Cybèle Locke – 'Solidarity and the Right to Strike': presentation given for the Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage Public History Talk in April 2023.

The following is a transcript of a talk by Dr Cybèle Locke about an aspect of her book Comrade – Bill Andersen, A Communist, Working-Class Life *(Bridget Williams Books, 2022), which traces how trade union leader Bill Andersen encountered the world between 1924 and 2005, broadening political history to embrace communist history. The talk was recorded live at the National Library of New Zealand on 12 October 2022.*

Introduction:- by Dr Emma-Jean Kelly, Pou Hītori Matua (Ataata-Rongo) Senior Audio Visual Historian, Manatū Taonga Ministry for Culture and Heritage

Dr Cybèle Locke foregrounds twentieth-century working-class narratives in her research. Her first book, *Workers in the Margins: Union Radicals in Post-War New Zealand*, drew on case studies of the unions of freezing workers, clerical workers, and unemployed workers to explore how women, Māori and Pasifika workers transformed union cultures.

A Pākehā historian, Cybèle is a senior lecturer in the History Programme at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington and is active in her trade union. She is also a very hard worker.

Cybèle and I are both oral historians, and we work together on the Labour History Project Committee; a group of volunteers who try to ensure workers' histories are not lost. Cybèle is passionate about this work, and has also been a social justice activist for a long time, continuing to do this alongside her scholarship, including being active in work for the Living Wage movement here in Te Whanganui a Tara. Very recently she helped organise a symposium on the Cost of Living which invited a range of historians, veteran activists and younger generations into conversation to try and work out how success and failures of the past might inform the current moment. That kōrero will be the topic of the upcoming Labour History Project Bulletin which Cybèle is guest editing. And she's a Mum of two!

Cybèle's recently published biography of Bill Andersen, *Comrade*, examines labour activism, communism and social change, from the 1930s until the turn of the twenty-first century.

When I first heard Cybèle was writing about Bill Andersen I wondered 'why Bill in particular?' But reading this fascinating story, which includes oral history recorded by Cybèle (and which will eventually be offered to the archive here at ATL), we learn of a deep and rich workers' story. Bill's early life as a seafarer, the injustice he witnessed which led him to active involvement in his union, in turn leading to his learning about Māori workers' struggles with racism in their workplaces as an organiser at the Drivers' Union. Bill was involved with the struggle at Takaparawhau Bastion Point through his relationships with Ngāti Whatua o Orakei. Syd Keepa was a close ally too. And there is so much more than that to learn – this is a tale of Pākehā and Māori, Pacific peoples, workers of Aotearoa trying to win a fairer and healthier working life through collective action.

Biography can offer a window into a time and movement through one individual which can in turn lead to wider stories of communities and struggles. This work does this in spades.

Biography offers the opportunity to hear someone's unique voice. For example, I was delighted to see Bill had written in his own (unfinished) memoir –

> A unionist or union leader can be as militant as a 'bull with a bum full of pepper' but unless he/she understands the laws of development of society and the need for a socialist strategy then she/he will not be in a position to take the struggle 'all the way'.

I think that gives you a certain sense of the flavour of Bill's language in the best possible way. It certainly stopped me in my tracks. Engari -

> Nau i whatu te kākahu, he tāniko taku.
> You weave the cloak and I the border.

I'm just here to tautoko you Cybèle, this is your work and your time to showcase your whakaaro. Please welcome Cybèle Locke, who in this talk offers possibilities for how Bill Andersen's communist, working-class life might speak to us in the current moment.

Cybèle Locke:

Kia ora Emma-Jean. Tēnā koutou katoa. Tēnei te mihi nui ki te mana whenua ko Te Atiawa and Taranaki whānui, Ngāti Toa Rangatira. Ko Pākehā ahua, ko Ingarihi, ko Airani, ko Kōtarani ōku tupuna. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa.

So I actually want to begin in the current moment, which is a little bit scary for a historian, but please bear with me.

