

**‘To me, Socialism is not a set of dogmas but a living principle’: Harry
Atkinson and the Christchurch Socialist Church, 1890-1905**

By

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Abstract

In the early 1890s Harry Atkinson, the subject of this thesis, travelled to England and spent a year as foundation secretary of the Manchester and Salford Labour Church. In Manchester Atkinson worked closely with the Church's founder John Trevor, took part in Labour Church services and worked with a variety of British socialist intellectuals and activists including Ben Tillett, Edward Carpenter and Robert Blatchford. Atkinson returned to New Zealand in late 1893 and three years later founded the Socialist Church in Christchurch. This was not a Church in the traditional sense—rather, it was a site for the debate, discussion and dissemination of radical and socialist literature and ideas, and a platform for political agitation and social reform. Its creed was to 'promot[e] a fellowship amongst those working for the organisation of Society on a basis of Brotherhood and Equality'. Members of the Church included Jack McCullough, James and Elizabeth McCombs and Jim Thorn. The critical, yet downplayed, role that Atkinson played working behind the scenes as an important mentor and conduit in the emergent socialist sub-culture in Christchurch from 1896 to 1905 has been for the most part unexplored in New Zealand labour historiography.

This thesis addresses this imbalance and examines the intellectual and associational activity of Harry Atkinson during the period 1890 to 1905 and reconsiders the work and key concerns of the Christchurch Socialist Church. It argues that the form of ethical socialism Atkinson experienced in Manchester, and later promulgated through the Socialist Church, has been mischaracterised as vague or, inaccurately, Christian Socialist. By situating Atkinson's beliefs and activities within a wider transnational context of 1890s 'New Life' socialism, we can see his ideas and work as part of a broader 'world of labour', shaped by multi-directional flows and contacts. The varied networks through which Atkinson was exposed to books and ideas are illustrated and the thesis attempts to trace the diversity of his, and others, associational activity. It suggests that the colonial New Zealand socialism of the 1890s was not 'without doctrine', and that individuals engaged in richer intellectual and associational lives than is often acknowledged. However, it is shown that Atkinson and members of the Church, though inspired by foreign or overseas experiences, ideas and literature, focused primarily on local issues. These are also surveyed and include agitation for municipal government, female equality and the radical reform of democratic institutions. It is argued that a reconsideration of the lived experience of Atkinson and his wider circle provides a lens to investigate some important aspects of colonial New Zealand radicalism and socialism, outside the usual foci of trade unions, the workplace and formal labour politics.

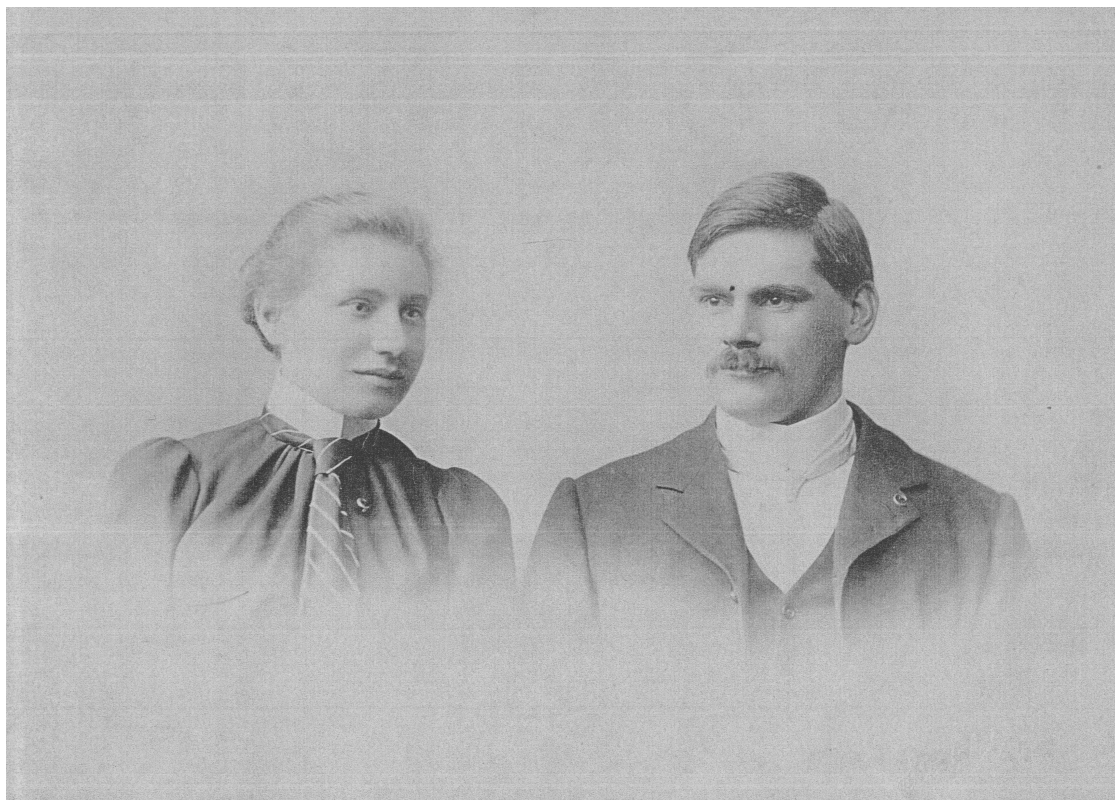
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Rose and Harry Atkinson. Christchurch, May 1901.

Miscellaneous papers - The Labour Churches and New Zealand by H Roth, 0071-18, Ranstead, William, 1859-1944: Papers, MS Papers-0071, Alexander Turnbull Library.

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Abbreviations

Organisations and legislation referred to in the text:

ASE	= Amalgamated Society of Engineers
ASRS	= Amalgamated Society of Railway Engineers
CTL	= Canterbury Trades and Labour Council
CWI	= Canterbury Women's Institute
FOL	= Federation of Labour
IC&A Act	= Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act (1894)
ILP	= Independent Labour Party (UK)
MHR	= Member of the House of Representatives
MPC	= Member of the Provincial Council
MUIOOF	= Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows
NCW	= National Council of Women
NZLP	= New Zealand Labour Party
NZSP	= New Zealand Socialist Party
PLA	= Progressive Liberal Association
PLL	= Political Labour League
SDF	= Social Democratic Federation (UK)
TLC	= Trades and Labour Council
WCTU	= Women's Christian Temperance Union

Archival repositories:

ATL	= Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
MRC	= Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick

Chapter One: Introduction

For a period 1890-93 I had something to do with some of the people connected with the movement of this time in England. Much of the history recorded in these writings is a part of the lives of every adult amongst us today but only some of the older ones have been connected with many events of importance of the earlier days that are now brought into the light & were the forerunner of these later developments.¹

In 1897 the British socialist Ben Tillett visited New Zealand. Exhausted after a decade of political, legal and industrial defeats, he suffered from 'profound nervous breakdown and depression'.² Because Tillett's visit was primarily for convalescence it has for the most part been passed over by New Zealand labour historians, barely registering compared to the prominence of the journeys of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, H.D. Lloyd, Tom Mann and his own later visits. Tillett himself only briefly mentions it in his autobiography.³ In Christchurch, where he was based for most of the time, he stayed with Harry Atkinson, nephew of the former Colonial Premier, Sir H. A. Atkinson, and a member of the Atkinson-Richmond clan. Harry Atkinson was not a union leader, nor ever held high rank in a union. Unlike a number of his relations, he never became a politician and only once ran a shortly aborted political campaign. In fact, he rarely features in New Zealand labour historiography. The question arises then: how did Tillett, at the time a leading and well-known trade unionist, come to spend his time recuperating with Atkinson?

The reason is that Tillett met Atkinson in the early 1890s, in Manchester, where Atkinson was for a short time foundation secretary of the Manchester and Salford Labour Church. For a year Atkinson worked intimately with the Church's founder John Trevor, a former Unitarian Minister who left his denomination to establish his own Church for working people, convinced that God was working through the labour movement. A product of the mid-Victorian 'crisis of faith', Trevor's prophets were not Jesus and the disciples, but Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁴ Atkinson worked closely with Trevor and experienced the colour and symbolism of protest and demonstration and the ritual and rhetoric of Labour Church services. He met, listened to

¹ Harry Atkinson to Bert Roth, 16 February 1953 in H. Roth Biographical Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (ATL) [Henceforth Roth Bio Notes].

² Tillett's doctor, G.E. Deamer, quoted in Jonathan Schneer, *Ben Tillett: Portrait of a Labour Leader*, London: Croom Helm, 1982, p.115.

³ Ben Tillett, *Memories and Reflection*, London: John Long Limited, 1931.

⁴ Mark Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement, 1891-1902', *The Journal of British Studies* 38, 2 (April 1999), pp.217-245.

and worked with an array of socialist agitators and activists, including Robert Blatchford, Ben Tillett, Tom Mann, Edward Carpenter and Keir Hardie, and became familiar with a wide spectrum of socialist forms, ideas and ideologies.

