claimed that ‘for most Americans, “the 1960s” really happened in the 1970s.’ Borstelmann, *The 1970s*, Princeton 2012, p. 3. I believe that was the case for Aotearoa too.

21 See for instance Jesson, ‘The lost causes.’

bypassed the shackles of the Arbitration Act and took substantial strike action – indeed, the 1970s witnessed the highest number and percentage of workers involved in stoppages in Aotearoa’s history.<sup>22</sup> Some of these strikes were political in nature.

These developments were global (with local and regional variations, of course). A similar protest movement and strike wave existed in many other countries during the 1970s. Other global developments which helped to shape the left in Aotearoa were the onset of a deep and lengthy global economic crisis in the early/mid-1970s; the Cold War and its end due to the downfall of many Stalinist regimes in the late 1980s; the presence of many popular anti-imperialist struggles in low-income countries, especially Vietnam; the beginnings of climate change; and, finally, the dawning of the global neoliberal counter-attack by the capitalist class. It first began in various South American dictatorships in the mid-1970s and then spread around the globe. This signalled the beginnings of a harsh ‘flexibilised’ regime of capital accumulation based on globalisation, de-industrialisation and the rise of casualised work in high-income countries, financial valorisation and so on.

As a consequence of these global events, the left in Aotearoa became more diverse and fragmented. For example, as Bert Roth notes, the left attempted (somewhat) to transcend Stalinism from the 1960s:

Previously the gospel came readymade from Moscow and there was very little intellectual debate. Today [1976] each group is forced to think out its position, to challenge the others, and to defend its ideas. There has been a return to the original works of Marxism-Leninism, instead of what you used to get - the Readers Digest-type versions, as in Stalin’s History or Mao’s Thoughts.<sup>23</sup>

Importantly, new currents emerged that challenged some socialist orthodoxies, especially social movements, but also Trotskyism,

22 See Toby Boraman, ‘Carnival and Class: Anarchism and Councilism in Australasia during the 1970s’ in Alex Prichard, Ruth Kinna, Dave Berry & Saku Pinta, eds., *Libertarian Socialism*, Basingstoke 2012, p. 255. See also Brian Roper, ‘The fire last time: the rise of class struggle and progressive social movements in Aotearoa/New Zealand 1968-1977’, *Marxist Interventions* 3, 2011, pp. 7-30.

23 Roth, ‘A history of socialist newspapers.’

Maoism, anarchism and forms of non-Leninist Marxism.

Although the ‘protest movement’ that coagulated around opposing the Vietnam War had largely disappeared by the early 1970s, it laid the groundwork for one of the biggest protests in terms of street mobilisation, direct action and confrontation in Aotearoa: the anti-apartheid protests against the 1981 Springbok Tour. By today’s standards, the numbers are staggering: it has been estimated at least 150,000 people took part.<sup>24</sup> As well, at least 300,000 workers participated in the 1979 general strike,<sup>25</sup> Ngāti Whātua and supporters occupied Takaparawha/Bastion Point in 1977-8, and during the 1980 Kinleith strike, workers chalked up a rare victory over the state. Overall the late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the most intense, confrontational and widespread dissent of the period under review. This contrasted with many other high-income countries that experienced their peaks in contestation during the late 1960s and early 1970s. After the early 1980s, with the onset of another deep recession, the wage-freeze and widespread restructuring, mass protest generally began to dissipate in Aotearoa, and the capitalist class and state gained the upper hand.

Due to the upswing in extra-parliamentary protest following 1968, the ‘parliamentary party of socialism linked to trade unions...lost its hegemony’ over the left.<sup>26</sup> The independent leftist press assumed greater significance in Aotearoa compared to many other countries due to the notable absence of a major, official social democratic paper during the period of study. The Labour Party (and the parties, such as New Labour, that have appeared since Labour adopted neoliberalism) did not produce a regular, long-lasting publication throughout the period under examination. The

24 Aroha Harris, *Hīkoi*, Wellington 2004, p. 108 and Ministry for Culture and Heritage, ‘The 1981 Springbok Rugby Tour’, accessed 16 August 2015, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/1981-springbok-tour>

25 Department of Labour estimate (297,418 to be exact) cited in ‘New figures prove impact of strike’, *PSA Journal*, 67/8 Sep. 1980, p. 16. The Department’s figures excluded most government workers who took part in the strike, such as PSA and Post Office Association members, and the Federation of Labour estimated a larger turnout of around 343,000-366,000 of its members (or 75-80 per cent). ‘New figures prove impact of strike’, p. 16.

26 Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy*, Oxford 2002, pp. 338-9.

Labour Party's last major publication was *The Standard*, which ceased in 1959.<sup>27</sup> Unusually, compared to many other countries, the New Zealand Labour Party has lacked a lasting, well-organised leftist faction, and thus a paper.<sup>28</sup>

This absence of an influential social democratic publication was ironic because, as *NZMR* noted, the majority of leftists in the country were social democrats.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, people to the left of Labour produced almost all leftist publications since the 1960s. Yet no one publication dominated the left and, more importantly, had substantial influence over the labour movement and the broader working-class.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, no left-wing party or organisation obtained a mass membership or appeal, apart from the Labour Party when it was still *arguably* wedded to social democracy up to 1984. As Jesson argued, its version of social democracy had become increasingly tepid and thoroughly embedded in capital and the state.<sup>31</sup>

27 According to Bert Roth, by the time of its demise *The Standard* (1935-59) had very little politics in it. It was earlier called the *New Zealand Worker* (1924-1935) and before that the *Maoriland Worker* (1910-24). Yet the *Maoriland Worker* for most of its existence was a largely ecumenical radical socialist paper that was independent of the Labour Party. Roth, 'A history of socialist newspapers.'

28 A few minor publications associated with the Labour Party appeared, such as *New Outlook* (1982-86), a current affairs magazine involving Peter Davis, Helen Clark's partner. *New Outlook* was considered to be linked with the left-wing of the Labour Party.

29 *New Zealand Monthly Review (NZMR)* 159, Sep. 1974, p. 4.

30 The working-class in this paper is seen as a broad, diverse, complex multicultural class, a class that includes women, ethnic minorities, migrants and beneficiaries, as well as most white-collar non-managerial labour. The term does not just mean the industrial working-class. I define class in Marxist terms as an exploitative social relation rather than a gradation based on social rank that is determined by qualities such as level of education, income or status. For a discussion, see Toby Boraman, 'A middle-class diversion from class-struggle?', *Labour History* 103, Nov. 2012, pp. 203-26.

31 As Bruce Jesson, among many others, highlighted. See his articles 'The betrayal of the working-class by the Labour Party', *Red Papers*, 1 May 1976; 'Looking at the Labour Party', *The Republican* 47, Sep. 1983, pp. 12-6; and *Fragments of Labour*, Auckland 1989. Jesson argued 'unlike other Labour and Social Democratic parties, it [the Labour Party] hasn't the emotional and intellectual resources to sustain a coherent left-wing. There is no continuous tradition of effective dissent.' Jesson, 'Looking at the Labour Party', p. 12.

In these independent socialist publications a nascent creative socialism started to develop which addressed local conditions. Significant debates and analysis emerged not just over orthodox subjects such as revolution versus reform, but also over newer topics that were explored in greater depth than previously. For example, debates occurred about the nature – and development of – class in Aotearoa, the nature of colonialism and its connection with capital's enclosures of Māori land, whether Aotearoa was a colony or semi-colony of Britain and/or the US, or a junior imperialist ally of the US with its own mini-empire in the Pacific, and whether internationalism or left nationalism was best suited for Aotearoa. Yet probably the most heated debates occurred over Māori self-determination and women's liberation, and an associated discussion over which form of oppression (ethnicity, gender or class) was the most fundamental, or whether they all had equal power.

However, I am not suggesting Aotearoa was swimming in a sea of rebellion in the long 1970s: there was still a deep conservatism in Aotearoa society, which had gelled into a 'militant conservatism'<sup>32</sup> under Muldoon as a reaction to dissent and the growing climate of social liberalism in the 1970s. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, protesters and strikers were only ever a minority of the population, and social ferment paled in comparison to countries that experienced revolutions or major revolts, such as Portugal, Iran and Italy. Strikes caused only a brief period of stalemate between labour and the combined forces of capital and the state. Aotearoa lacked a strong radical leftist tradition. The socialist movement, while growing, was still tiny. For example, Bert Roth estimated that the combined membership of Leninist parties was 300-400 in 1973 and 500 in 1980.<sup>33</sup> The independent left, while perhaps twice the size of the Leninist left, was also infinitesimal. There were only two brief, fleeting periods of radicalisation – the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in 1981. The movements it produced were never anti-systemic.