The last few years have not been easy – the covid pandemic and cost of living crisis hitting us in different ways, depending on our circumstances. In the university education sector, our already high workloads have been intensified as we all moved to dual delivery education systems – teaching and supporting students simultaneously online and in person, with little resourcing. Students were already struggling on unliveable student loans and allowances and working long hours in order to study. Real full-time students are only those with the wealth to enable it. Covid brought further income insecurity for students, stress and fear, as the death toll mounted, and began to include our friends and relations. Academic staff like myself have weathered the cost of living crisis ok but general staff on low wages are increasingly stressed as the cost of living rises. Through this period our Vice-Chancellor

wailed about the loss of international students, then later threatened job cuts if enough of us didn't take redundancy. 200 people left and stress levels rose again as people took on more work to cover where staff had left. A wage and hiring freeze was instituted. And at the end of 2021, the university announced a budget surplus.

In early 2022 our university refocused on face to face teaching, to rejuvenate our campus; no plan was put in place for omicron. The first day of classes, hundreds of students in the halls had covid, but academic staff weren't told. A journalist broke the story. At the same time, covid spread through my kids' school. Covid deniers and their alt-right supporters occupied parliament and surrounds, closing the Pipitea campus to staff and students. Already exhausted, each of us found ways to keep teaching and supporting our students. People at my workplace were miserable.

The one place I found solace during this time was my branch of the Tertiary Education Union. This policy here put out during the first lockdown became a touchstone.

[Emma-Jean Kelly: Kia ora listeners – quick bit of information for you.
At this point, Cybèle is displaying a slide with the heading 'Working Remote – Covid 19 Principles'.
Underneath is a list of six principles that read:

1. **You are not "Working from Home", you are "At your home, during a crisis, trying to work".**
2. **Your personal physical, mental and emotional health is far more important than anything else right now.**
3. **You should not try to compensate for lost productivity by working longer hours.**
4. **You will be kind to your yourself and not judge how you are coping based on how you see others coping.**
5. **You will be kind to others and not judge how they are coping based on how you are coping.**
6. **Your team's success will not be measured the same way it was when things were normal.**

Underneath the list, it says 'These are extraordinary times', and has the hashtags Awhi atu, Awhi Mai and Covid 19, and the logo for the Tertiary Education Union Te Hautū Kahurangi.]

Union members came together on zoom and shared our experiences, we had a moan about our misery; and decided what to do collectively to make things better. Every university branch of our union has a separate collective agreement with their particular employer –

Vice Chancellors and others in senior leadership teams. For the first time in ten years, universities were all up for bargaining at the same time and we decided to run a national campaign on the same demands. Strike laws do not allow us to take strike action in solidarity with another university's action, but at least we can organise to take action at the same time.

Our employers made insulting offers in collective bargaining – pay cuts given inflation - and union meetings were held simultaneously on every campus to decide what to do. We all voted to strike, and to do so at the same time. I hadn't seen people smile and laugh so much as those strike actions we took in October last year. There is a fierce joy to be found in standing shoulder to shoulder with workmates, simultaneously downing tools, walking away from those computers and gathering together in a public place to state (sing, chant) loudly our grievances and demands. We are together in this, withdrawing our labour, and bringing our workplaces to a standstill.

But there are severe limits to our right to strike. It is illegal for us to strike in solidarity with our tutors because they are on a different collective contract. At Vic, we ended up settling our collective contract for less than what we wanted because we were offered a pathway to bring tutors into our collective agreement, and our tutors were offered a pay rise for the first time in 3 years; we look forward to legally being able to take industrial action with our tutors. It was illegal for us to take further action with our colleagues at other universities who didn't settle and continued to strike.

So many other workers have been taking strike action of late - in construction, hospitality, horticulture, manufacturing, education, health and firefighting - on similar issues: wages not keeping up with the cost of living; staff shortages wearing workforces thin. Yet, it is illegal for university workers to take strike action in support of other workers. It is illegal to walk off the job and support our kids when they walk out of school, demanding urgent action on climate change. It is illegal to walk off the job without notice before our collective agreement expires. If we do, employers have the right to seek substantial damages from unions and union members. These are real roadblocks to solidarity.