Atkinson returned to New Zealand in late 1893 and three years later founded the Socialist Church in Christchurch. Its creed was 'promoting a fellowship amongst those working for the organisation of Society on a basis of Brotherhood and Equality'.⁵ The Socialist Church was not a Church in the traditional sense of the word. Instead it was a site for the debate, discussion and dissemination of radical and socialist literature, and a platform for political agitation and social reform. People involved with the Church included Jack McCullough, Atkinson's best friend, James and Elizabeth McCombs, and Jim Thorn. Working behind the scenes, Atkinson was a key mentor and conduit in an emergent socialist sub-culture. Because of this, Bert Roth described him as 'the father of New Zealand socialism'.⁶

Despite this, Atkinson and the Socialist Church barely register in New Zealand labour historiography. He has, for the most part, suffered from the condescension of posterity. This thesis seeks to redress this imbalance, and is a biographical study of Atkinson's intellectual life and associational activities from the period 1890 to 1905, and a reconstruction of the activities of the Christchurch Socialist Church. The form of ethical socialism Atkinson experienced in Manchester and later promulgated through the Socialist Church has been under-emphasised in previous literature. By situating Atkinson's beliefs and the activities of the Socialist Church within a wider transnational context of what Stephen Yeo has described as 'New Life' socialism, we can see his ideas and conception of socialism as of their time rather than Christian Socialist.⁷ Atkinson's ethical socialism emphasised fellowship, education and self-education. It was driven by ethical and moral considerations, more than economic analyses. His beliefs flowed from a non-Marxian, British tradition: the prophets of this type of socialism were Trevor, John Ruskin, William Morris and Robert Blatchford. Indeed, the Socialist Church was part of a broader, transnational 'world of labour', shaped by multi-directional flows, contacts and dialogues. But while inspired by foreign or overseas

⁵ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.1, February 1897, p.1, in Socialist Church Records 1897-1903, 94-106-14/14, Roth, Herbert Otto, 1917-1994: Papers, MS-Group-0314, ATL [Henceforth Roth Papers].

⁶ H. O. Roth, 'In Memoriam: Harry Albert Atkinson', *Here and Now* (June 1956), p.18.

⁷ Stephen Yeo, 'A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896', *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (Autumn 1977), pp.5-56.

experiences, ideas and literature Atkinson and members of the Church focused on local issues. Amongst key concerns were municipal government, female equality and the radical reform of democratic institutions. Atkinson's experiences and the work of the Socialist Church provide a lens into the understudied intellectual life and associational worlds of colonial New Zealand radicals and socialists, outside the usual foci of trade unions, the workplace and formal labour politics.

The 'Father of New Zealand Socialism'?

There are two reasons why Harry Atkinson and the Socialist Church have had little scholarly attention. One is a problem of a lack of traditional sources, such as a full set of minute books, which has meant a reliance on the accounts of Bert Roth and a mis-characterisation of Atkinson and his motivations as Christian Socialist. The second is an explanatory emphasis in New Zealand labour historiography: a focus on the syndicalist inspired 'Militant Storm' from 1906 onwards, with accounts often framed in reference to the foundation of the Labour Party in 1916. Furthermore, until recently there has been an ideological dismissal of non-Marxist forms of socialism and radicalism, and an anachronistic expectation that consistent and coherent Marxism should have been promulgated by nineteenth century socialists.

The Frenchman Albert Metin was the first author to write about Atkinson and the Socialist Church, in his famous book *Le Socialisme Sans Doctrines*.⁸ Metin was commissioned by the French Labour Office and travelled through Australia and New Zealand as part of a wider tour of the British Empire and the United States from October 1898 to April 1900. Originally a report, *Labour Legislation in Australia and New Zealand* in 1901, and the book was rewritten and republished the same year.⁹ However, it was not printed in English until 1977, though Metin's conclusions were reported in the colonial press.¹⁰ Even if the book did not have a wide audience, Metin's characterisation of the Socialist Church, and colonial socialism more generally, remained remarkably prescient of later interpretations. In his section on Antipodean Labour parties, Metin claimed 'Socialism has not seduced the Australasians', and 'Socialism as we know it in

⁸ Albert Metin, trans Russell Ward, *Socialism without Doctrine [Socialisme Sans Doctrines]*, Chippendale (NSW): Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1977.

⁹ Details from a biographical sketch by Camille Vallaux in Metin, *Socialism without Doctrine*, [unpaginated].

¹⁰ For example 'Noted French Visitors: M. Metin Interviewed', *Evening Post*, 28 August 1899, p.2.

France, scarcely exists in Australasia except for a few small societies on the fringes of the labour movement'. One of these 'small societies' was the Socialist Church, and he wrote of Atkinson that '[i]n Christchurch, New Zealand, a young craftsman, recently arrived from England, set out to make a little propaganda. Being vaguely Christian Socialist by conviction, he set up a small group known as the Socialist Church'.¹¹ Metin's characterisation of Atkinson and the Church as Christian Socialist, primarily propagandistic and on the fringe of the labour movement, as well as his more general typecasting of Antipodean radicalism as 'without doctrine', practical and pragmatic, was influential and long lasting.

The next historian after Metin to write about Atkinson and the Socialist Church was Bert Roth, more than fifty years later.¹² Indeed, Roth remains Atkinson's main chronicler, and historians who later examined the Socialist Church rely almost entirely on his accounts.¹³ His study of the Socialist Church was one of many publications about a variety of New Zealand labour and radical groups.¹⁴ Roth believed that Atkinson's establishment of the Church was significant for a number of reasons: it was the first organisation in the colony to call itself socialist; it published a newspaper, *The Socialist*, which for the first time put forward the idea of an independent labour party in New Zealand; and it provided an active forum for discussion and agitation 'introduce[ing] a number of middle-class people and intellectuals to socialist ideas, such as James McCombs, Jack McCullough and Jim Thorn. Roth's interpretation of the Church as

¹¹ Metin, *Socialism without Doctrine*, p.54.

¹² New Zealand labour historiography is a surprisingly large body of literature, though most of it remains in the form of unpublished theses. As part of the research for this thesis a number of theses and monographs dealing with either political or 'moderate' labour were consulted. Atkinson and the Socialist Church do not appear in the following works: Erich H Fisher, 'A Review of the Political Labour Movement in New Zealand, 1899-1913', MA Thesis, Victoria University College, 1932; D W Crowley, 'The New Zealand Labour Movement, 1894-1913', MA Thesis, University of Otago, 1946; J. T. Paul, *Humanism in Politics: New Zealand Labour Party Retrospect*, Wellington: The New Zealand Worker Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1946; R T Newman, 'Moderates and Militants in the New Zealand Labour Movement: A Critical Study 1901-1913', Thesis, Canterbury University, 1948; J. D. Salmond, *New Zealand Labour's Pioneering Days: The History of the Labour Movement in N.Z. From 1840 to 1894*, Auckland: Forward Press, 1950; Bruce Brown, 'The New Zealand Labour Party 1916-1935: An Outline of the General Development of the Party from the Time of Its Formation...', MA Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1955; Bruce Brown, *The Rise of New Zealand Labour: A History of the New Zealand Labour Party from 1916 to 1940*, Wellington: Price Milburn, 1962. See also Josephine Milburn's article, 'Socialism and Social Reform in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *Political Science* 12, 1 (1960), pp.62-70.

¹³ See H. O. Roth, 'The Labour Churches and New Zealand', *International Review of Social History* 4, 4 (1959), p.361-366; H. O. Roth, 'In Memoriam', 1956, p.18-20; Herbert Roth, 'Atkinson, Harry Albert 1867-1956', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, <<http://www.dnz.govt.nz>> [accessed 17 April 2008].

¹⁴ See Kerry Taylor, 'A Labour of Love: The Making of Bert Roth, Labour Historian', in Pat Walsh (ed.), *Pioneering New Zealand Labour History: Essays in Honour of Bert Roth*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994, pp. 9-20.

primarily having an educational or propaganda function has been taken on by most later historians almost unquestioned.¹⁵

Barry Gustafson's 1961 thesis also briefly details the Socialist Church. Gustafson's argument, which was carried into his 1980 book, is that the early part of the twentieth century was a period of struggle 'not only of independent labour against Liberal and Reform, but also between the moderate craft unions, with their political organisations, and the new, militant unskilled unions represented by the New Zealand ('Red') Federation of Labour and the Socialist Party'.¹⁶ The Socialist Church features as one of the 'short-lived' socialist groups that were founded in the 1890s.¹⁷ Gustafson follows Roth's characterisation of them, which included the Dunedin Fabian Society and Wellington Socialist League, as 'primarily educational organisations' driven by 'moderate reform ideas'.¹⁸ They are situated firmly outside the mainstream currents which fed into the development of the New Zealand Labour Party (NZLP) in 1916. Thus their activities pale into insignificance compared with the later agitation of the New Zealand Socialist Party (NZSP) from 1901 onwards.¹⁹

Valerie J. Smith's 1976 essay was the next work to feature the Socialist Church, in her study of socialist and anti-socialist discourse and activities during the period from the mid 1890s to 1908.²⁰ Her explanation of events is based on a generational shift from 1890 to 1908: '[t]he well-educated Reevesian-type "State Socialists" were slowly displaced by those calling themselves "Revolutionary Socialists"'. However, her argument is deeply problematic as she draws on the deterministic and reductive theories of Seymour Martin Lipsett's *Political Man* (1960) when arguing that a working class 'predisposition to fanaticism' can account for this transformation.²¹ As with other historians, her discussion relies almost exclusively on Roth's 1959 article and describes

¹⁵ Roth, 'The Labour Churches', p.365.

¹⁶ Barry S. Gustafson, 'The Advent of the New Zealand Labour Party, 1900-1919', MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1961, p.16; Barry Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence: The Origins and Establishment of the New Zealand Labour Party, 1900-19*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1980.

¹⁷ Gustafson, 'The Advent', p.17.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp.17-18.