Nor is it necessary to posit that there is a deterministic link between the vitality of struggle and the vitality of the leftist press. Sometimes a lively and innovative magazine can appear in hard times. Furthermore, and crucially, movements are often

32 Jesson, 'The lost causes', p. 4.

33 Bert Roth, *Yearbook of International Communist Affairs*, cited in Toby Boraman, *The New Left in New Zealand from 1956 to the early 1980s*, PhD thesis, Dunedin 2006, p. 380n.

organised in workplaces and communities independently from the ‘organised’ left. A prime example is the tino rangatiratanga movement. In accord with tikanga, it was a primarily oral and face-to-face movement, and generally placed more importance on flaxroots activism than on publishing.<sup>34</sup>

A more ominous reaction to working-class dissent – and the economic crisis and ‘oil shock’ of the mid-1970s – than Muldoonist social conservatism appeared in the late 1970s: capitalist restructuring of industry, or ‘destructuring’ as Jim Knox called it.<sup>35</sup> This was a forerunner to the open class war on the working-class of the period from the mid-1980s to about the mid-1990s, when capital and successive Labour and National governments imposed neoliberal practices on society in a widespread and far-reaching manner. This was a joint effort by capital and the state to restore long-term profitability, and thus facilitate the massive transferring of wealth from labour to capital that has occurred in the last 40 years. Much of the left was demoralised by neoliberalism being first imposed by a Labour Government, stunned by the blitzkrieg ‘shock and awe’ method by which it was enacted, and finally confused by Labour’s liberal social agenda. However, there was considerable early resistance to neoliberalism in the mid-1980s, especially from rural communities and also by workers attempting to resist restructuring and ‘downsizing’. I examine some of the long-term effects of neoliberalism on the left in the section on the 1990s to the present.

## Independent Socialist Journals 1970s/1980s

In the post WWII period, the independent left was a product of the New Left. The latter was originally formed by dissidents from the Labour Party and the Communist Party during the mid-1950s.<sup>36</sup> In the 1970s, the independent left grew due to the multitudinous forms of protest during the decade, and the many socialists who remained sceptical of both Labour and Leninist parties.

<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, many publications did appear, often in the form of newsletters. In the 1970s, for example, *MOOHR Newsletter*, *Te Matakite o Aotearoa Newsletter*, *Te Matakite o Aotearoa Poneke Paanui* and *Takaparawha ‘Bastion Point Tent Town’ Bulletin* were published.

<sup>35</sup> Jim Knox, ‘Knox on the smelter’, *Federation of Labour Bulletin* 22, Sep. 1980, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> See Boraman, ‘A middle-class diversion from class-struggle?’

Aotearoa has an important tradition of the independent left producing arguably many of the left's most successful and stirring publications. This tradition can be seen as beginning with several independent papers formed out of the class-based ferment before WWI, especially the fiery newspaper *Maoriland Worker*.<sup>37</sup> From the 1930s, this tradition took a more intellectual turn with *Tomorrow* and *Here and Now*.<sup>38</sup> Winston Rhodes, the inaugural editor of *NZMR*, noted that *NZMR* was founded in 1960 explicitly to succeed *Tomorrow* and *Here and Now* to fill a vacuum after those publications had ceased or had been effectively suppressed by the Labour Government.<sup>39</sup> Like those publications, *NZMR* attempted to intertwine independent socialist comment with a focus on the arts and culture.<sup>40</sup>

I concentrate on *NZMR* and *The Republican* in this section, mainly because they were the most influential and long-lasting independent socialist publications of the period. I also examine *Race Gender Class* to help illustrate an important leftist trend to adopt the 'tripod theory' of oppression, a theory which saw race, gender and class as the three interlocking pillars of societal oppression, a view that even the formerly Maoist Workers' Communist League adopted in the mid-1980s.

37 *The Maoriland Worker* was a borderline independent socialist paper because it was not independent from trade unions – it began as the paper of the Shearers' Union and then became the paper of the first Federation of Labour or 'Red Feds' – yet it was independent in the sense that it became the major left-wing and 'non-sectarian' paper of its day, and developed into a forum for all shades of socialist opinion, from revolutionary to reformist. Its independence from political parties ceased when the Labour Party captured it in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

38 Wolfgang Rosenberg viewed *Tomorrow* as 'New Zealand's first independent periodical.' Rosenberg, 'In memory of Winston Rhodes', *NZMR* 301, Sep. 1987, p. 2.

39 Winston Rhodes, 'Looking 200 issues backwards', *NZMR* 200, June 1978, p. 3. Rhodes notes *Here and Now* earned the nickname 'now and then' due to its spasmodic publication (p. 3).

40 Indeed, Rhodes, an English lecturer at the University of Canterbury, had been earlier involved in *Tomorrow*. For *Tomorrow*, see Rachel Barrowman, *A Popular Vision*, Wellington 1991 and Andrew Cutler, 'Tomorrow magazine and New Zealand Politics 1934-1940', *New Zealand Journal of History* 24/1, 1990, pp. 22-44. For Rhodes see Rachel Barrowman, 'Rhodes, Harold Winston', from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Te Ara - The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, accessed 5 August 2015, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4r13/rhodes-harold-winston>

Several other independent leftist publications have not been examined. *Red Papers* (1976-79) was one important example. It was an independent non-sectarian Marxist theoretical publication published by the Marxist Publishing Group including David Bedggood. *Red Papers* was associated with several (independent and non-academic) political economy conferences in the late 1970s. It attempted to broaden the scope and raise of the standards of Marxist analysis and debate in Aotearoa, and overcome the 'backward state of class analysis in New Zealand.'<sup>41</sup>

*The Paper* (1973-75), a monthly newspaper, importantly differed from most independent leftist publications in that it was directed at working-class people rather than at leftists or activists, and was sold outside factories. Despite the involvement of many different leftists in Wellington and elsewhere, it was, however, regarded by some as a Maoist paper with strong links to a grouping that eventually became the Workers' Communist League in the late 1970s.<sup>42</sup>

*The Paper* was possibly the best selling independent socialist paper since the 1970s. It claimed to have sold 3,500 copies in 1974. *NZMR* possessed at its peak at least 2,000 subscribers, and *The Republican* had a circulation of about 600.<sup>43</sup> *Socialist Action*, the paper of the Socialist Action League (SAL), claimed to have probably the largest circulation of any regular leftist paper published since the 1970s, selling a peak of about 8,400 copies during the 1978 election campaign, and 4,000 copies in both 1971 and 1986.<sup>44</sup> *People's Voice* never got close to its earlier peak of 14,000 copies in 1945.<sup>45</sup>

Several key contributors to *Red Spark* (1969-70) – another arguably independent socialist publication, this time the short-

41 *Red Papers*, 1 May 1976, p. 2.

42 Ron Smith, *Working Class Son*, Wellington 1994, p. 162.

43 Horton, 'Obituary: *Monthly Review*', p. 75; Smith, *Working Class Son*, p. 162; and Bruce Jesson, 'To build a nation', *New Zealand Political Review* (NZPR), April 1999, p. 29.

44 *Socialist Action*, 1 Dec. 1978 and 31 Jan. 1986; *NZMR* 88, April 1968, p. 24 and 124, July 1971, p. 4. The New Labour Party's short-lived newspaper *New Times* claimed a print run of 20,000 copies for its first issue in 1989. *NZMR* 321, Nov./Dec. 1989, p. 31.

45 Roth, 'A history of socialist newspapers'.



lived magazine of the Victoria University Socialist Club – helped to form the SAL. Hence, like *The Paper*, *Red Spark* was similarly ambiguous in its relationship with Leninism, albeit of a different kind (Trotskyism).

### *New Zealand Monthly Review in the 1970s and 1980s*

A product of a minor renewal in the left during the late 1950s and early 1960s, *NZMR* became a national leftist institution for 36 years.<sup>46</sup> It seemed that most prominent leftist activists in Aotearoa wrote at one stage for *NZMR*. Leo Huberman, writing about *NZMR*'s counterpart *Monthly Review* in the US, noted that the magazine was based on the notion that 'agitation, based on information, brings lasting converts to socialism; agitation, based on exhortation, does not.'<sup>47</sup> This too was an unwritten motto of *NZMR* up to the late 1980s: it performed an essential function of providing leftist news, comment and correspondence from around the country and the world at a time when such information was difficult to find.

*NZMR* also had a strong focus on the broader Pacific, including regular news and opinion pieces about the New Zealand state's territories in the Pacific, especially the Cook Islands. It showcased investigative research about the Pacific and Aotearoa, especially about neo-colonialism, the nuclear threat and the US military and spy presence, particularly by the prolific researcher Owen Wilkes and later by David Robie.<sup>48</sup>

Reflecting the times, *NZMR* included many articles on peace, Vietnam, apartheid and civil liberties. Yet perhaps *NZMR*'s strongest focus was on a subject often ignored in terms of in-depth coverage in the leftist press: economics. Important economists such as Brian Easton (who was *NZMR* editor in the mid to late 1970s), Geoff Mason and especially Wolfgang Rosenberg penned a multitude of articles in *NZMR* about such topics as inflation, restructuring, class struggle, and global economic and local trends.