I want to turn to the past and ask how the solidarity-building and strike actions of the Northern Drivers' Union, led by Bill Andersen, might speak to us in this current moment. *Comrade* is about Bill Andersen's communist, working-class, trade union, Pākehā life, but that life was always embedded in collectivism. Comrade is a book of many voices that articulate that collectivism, and so is this talk today.

I'm taking you back to a time when it was the law that anyone joining a private sector workforce, had to join the appropriate trade union. It was never this way for state workers however, joining the PSA, Post Primary Teachers Association, and so forth was always voluntary. Every occupation had a collective agreement covering wages and conditions, negotiated regularly between representatives of trade unions and employers supported and enforced by the arbitration system. The Arbitration Court regularly assessed economic conditions and set minimum wages for occupations within its jurisdiction. Unions who registered with the arbitration system, gave up the right to strike.

Compulsory union membership gave private-sector trade unions a stable financial base but not necessarily active members. Often trade union members knew little about their rights under the arbitration system and what trade union officials were doing on their behalf. Some unions did have very active memberships – waterside workers, freezing workers, labourers, railway workers and drivers unions. Frustrated by the low wages and limited conditions set by the arbitration system, they drew on different kinds of strike action – work stoppages, go-slows, overtime work refusal and so forth to force employers to bargain. They did so despite strikes being illegal in New Zealand.

Bill Andersen was a merchant seaman during the Second World War and suffered exploitative shipboard conditions. By the time Bill came home in 1946, aged 22, he was a committed communist, with a hatred of racism. Andersen's anti-racism arose from witnessing the treatment of colonised Arab dockworkers in ports like Aden. In Auckland, Andersen was nurtured by strong friendships with older maritime trade union communist leaders who set an example of united front communism – they built democratic, industrially militant union cultures that practiced international working-class solidarity and understood this solidarity-building as a key step on the long road to socialism.

Now, this kind of membership-led, militant trade unionism became increasingly difficult in 1948. Cold War anti-communist rhetoric was unleashed by the Labour govt and the Federation of Labour, the peak body of private-sector unions, and continued by the National government from 1950. Trade union militants were demonised as a communist threat to national and international economic and political interests; Bill was blacklisted from seafaring, freezing work, and finally waterfront work in 1951.

The 1951 waterfront lockout began in February and after five months, ended in defeat. Bill Andersen was amongst about 200 ex-waterside workers, who became truck, bus, ambulance, taxi, or construction vehicle drivers and joined the Northern Drivers' Union. They brought their beliefs in membership-led militant trade unionism with them. The Union represented drivers from Northland, Auckland, Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions, many of whom were Māori.

Bill was elected an organiser in 1954 and secretary of the Northern Drivers' Union in 1956. True to his communist philosophy, he set about democratising the Northern Drivers' Union. Delegates were to be elected on every worksite with 20 workers or more. Bill wrote a manual on how to be a "good Union delegate": "fully take into account the ideas and mood of the workers on the job," look out for that key point of agreement – the issue that most people care about and can unify around – and that is the issue to go ahead on.[1] Crucial to active unionism was the ability of union delegates to listen and provide spaces where the issues most workers cared about could be discussed, and actions planned. Regular union newspapers informed members about drivers' concerns, kept the conversations going.

Other ex-waterside workers seeded membership led trade unionism in the 1950s and Bill's delegate manual became a tool for delegate education in the 1960s. New leaders arose in the Federation of Labour and in 1960 conference agreed to push for the legal right to stop work meetings –meetings on the job where workers could discuss key issues of the day. The Northern Drivers Union built solidarity with other like-minded trade unions, sharing office

[1] Northern Drivers' executive, "A Case for Strong Trade Unionism," 1962, 17-18. This manual became a central tool for union education.

space and coordinating activities across the Northern region, through the Trades Councils and nationally through the Federation of Labour.