¹⁹ Describing the Socialist Church as 'short-lived', as Gustafson does is inaccurate relative to other organisations of the same time. The Church was extant for nine years from 1896 to 1905. Compare this with the Political Labour League, United Labour Party, and even the original Red Federation of Labour. Moreover, in his biographical appendix of the many individuals who 'made' the Labour Party, Atkinson does not feature.

²⁰ Valerie J. Smith, 'Gospel of Hope or Gospel of Plunder: Socialism from the Mid 1890s up to and Including the Blackball Strike of 1908', BA (Hons) essay, Massey University, 1976.

²¹ Smith, 'Gospel of Hope', p.3.

John Trevor's influence as 'pseudo-religious' and that Atkinson took on 'a *Clarion* type of socialism and political action', without defining this in more detail.²² She revises Roth's interpretation of the membership of the group, suggesting that despite having support from the working class, it was 'just another organisation which a small number of labour leaders "drifted through"', being drawn to the group as they were 'seeking a home for an inchoate and vaguely socialist philosophy'.²³ Ultimately, for Smith, the Socialist Church was '[l]imited by Atkinson's rather ethical conception of the role of his Church', and, without a coherent political platform, 'it faded out of existence' due to the emergence of the NZSP in Christchurch in 1904.²⁴

A more detailed account of the Socialist Church is provided by Elizabeth Plumridge, who examines it as part of her wide-ranging study of the development of the Canterbury labour movement from around 1890 to 1916.²⁵ Unlike Smith, Plumridge does not treat the Socialist Church as immature or transitional, though she does suggest that it was 'largely peripheral to labour developments'.²⁶ Despite this, in her chapter on labour and ideology, she situates it within a long tradition of Christian Socialist groups in the city, claiming it was 'one of the first... Christian Socialist organisations in Christchurch'.²⁷ She again draws heavily from Roth's work on the Socialist Church and emphasises its educational role as against political activity which Atkinson 'considered premature in New Zealand'.²⁸ She correctly suggests that Atkinson's socialism was 'imbued with a religious conviction', but, like Smith, believes that this conviction, or 'what was meant by socialism', was vague.²⁹ While her analysis is less dogmatic than Smith's, she argues the Socialist Church had an undertheorised critique of capitalism: its members 'did not look at the way it functioned as a system, distributing economic, political and social power. They did not give great thought to the means whereby socialism... was to come about'. For them, 'the locus of change was... within the individual'.³⁰ This is fundamentally a correct analysis of Atkinson's conception of socialism, but many

²² *ibid.*, p.37.

²³ *ibid.*, p.38.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Elizabeth Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch: Community and Consciousness, 1914-1919', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979 and also 'The Necessary but Not Sufficient Condition: Christchurch Labour and Working-Class Culture', *New Zealand Journal of History* 19, 2 (1985), pp.130-150.

²⁶ Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch', p.280.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.254.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.254-255.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.255.

socialists of the period—Edward Morris, Robert Blatchford, and Edward Carpenter amongst others—believed the same thing. Atkinson and other members of the Church were hardly alone in this belief.

As regards membership, she implies that the Socialist Church was mostly made up of middle-class individuals, stating that members were ‘at least educated if not themselves wealthy’.³¹ For Plumridge, the middle-class nature of the Church’s membership led to moderation in belief and activity, and somewhat condescendingly suggests that ‘[f]rom the material comfort of their middle-class lives they were better able to counsel restraint’.³² Thus, Plumridge still primarily sees the Socialist Church as an educational organisation, and as vague and atheroretical. While Plumridge looks in detail at her subjects’ rhetoric and writing, she does not delve into the nature of ideological influences, such as people’s reading, nor the ideas that drove their rhetoric. Ultimately for Plumridge, the Socialist Church was middle-class, reformist, and ‘peripheral’ to developments in Christchurch.

Melanie Nolan briefly discusses the Socialist Church in her thesis on Jack McCullough, Atkinson’s best friend, co-founder of the Socialist Church, and later Workers’ Representative on the Arbitration Court. Nolan acknowledges the depth of their friendship, and particularly the role that Atkinson played in introducing McCullough to socialist literature. However, her work focuses more on McCullough’s activity after he joined the Arbitration Court from 1907 onwards. Like Plumridge and Smith she mistakenly identifies Atkinson and the Socialist Church as Christian Socialist. Geoff Troughton’s PhD thesis also characterises Atkinson as a Christian Socialist.³³ Finally, the Socialist Church appears occasionally in Kath Clark’s study of the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council, though given the focus of her thesis she does not focus on it in any detail.³⁴

³¹ *ibid.*, p.257.

³² *ibid.*, p.259.

³³ Melanie Nolan, 'Jack McCullough: Workers' Representative on the Arbitration Court', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1985, and *Kin: A Collective Biography of a New Zealand Working-Class Family*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2006. Geoffrey Troughton, 'Jesus in New Zealand 1900-1940', PhD Thesis, Massey University 2008.

³⁴ Kath Clark, 'A History of the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council, 1889-1937', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1993.

‘Socialism without Doctrine’

Apart from the works mentioned, the Socialist Church has been all but ignored in the writing of New Zealand labour history.³⁵ The characterisation of the Church as a fringe group points to a more general feature of the writing of New Zealand labour history, and one of the main reasons for its neglect: a predominant focus on developments relating to the formation of the NZLP in 1916, and its eventual electoral success in 1935—a teleological narrative overwhelmingly concerned with the ‘rise of independent labour’. This points to a wider weakness with the writing of labour history in New Zealand (and elsewhere). Bruce Scates has argued that Australian labour historiography ‘has privileged the role of formal protest’, and the same could be said for New Zealand.³⁶ To which we could add, New Zealand historians have privileged formal labour politics, trade unions, and expressions of overt class conflict, such as the ‘great strikes’ of 1890, 1913 and 1951. In the process, other forms and traditions of radicalism and socialism, such as the Socialist Church, have been marginalised or dismissed. This is most apparent in works produced from the 1920s to the mid 1970s, which could be described as ‘old labour history’. This history is characterised by either empiricist, chronological narratives, or Fabian influenced interpretations emphasising gradual change and focusing on political history, unions and leaders, with interpretations framed in terms of a clash between moderate and militant groups and ideologies.

Barry Gustafson’s book, *Labour’s Path to Political Independence*, based on his thesis, is the apotheosis of this Whiggish approach.³⁷ Gustafson focuses on industrial and political organisations and claims that ‘the moderate and militant factions discernible in the Labour Movement after 1900 came much closer together and, with a few exceptions, coalesced finally in 1916’.³⁸ With the election of Labour MPs to parliament in 1919, ‘[t]he old Liberal-Labour political alliance had finally been severed and Labour at last stood alone. It had come towards the end of the path to political independence and was about to embark on an equally long journey towards the treasury benches’.³⁹

³⁵ For an overview of New Zealand labour historiography see Pat Moloney, and Kerry Taylor, ‘Introduction: Bringing the Left Back In’, in Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor (eds.), *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002, pp. 11-20.

³⁶ Bruce Scates, *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.203.

³⁷ Gustafson, *Labour’s Path*.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.6.

³⁹ *ibid.*

The revision of this 'old labour history' and its institutional focus began with Smith's and Plumridge's works in the mid 1970s, but was primarily led by Len Richardson and Erik Olssen. Richardson produced new insights with his work on West Coast coal-mining and was responsible for supervising a generation of graduate students, creating a 'southern labour history school'.⁴⁰ Olssen exhorted fellow historians to pay more attention to the subtlety and complexity of both militant and moderate ideological positions and their diffuse influences, as well as broader social processes such as unionisation, regional differences and variations in localities and industries, and wider cultural transformations.⁴¹ The influence of social history is apparent in the work that resulted from the 1980s onwards, and there were new studies in gender, community and the work-place.⁴² In this regard, Olssen's *Red Feds* was an important break with the old labour history.⁴³ However, despite throwing off most of its shackles this new work still emphasised the rise of the Labour party, and, to a smaller extent, was framed by concepts of militancy and moderation, if in a less reductive manner than in the past.

This has begun to change recently. There have been a number of books and articles that have provided new insights into earlier groups, such as the Knights of Labour, as well as broader works dealing with artisan radicalism, skilled trade unionism, traditions of radical democracy and the 'multi-vocality' of working class experience in Dunedin and

⁴⁰ Nolan, *Kin*, p.15. Richardson supervised many of these theses, including Plumridge, Nolan, McAloon and Clark.

⁴¹ See Erik Olssen, 'Some Reflections About the Origins of the "Red" Federation of Labour, 1909-1913', in Eric Fry (ed.), *Common Cause: Essays in Australian and New Zealand Labour History*, Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1986, pp. 27-41; 'The Origins of the Labour Party: A Reconsideration', *New Zealand Journal of History* 21, 1 (1987), pp.79-96. And also Jack Vowles, 'Ideology and the Formation of the New Zealand Labour Party: Some New Evidence', *New Zealand Journal of History* 16, 1 (1982), pp.39-55; 'From Syndicalism to Guild Socialism: Some Neglected Aspects of the Ideology of the Labour Movement, 1914-1923', in John E. Martin and Kerry Taylor (ed.), *Culture and the Labour Movement: Essays in New Zealand Labour History*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1991, pp. 283-303.

⁴² See for example, Jim McAloon, 'Working Class Politics in Christchurch, 1905-1914', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1986.