Rosenberg was a pivotal figure in *NZMR* for three decades,

46 Horton, 'Obituary: *Monthly Review*', p. 74.

47 Huberman quoted in Phelps, 'Introduction', p. 25.

48 Horton, 'Obituary: *Monthly Review*', p. 75.

from its foundation until the 1990s.<sup>49</sup> While describing himself as a ‘Marxist with a small “m”’,<sup>50</sup> he wrote from a pragmatic socialist viewpoint that led some to assert that he was a Keynesian.<sup>51</sup> Whilst ultimately aiming for a socialist society, he recommended a variety of measures, such as socialist co-operatives, nationalisation, greater self-sufficiency, import controls and economic planning in order to improve workers lives in the here-and-now and provide a basis for a deeper shift to socialism. *NZMR* published many books about economics by Rosenberg, including early critiques of neoliberalism dating from 1984 during a period when the Labour government proclaimed ‘there is no alternative’ to its ‘shock doctrine’.<sup>52</sup>

According to Andrew Cutler, *Tomorrow* magazine in the 1930s paid little attention to ‘working-class ideas and politics’ due to the ‘middle-class intellectual bias’ of its contributors.<sup>53</sup> In contrast, *NZMR* contained multiple defences of trade unions and strikes during a lengthy period when workers and unions were being ‘bashed’, especially after the lengthy economic crisis began in 1973-4. It also contained many contributions from trade unionists.

*NZMR* also published poetry in almost every issue until the late 1980s, as well as a scattering of short stories. Murray

49 See Rhodes, ‘Looking 200 issues backwards’, p. 4.

50 Murray Horton, ‘Wolfgang Rosenberg’, *Foreign Control Watchdog* 114, May 2007.

51 For instance, see Russell Barrett, ‘The Revolutionary Road to Socialism’, *NZMR* 316, March 1989, p. 8.

52 See Wolfgang Rosenberg, *New Zealand on a New Road* (1961), *Foreign Investment in New Zealand* (1966), *Import Controls and Full Employment or Else!* (1972), *The Coming Depression and How to Overcome it* (jointly published with Caxton Press, Christchurch, 1978), *CER: Closer Economic Relations with Australia* (1982), *Unemployment is not Necessary, and, Bob Jones and co. - What is Wrong with their Economics?* (1984), *The Magic Square* (1986), and *New Zealand can be Different and Better* (1993). Rosenberg also published a number of other books not published by the Monthly Review Society, such as *Full Employment* (Wellington 1962). Rosenberg was a founder of *NZMR*, and Hon. Secretary for most of its lifetime. For a detailed obituary of Rosenberg, see Horton, ‘Wolfgang Rosenberg’. See also *New Zealand and the World*, W. E. Willmott ed., Christchurch 1980; and John Freeman-Moir, ‘Wolfgang Rosenberg: a writer in the *Monthly Review* tradition,’ *NZMR* 324, April/May 1990, p. 2. The term ‘shock doctrine’ comes from Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*, London 2008.

53 Cutler, ‘*Tomorrow*’, p. 24.

Horton claims *NZMR* ‘played a great role in fostering New Zealand writing...writers and poets of international stature like Janet Frame and Hone Tuwhare wrote for it.’<sup>54</sup> James K. Baxter and Rewi Alley, among many others, published in *NZMR*.<sup>55</sup> Yet, overall, literature was not its main focus; politics was.

*NZMR* declared ‘we exist to be a free forum for the Radical Left in New Zealand.’<sup>56</sup> Conrad Bollinger, one of its long-term columnists, claimed *NZMR* was ‘rather freer from dogmatism than most other exemplars of the radical press’ and so has evaded becoming ‘side-tracked into the sterile and outmoded rigidities of the “old left.”’<sup>57</sup> John Stewart, the editor of *NZMR* in the early to mid-1980s, said *NZMR* ‘is not committed to any political party, sect or faction.’<sup>58</sup>

Given the Cold War context and the presence of strong anti-imperialist and left nationalist movements abroad, up to the late 1980s *NZMR* contained a dizzying array of articles about life in Vietnam, Cambodia, China, USSR, North Korea, DDR (East Germany), Yugoslavia, Cuba, Albania and Chile under Allende. For example, it published much correspondence from China by Rewi Alley and from Vietnam by Freda Cook.

While *NZMR* did not have a ‘party line’, and its politics often changed from contributor to contributor, there was an overall trend in *NZMR* up to the late 1980s to assert that socialism existed in the above countries, and to contend – often on the basis of visits to countries – that life for ordinary people was mostly pleasant under such regimes.<sup>59</sup> *NZMR* did not really debate the views of other socialists that these regimes were ‘state capitalist’ or ‘state socialist’, or were ‘welfare dictatorships’ where the ‘communist’

54 Horton, ‘Obituary: *Monthly Review*’, p. 75.

55 For a list of *NZMR* fiction writers, see Roger Robinson, ‘New Zealand Monthly Review’, in Roger Robinson & Nelson Wattie eds., *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, Auckland 1998, p. 401.

56 Editorial, *NZMR* 132, April 1972, p. 5.

57 Ventosus [Conrad Bollinger], ‘No holiday from protest in the capital’, *NZMR* 130, Feb. 1972, p. 16.

58 John Stewart, *NZMR* 249, Nov. 1982, p. 2.

59 See for example Wolfgang Rosenberg, ‘Impressions from East Germany’, *NZMR* 206, Dec./Jan. 1979, pp. 13-4 and ‘No sure guarantee of Peace’, *NZMR* 209, April 1979 p. 13, in which Rosenberg noted ‘Marxism-Leninism in its various forms of governmental implementation has achieved a huge step forward in man’s long march from barbarism: it has abolished destitution and even poverty in over one third of the globe’.

party elite became the new ruling class.<sup>60</sup> It was not until the late 1980s, when the Cold War began to end, and under a new editorship, that *NZMR* took a distinct anti-Stalinist bent.

It was unusual for a New Leftist publication – given the New Left’s attempt to find a third way beyond the Cold War blocs of the USSR and USA, and a third way beyond Stalinism and social democracy – to publish articles sympathetic to the Soviet bloc. However, the division between the Old Left and New Left was not rigid, and to some extent *NZMR* combined the old and the new, like many other groups and publications.<sup>61</sup> Other New Leftists were dismayed by *NZMR*’s sympathy for the Soviet bloc. For example, *Dispute* was formed in 1964 by disgruntled young New Leftists, including Owen Gager, who were unhappy with *NZMR*’s ‘uncritical adulation of the foreign policy of the Communist bloc.’<sup>62</sup> *Dispute* (1964-68) was another independent leftist publication that attempted to mingle radical politics and the arts.<sup>63</sup>

While *NZMR*’s eye was often on ‘really existing socialism’ overseas, on the whole the magazine was taken up with comment on the current state of Aotearoa’s politics. Its overall politics, while supportive of a socialist society to replace capitalism, were generally cautious.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, during an era of protest – the long 1970s – *NZMR* seemed slightly aloof from it, and sometimes a little out of touch. While *NZMR* was sympathetic to the ‘youth rebellion’ of the late 1960s and early 1970s, it lacked the youthful exuberance

60 For an overview of some of these debates about the nature of the USSR, see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union*, Leiden 2007. However, many letters critical of ‘Stalinist terror’ were published in *NZMR* during a debate about the ‘Solzhenitsyn affair’ in the mid-1970s. Further, an article by Bruce Robinson claiming that the USSR was an imperialist power, and had become capitalist (‘The Soviet Military Threat’, *NZMR*, 182 Oct. 1976, pp. 11-2) caused a flurry of articles and letters objecting to such a characterisation of the USSR. Some people suggested they would cancel their subscriptions to protest against Robinson’s article being published.

61 Boraman, ‘A middle-class diversion from working-class struggle?’, pp. 204-5.

62 Owen Gager quoted in Wolfgang Rosenberg, ‘Take-over bid for *NZMR*’, *NZMR* 46, Aug. 1964, p. 22. *Dispute* was founded after Owen Gager, backed by his friends, unsuccessfully tried to oust Rhodes as editor of *NZMR*.

63 See Dougal McNeill, ‘Notes on *Dispute* as a journal of poetics’, *Ka Mate Ka Ora*, 12 March 2013, accessed 9 Aug. 2015, [http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/12/ka\\_mate12\\_mcneill.asp](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/kmko/12/ka_mate12_mcneill.asp)

64 See for instance Margot Roth’s ‘Auckland letters’ column in *NZMR* during the 1960s and early 1970s.

and optimism of many radical papers during the same period, including *Red Spark* and much of the underground press.