As the Northern Drivers Union delegate system expanded, Māori drivers became increasingly involved in union affairs. They made their Pakeha union officials aware of incidents of racial discrimination in the workforce and organisers gained the reinstatement of Maori workers where this occurred. From 1958, annual delegate conferences were organised to provide lively forums for drivers to debate current issues. As South Akld driver Neil Chapman told me, drivers gathered to "grapple with … the question of racism, women's rights, worker's rights, … world peace … It was not just about pay and conditions but the betterment of mankind, global issues."[2] General Foods Driver Rameka Harris reflected: "The Northern Drivers' Union was one of the most democratic unions I've ever worked with … We were against racism, supported the Māori movement."[3]

Incensed by the New Zealand Rugby Football Union's racial discrimination when selecting teams to play South Africa, drivers took part in the 1959 "No Maoris, No Tour" campaign. In May 1960, peaceful demonstrators in Sharpeville were shot down by police and the press brought the reality of South African apartheid home to the outside world. Northern Drivers' anti-apartheid support can be traced from this moment. Bill reported: "shootings, beatings and mass punishments of coloured South African workers have motivated a strong protest from this union." He went on to say:

> The Northern Drivers' Union is firmly opposed to the colour bar. We recognise that New Zealand is not completely free of guilt in this regard. We support the N.Z. Federation of Labour's protest in the matter and urge the Government to use every opportunity to speak out boldly against the actions of the South African Government regarding the apartheid policy."[4]

[2] Neil Chapman, oral interview with author, 4 September 2013. Equal pay was an issue of focus for drivers in the early 1970s despite the very small number of women drivers. Drivers had been part of the peace movement, anti-conscription and ban the bomb movements, since 1949.
[3] Rameka Harris, interview with author, 1 December 2014, First Union, Onehunga.
[4] *Wheels*, May 1960, 5.

The FoL called on the government to cancel the 1960 tour.[5] The Seafarers' Union went further, stopping work for 24 hours to protest the massacre.[6] Prime Minister Walter Nash refused to intervene, leaving the decision to the NZRFU. Despite demonstrations of between one and three thousand people (an unusually large number for the time), the tour went ahead.[7]

Just under 60 delegates attended the July 1960 Drivers' Delegate Convention in Auckland, where racial discrimination was discussed. Delegates unanimously agreed to the Union executive's proposed "stand against racial discrimination wherever it may raise its ugly head." Bill reported: "racial discrimination has the effect of dividing the working people and … we should be united, irrespective of colour, religion or political beliefs." Northern Drivers' Union members recognised that a colour bar existed "to some extent in New Zealand and it must be vigorously stamped out, root and branch."[8] This policy made the Northern Drivers an explicitly anti-racist union and is significant given the mainstream Pākehā belief of the time that New Zealand was a place of racial harmony.[9]

In the 1960s, drivers took part in a boycott of South African goods and supported the work of Citizens' Association for Racial Equality (CARE), formed in 1964 to focus on race relations in South Africa and racism experienced by Maori and Pacific Island migrants to Auckland city.[10] Māori MP Matiu Rata was vocal in his opposition to apartheid and spoke against racial discrimination at the 1966 Drivers' Delegate Convention. This time there was success: the planned 1967 All Blacks tour of South Africa was cancelled.[11]

---

[5] Walsh had grown disaffected with the Labour government between 1957 and 1960 and became more accommodating of left-wing trade unionists as a result. Andersen, "60 Years of Struggle," 9.
[6] This became an annual event. Noel Hilliard, in Grant, *Jagged Seas*, 288; Kirkby and Ostapenko, ''Second to None in the International Fight," 448.
[7] Richards, *Dancing*, 25-6.
[8] *Wheels*, August 1960, 13.
[9] Harris, *Hikoi*, 20.
[10] First Committee: Harold Innes (President), Gladys Salter (Secretary), Mrs J. Abrahams (Treasurer), W. Glass, Sarah Campion, Syd Pilkington (Carpenters' Union), N. Karaka, Frank Haigh, W. McNaughton, Mabel Wilson. Haigh would be president from 1966-1970, Tom Newnham, secretary 1966-73. Early discussions were held on apartheid in South Africa and the position of Maori in New Zealand society, led by MP Matiu Rata, Koro Dewes and Dr Muriel Lloyd Pritchard. Both meetings were chaired by Dr John Reid, professor of English at Auckland University.
[11] Northern Drivers' Union, *Union News: Official Union News Bulletin*, September 1966.