⁴³ Erik Olssen, *The Red Feds: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism and the New Zealand Federation of Labour, 1908-14*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Christchurch.⁴⁴ Several edited publications have also further revised previous interpretations, though there remain large gaps in our knowledge.⁴⁵

New Approaches to Harry Atkinson and the Socialist Church

This thesis is the first in-depth analysis of Atkinson's time in Manchester with Trevor and of the activities of the Socialist Church and seeks to complement and build on previous research—while drawing heavily on Roth's archival material it expands on his published work. Secondly, this thesis is strongly influenced by Bruce Scates' history of the 'silenced voices' of Australian labour history. His study of nineteenth century Australian radicalism and socialism focuses on the single-tax, anarchist and other socialist groups which have previously been treated as 'small and ineffectual factions, insignificant "tributaries" of mainstream political life'.⁴⁶ His suggestion that 'the world of nineteenth-century radicalism is worthy of study in its own right' is followed as is his exploration of 'radicals' vibrant and dynamic culture, their rich and colourful repertoire of symbol and ritual, rhetoric and belief'.⁴⁷ In this section three problems with past interpretations of Atkinson and the Socialist Church are presented, then the main research questions are discussed in further detail.

The first problem is that the prior treatment of the Socialist Church has been inaccurate and anachronistic. Atkinson's core beliefs were not, as some have claimed, 'Christian Socialist'. Rather we need to understand the context of his time in Manchester—as he wrote to Roth, the Socialist Church was a 'lineal descendent' of the Manchester and Salford Labour Church.⁴⁸ While Atkinson and his mentor John Trevor believed that

⁴⁴ Robert E. Weir, 'Whose Left/ Who's Left? The Knights of Labour and 'Radical Progressivism'', in Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor (ed.), *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002, pp. 21-38; Erik Olssen, *Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham 1880s-1920s*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995, particularly pp.188-225; Jim McAloon, 'Radical Christchurch', in John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (eds.), *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography 1850-2000*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000, pp. 162-92; Nolan, *Kin*, 2006.

⁴⁵ i.e. Melanie Nolan, *Revolution: The 1913 Great Strike in New Zealand*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2005; Miles Fairburn, and Erik Olssen (eds.), *Class Gender and the Vote: Perspectives from New Zealand History*, Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2005. The South Island cities of Dunedin and Christchurch in particular have received disproportionate attention, compared with a lack of similar studies examining Auckland and Wellington. This study is guilty of this imbalance. Similarly, while New Zealand did not have indentured or slave labour, the exploration of Maori work experiences and unionisation is negligible.

⁴⁶ Scates, *A New Australia*, p.6.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Atkinson to Roth, 20 January 1953, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

socialism was religious, they did not share the Christian Socialist beliefs of, for instance, the Anglicans of the Christian Social Union. This issue is covered in more detail in chapter three, but briefly, Atkinson followed his mentor Trevor's belief that the established Christian Churches had failed in their social duties, and that working with or within them would not be enough to tackle the social problems of the day.

Secondly is both Smith's and Plumridge's interpretations and critique of Atkinson and the Socialist Church as 'vague' and their pronouncements and programmes lacking theoretical vigour. This is similar to what Robert Gray has described as the search for 'the straw person model of a class conscious and revolutionary working class, equipped with a rigorous class ideology, and theoretical understanding of the capitalist economy'. By dismissing Atkinson's beliefs as naive, Plumridge and Smith forget that, as Gray points out, '[i]t is hard to find a single historical example of an effective working-class movement, in this simple, unmediated sense'.⁴⁹

Thirdly, in characterising the Socialist Church as a moderate, primarily educational/propaganda body, historians have marginalised the Church's particular form of radicalism—to be non-revolutionary did not necessarily entail de-facto reformism, while promoting education did not necessarily mean being apolitical. The Socialist Church, in its early days at least, was one of the few radical critics of the Liberal Government and promulgated a form of ethical socialism which emphasised fellowship, association and self-education rather than class struggle and revolution. Atkinson and members of the Church practiced a particular form of radicalism that was primarily, though not entirely, concerned with debates about democracy, and called for proportional representation, referendums, and other 'strong' democratic programmes and platforms. The radicalism of Atkinson and the Socialist Church was of its own time, and deserves to be treated as such.

In doing so, there are a number of questions examined in this thesis. The first is focused on individual biography and has been asked by Bruce Scates of Australian radicals but is also pertinent in a New Zealand context. Firstly, how did personal and familial backgrounds shape individual radicalism?⁵⁰ Related to this is what factors contributed to conversion to the socialist cause? This is analysed in the case of Harry

⁴⁹ Robert Gray, 'Review Article: The Deconstructing Of the English Working Class', *Social History* 11, 3 (Oct. 1986), p.373.

⁵⁰ Scates, *A New Australia*, p.13

Atkinson in chapters two and three, which explore his familial background and his time with Trevor involved with the Labour Church, which imprinted on him a life-long belief in ethical forms of socialism. To a lesser extent, these background influences are also assessed in relation to Jim Thorn and Jack McCullough.

While familial background and reasons for conversion tell us much about beliefs and actions at an individual level, this thesis seeks to explore the wider influences and inputs that moulded peoples world-views. Thus a third question: after conversion, what material continued to shape socialist beliefs? In this regard the social practice of radical reading is focused on, especially the books, pamphlets and periodicals read by Atkinson and members of the Socialist Church. Though difficult because of a paucity of source material, these authorial and ideological influences are appraised in chapters two, four and five.

Two further interrelated aspects are also investigated. One is ascertaining how connected New Zealand socialists were to wider movements, developments and debates. It is argued that a transnational framework is useful for exploring this and the Church's role in the dissemination and distribution of literature is sketched out. Finally, this thesis seeks to emphasise a wider 'world of labour' outside the usual foci of trade unions, the workplace and formal labour politics. The forms of associational life that Atkinson and members of the Socialist Church took part in, and various forms of sociability, are explored throughout the thesis. In asking these questions Atkinson's biography can be used as a prism to examine wider social developments in general, and the intellectual and associational lives of late nineteenth and early twentieth century New Zealand socialists in particular.⁵¹

Class, Beliefs and Experience

To unlock the nature of Harry Atkinson's conception of socialism it is necessary to understand the social and historical context of his personal experiences. In this regard an important concern is class, especially class sociability, belief and consciousness. Recently Jim McAloon has argued that concepts of class, when used in a non-deterministic way, remain a useful way to analyse 'some fundamental realities of

⁵¹ Mark Hearn, and Harry Knowles, 'Struggling for Recognition: Reading the Individual in Labour History', *Labour History* 87 (2004), <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lab/87/hearn1.html>> [accessed 24 January 2006].

colonial society'. And Melanie Nolan has pointed out that many New Zealand political biographies are 'riddled with class analysis', but they have 'not contributed to a debate over class'.⁵² As both McAloon and Nolan have shown, both the 'Reeves-Sinclair paradigm' of progressive history and the 'Oliver-Fairburn school' focusing on limited social stratification with a 'short expanse from floor to ceiling', have been influential in much historical writing during the twentieth century, and both schools of thought deny class as a central analytical category in New Zealand history.⁵³ Indeed, as McAloon has illustrated in work on class (or the lack thereof), there is often a straw-man type of argument deployed—the absence of 'theoretically pure' proletarian ideal types is seen to falsify the utility of class analysis, and class is written off as a legitimate category of historical enquiry.⁵⁴

Scholars who have actively engaged with class in New Zealand have been labour historians, such as Nolan, McAloon, Len Richardson and Erik Olssen. Their work has focused on sub-cultures and class consciousness, and this thesis follows them in suggesting that class is a useful category for understanding aspects of colonial New Zealand history. Of particular interest is Atkinson's conception of socialism, and the forms of socialism promoted by the activities of the Socialist Church.

In this regard E. P. Thompson's work is useful. For instead of trying to determine either an authentic or a false consciousness, he appreciates class as lived experience.⁵⁵ One of the most simple and widely known definitions of class is in his classic work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, where he states: 'Class is defined by men as they live their own history'.⁵⁶ This definition was revised and clarified by Thompson in a 1978 article:

⁵² Jim McAloon, 'Class in Colonial New Zealand: Towards a Historiographical Rehabilitation', *New Zealand Journal of History* 38, 1 (2004), p.16; Nolan, *Kin*, p.15.

⁵³ McAloon, 'Class in Colonial New Zealand', pp.5-6; Nolan, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ McAloon, 'Class in Colonial New Zealand', pp.11-13.

⁵⁵ This form of class analysis has been criticised as being problematic, first by feminist scholars, such as Joan Scott, and later by those historians, such as Gareth Steadman Jones, Patrick Joyce and James Vernon, who have been variously influenced by the linguistic turn. There is a large literature on these debates, and there is not space to go into this in detail, but see Keith Jenkins (ed.), *The Postmodern History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1997. For a 'middle-range' philosophy of history which, while taking heed of some of the precepts of the linguistic turn, ultimately rejects the anti-foundationalism of post-structural and post-modern theorising see Mark Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁵⁶ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London: Penguin Books, 1991.

Class eventuates as men and women *live* their productive relations, and as they *experience* their determinate situations, within “the ensemble of the social relations”, with their inherited culture and expectations, and as they handle these experiences in cultural ways.⁵⁷

The important point here is that Thompson recognises agency and experience as key factors, manifested in a variety of positions and forms of protest and resistance—not only that of the archetypal revolutionary. Thus experience is an important organising concept or framing device in the chapters that follow.