Further, *NZMR* gave the impression that socialism was a step-by-step *programme* to be implemented by capturing the state, rather than a ‘*movement* [my emphasis] which abolishes the present state of things.’<sup>65</sup> *NZMR* was highly critical of the Labour Party’s similarity to National, and Labour’s belief that ‘socialism’ merely equalled ‘full employment plus a Welfare State’. Yet it often urged Labour to adopt concrete social democratic policies, such as a stronger welfare state, economic planning, and import and price controls during an era of inflation.<sup>66</sup> Hence much like the early British New Left, *NZMR* paradoxically was ‘involved in, yet opposed to, party politics...it wished to provide a new political identity for those disillusioned with the orthodoxies of socialism, yet it remained closely engaged with developments in the Labour Party’.<sup>67</sup> However from 1984 onwards *NZMR* became more unashamedly critical of Labour.

### *Beyond Class: The Republican and Race Gender Class*

The rise of ‘social movements’ represented a fundamental challenge to the male, Pākehā -dominated left. Like much of that left, *NZMR* slowly warmed to this challenge. While it published some articles about Māori politics, its coverage could be parsimonious – for example, it contained no coverage of the Māori land march in 1975. It was not until Marxist historian Harry Evison edited *NZMR* from 1985 to 1987 that far more articles about Māori appeared. Evison wrote several pioneering histories about Te Waipounamu

65 Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, 1845, accessed 27 Aug. 2015, available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>

66 See for instance Wolfgang Rosenberg, ‘Criticus comments’, *NZMR*, 197 March 1978, p. 16, where he argued Labour does not present an alternative system of economic organisation and the best we can hope for under Labour is “a depression with a human face” because neither National nor Labour can avoid permanent mass unemployment.’

67 Michael Kenny, *The First New Left*, London 1995, p. 198. Kenny is referring to the first or early British New Left of the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, but his comments are just as applicable to the early Aotearoa New Left of the same period.

Māori history, and colonialism.<sup>68</sup> Further, it was not until the late 1970s that numerous articles about feminism written by women began to appear in *NZMR*, particularly under the editorship of Neil Williams. While overall little attention – as with most leftist magazines – was paid to ecology, *NZMR* was an early supporter of environmentalism, arguing for instance that global socialist planning was needed to avoid environmental catastrophe.<sup>69</sup>

However, two other important independent leftist publications more directly took up the challenge of non-class politics, namely *The Republican* and *Race Gender Class*. In contrast to *NZMR*, both of these magazines were theoretical journals (although *Race Gender Class* was often more concerned with the concrete realities of ethnicity, gender and class than abstract theory). Jesson had already lamented the lack of leftist theory in New Zealand:

Look at the record. There have been left-wing organisations present in New Zealand since before the turn of the century. Eight decades of radical activity; millions of leaflets and newspapers produced; tens of thousands of demonstrations organised; dozens of elections contested; and years of patient work in trade unions. And on the theoretical side? Virtually nothing...Radicals in this country have a student mentality in that they regurgitate...the wisdom of their overseas mentors.<sup>70</sup>

*The Republican* attempted to remedy this gap. It began as the newsletter of a group called the Republican Movement, but quickly became – to the annoyance of some republicans – a ‘magazine of left-wing analysis and discussion.’ It soon became the major theoretical journal of the left and a forum for theoretical debate. Jesson’s importance was that his writing possessed a level of originality,

68 For a brief autobiography of Evison, see Harry Evison, ‘Harry Evison’, *Foreign Control Watchdog*, 138 April 2015, pp. 57-9. For some of his histories, see Evison, *Te Wai Pounamu, The Greenstone Island: A History of the Southern Māori During the European Colonization of New Zealand*, Christchurch 1993 and *The Long Dispute: Māori Land Rights and European Colonisation in Southern New Zealand*, Christchurch 1997.

69 *NZMR* editorial, ‘Only International Socialist Planning will Save the World from Environmental Disaster’, *NZMR* 139, Nov. 1972, p. 5.

70 Bruce Jesson, ‘The Function of *The Republican*’, *The Republican* 22, April 1978, p. 2.

analytical clarity and rigour not often seen in Aotearoa. Indeed, he was once described by Simon Upton as one of the most perceptive political commentators in the country.<sup>71</sup>

*The Republican* differed from *NZMR* in not only its theoretical focus, but also in that it was highly critical of the left in Aotearoa. Jesson utilised Western Marxist theory to develop such an analysis. Yet while the *New Left Review*, under the editorship of Perry Anderson, made a project of *internationalising* the British independent left, ‘of making British left culture less parochial... of bringing British left intellectuals into the transnational conversation of social and cultural theory’,<sup>72</sup> *The Republican* was firmly focussed on developing an analysis of specific conditions in Aotearoa. *The Republican* did not attempt to integrate the local with the global, and seek to trace how Aotearoa is enmeshed in a web of converging and radiating transnational connections. Indeed, perhaps Jesson’s main critique of the left here was that it was colonial, and hence aped various overseas causes.<sup>73</sup> In the tradition of Western Marxism, Jesson emphasised the hegemonic role of capital in shaping a working-class that was allegedly docile, inert and conservative, and lacking its own identity – a seemingly anachronistic view given the level of dissent during the 1970s.<sup>74</sup> He saw capital as a product of highly complex impersonal forces, and criticised those who stressed subjectivity and agency.<sup>75</sup> As such, his views are open to the traditional criticism of Western Marxism that it is too pessimistic, aloof from class struggle, and capital-centric.<sup>76</sup>

71 Cited in Malcolm MacLean, ‘Behind the mirror glass’, *Race Gender Class*, 7 July 1988, p. 108.

72 Geoff Eley, ‘Lin Chun – The British New Left’, *Left History* 2/2, 1994, p. 120. Jesson published an article in *New Left Review* – ‘The disintegration of a Labour tradition’, *New Left Review* 192, March/April 1992, pp. 37-54.

73 Many of Jesson’s articles from *The Republican* have been reprinted in *Bruce Jesson To Build a Nation*. For his analysis of capital, see for example *Only Their Purpose is Mad*, Palmerston North 1999, and *Fletcher Challenge*, Pokeno 1980. For his critique of the left, see for example *Fragments of Labour*, Auckland 1989; ‘Nationalism and the Left in New Zealand’, *Spartacist Spasmodical* 4, 21 Sep. 1970, pp. 14-8; ‘The colonial left’, *Counter Culture Free Press* 6, 1973, pp. 25-26; ‘Tripping the left fantastic’, *The Republican* 19, Aug. 1977, pp. 9-14; and ‘In search of a theory (or, mesmerised by Marxism)’, *The Republican* 31, Feb. 1980, pp. 2, 6-14, among many other articles.

74 See Jesson, ‘The lost causes’.

75 See for instance Jesson, ‘One-dimensional Marxism’.

76 See for example Russell Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat*, Cambridge, 1981 and Thompson, *Pessimism of the Intellect?*

Jesson's Marxism was not dogmatic – he did not see it as a 'total system', nor think that class explained all oppression.<sup>77</sup> He attempted to revise Marxism in the light of feminism and Māori protest. To develop a local Marxism, he attempted to address colonialism and Māori sovereignty. Following 1981, many tino rangatiratanga activists challenged the Pākehā-dominated left for opposing apartheid in South Africa, but not racism in Aotearoa. Donna Awatere published a seminal series of articles in *Broadsheet* in 1982-3, later republished as *Maori Sovereignty* (1984) that represented a taki (challenge) to Pākehā (especially the Pākehā left) to understand and support Māori self-determination.<sup>78</sup> Her writing, as well as the Black Unity document, hit the left like a shockwave.<sup>79</sup>

The response from the left varied. Heated conflict ensued.<sup>80</sup> Jesson claims most leftists rejected supporting Māori sovereignty on the basis of the need for class unity between Māori and Pākehā, and preferring not to give Māori more power.<sup>81</sup> In contrast, Jesson supported Māori sovereignty because he thought it would be for the benefit of all, and it had anti-capitalist and anti-colonial repercussions.<sup>82</sup> Jesson proudly noted that Western Marxism had influenced parts of Awatere's analysis.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, not all Pākehā leftists rejected tino rangatiratanga, and the Pākehā anti-racist movement grew rapidly in the early 1980s based on supporting various hīkoi to Waitangi.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, some have claimed that support for Māori sovereignty became the default Pākehā leftist view from the early 1980s onwards.<sup>85</sup>

77 For example, see Jesson, 'In search of a theory', pp. 9-10.

78 Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*, Auckland 1984.

79 Bruce Jesson, 'Reviewing the "Maori Sovereignty" debate', *The Republican* 48, Dec. 1983, p. 3.

80 See Cybele Locke, 'Maori Sovereignty, Black Feminism and the New Zealand Trade Union Movement,' in Carol Williams ed., *Indigenous Women and Work: From Labor to Activism*, Chicago 2012, pp. 254-67.