The South African Prime Minister John Vorster adapted the rules so Maori and Pacific Island players could be included in the All Blacks touring team as 'honorary whites'.[12] In response, CARE hosted Dennis Brutus, president of the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee, to strengthen their campaign against sporting contacts with South Africa. In 1969, Brutus spoke at the Auckland Town Hall and argued the tour would demonstrate New Zealand's approval of apartheid laws. Northern Drivers executive member Wally Foster, a Māori South Auckland Council driver, found Brutus a persuasive speaker.

Foster was involved in Māori land rights struggles and educated those around him. Chapman remembered: 'He was a great reader of New Zealand history and he'd share those stories about land confiscation.' Foster was active with Bill in challenging racist hiring practices in Pukekohe. Foster educated drivers on why they should oppose the 1970 Tour:

> 'Each year, at the Annual Convention of the Northern Drivers' Union, when race relations are being discussed, the delegates have always adopted a policy which has condemned racial discrimination, racial prejudice, or racial disharmony. This is a very important part of our discussion of our annual conventions for the reason that Pakehas, Maoris, Islanders and others work side by side, engage at times in conflict with employers side by side, and go home at night to live in their communities side by side. Racial harmony is a question of bread and butter for all working people here in New Zealand….Every worker be he Pakeha, Maori or Islander has problems of a similar nature, for example, housing, making the wage packet spin out, feeding the family and sending children to school. These problems cannot be solved by allowing arguments over race or religion to divide us.'[13]

Foster presented opposing sporting contacts with apartheid South Africa as solidarity work to promote racial harmony of the working class, both domestically and internationally. Class identity was also central to Te Rarawa ambulance driver John Willis who was elected an organiser and vice-president of the Northern Drivers Union in 1970.

[12] Aroha Harris, Hikoi, p. 104.Melissa A. Morrison, 'The Grassroots of the 1981 Springbok Tour: An Examination of the actions and perspectives of everyday New Zealanders during the 1981 Springbok Rugby Tour of New Zealand', MA thesis, Uiversity of Canterbury, 2017, 46-9

[13] Wally Foster, 'The Apartheid Question', *Road Transport Worker*, June 1969.

Debates about the 1970 and 1973 All Black tours of South Africa at Northern Drivers delegates meetings were fiery; a range of opinions were expressed. Some drivers argued: we shouldn't 'drag politics into sport'; the All Blacks could set South Africans a good example with a mixed-race team; and Maori play separately from Pakeha internationally sometimes, isn't this racial discrimination? Other members responded: 'why should we care'?[14] This was not a sign of apathy but that rugby union was not that important to them. The majority of drivers were rugby league supporters and no league teams had sporting contacts with South Africa. Some drivers argued the Union shouldn't oppose apartheid in South Africa before cleaning up 'our own back yard'.[15]

While the Northern Drivers executive was unified in opposition to sporting contacts with South Africa, they did not gain the support of the majority of Northern Drivers' Union members. It was students, forming Halt All Racist Tours, who took the lead in the 1970s NZ anti-apartheid movement.

Taking direction from their members, the Northern Drivers' executive decided to focus debate on local racism issues. Radical protest groups Ngā Tamatoa and the Polynesian Panthers had emerged in inner-city Auckland, simultaneously influenced by local conditions and transnational Black Power movements. They campaigned to save te reo Maori, drew attention to the broken promises of the Treaty of Waitangi, protested the racist 'dawn raids' that targeted Pasifika peoples in their homes and on the streets, joined the anti-Vietnam war and anti-apartheid movements. Ngā Tamatoa leader Hana Jackson addressed an Auckland stopwork meeting of the Northern Drivers' Union and explained the work they were doing in late 1973. After a lively debate, the meeting resolved to give Ngā Tamatoa $100 to assist with their work.[16] Articles about Nga Tamatoa campaigns were published in the Northern Drivers' newspaper and support was generated from drivers for the Maori land march in 1975.[17]

[14] *Road Transport Worker*, June 1969.
[15] *Road Transport Worker*, 1972.
[16] *Road Transport Worker*, December 1973.
[17] Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou*, p. 210. It was established by John Ohia, Paul Kotara, Ted Nia, Taura Eruera and Auckland university students Hana and Syd Jackson, Peter Rikys and Donna Awatere. Walker argues that Nga Tamatoa was initially divided between radicals John Ohia, Paul Kotara and Ted Nia, who modelled themselves on Black Power leaders, and the more conservative university students who would take control of the group, with more focus on reform.