Transnational History

To further contextualise the nature of Atkinson’s experiences his activities from 1893 to 1905 are situated within a transnational context. Indeed, Atkinson is a rare example not just of transnational movement, a more common phenomenon than the recent interest in the subject suggests, but also of someone shaped by transnational effects—indeed, it is in illustrating this that the utility of the concept of the transnational comes into play.⁵⁸ Atkinson not only travelled abroad, he put into action in New Zealand the lessons he learnt overseas. A transnational framework adds to a burgeoning literature, which has almost exclusively focused on the movement and effect of ‘militant’ ideas and ideologies, particularly those of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and North American and Australian influences.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ E. P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?', *Social History* 3, 2 (May, 1978), p.150.

⁵⁸ On this point see Michael Werner, and Benedicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisee and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45 (February 2006), pp.30-50. The literature on transnational labour history is vast. The best summary remains Michael P. Hanagan, 'An Agenda for Transnational Labor History', *International Review of Social History* 49 (2004), pp.455-474.

⁵⁹ For the utility of a transnational approach in New Zealand labour history, see Melanie Nolan, 'Pacific Currents in the Tasman: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives on New Zealand Labour History', *Labour History*, 88, May (2005), pp.233-241. Despite a recent surge in interest in transnational methods the originality of the approach is questionable. In the 1970s Rollo Arnold and Peter J. Coleman explored, respectively, Australian connections and the influence of New Zealand nineteenth century liberalism on American progressivism. More recent work focuses on the IWW and Federation of Labour (FOL). Fran Shor has introduced a number of theoretical innovations in his work on the IWW, but James Bennett's work examining trans-Tasman connections, despite purportedly bringing a fresh perspective to bear, still tends to be heavily marked by concepts of militancy and moderation, and is not as much of a break with the old labour history as he suggests, particularly with his romanticisation of ‘militants’ and dismissal (and in fact, almost total neglect) of so-called ‘moderate’ groups and individuals. See Rollo Arnold, 'Some Australasian Aspects of New Zealand Life, 1890-1913', *New Zealand Journal of History* 4, 1 (1970), pp. 54-76; Peter J. Coleman, *Progressivism and the World of Reform: New Zealand and the Origins of the American Welfare State*, Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1987; Francis Shor, 'Left Labor Agitators in the Pacific Rim of the Early Twentieth Century', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 67, Spring (2005), pp.148-163; and James Bennett, *'Rats and Revolutionaries': The Labour Movement in Australia and New Zealand, 1890-1940*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2004.

This thesis has been influenced by the work of Neville Kirk who has shown the two-way nature of transnational flows, as well as the interconnections between Britain, the United States, Australia and, to a lesser extent, New Zealand. He argues that from the 1880s onwards:

the more extensive movements of capital and parts of its labour force across the world were paralleled by extended and strengthened international labour-movement links and contacts, both at the formal institutional level, and in terms of less formal, personal and group contacts.⁶⁰

Thus informal transnational relationships are examined in this thesis. Atkinson's trip to the United Kingdom is discussed in chapter three, but conversely Atkinson also hosted both Ben Tillett and William Ranstead, amongst other visitors to New Zealand. This is detailed in chapters four and five. More importantly, Atkinson's activities in Christchurch also point to his role in facilitating socialist communication and the transnational diffusion of ideas. Indeed, within the New Zealand literature, the influence of immigrants is often singled out as an important causal factor during periods of heightened class consciousness, such as the period 1890-1891 and, particularly, the period 1906 onwards, with the 'militant storm' driven in part by the arrival of militant Australian and North American ideologues and ideologies. Less well known is the role that local or New Zealand born radicals played, particularly in the period studied in this thesis; similarly, we know less about the spread of ethical socialist ideas and ideologies.

This is related to the question of how aware New Zealanders were of overseas issues and debates. There are contrasting arguments in the literature. Plumridge argues that '[t]he haziness of New Zealanders' comprehension of developments within international socialist movements was not helped by the paucity in the availability of up to date information'.⁶¹ On the other hand, Olssen has claimed, for a slightly later period, that 'the literate members of the rank and file were exceptionally well informed about developments elsewhere', and 'debates over strategy and tactics were constantly informed by and even presupposed a widespread knowledge about developments' in Britain, Australia and the United States.⁶² This thesis tests both contentions. It seeks to make a contribution to the literature by detailing the distribution and dissemination of

⁶⁰ Neville Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins: Globalization, Workers and Labour Movements in Britain, the USA and Australia from the 1880s to 1914*, London: The Merlin Press, 2003, p.7.

⁶¹ Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch', p.262.

⁶² Olssen, 'Some Reflections', p. 31.

literature that was undertaken under the guise of the Socialist Church and the role the Church played in the two-way exchange of ideas, ideologies, debates and tactics. Though most historians of the Socialist Church have characterised it as a propaganda organisation, only Roth has studied this aspect in any detail.

Books and Reading

The importance of books and reading—associated with a long-standing British working-class culture of self-improvement and autodidacticism—has been recognised by historians recently, who have re-theorised the role of books and the practice of reading, by moving away from examining canonical literature. Instead, new approaches have sought to focus on an audience or reader-centric approach to the study of printed material. This thesis is particularly influenced by Jonathan Rose's and Bruce Scates' work on the reading habits and intellectual lives of the British working-class and Australian radicals and socialists.⁶³ These authors argue that books should be seen as cultural artifacts that impart meaning to historical actors, rather than as material treated to a subjective textual deconstruction. Both treat reading and reception as 'an active rather than passive process... literature did not simply impart information, books were shaped and interpreted in light of the reader's values and experiences'.⁶⁴

Scates argues that reading, for Australian radicals, 'assumed a singular importance'. Literate socialists of the time were 'omnivorous readers', and 'books figure in every memoir, every pamphlet, every polemic of the period'.⁶⁵ As regards New Zealand socialists and radicals, the situation is comparable, however the individual, rather than more general, reading habits of the working classes have yet to be studied in any great detail.⁶⁶

⁶³ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001; Jonathan Rose, 'Rereading the English Common Reader: A Preface to a History of Audiences', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, 1 (Jan.- Mar., 1992), pp.47-70; Bruce Scates, *A New Australia*, 1997.

⁶⁴ Scates, *A New Australia*, p.38.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ The number of studies of working-class reading is slim, but see Mark Derby, 'Subversive literature for all the family'- Radical Literary Culture in New Zealand 1900 to 1914', HIST 424 Research Essay, Victoria University of Wellington, 2006; Lydia Wevers, 'Reading on the Farm: A Study of the Brancpeth Farm Library', *Bulletin of the Bibliographical Society of New Zealand and Australia* 28, 1-2 (2004), pp.184-94; Len Richardson, 'West Coast Coal-Mining Unionism: Pit Radicalism and the Independent Collier', in Pat Walsh (ed.), *Pioneering New Zealand Labour History: Essays in Honour of Bert Roth*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994, p.60 and Len Richardson, *Coal, Class and Community: The United Mineworkers of New Zealand, 1880-1960*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995, pp.14-16, 178.

In old age Atkinson emphasised the role of books in his activities, especially as part of his belief in the necessity of preaching socialism. A voracious consumer of print material, books and pamphlets, he fully understood their importance:

Books, I should say were the major influences in our New Zealand movement. Not only books advocating socialism or socialist utopias but many other thought provoking books, quite a list of them putting forward unordinary ideas & appealing to different classes of minds & stimulating discussion.⁶⁷

Atkinson was what Jonathan Rose described as a ‘common reader’: a fitter at the Addington Railway Workshops then later a life insurance clerk, he ‘did not read books for a living’.⁶⁸ In his studies of British working class reading, Rose argues ‘books and ideas were... diffused through a web of cultural institutions and personal networks that were often created and controlled by common readers’.⁶⁹ These ‘channels of dissemination’ are explored, in particular the personal and associational networks through which Atkinson was exposed to books and ideas, tracing the variety and diversity of his radical reading—one aspect of his ‘informal education’ through socialist literature. By doing so, we can further understand his worldview, and the material that shaped the ‘webs of beliefs’ that framed his actions and motivations. However, the story of Atkinson’s reading was not just of his individual private consumption. He passed on and introduced literature to other people. Atkinson’s role as a conduit of literature is also explored, in chapters two, four, five and six.

Association and Sub-Culture

This thesis also examines sociability and association, social practices that were a most important part of Atkinson’s life. Indeed, if Atkinson’s diverse exposure to reading points to varied ‘webs of beliefs’, his practical associational activity points to ‘webs of sociability’. For a long part of his adult life he was a joiner; a member of a wide range of groups and organisations. Two different types of sociability are studied in this thesis, familial and associative.

⁶⁷ Atkinson to Roth, 19 May 1953, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁶⁸ Rose, ‘Rereading the English’, p.51.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.55.

Melanie Nolan has recently called for New Zealand historians to pay more attention to families, alongside the more common analytical category of social networks.⁷⁰ So, the second chapter follows her lead, and examines the role of familial sociability in the development of Atkinson's nascent radicalism. It was through his family that he was introduced to voluntary organisations and 'associative sociability': the joining and being a member of groups for 'mutual improvement through association'.⁷¹ These associations provided social spaces where, as Carl Levy suggests, 'traditions, and formal or informal knowledges, were circulated and cross-fertilised'.⁷² A further reason for the importance of association in Atkinson's life is that the 'New Life' socialism of the 1890s stressed the importance of fellowship and brotherhood. The mast of *The Clarion*, Atkinson's favourite newspaper, carried a quote attributed to William Morris: 'fellowship is life, lack of fellowship is death'. In this regard the importance of friendship for Atkinson is emphasised; he was involved with a wide circle of companions, confidantes and colleagues.