81 Jesson, 'Reviewing the "Maori Sovereignty" debate', p. 20.

82 Ibid, p. 20 and Bruce Jesson 'WCL and the disintegration of New Zealand Communism', *The Republican* 57, Jan. 1986, p. 19.

83 Jesson, 'Reviewing the "Maori Sovereignty" debate', p. 20.

84 For the earlier development of Pākehā anti-racism, see Miranda Johnston, "Land of the wrong white cloud", *New Zealand Journal of History* 39/2, 2005, pp. 137-57.

85 See for example, Huw Jarvis, 'Maori Liberation versus the Treaty process', *Revolution* 22, May/July 2004, pp. 31-6.



Jesson noted that within the liberal and radical milieu the tripod theory of oppression, which he believed developed from radical feminism in the 1970s, had become the prevailing orthodoxy by the early 1980s.<sup>86</sup> Yet this theory was often undeveloped, with race, gender and class either seen as equal foundations of oppression, or unequal according to individual circumstances.

*Race Gender Class* represented, perhaps, the most significant attempt to flesh out this theory. It was an important journal produced by the Race Gender Class co-ordinating collective in Christchurch. Its opening editorial noted ‘we are hoping the articles in this journal are readable, not “academic”, and that they will assist understanding and radical political action in the areas of Māori self-determination, feminism and socialism.’<sup>87</sup> However, some commented that they found *Race Gender Class* too academic.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, most articles were lengthy, and in academic format. In my view, it was located between the academic and activist communities. Many (activist) academics and students wrote for it, as did many activists. According to David Small, the periodical bore the imprint of Rob Steven, a politics lecturer at the University of Canterbury, in that it was ‘community-based, academically rigorous and politically relevant.’<sup>89</sup>

*Race Gender Class* was a landmark publication in that, unlike other independent socialist papers, it was produced by a collective that was majority female and contained many Polynesians (although *Working Women*, a socialist feminist paper published from 1975 to 1979, was produced by an all-female collective).<sup>90</sup>

86 Bruce Jesson, ‘Reviewing the Maori Sovereignty debate, Part 2’, *The Republican* 49, Feb. 1984, p 16.

87 *Race Gender Class*, 1 July 1985, p. 2.

88 ‘He Tikanga’, *Race Gender Class*, 8 March 1989, p. 2.

89 David Small, ‘Rob Steven’ (obituary), *Foreign Control Watchdog* 97, August 2001, accessed September 7 2015, <http://www.converge.org.nz/watchdog/97/13.htm>

90 It was the publication of the Working Women’s Alliance, a coalition involving socialist feminists and feminist unionists. *Working Women* contained articles about the conditions women faced in wage-work, but also featured articles about ‘housewives as workers’, viewing women as ‘doubly oppressed’. See ‘Statement of principles’, *Working Women*, July 1975. The Auckland Working Women’s Resource Centre, which was established in 1984, also published an occasional news magazine called *Working Women* from the mid-1980s. The centre still publishes a newsletter today.

Many Māori, including well-known activists like Syd Jackson, Moana Jackson and Ripeka Evans, contributed to it – especially in the form of interviews. It also provided abstracts for its articles in Māori, and contained the occasional article in Māori (which was also translated into English). *Race Gender Class* was possibly the first leftist publication of its era to publish in Māori – *Unity*, the paper of the Workers' Communist League had earlier published a back page in Samoan, but not Māori.

The general intention of *Race Gender Class* was to highlight the intersections between race, gender and class and the need to fight all forms of oppression together, although many articles concentrated on one form of domination. The journal covered a very wide variety of feminist, Māori and class-based issues, as well as other forms of oppression.<sup>91</sup> Reflecting the rise of social movements, an editorial argued that most progressive groups organise today without the bureaucratic hierarchies that characterised Labour and the old left:

The seeds of a new revolutionary political force, this time with the power to effect real change, lie in the new bottom-up forms of organisation spreading through progressive circles...of course, each of the Maori nationalist, feminist and working class movements need to be built further, and additional ways of linking them together for mutual support must also be developed.<sup>92</sup>

Steven argued that the 'race-gender-class linkup' in Aotearoa was based on 'interconnected clusters' of oppression.<sup>93</sup> He used Marxism to trace these links. For example, he contended that the strong Pākehā racism against Māori had its material basis in Pākehā uniting together to secure Māori land under settler capitalism, and thus extracting 'rent' (a form of surplus value) from Māori. This enabled Pākehā capitalists to grant Pākehā working-class males high wages and a high standard of living. Steven's overly

91 Such as abortion, women's health, women contract workers or 'outworkers', women in unions and workplace disputes, the Labour Party, Māori sovereignty, Māori concepts of justice, critiques of bi-culturalism and devolution to iwi organisations, the 1990 celebrations of the invasion of Aotearoa, benefit cuts and the Employment Contracts Act, unemployment, and queer issues.

92 *Race Gender Class* 7, July 1988, p. 2.

93 Rob Steven, 'A glorious country for a labouring man', *Race Gender Class* 1, July 1985, pp. 51, 54-5.

rosy theory that Aotearoa ‘was a glorious country for a labouring man’ perhaps represented an antipodean version of the ‘wages of whiteness’ argument developed in the US, albeit in a different context.<sup>94</sup>

In terms of gender, Steven believed patriarchy concurrently developed under the same settler society. It was reinforced by males receiving a high wage (or the family wage) which consigned women to domesticity.<sup>95</sup> Steven placed great emphasis on the struggle for equal pay, not just for the same work, but for equal opportunity as he believed patriarchy, capital and unions combined to ensure males were concentrated in highly skilled, highly paid occupations.<sup>96</sup> Many other articles in *Race Gender Class* elaborated on different aspects of these themes, and likewise placed great importance on opposing segregated labour markets, and extended such an analysis to include unpaid domestic labour.<sup>97</sup> When it came to Māori sovereignty, *Race Gender Class* simply gave voice to tino rangatiratanga activists through the primary medium of interviews, rather than elucidating their own views.

However, *Race Gender Class* differed from *The Republican* in many different ways – for one, Jesson was not an exponent of the tripod theory, seeing it as individualistic in practice.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, Jesson criticised it (and the Pākehā anti-racism movement) for being driven by guilt and individual culpability, rather than collectivity.<sup>99</sup> That is, individual Pākehā were seen to be responsible for racism and colonialism. Such a view, and practice, often led to

94 See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, London 2007.

95 Steven, ‘A glorious country’, pp. 51, 54-5.

96 Rob Steven, ‘Equal pay for work of equal value: Marxist theory’, *Race Gender Class* 4, 1986, p. 47.

97 See for example Jan Andrews, “‘Boom and bust’ – capitalist patriarchy and women outworkers in Aotearoa 1890-1950”, *Race Gender Class* 5, July 1987, pp. 1-23; Linda Hill, ‘Employment iniquity: the great leap backwards’, *Race Gender Class* 11/12, 1991, pp. 16-23; and Ruth Gray, ‘Women in struggle: the Wool Testing Authority/PSA Dispute’, *Race Gender Class* 6, Dec. 1987, pp. 7-23.

98 Jesson, ‘Reviewing the Maori Sovereignty debate, Part 2’, p. 16. For a similar critique of the tripod theory and its individualistic ranking of people by their single, double or triple (or more) oppression, rather than offering a structural analysis, see Dennis Rockell, ‘Understanding racism’, *The Republican* 47, Sep. 1983, pp. 10-2.

99 Jesson, ‘Reviewing the Maori Sovereignty debate, Part 2’, pp. 15-6.

‘moral coercion’ based on ‘verbal intimidation’, ‘guilt-tripping’ and even violence, with self-destructive results.<sup>100</sup> In contrast, Steven simply re-asserted the need for a genuine sense of regret over the colonial past in Aotearoa after discerning that by the late 1980s leftist Pākehā often denied such guilt.<sup>101</sup>

Yet *Race Gender Class* and *The Republican* did generally share the same view that the white working-class – which made up a majority of the working-class – was a conservative and largely affluent force, and one had to turn to Māori (in a coalition with the most oppressed layers of society, in the case of *Race Gender Class*) for radical revolt. Undoubtedly this view reflected the important reality that Māori, including Māori workers, were often at the forefront of dissent from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s (if not later).