Now these fiery debates all took place at legal stop work meetings, a condition drivers had won from their employers by using illegal strike action in 1969. How did this come about? The Arbitration Court failed to deliver wage increases that kept up with the cost of living in 1968 and Federation of Labour members lost faith in the arbitration system; they voted to engage direct bargaining with employers instead. In this new environment, the Drivers' Union engaged targeted strike action, focusing on particular employers in the export sector, and gained the best results they ever had. In their 1969 collective agreement they won: a wage rise, long service bonuses, trailer rates, five days sick leave per year and two stop work meetings per year.

Petrol, beer, cement and refrigerator drivers took strike action in 1970, and weathered threats of deregistration from the arbitration system. Bill Andersen was very careful in the way strike action was conducted: 'analyse a dispute' with members, devise a clear strategy and the tactics to get there; know 'when to fight … when to advance and when to retreat'. Always 'settle at the peak' of a dispute to preserve organisational capacity.[18] Other trade unions took industrial action as well and issues and strategies were debated at monthly Auckland Trade Council meetings, where every union was represented.

In this new industrial reality, the Labour government passed the Industrial Relations Act 1973, which established a dual system: trade unions could continue to negotiate collective agreements through the arbitration and conciliation system *and* engage in direct industrial action to win settlements outside and on top of collective agreements. Most significantly, the Act partially repealed sanctions for strikes relating to disputes of interest, thus permitting such strikes. However, common law injunctions could still be gained by employers to bring strikes to an end. Bill Andersen became the target of an injunction in 1974.

The Northern Drivers committed to solidarity strike action with the Seamen's Union after North Shore Transport Company manager Leo Dromgoole had sacked all crew on the

[18] Peter Conway, 'NZCTU Tribute to Bill Andersen'; Andersen, '60 Years of Struggle', p.22.

Auckland–Waiheke Island ferry *Manu-wai*; drivers refused to deliver fuel to the Company. Dromgoole gained a common-law injunction to force people back to work but the Drivers and Seafarers' unions ignored the injunction. They knew they had the backing of FoL and Labour Party annual conferences, which had condemned the use of injunctions against unions. Dromgoole then applied to have the government seize the assets of both Seamens' and Northern Drivers' unions and arrest their secretaries; Justice Peter Mahon ordered Bill Andersen's arrest and he was taken to Mt Eden prison.

Word spread and the following day, about 20,000 Auckland industrial workers downed tools and walked off the job; Auckland city lost $1.6 million in profits that day. Prime Minister Norman Kirk was so concerned that Auckland anti-injunction strikes would spread nationwide, he prepared to declare a State of Emergency and call in the army. Hasty negotiations occurred with Bill and a Supreme Court hearing organised. Nearly 10,000 people gathered to support Bill outside. In court, it was agreed both unions were to lift their bans if court injunctions were dropped, and that Dromgoole would sell his company – all of which came to pass. The Drivers' Union understood that the Labour government had also agreed to change the law so that court-imposed injunctions could not be used to end industrial disputes in the future; but this never occurred.

The National Party, led by Robert Muldoon, was elected into government in 1975. Muldoon was anti-union, anti-communist and 'scratched every itch of prejudice against the poor, particularly the brown poor.' In the face of rising inflation, National cut public spending, instituted a 12-month wage freeze and amended the law, limiting trade union industrial activity and making it illegal to protest government policy. Determined to defend a decent standard of living, trade unions continued to coordinate industrial action to break the wage freeze. They took strike action when US and British nuclear armed and powered ships visited New Zealand, and in support of environment and Māori land rights movement as well; 25 per cent of workers were involved in work stoppages in 1976, despite the illegality of some of them.