Finally, the development of a socialist sub-culture in Christchurch is sketched out, drawing from the typology of Clarke et al.⁷³ A key concern for these authors is the recognition of multiple cultures rather than the concept of a singular 'culture'. The authors suggest that '[t]he dominant culture of a complex society is never a homogenous structure', rather it is 'layered, reflecting different interests' composed of different 'cultural-class configurations'. Sub-cultures exist within these wider structures, 'sub-sets—smaller, more localised and differentiated structures' located within 'larger cultural networks'. A sub-culture contrasts with these wider networks due to 'its "focal concerns", its peculiar shapes and activities'.⁷⁴

Clarke et al distinguish between loosely and tightly bounded sub-cultures. Loosely bounded sub-cultures 'are merely loosely defined strands of 'milieux' within the parent culture: they possess no distinctive world of their own'.⁷⁵ However, tightly bound sub-

⁷⁰ Nolan, *Kin*.

⁷¹ Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, 'Democracy and Associations in the Long Nineteenth Century: Towards a Transnational Perspective', *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (June 2003), pp.269-299.

⁷² Carl Levy, 'Introduction: Historical and Theoretical Themes', in Carl Levy (ed.), *Socialism and the Intelligentsia 1880-1914*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, p.15.

⁷³ John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts, 'Sub Cultures, Cultures and Class', in Tony Bennett, Graham Martin, Colin Mercer and Woollacott (ed.), *Culture, Ideology and Social Process*, London: The Open University Press, 1981, pp. 53-79.

⁷⁴ Clarke et al, 'Sub Cultures', p.55.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.56

cultures develop 'a clear coherent identity and structure', and display 'reasonably tight boundaries, distinctive shapes, which have cohered around particular activities, focal concerns and territorial spaces'.⁷⁶ It is argued that a 'tightly-bound' sub-culture formed in Christchurch during the period c.1896 to 1906. To be a 'New Life' socialist, even in colonial New Zealand, meant to believe in socialism as a 'whole way of life', and members of the Socialist Church and other associated groups developed a radical 'world' of their own. This is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Sources: Broken Threads and Blank Places

Unlike many other subjects of biography, Atkinson did not leave behind a diary, memoirs or an autobiography, thus in this thesis there are striking absences and gaps. There is no detail, for example, of how he met John Trevor in Manchester, or came to know his future wife Rose Bell. He was not an intellectual and published no major manuscripts, so there is also the problem of establishing intention. Indeed, Atkinson was aware of the difficulties of writing about this time:

Whatever you may be able to piece together in a view of the past struggles & developments & accomplishments of the labour movement in NZ there are bound to be many broken threads & blank places.⁷⁷

A range of sources were consulted to fill these blank places and to reconstruct, if partially, Atkinson's intellectual and associational activities; sources that historians other than Roth have not used. The most important are the letters from the correspondence between Roth and Atkinson from 1951 to 1953, a few years before Atkinson's death in 1956. These provide insight into his beliefs and motivations for establishing the Socialist Church. Furthermore, Atkinson was a great collector of socialist pamphlets and print ephemera from the various groups he was involved with in both New Zealand and the United Kingdom. These and partial Socialist Church minute and cash-books were deposited at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington. Copies of *The Socialist*, the Church's newspaper, and *Socialist Church Monthly Newsletters* have survived and are held at the Canterbury Museum and the Turnbull. The combination of these records allowed this history to be written.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Atkinson to Roth, August-September 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

No records of the Manchester and Salford Labour Church survive, and John Trevor is said to have burnt all his correspondence, so research in the United Kingdom was undertaken to fill the gaps in this part of Atkinson's life. At the Modern Records Centre at Warwick University the Brassington Collection has a variety of records concerning the Labour Church movement. The Modern Records Centre and Manchester Central Library hold copies of the *Labour Prophet*, and contemporary pamphlets are at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre in Manchester. The *Clarion* is held in the National Library of New Zealand newspaper collection and the Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) Library. For more general material concerning 1890s Manchester *The Guardian and Observer Digital Archive* was drawn from.

Bert Roth's research into the New Zealand labour movement was drawn from extensively, both material held in his massive collection at the Turnbull and his pamphlet collection at the Beaglehole Room, VUW. Of particular use were his Biographical Notes and separate research into the Socialist Church, Fabian Society and Socialist Party. The records of William Ranstead, again from the Turnbull, provide particular insight into radical Christchurch in the early 1900s, as well as provide an outsider's perspective on New Zealand. Finally, to fill in the rather large gaps regarding the Socialist Church's activities the Christchurch *Star* from 1896 to 1905 was systematically examined. The *Star's* "Local and General" column provides details of meetings and events in Christchurch. *Papers Past*, the National Library of New Zealand's online and searchable newspaper collection has been extremely useful, particularly for information about other contemporary groups and individuals.

Chapter Two: Early Life and Wellington

There have been recent calls for labour historians to pay closer attention to the family.¹ This chapter therefore explores the role familial sociability played in Harry Atkinson's developing radicalism: especially his introduction to socialist literature and participation in fraternal associations. Atkinson was a part of a large and expansive kin-network—the Atkinson-Richmond clan. Described as the Colony's 'governing family', the Atkinson-Richmonds had many connections to colonial politics and the burgeoning voluntary organisations and associations of colonial civil society.² While it was a world of sociability, both familial and within wider settler society, it was also a world of intellect and ideas.

Though the Atkinson-Richmond clan played a significant role in early New Zealand colonial government and politics not a lot is known about Atkinson's parents, Decimus and Marion.³ The published historical records of the family do not feature documents from either, and there is little to be gleaned of Atkinson's early life from this source.⁴ However, Frances Porter's biography of his aunt, Jane Maria Atkinson, can be drawn from as a springboard into a vast web of family relations. Atkinson's parents do feature in Porter's study, and this is drawn on to detail his early life.⁵ The remainder of the chapter discusses his move to Wellington in the late 1880s where he took part in a middle-class reading group, and was introduced to colonial artisan culture, becoming a member of a small trade union and an Oddfellows lodge.

Taranaki, 1867-1887: Atkinson-Richmond Clan

Harry Albert Atkinson was born in 1867 in Urenui, outside New Plymouth, the fourth of six children of Decimus and Marion. He was a scion of the Atkinson-Richmond 'mob', an inter-married group of important colonial settler families who migrated to New

¹ Nolan, *Kin*.

² *Nelson Colonist*, 2 June 1881, quoted in Frances Porter, *Born to New Zealand: A Biography of Jane Maria Atkinson*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1995. p.328.

³ An indication of their role in colonial life is the presence of seven Atkinsons and eight Richmonds in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*.

⁴ G. H. Scholefield (ed.), *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*. 2 Vols., Wellington: Government Printer, 1960.

⁵ Porter, *Born to New Zealand*.

Zealand in the early 1850s.⁶ Harry's father Decimus was one of thirteen children of Elizabeth Smith and John Atkinson, an architect and stonemason. According to Judith Bassett, John Atkinson was 'a well-read, tolerant, practical man, a Unitarian in religion and Liberal in Politics'.⁷ The Atkinsons grew up in an atmosphere of intellectual stimulation and John Atkinson encouraged his children to have freedom of religious thought from an early age.

The Atkinson connection to the Richmond family, and their eventual mass emigration to New Zealand, started in 1845 when the eldest child John Staines Atkinson met James Crowe Richmond when the pair worked together on Brunel's railway. This friendship eventually extended to their wider families.⁸ The Richmonds had relatives from the Hursthouse family who had already emigrated to New Zealand, and a group of ten Richmonds and Atkinsons, including H. A. and Arthur Atkinson, emigrated to New Zealand in December 1852. They followed William Smith Atkinson who emigrated in 1849, and James and Henry Richmond in 1850.⁹ Arthur and H. A. Atkinson learnt practical skills in preparation for their departure, and by 1853 they had purchased 200 acres on the Grey block, on the outskirts of New Plymouth. Members of the 'mob' then set to work clearing land, and building houses and named the settlement 'Hurworth'. Such progress was made that by 1859 C.W. Richmond reported: 'I find Hurworth much improved since my last visit: the clearings extend considerably above a mile along the road... The houses of the various members of the two families rise in all directions'.¹⁰

Decimus made the trip out to New Zealand with Amelia Jane Skinner, H. A. Atkinson's first wife, and arrived in New Plymouth in November 1855 aged nineteen. Decimus 'fell into place at once. He was immediately taken in charge by Arthur to help with the latter's clearing at Hurworth'.¹¹ Decimus worked as a mail-carrier and sawyer, and in 1859 was engaged to Marion Ronalds whose family lived in a neighbouring farm. The Ronalds family 'had always considered themselves honorary members of the mob... the

⁶ To distinguish between the elder and younger Harry Albert Atkinson, in this chapter the elder Atkinson is referred to as H. A. Atkinson.

⁷ H. A. Atkinson and Arthur Atkinson joined the Church of England. It is unknown what denomination Decimus belonged to, although presumably he was also Anglican.

⁸ Judith Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson, 1831-1892*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1975, pp.1-2. Both the Atkinson and Richmond families had a shared background of belief in the Unitarian faith.

⁹ C. F. Hursthouse was an early advocate of emigration to New Zealand; in 1849 he published *An Account of the Settlement in New Plymouth*.