Steven also argued ‘Maori people have a rich here-and-now experience of alternatives to capitalism, an experience which can be built on to lead the way in devising a socialist solution to the crisis’.<sup>102</sup> To a large extent, however, Steven recognised that the economic crisis of the 1980s also affected white men by reducing their living standards, and it also offered greater possibilities for working-class organisation and unity by lessening the major divisions within that class.<sup>103</sup>

In the pages of *Race Gender Class*, some challenged this view that the white working-class was essentially conservative, and re-asserted its radical potential and history of revolt. Brian Roper claimed what was needed was to march separately, but to strike together – that is, to forge a unity against neoliberal austerity on the basis of opposition to the predominantly white and male dominated capitalist class, despite having separate agendas. He argued social movements lacked industrial power, and that the working-class was still pivotal under capitalism.<sup>104</sup> Seemingly overlooked in this

100 Bruce Jesson, ‘Morality as a means of coercion’, *The Republican* 50, June 1984, pp. 2-3, 16.

101 Rob Steven, “‘Politically sound’ Pakeha backlash”, *Race Gender Class* 7, July 1988, pp. 87-92.

102 Steven, ‘Politically sound’, p. 92.

103 Steven, ‘A glorious country’, p. 55.

104 Brian Roper, ‘March separately, strike together – the retreat from

debate were the complexities and contradictions of working-class politics – many blue-collar white workers, far from being incurably conservative and racist, were often practising shopfloor solidarity with Polynesian workers in the vast number of work stoppages of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, at the same time, many supported sporting contact with apartheid South Africa.

## The 1990s until today

The period since the 1990s has been rather grim for leftist publishing. The long-term effects of neoliberalism and its widespread enclosures and commodification, its intensified exploitation, alienation and atomisation, have all been well-documented: working-class people – including Māori, Pasifika, migrants, and women – are generally much worse off.<sup>105</sup> This would seem to be fertile ground for revolt. Instead, protest – including strikes, and other forms of workplace dissent – has dwindled.

The working-class and the left have been forced on to the defensive, horizons have narrowed, and the left is now a shadow of what it was.<sup>106</sup> One writer in *NZMR* asked ‘Where did all the lefties go?’ He continued: ‘The new right just seemed so strong. Jobs were hard to find...And the left became boring’ in the 1980s, while previously it had been intellectually stimulating.<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, some protest has occurred. This was particularly the case during the early to mid-1990s, with a wave of large-scale protests against the Employment Contracts Act and

class and socialist strategy in New Zealand,’ *Race Gender Class*, 7 July 1988, pp. 73-4.

<sup>105</sup> See for example, Brian Roper, *Prosperity for All?*, Melbourne 2005 and ‘The Fifth (Key) Government’s neoliberal policy agenda: description, analysis and critical evaluation’, *New Zealand Sociology* 26/1, 2011, pp. 12-40; and Melanie Nolan, ‘Neoliberalism at Work in the Antipodean Welfare State in the Late Twentieth Century: Collusion, Collaboration and Resistance’, in Leon Fink, Joseph McCartin & Joan Sangster eds., *Workers in Hard Times*, Chicago 2014, pp. 161-183.

<sup>106</sup> See Philip Ferguson, ‘Low Horizons and the Legacy of Defeats’, Redline Contemporary Marxist analysis blog, accessed Nov. 22 2015, <https://rdln.wordpress.com/2012/10/14/low-horizons-and-the-legacy-of-defeats/>

<sup>107</sup> Peter Fuller, letter to the editor, *NZMR* 323, March 1990, p. 7.

benefit cuts in 1991, and a series of occupations and demonstrations against ‘the fiscal envelope’ and student fees. Of these struggles, the largest was the one waged against the Employment Contract Act in 1991. There have also been various hīkoi, especially in 2004; numerous demonstrations and movements against different forms of privatisation, from hospital closures and state housing sell-offs to water privatisation; movements against various free trade deals from the 1990s onwards; the brief rise and fall of the ‘anti-capitalist movement’ in the late 1990s and early 2000s, since rebranded by academics the ‘alter-globalisation movement’; anti-Iraq and anti-Afghanistan War protests; and protests about oil drilling, mining, and climate change.

While people have not been passive in the face of neoliberalism, most of these protests have ended in resounding defeat. Overall the period since the early 1980s has been one of an enduring working-class defeat.<sup>108</sup> As Susan Watkins notes, today’s younger generation

have grown up within far more depoliticized cultural and intellectual environments, structured by the market and mediated, for better or worse, by electronic forms of sociability. Flares of protest have been ephemeral; every mobilization they have known—alter-globo, climate change, marches against the invasion of Iraq—has ended in defeat.<sup>109</sup>

Some of these movements have produced brief spells of optimism on the left, epitomised by a slogan of the anti-capitalist movement: ‘another world is possible’. Yet these struggles have not led to a long-term revitalisation of socialism and the broader left, and more importantly, the tradition of social dissent that was evident in the long 1970s. For instance, theories that new foci of long-term resistance would form around the ‘precariat’ (the precarious fraction of the working-class, mainly based in service occupations such as cleaning, fast food and retail), ‘information revolutionaries’ and ‘immaterial labour’, the ‘cybertariat’, or simply the vague ‘multitude’, have not on the whole eventuated yet (despite the vast

108 See Toby Boraman, ‘The myth of passivity’, *Red & Green* 5, 2005, pp. 25-48.

109 Watkins, ‘Editorial’, p. 27.

efforts of Unite Union in organising among precarious workers).<sup>110</sup>

Overall, protest against neoliberalism was at its most intense and popular when it was first imposed by capital and the state, particularly in the early ‘shock doctrine’ period from 1984 to about the mid-1990s. Since that era, neoliberalism has been consolidated, and has not needed to be as harshly imposed as it was previously. Indeed, various governments have at times softened it since 1999. Concurrently, strict repressive laws, practices and the parallel development of a surveillance state and society have also played a part in curbing dissension over the long-term – such as the disciplinarian regime that has been enforced on beneficiaries, severe legal restrictions on strikes, and an intense level of managerial control on many shopfloors. Officially recorded strikes have plummeted to record low levels in the 2000s and 2010s. In 2014, for instance, a mere 1,564 workers participated in officially recorded stoppages. In 1979, 471,450 workers struck.<sup>111</sup>

This relative paucity of mass protest was illustrated by how the recent global wave of class struggle since the global financial crisis (the ‘movements of the squares’ and other forms of anti-austerity dissent in Europe, strike waves in parts of Asia, as well as the ‘Arab Spring’ and Occupy) did not reach these shores in a significant way. Perhaps this was because the austerity cuts made in Aotearoa since that crisis were not nearly as deep as they were in many European countries. The recent mass mobilisations against the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement and climate change have been impressive in terms of numbers. Yet it remains to be seen if they are further fleeting flares of resistance.

As Chris Trotter observes, the left’s response to neoliberalism took two main courses: firstly, the moderate, ‘realistic’ left sought some form of accommodation with ‘a revanchist capitalist enemy it was convinced the working class could not defeat’; and

110 See for example Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labor*, New York 2003; Antonio Negri & Michael Hardt, *Multitude*, London 2005; Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber Marx*, Chicago 1999; and Guy Standing, *The Precariat*, London 2011.

111 Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, *Annual Work Stoppages Statistics Calendar Year 2014*, Wellington 2014, p. 2, and Department of Labour, *Industrial Stoppages: Handbook of Statistics 1979*, Wellington 1981, p. 1.

secondly, the ‘radical, activist left...demanded resistance to the New Right onslaught’.<sup>112</sup>

This same rift occurred in the independent left. Many thought the best method to oppose neoliberalism, or stem its tide, was to form or join social democratic parties. Yet when the Alliance gained political power as a junior partner in a coalition government with Labour it had to compromise to a considerable degree with neoliberal capital in return for some minor reforms. Many journals that were, or aimed to be, independent were, or became, informally or formally tied with various electoral or organisational projects – such as *Red & Green*, *New Zealand Political Review*, *Workers’ Charter* and *Revolution*. Hence the independent left rapidly declined in the 1990s, and its publications that remained independent ran out of steam, namely *NZMR*. This illustrated the age-old political dilemma in repressive, hard times between either accommodation and compromise in an attempt to secure some limited influence and popularity, or retaining integrity and principles but remaining isolated and unpopular.

Another general trend was that publications declined in quantity and quality. Theoretical development tended to stagnate, and many articles re-stated basic positions or recycled old ones. The range of topics covered narrowed. Some publications exhibited a shift in focus to issues of poverty, inequality, capitalist ideology and repression – in other words, what was done to working-class people (although such a liberal-left discourse was rarely couched in class terms), seeing them as victims or passive subjects – rather than their attempts at resistance.

An editorial in *NZMR* noted that in times of defeat, and right-wing attack, the left becomes more sectarian and more intolerant of the political views of others.<sup>113</sup> To a certain extent, some demonising of individuals and movements for the astonishing success of capital in its neoliberal garb and the left’s startling decline has occurred, rather than seeing the neoliberal regime of capital accumulation as a complex, systematic project by capital to

112 Chris Trotter, ‘¡No Pasarán! An open letter to the New Zealand Left on the eve of the 1996 general election’, *NZPR* Sep./Oct., 1996, p. 34.

113 Gerry Cotterell, ‘Sectarianism: the lonely road to nowhere’, *NZMR* 327, Oct./Nov. 1990, p. 2. Cotterell argued for greater unity and tolerance.



restore and further increase profitability.