Muldoon announced that 24 hectares at Takaparawhau Bastion Point, on the Auckland waterfront would be subdivided, sold off, and 'redeveloped as a pricey retirement village'.[19] Ngati Whatua Orakei were outraged. Takaparawhau was Ngati Whatua Orakei land that had been taken by stealth and force over the years; and now it would be developed even further out of reach. A delegation from the Orakei Maori Action Committee came to the Auckland Trades Council, chaired by Bill, and make a case for a Green Ban on Bastion Point – that is, a ban on any work on the planned redevelopment. And Auckland Trades Council delegates agreed.

Truck driver Syd Keepa, remembered:

> 'Muldoon wanted to build rich people's houses on there…. So that was a big draw card, not only for me but some who were a bit iffy on Maori rights anyway…. [I] was going up to support the people at Takaparawha to keep the rich white people out….I don't think there was anything in it about supporting Maori rights. I think that's how …[the Auckland Trades Council] sold it to the membership. It was about poor people against rich people…, which I thought was a brilliant way of doing things. Rather than to say it was Maori land and its there's – so the whole Auckland Trades Council agreed to put the Green Ban on.'[20]

On 4 January 1977, Joe Hawke and the Orakei Maori Committee Action Group began an occupation of Takaparawhau demanding justice for their grievances; it would last for seventeen months. Trade unionists supported the occupation in practical ways. They conducted education work on Māori land rights issues at stake through union newspapers and organised job-site meetings with all workers concerned, to make sure all Auckland trade unions members upheld the green ban. Maori workers were deeply involved.

While the Green Ban was initially sold to trade union members as a class issue, during the occupation conversations inside trade unions became focused on Maori land rights and the history of colonisation. For example, Andersen explained to

[19] Miranda Johnson, ''The land of the wrong white crowd': anti-racist organizations and pakeha identity politics in the 1970s', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 39, 2, 2005, p. 140.
[20] Oral interview with Syd Keepa.

members: 'All the jokes about the "pakehas stealing Maori land" are almost correct. The pakehas who have stolen (legally on some occasions) Maori land were not drivers, storemen, labourers or carpenters. It was the stock and station companies and other carpet baggers – that is the rich pakehas or their agents. Many of our Union members and other Union members are amongst those who have been or are being robbed. The great Maori Land March and the Bastion Point struggle represent the first real roll back in this long and infamous period of injustice against the Maori peoples.'[21]

On 25 May 1978, 'seven hundred police and army personnel invaded Bastion Point. The military cordoned the land by human ring of police officers. They removed two hundred and twenty-two people and charged them with wilful trespass.'[22] But Auckland trade union members ensured the Green Ban stayed in place for as long as Ngāti Whātua needed it to.

Bill, the Northern Drivers' Union and other trade unionists learned much from the Bastion Point occupation. What was initially interpreted as a class issue, over time was understood in relation to Māori land rights and colonisation. And Māori drivers, in solidarity with other Māori workers, played increasingly prominent roles in their unions, during some of the most significant strikes in New Zealand.

The National government blamed a rising cost of living on wage increases and increasingly intervened in wage bargaining to drive wages down. Workers were already struggling and pointed the finger at businesses who upped their prices to increase their profits – this was causing inflation, the Federation of Labour argued. In September 1979, for the first time, private-sector and state sector unions came together in a one-day national strike to bring an end to government interference in direct bargaining with employers. It was extremely effective, Toby Boraman calculates 46 percent of the workforce took part in work stoppages ion large part due to the general strike. For Bill, this was the high point of the trade union movement.

[21] RTW, December 1977.
[22] Sharon Hawke, 'Introduction to the Point', *Takaparawhau: The People's Story*, p. 7.