¹⁰ Porter, *Born to New Zealand*, p.111.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.83.

connection was made secure by marriage', as Bill Atkinson was engaged to Marion's sister Eliza.¹² However, shortly thereafter Marion broke off the engagement but he was 'still determined "to have her"'.¹³ They were eventually married in 1862.

During the 1850s the clan developed strong links to Hurworth and the local area. C.W. Richmond claimed they '[a]ll seem more than contented. They are attached, even with a kind of Taranaki fanaticism, to the life', and a number of Atkinson-Richmonds took on roles in local and national government.¹⁴ In 1855 C.W. Richmond became a Member of the House of Representatives (MHR), then colonial treasurer (1856-1861), and Minister of Native Affairs (1858-1860). H. A. Atkinson was elected Member of the Provincial Council (MPC) for Grey and Bell (1857-1864, 1873-1876). J.C. and Henry Richmond, C.W. Richmond's brothers, were also MPC (1858-1862). These politically active members of the 'mob' were, for the most part, vociferous proponents of settlers' land rights and of the use of force to pacify the local Maori population, part of a wider faith in the British civilising mission. Thus male members of the clan willingly took up arms when the Land Wars broke out in Taranaki in 1860.¹⁵ H. A. Atkinson was captain of a volunteer rifle company, Arthur and Decimus were amongst his charges. Heavy fighting occurred from March 1860, and Hurworth was evacuated, with family members dispersed to Wanganui, New Plymouth and Nelson.

A truce with local tribes was declared in March 1861 and family members began to move back to Hurworth later that year. However, because 'the clan was scattered during the war', they 'never regained the cohesion that had made it such a formidable force in New Plymouth in the 'fifties'.¹⁶ Members of the clan spread from Hurworth—H. A. Atkinson increasingly spent more time in Wellington, as did C. W. Richmond; J.C. Richmond and Arthur Atkinson settled in Nelson. Despite this, family members continued to be active in provincial and national government and in the colony's intellectual and social life. Apart from their attitude towards Maori, members of the clan were generally liberal in intellect and religious belief, though, as is to be expected of a family this large there were divergences in opinion. Bassett claims that '[t]he Richmonds

¹² *ibid.*, p.110.

¹³ *ibid.*, pp.111, 375, fn.65.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.111.

¹⁵ For details of the Land Wars, and the role of the Atkinsons and Richmonds, see James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1998, particularly pp.73-116.

¹⁶ Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson*, pp.19-20.

were laissez faire conservatives, doubtful of the morality and the efficacy of state interference in social and economic problems. [H. A.] and Arthur Atkinson grew more enthusiastic about the possibilities of an active state as the century advanced'.¹⁷

A short survey of some of the members of the family reveals the leading position the family held in colonial politics until the turn of the twentieth century. In 1862 C.W. Richmond retired from politics and became a Supreme Court judge; Arthur Atkinson edited and was part proprietor of the *Taranaki Herald*, MPC from 1864 to 1869 and MHR 1866 to 1877.¹⁸ H. A. Atkinson became MHR in 1861, and Minister for Colonial Defence from 1864 to 1866. From the 1870s he was one of New Zealand's preeminent politicians, becoming Colonial Treasurer and Premier in 1876, positions he held a number of times between 1875 and 1891. In 1888 he was knighted.¹⁹

A number of historians have argued that, because of Atkinson's family background, the Socialist Church was a middle-class organisation. For example, Elizabeth Plumridge contends that Harry Atkinson was 'far from working class' because he was the 'nephew of a former conservative premier'.²⁰ Yet inferring his direct familial financial status from his uncle's political career is misleading. In the early 1860s Decimus and Marion seemed on 'a fair way to greater and sounder worldly prosperity than any Atkinson ha[d] yet attained', due to Decimus undertaking a successful blacksmithing business at Hurworth.²¹ However a few years later this failed, leaving Decimus £4000 in debt. He survived by means of a commission and regular pay in a native militia from 1864. Marion, 'humiliated' by the bankruptcy, worked as H. A. Atkinson's housekeeper.²² Part of Decimus' commission was 250 acres of land at Urenui, which he sold to pay off his creditors when hostilities in the area ceased.²³ His aunt Jane visited his parents and elder brothers in Urenui in 1867, the year Harry was born. They were:

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁸ See Frances Porter, 'Atkinson, Arthur Samuel', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, <<http://www.dnz.govt.nz>>, [accessed 23 January 2007].

¹⁹ Minister of Crown Lands and Immigration 1874 to 1876, Premier and Colonial Treasurer first from 1876 to 1877, then for ten years from 1875 to 1891. He was Premier three further times, with two short spells in 1883-1884, then from October 1887 to January 1891. Speaker of the House in 1891.

²⁰ Plumridge, 'The Necessary but Not Sufficient Condition', p.138.

²¹ Porter, *Born to New Zealand*, p.168.

²² Frances Porter, *Born to New Zealand*, 1995, pp.225-226. Decimus relied heavily on his brothers for financial support during this time—'Decie's affairs had absorbed most of Arthur's spare cash', and Henry Richmond 'lost nearly £1000 to him', p.257.

²³ *ibid.*, p.258.

living in a three-roomed fernpost and raupo whare with additional accommodation for Maori retainers and visitors provided by two tents. The Maori, three of four men and a varying number of 'girls', worked for their keep only, 'which is a convenient arrangement...as a principal part of their food is wild pig & fish which they catch themselves'.²⁴

Decimus and Marion rarely rose above the line of lower middle class impoverishment as early hopes of financial prosperity faded. Decimus remained in constant financial strife, and was described as 'much too sanguine about finance'.²⁵ In the early 1870s the family remained in Taranaki. Jane Atkinson recorded that Decimus 'did nothing' and 'Marion provided for the family by conducting a small school'.²⁶ Later Decimus was the foreman of a road gang. In the late 1870s and early 1880s Decimus was said to have 'cement on the brain'; Marion was 'careworn' having borne six children.²⁷ In 1884 the family shifted to Whangarei, where Decimus 'was confident a fortune lay in Portland cement'.²⁸ This was not a successful move. On 23 October 1884 Decimus drowned while crossing a river at Kaipara Harbour. Marion and Edmund, her youngest son, travelled to England in late 1885. They returned to New Zealand in 1886 and Marion opened a boarding house in Wellington.²⁹

Little else is known about Harry Atkinson's childhood and early schooling, nor of his relationship with his parents. He attended Nelson College and completed his secondary education in 1883, the year before his father died. He then began a mechanical engineering apprenticeship in Auckland, before relocating to Wellington in 1887, where he completed the final years of his apprenticeship.

Wellington, 1887-1890: Transitions

Harry Atkinson was twenty years old when he arrived in Wellington. His uncle H. A. Atkinson became Premier and Colonial Treasurer for the final time in October 1887 and was faced with the worst years of the long depression of the 1880s. Constrained by a precarious financial situation, a difficult government caucus and suffering the effects of age and ill-health, H. A. Atkinson responded with retrenchment, loans for public works

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.254.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.330.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.299, 391, fn.19.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.330.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.341.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.341, 396, fn.67.

and promises for further land settlement and stimulus for local industry.³⁰ The 'Scarecrow Ministry' of 1887 to 1890 which Atkinson led was attacked by contemporaries as feeble, with the *Taranaki Herald* describing his 1888 budget as 'bald, uninteresting, non-progressive [and] impotent'.³¹ The *Lyttelton Times* went further, claiming in 1889 that Atkinson was 'kept in office merely to give effect to the wishes and desires of the Tory Conservative party'.³²

The characterisation of H. A. Atkinson as conservative and a member of the 'old oligarchy' that the Liberal Government supplanted was a long held view in New Zealand historiography.³³ Yet his biographer Judith Bassett is correct to suggest that this reputation is unjustified.³⁴ As Jim McAloon argues, Atkinson 'was more of the political centre than the right wing, but his enduring problem... was that he depended for confidence and supply on some right-wing colleagues whose views he detested'.³⁵ Though a cliché, he was pragmatic when in office and, as with many colonial politicians of the pre-party era, he is difficult 'to categorize except on specific issues'.³⁶ However, a characterisation of Atkinson's time in office as pragmatic does not necessarily mean he was un-intellectual, uninterested in ideas or merely 'power-hungry'. Indeed, one of the major contemporary complaints laid against him was of 'faddism'. In the late 1880s he supported causes such as women's suffrage and federation with Australia, while in his last term as Premier he brought forward a number of labour reform bills and promoted the reform of the Legislative Council—all were stymied as his ministerial coalition was too weak.³⁷

H. A. Atkinson's support of women's suffrage in particular was related to a wider familial interest in the issue. By the late 1880s the Atkinson-Richmonds were no longer the colony's 'governing family', and following the death of H. A. Atkinson in 1892, only A. R.

³⁰ Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson*, p.139.

³¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.151

³² Quoted in *ibid.*, p.152.

³³ For example, see William Pember Reeves, *The Long White Cloud: Ao Tea Roa*. 4th ed, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950.

³⁴ Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson*, p.170.

³⁵ Jim McAloon, *No Idle Rich: The Wealthy in Canterbury and Otago, 1840-1914*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002, p.105.

³⁶ Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson*, p.171.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 133, 157. These included bills concerning the eight hour day, early closing, employers' liability and factories and shops. See also John E. Martin, '1890: A Turning Point for Labour', in Pat Walsh (ed.), *Pioneering New Zealand Labour History: Essays in Honour of Bert Roth*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994, p.42 onwards.