This has affected major debates on the left, such as the on-going debate between proponents of class and identity politics. For example, Chris Trotter has argued that the accusatory tactics of ‘separatist’ identity politics caused major splits within the left in the 1980s, drove people away from the radical extra-parliamentary left, and left behind ‘in their wake the tragic wreckage of personal and political relationships.’<sup>114</sup> Trotter highlights that proponents of class were castigated during the 1981 Springbok Tour, when many activists *essentialised* the working-class as sexist, racist and homophobic rugby supporters (in my view, the anti-tour movement was mainly working-class, but it did not see itself as so).<sup>115</sup> Dougal McNeill argued in reply this is a wishful ‘if only’ view of history – ‘if only...those bloody Maori, and women, hadn’t kicked up a fuss’, then things would have been alright.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, many anti-tour protesters were incensed by the lack of concrete opposition to racism in Aotearoa, and dismayed by the top-down organisational practices and largely class reductionist ideologies of some Leninist parties that were prominent during the tour.

Yet at the same time this debate between class and identity politics became more complex. For example, as protest declined, and as capital attempted to co-opt identity politics, by about the mid to late 1980s identity politics tended to shift away from the tripod theory (especially the class leg of the tripod frame of oppression, which was often seen as outmoded) and concentrate on individual forms of oppression. Consequently, the independent left press became more critical of it – especially the development of the ‘browntable’, or the rise of a Māori mercantile elite, or wing to the capitalist class, due to the state’s Treaty of Waitangi settlement process.<sup>117</sup>

114 Chris Trotter, ‘What’s Left?’, *NZPR*, Summer 2002-2003, p. 24.

115 Chris Trotter, ‘Mistaken identity’, *Red & Green* 4, 2004, p. 69.

116 Dougal McNeill, letter to editor, *NZPR*, Autumn 2003, p. 5.

117 See for example, Murray Horton, ‘First there was the Business Roundtable, now there’s the Brown Table’, *NZMR*, 341 Nov./Dec. 1993, pp. 14-6; Elizabeth Rata, ‘Trading on the Treaty’, *NZPR* 53, Spring 2004, pp. 28-43; Jarvis, ‘Maori Liberation’; and Matt Russell, ‘The pacification of contemporary Maori protest’, *Red & Green* 5, 2005, pp. 51-71.

## The Independent Socialist Press in the 1990s

By the late 1980s, *NZMR* was in decline. As with other leftist publications, this was mainly due to the left's rapid decline if not demoralisation under the neoliberal era. Ironically, it was then announced 'NZMR is now being restructured.'<sup>118</sup> A new younger editor, Steven Cowan, was appointed. The magazine became far more attractively designed – previously *NZMR* had been a text-heavy magazine. Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s it had avoided using images almost altogether.

The new editor, in reference perhaps to *NZMR*'s former emphasis on economics and statistical analysis, somewhat caustically noted *NZMR* was previously 'a magazine teetering on the edge of dullness...the bottom line is that articles that read like *Pravda* reports on tractor production will not be published.'<sup>119</sup> While Cowan claimed that *NZMR* would remain independent, and have no one political line, it soon drifted towards the revolutionary end of Marxism, especially Trotskyism. Trotskyism became relatively popular on the left during the late 1980s and 1990s as Maoism and Stalinism rapidly lost popularity due to the toppling of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Tiananmen Square massacre. Indeed, the Maoist CPNZ transformed itself into the Trotskyist organisation Socialist Worker after a merger. A new younger generation of writers published in *NZMR*, including John Freeman-Moir and Brian Roper. Correspondingly, social democrats wrote fewer articles. Pictures of Lenin and Marx appeared on *NZMR*'s cover. *NZMR* became critical of 'actually existing socialism' and left nationalism. It also became far more hostile towards the Labour Party, rather than offering alternative policies for it.<sup>120</sup> However, *NZMR* still offered 'critical support' to the newly formed New Labour Party in 1989.

Its response to the 'race gender class' debate was largely to assert the continuing relevance of class during a period of alleged capitalist hegemony, and to lament the shift away from

118 *NZMR*, 303 Nov. 1987, p. 3.

119 Steven Cowan, *NZMR* 304, Dec. 1987, p. 2.

120 See for example, Bruce Curtis, 'The development of the Labour Party', *NZMR* 316, March 1989, pp. 14-20 and 'The Development of the Labour Party', *NZMR* 317, April 1989, pp. 13-8.

class in the broader left towards identity politics. However, like much of the left, *NZMR* made no sustained, in-depth attempt to update class analysis in accord with enormous transformations in capital, management practices and the working class that had been occurring in the neoliberal era, such as the decline of the traditional blue-collar occupations, and the rise of a more diverse, casualised and multicultural working class. An exception was Pete Lusk's investigation into the inanities of 'teamwork' on the Fisher & Paykel assembly line.<sup>121</sup>

Many older, largely social democratic, subscribers to *NZMR* were alienated by this shift to Trotskyism.<sup>122</sup> They believed that the journal had become 'sectarian' and dogmatic, and had abandoned *NZMR*'s dual aim of providing a broad leftist forum and circulating information. Chris Wheeler, the former editor of the colourful underground magazine *Cock* (1967-74), argued that *NZMR* had become terminally boring and heavily ideological, and did not provide facts and news anymore. He claimed the 'the grey weight of Marxism just sinks the whole turgid journal below the level of credibility'.<sup>123</sup> *NZMR* began to be published irregularly, and lost subscribers and writers.<sup>124</sup> The appointment of an editorial committee to edit the magazine in 1994 did not give it a new lease of life, although the magazine returned to a somewhat more investigative approach. In 1996, it folded after 354 issues.

Since *NZMR* ceased publication, no major, long-lasting and genuinely independent leftist publication has appeared. As Horton noted in 1997, 'the need is as great as ever for a regular journal of the Independent Left (*Political Review* is a much more mainstream publication).'<sup>125</sup> *New Zealand Political Review* (*NZPR*, 1992-2005), founded by Chris Trotter, was a social democratic magazine with a focus on 'informed journalism.'

121 Pete Lusk, 'Share the dream: six months on the drier line at Fisher & Paykel', *NZMR* 354, Feb./March 1996, pp. 4-7.

122 See for example Bernard Gadd, *NZMR* 306, March 1988, p. 11.

123 Chris Wheeler, *NZMR* 324, April/May 1990, p. 9.

124 *NZMR* was almost published monthly for 300 issues, apart from a double issue in December and January every year. Issue no. 299 (June/July 1987) was published one month late due to increased liabilities due to rising costs (p. 14).

125 Horton, 'Obituary: *Monthly Review*', p. 75.

In some respects, however, *NZPR* continued the independent socialist tradition, and in 1996 it incorporated *The Republican*, because the magazines aimed to do ‘very similar things’ – in that ‘both have provided a forum for an intelligent discussion of New Zealand politics’.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, *NZPR* diverged from the independent leftist press by paying considerable attention to the machinations of parliamentary politics, and by having sparse comment on grassroots movements and unions. At the same time, *The Republican* by the early 1990s drifted away from Marxism – rejecting communism and revolution – and became supportive of the Alliance, reflecting Jesson’s involvement in that party.<sup>127</sup> Hence the merger between *The Republican* and *NZPR* was also a product of Jesson’s and Trotter’s participation in the Alliance.

During the 1990s, *NZPR* had ties with the left wing of the Alliance – many Alliance members wrote for it or edited it – and it urged readers to vote for that party, although it became more critical of the Alliance and Jim Anderton’s leadership, especially after the Alliance entered a coalition with Labour in 1999.<sup>128</sup> While *NZPR* contained many articles about economics, feminism and the left’s decline (among other topics), it generally lacked the breadth of coverage, and the in-depth research, of *Race Gender Class* and *NZMR* at their best, and the incisive Western Marxist critiques of *The Republican*.

While Trotter, the editor of *NZPR*, did not support the Alliance left’s stand against the Iraq war in 2001,<sup>129</sup> another journal, *Red & Green* (2003-07), developed out of that stand. *Red & Green*, ‘the New Zealand journal of left alternatives’, was directly established by the ‘Left anti-war faction’ of the Alliance in 2002. While ‘initiated by the Alliance...it is not a Party journal’.<sup>130</sup> It aimed to become, in the tradition of the independent left, a forum for the broad spectrum of left views ranging from red to green, from anarchists and anti-capitalists to social democrats, and also from

126 Bruce Jesson, ‘An intelligent interest’, *NZPR*, March 1996, p. 4.

127 See Bruce Jesson, ‘The crisis of socialism’, *The Republican* 70, Sep. 1990, pp. 3-8.

128 See for instance Chris Trotter, ‘Riding the whirlwind’, *NZPR*, April/May 1996, p. 4.

129 Trotter, ‘What’s Left’, p. 40.

130 ‘Red & Green’, leaflet, no date, c. 2003.

feminists to Māori nationalists, among others.<sup>131</sup>

To a certain extent this aim was achieved, but it did not last long enough to have impact, or to develop rigorous debate. *Red & Green* was more in touch with community-based and union activism (indeed, many important activists wrote for it) than *NZPR*, yet despite its name, its coverage of green (grassroots) politics was lacking. Further, despite claiming to be a theoretical publication, most of its articles were either descriptive or polemical.