How does this history speak to me – it reminds me of the really important role that union delegates can play– those people at the grass roots who organise time and space where we can come together and listen to each other, moan, gossip, have a laugh, share the issues that are of deep concern to us, have hard conversations about the different kinds of discriminations that we face in our workplaces and communities. A delegate who also pushes us to unify around a particular issue we most care about, one we would be prepared to take action on. And to network all of those delegate-led grassroots conversations, building solidarity on that key issue, outwards and outwards through our unions, community groups until we have such a critical mass of people with us that it we are not afraid to break those strike laws that pen us in.

Question 1

Thanks very much Cybèle, wonderful work. Of course, the big debate of the times was the impact of the arbitration court. And, you know, there was unions - the large part of the union movement - was in constant debate whether it was actually the leg irons of labour or assistance, and the debate over whether it held people back or not. And then there those various changes to the law that came about, I'm just wondering what your assessment of those different institutions - reflecting on this work that you've done.

Cybèle Locke

I mean, Bill was always of the mind, Bill Andersen was always of the mind that workers need to use their own collective power. But even though he said that, the way that he engaged other workers around him to use industrial activity, was always in conjunction with that arbitration system. That wielding both ways, you could get the best for everybody. So in some ways, I think he really had a leg in both camps, that it really wasn't an 'either or' that we either just need to let go of that shackle, that arbitration court or we lose the right to strike. Or, we just stay within its parameters.

Question 2

Did Bill retain his communist beliefs, particularly after 1956? When I know a lot of people did leave the party?

Cybèle Locke

Yes. Bill remained a communist until the day he died. He maintained a real faith in Soviet Union, despite everything right up until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. And by that stage, what he saw was that the leadership of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union had been corrupt, removed from the people. But for him, the Marxist Leninist principles were still true. And so he held to those for the rest of his days.

Question 3

Can I come back to the present? One of my daughters has a senior position - nursing position in the local hospital. Last week, she resigned and is going to a much less well paid job in the private sector. Three of her colleagues that she told ended up crying and one of them indicated that she wished she had the courage to resign as well. How do you think collective bargaining will resolve the issues that they're obviously going through in the health sector?

Cybèle Locke

You're asking a historian about the current moment and about a union that I don't belong to. I guess what I'm thinking is there's no one answer, right. There's is a whole lot of things that need to be done to address the fact that we're overworked. Which I'm presuming is a big part of the reason for the change of job, So, why isn't it that our taxes support, you know, fully, and living allowances, for anyone training in the health sector? All of those kinds of things, whether we can necessarily achieve that through just a union and the laws that are available that way, is a different question. That's my very uncomfortable answer.

Question 4

In 1971, I worked in the office of the Seamens Union for a few months as their office girl, and [?] Martin and Les Barber, gave me quite a insight into unionism. And one of the things I found really interesting was that one of my jobs was to draw up the list of seamen to work on the ships that were in Wellington Harbor, because they had a union hiring hall. And it wasn't until I got to the United States that I learned how many places had union hiring halls, but one of my jobs was, when a seaman came in and wanted to get a new ticket, you would

go through the log, an enormous book, and every strike was noted over the years, and every single seaman union member's name was there. And if they had scabbed, on any strike, they got no job. So they ran it, but the hiring hall was extremely important. Because what it meant was that when a seaman came in to register that they were available for a job, they got first in first serve. So if you're able seaman, and they needed one, the employer had no opportunity whatsoever to say, 'I ain't having that militant sod on the ship'. We need that sort of thing returned. But what I like to really ask, we have all this history. This whole thing of political discussions within unions, we don't have them today. We have bread and butter, wage, conditions, all the rest is out. And in the Employment Contracts Act, there were some of us who actually pushed resolutions. One, I lost by three votes in my union, for us to go out on strike. And there was no fight back, real united fight back, which is why today, we have low wages, appalling conditions.

Emma Jean Kelly

I think that's a great place to close - thank you for the questions and comments and just wrap up with a big thank you to Cybèle.

End:

Thanks for listening to this New Zealand History podcast from Manatū Taonga. Don't forget to subscribe. And if you're looking for other content about New Zealand history, check out earlier talks in the series. You can find them on your favourite podcast channels. Just search for New Zealand history. Mā te wā.