*Revolution* (1997-2006) began as an independent theoretical Marxist magazine with somewhat similar politics to the 1990s (non-party) Trotskyist version of *NZMR*. Its main thesis was that the working-class had been decimated and fragmented by capital's offensive, and that the new identities bound up with pluralism and multiculturalism had replaced the old social conservatism as a new *ideology* of capital.<sup>132</sup> As such, it contended capital and the state had thoroughly co-opted feminism and the Māori sovereignty movement. Indeed, *Revolution* believed that both movements did not represent a radical challenge to capital.<sup>133</sup> In 2002, *Revolution* joined the electoral party called the Anti-Capitalist Alliance along with the Maoist Workers' Party, before finally merging into the Workers' Party.

*Workers' Charter* (2006-8), a newspaper edited by veteran activist John Minto, was an independent left publication in the sense it was not tied to a party, but it was tied to a short-lived organisation called Workers' Charter that some prominent officials in Unite Union established. Like *The Paper* in the 1970s, *Workers' Charter* – which aimed to provide a forum for 'workers to talk to workers' about issues at work and in the community – was a rare example of a (somewhat) independent publication that was aimed at workers rather than at the 'already converted'.<sup>134</sup>

131 'Introduction', *Red & Green* 1, 2003, pp. 5, 8.

132 See for example Philip Ferguson, 'New identities for old', *Revolution* 4, Oct. 1997/Jan. 1998, pp. 10-13. Ideology is used in the Marxist sense of the word, meaning the complex ideological bulwarks that help to maintain, sustain and enhance capitalist social relations.

133 See Phil Duncan and Grant Cronin, 'Behind the rise of Maori sovereignty', *Revolution* 4, Oct. 1997/Jan. 1998, pp. 15-21.

134 See John Minto, *Workers' Charter* 1/1, 2006, p. 2.

The development of the internet has dramatically changed the nature of publishing. Debates over its worth for the left oscillate between two extremes. On the one hand, some optimistically claim that the internet represents a new commons (or in a softer version, a 'public sphere' where anyone can publish for free, and have free access). Conversely, others view it as an increasingly commodified, mediated space that is vital for today's 'communicative capitalism'.<sup>135</sup> The internet is probably more paradoxical and contradictory than these two views admit, as is seen in independent left online publishing.

The internet has relieved publishers of major obstacles: printing and mailing costs. As such, several important independent left blogs have appeared, such as 'Redline' (an independent Marxist collective that has similar politics to *Revolution*), and 'Against the Current', published by the last editor of *NZMR*. Yet leftist internet publishing tends to be individualistic (in that many are solo blogs, such as 'Against the Current'), and full of news comment rather than socialist analysis (such as the 'Daily Blog'). Internet publishing also tends to be top-down, in that people are bombarded with the instantaneous opinions of a galaxy of leftists on topical issues, rather than investigating conditions at the flaxroots, or encouraging face-to-face debate and grassroots organising. As Jodi Dean notes, such one-way communication is often more for circulation than use, and for getting temporary attention ('hits' or ratings), than for furthering understanding.<sup>136</sup> Further, it is unclear as to who the audience for these blogs is, and (crucially) if they are read by 'non-politicos' outside the left.<sup>137</sup>

135 For example, contrast Nick Dyer-Witheford's *Cyber Marx* with Jodi Dean's 'Communicative Capitalism', in Joshua Hanan & Mark Hayward eds., *Communication and the Economy*, New York 2014, pp. 147-66; and also her 'Why the Net is not a public sphere', *Constellations* 10/1, 2003, pp. 95-112.

136 Jodi Dean, 'Communicative capitalism', *Cultural Politics* 1/1, 2005, pp. 51-74.

137 One study of blogs in the US found that 'blog readers gravitate toward blogs that accord with their political beliefs.' Eric Lawrence, John Sides & Henry Farrell, 'Self-segregation or deliberation? Blog readership, participation, and polarization in American politics', *Perspectives on Politics* 8/1, March 2010, pp. 141-57.

## Conclusions

A major factor in the long-term waning of protest – albeit punctuated by fleeting, ephemeral flares of resistance – has been capital and the state’s astonishingly successful, adaptable, resilient and entrenched counter-reaction to the multiple crises and struggles of the long 1970s. Former hotspots of resistance, such as meat-workers, have been thoroughly restructured. So far, new sites of lasting and deep resistance have not developed in the community and workplace. In short, the working class has experienced a prolonged period of class decomposition and fragmentation, without a corresponding period of class re-composition.

Consequently, the independent left has withered away and, with it, its publications. Today, there are no major, widely-read socialist (let alone independent socialist) publications being produced, and the ones that are – a handful of web blogs, a magazine or two (such as *Socialist Review* and *Fightback*), and a trade union bulletin or two from the few remaining unions that describe themselves as socialist – seem precarious, as they depend on the efforts of a handful of people. Indeed, most of the contemporary left do not consider themselves socialists. However, this trend is not inevitable given the fundamental tensions within capitalism, nor should the past and present be despairingly portrayed as one of complete hegemony for capital. Nor is there a deterministic link between the level of dissent and the health of the leftist press – some movements have flourished without a major press.

On the whole, at its best the independent socialist press was informative and investigative, and provided valuable analysis of Aotearoa society as well as an ecumenical forum for debate. It attempted to grapple with the class-based nature of Aotearoa’s economy and society, and its associated legacy of white-settler capitalism and colonialism, as well as racism and sexism.

Perhaps the major debate explored in the independent left press was that between class and identity politics. It might seem that this dispute became stuck between two irreconcilable positions, with both sides making a caricature of each other. On the one hand, some contrasted innovative social movements with an old-fashioned class reductionism promulgated by Pākehā males who refused to admit that other forms of oppression existed. Conversely, some thought that serious political analysis of capital

and class had been jettisoned in favour of a de-politicised, co-opted, separatist middle-class identity politics.

Yet a rough, unsteady consensus emerged in the independent socialist press in the 1980s. It generally rejected a narrow class-based determinism, and recognised the importance of other forms of oppression, and attempted to revise and broaden socialism, while still retaining the efficacy of class. For example, it is too simplistic to claim that the tripod theory, whatever its failings and vagueness, was simply an expression of identity politics *as it still recognised the importance of class*, and often expounded materialist rather than idealist explanations of racism and sexism.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, considerable disagreement remained between those who thought class was underemphasised or overemphasised. Today, there is also a broad agreement within the contemporary left that there are multiple oppressions, and that class exploitation is inseparable from other forms of 'social injustice' – sexism, imperialism, colonialism, and environmental destruction.<sup>139</sup>

However, the independent socialist press could also be distant from grassroots struggle. Mostly, it was highly isolated from the broader working-class. And it was mainly geared towards other leftists and activists. Crucially, it was also ambiguous. Possibly its main ambiguity was how it was independent and sceptical of political parties and organisations, yet informally or formally tied to them, in perhaps what might be called a symbiotic relationship. The independent left needed some degree of influence, and political parties and organisations needed a press that provided some analysis and offered research. Other contradictions were also evident. The independent left press was often produced by intellectuals yet lacked in-depth theory and the richness of debates that have occurred overseas, such as discussions concerning the capitalist spectacle, changing class composition and wages for housework. And although produced mostly by the radical left, the independent left press often subscribed to an unimaginative pragmatic socialism.

138 Cf. Jarvis, 'Maori liberation', p. 31.

139 Wayne Hope and Jane Scott, 'Left Political Activism' in Janine Hayward ed., *New Zealand Government and Politics*, Sixth edition, South Melbourne, 2015, p. 548.



Two major political currents were absent from the independent socialist press. Firstly, unlike for instance *Radical America* in the US, no publication promulgated a genuine *socialism from below* that documented and analysed the creativity and richness of working-class autonomy and self-activity, especially during the long 1970s. Such subjectivity was neglected in favour of a tendency to emphasise hegemony and structure, as in *The Republican*.

Secondly, there was a notable negligence of ecological politics, and an analysis of the ecological crisis. Race, gender and class were the main foci, and other types of oppression outside that paradigm were given scant attention. Surprisingly, no one magazine even discussed eco-socialism, let alone developed such a perspective.

Overall, an independent socialist journal is sorely needed. As Watkins notes, the ‘very rarity of a serious left forum’ in hard times makes such a journal more valued. Yet she asks a vital question: can a leftist magazine ‘hope to thrive in the absence of a political movement?’<sup>140</sup>

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