Atkinson sat in parliament, as an independent critic of Seddon's Liberals, from 1899 to 1902. Despite this, members of the clan remained busy in civil society. As Porter suggests, 'if the mob lost its men from direct political influence, it had its women come to the fore in the hustings: the Temperance Movement was a natural partner to the agitation for women's suffrage'.³⁸ A number of Atkinsons and Richmonds, of both sexes, were later involved with the Forward Movement, established in Wellington in 1893 by the Rev. W.A. Evans.³⁹ It was through his extended family in Wellington that Harry Atkinson was first introduced to socialist ideas and literature, and took part in labour and fraternal organisations.

In some respects Atkinson's exposure to radical ideas was not uncommon or remarkable amongst people at the time. While there is a continuing historical debate over the significance of the 1890 election, and the role that ideas played in various Liberal reforms, McAloon has identified a 'genuine democratic impulse' in colonial political culture with the rise of the Liberals, and this impulse was apparent in broader colonial society.⁴⁰ Indeed, Atkinson remembered the effect of Henry George's 'galvanising mission'.⁴¹ George's *Progress and Poverty* (1879) was read and commented on by a number of colonial politicians. A Georgist Anti-Poverty Society was established in Auckland in December 1887; while the influence of the single tax is most apparent in the growth of the Knights of Labour in New Zealand in the late 1880s.⁴² W. B. Sutch asserted that '[n]o other economic writer except perhaps Adam Smith, has had such an effect on New Zealand as had Henry George'.⁴³

³⁸ Porter, *Born to New Zealand*, p.328.

³⁹ For further details, see Timothy Beaglehole, *A Life of J. C. Beaglehole: New Zealand Scholar*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006.

⁴⁰ David Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals: The Years of Power, 1891-1912*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988, pp.24-39 and McAloon, *No Idle Rich*, pp.105-108 for a recent discussion.

⁴¹ Atkinson to Roth, 16 February 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁴² Weir, 'Whose Left/ Who's Left?', pp. 21-38.

⁴³ W. B. Sutch, *The Quest for Security in New Zealand, 1840-1966*, Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1966, p.75. See also Frank Rogers, 'The Single Tax Movement in New Zealand', MA thesis, University of New Zealand, 1952, and his 'The Influence of Political Theories in the Liberal Period, 1890-1912: Henry George and John Stuart Mill', in Robert Chapman and Keith Sinclair (ed.), *Studies of a Small Democracy: Essays in Honour of Willis Airey*, Auckland: Blackwood and Janet Paul Ltd, 1965, pp. 153-174; Peter J. Coleman, 'The Spirit of New Zealand Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century', *The Journal of Modern History* 30, 3 (1958), pp.227-228 For the Liberals and the Single Tax see Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals*, pp.91-93.

The writings of Edward Bellamy, particularly his *Looking Backward*, were also hugely popular in mid-1890.⁴⁴ Recalling this period, William Pember Reeves, the architect of the Liberal's industrial legislation, claimed that '[t]ens of thousands read Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. Many studied, and some borrowed from, the *Fabian Essays*. Such socialism as filtered through newspapers and magazines was all English and of the cautious and tentative kind'.⁴⁵ Their effect was:

A rapid growth of trade unions in the eighties... taught colonial Labour the strength of organisation. The success of the German Socialists at the polls, and the loud declarations in England in favor of an Independent Labour movement, were heard in the colonies. A wave of socialistic feeling swept over them. In 1889 every one was reading collectivist tracts and listening to altruistic sermons.⁴⁶

However, Harry Atkinson's burgeoning radicalism should not be simply reduced to Reeves' Fabian tinged *zeitgeist*. Scates has argued that 'from the 1950s to the 1990s, historians and literary critics [dealing with Australian history] have reproduced familiar accounts of Henry George or Edward Bellamy'.⁴⁷ The same could be said for New Zealand. Instead, Scates suggests the need to situate radical reading within a 'wider ecology of writers', and to focus on the 'channels of dissemination' through which people came to literature. As we will see, in the late 1880s Atkinson was exposed to a broad ecology of writers that included, but did not solely consist of, Bellamy and George. His introduction to radical literature came through a family friend, Frederick Frankland.

Frederick Frankland

Frederick Frankland was born in 1854, the second child of Sophie Flick and Edward Frankland, then professor of chemistry at Owens College, Manchester.⁴⁸ His father Edward became one of the preeminent scientists of Victorian England and was knighted

⁴⁴ Herbert Roth, 'Bellamy Societies of New Zealand', in Sylvia E. Bowman (ed.), *Bellamy Abroad: An American Prophet's Influence*, New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962, pp. 231-238. See also, Margaret J. McArthur, 'Collectivist Tracts and Altruistic Sermons: A Study Of "Socialism" In Late Nineteenth Century New Zealand', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1981, particularly 'Chapter Two: Edward Bellamy in New Zealand', pp.23-54.

⁴⁵ William Pember Reeves, *State Experiments in Australia & New Zealand*, Vol. One, London: Alexander Moring Ltd, 1923 (originally published 1902), p.68.

⁴⁶ Reeves, *State Experiments*, p.74

⁴⁷ Scates, *A New Australia*, p.38. John Saville makes a similar point in 'Henry George and the British Labour Movement: A Select Bibliography with Commentary', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 5 (Autumn 1962), p.18.

⁴⁸ Later Manchester University.

in 1897; his research achievements included the 'foundation of organometallic chemistry, discovery of the phenomenon of valency, recognition of the chemical "bond", and pioneer[ing] work in organic synthesis'.⁴⁹ From 1865 he taught and researched at the Royal College of Chemistry in London and alongside this position ran a successful consulting industrial chemistry laboratory, playing a part in the commercialisation of science during this time. A prominent proponent of practical science teaching and the reform of university science curricula, Edward Frankland held leading positions in various scientific institutes and associations and, importantly, from 1864 was a member of a group of scientists and intellectuals called the 'X Club'. Members included T.H. Huxley, John Tyndall, Herbert Spencer and other renowned scientists and journalists, who 'united in advocating a science unconstrained by either commercial objectives or theological dogma'.⁵⁰ The X-Club promoted the freedom of science from government control and challenged religious orthodoxies, agitating for the separation of scientific knowledge from religious faith. Members of the group, particularly T.H. Huxley, played a part in the Victorian 'crisis of faith', discussed further in the next chapter.

Frederick Frankland grew up in the midst of these developments and around family friends who included members of the English scientific and intellectual elite; 'young Frankland' was known personally to Herbert Spencer. Frederick was educated in London at University College School, then University College and worked in his father's research laboratory. In 1875 he emigrated to New Zealand due, he claimed, to 'ill-health', though Colin Russell suggested that he was ostracised for not meeting his father's high academic standards.⁵¹ Based in Wellington, he secured a position in the Government Life Insurance Office in 1875 and rose quickly through the ranks of the

⁴⁹ Colin A. Russell, 'Frankland, Sir Edward (1825–1899)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10083>> [accessed 9 November 2006] and Colin A. Russell, *Edward Frankland: Chemistry, Controversy, and Conspiracy in Victorian England*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁵⁰ Ruth Barton, 'X Club (act. 1864–1892)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/theme/92539>> [accessed 9 November 2006]

⁵¹ Russell, *Edward Frankland*, pp.352 and 491.

colonial civil service, becoming Government Insurance Actuary in 1884, Government Statistician in 1886 and Government Insurance Commissioner in 1889.⁵²

Highly intelligent and widely read, Frankland's 'interests ranged from non-Euclidean Geometry to utopian communistic colonies'.⁵³ A prolific writer, he dealt with a range of topics in various periodicals and public fora from the 1870s, ranging from mathematics to metaphysics and theology. His lifelong projects were the development of his 'Theory of Discrete Manifolds' and 'The Doctrine of Mind-Stuff'.⁵⁴ Both topics were aired in the mid 1870s when he introduced the colonial scientific community to the ideas of W. K. Clifford, whose lectures he attended at University College London.⁵⁵ Frankland read a paper 'On the Simplest Continuous Manifoldness of Two Dimensions' in November 1876 before the Wellington Philosophical Society. He expounded his critique of Euclidean geometry, drew on the work of Bernhard Riemann and Clifford's lecture on 'The Postulates of the Science of Space', and put forward a multi-dimensional conception of space.⁵⁶ The *Evening Post* later reported that the paper was 'regarded on all sides as a most masterly effort', and 'met with considerable attention' in England, being read in front of the London Mathematical Society in December 1876 and republished in *Nature* in April 1877.⁵⁷ Frankland's advocacy of non-Euclidean geometry provoked controversy, and continued to garner critical responses through the 1880s.⁵⁸

⁵² For Frankland biographical material, see 'Councillor Frederick William Frankland', *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 6, Wellington: Cyclopaedia Co., 1908, pp.695-696; G. H. Scholefield (ed.), *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. Vol. 1, Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940, pp.279-280; H. O. Roth, 'Frankland, Frederick William', in A. H. McLintock (ed.), *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 1, Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1966, p.747; and Garry J. Tee, 'Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Statistics: Some New Zealand Connections', *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Statistics* 44, 1 (2002), pp.3-12. His obituary was published in *Nature*, 14 September 1916, p. 38. Garry J. Tee shared his research on Frankland and answered a number of enquiries.

⁵³ Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁵⁴ See for example Frederick William Frankland, *Collected Essays and Citations, Volume 1: Theology and Metaphysics, 1872-1906*, Foxton: G. T. Beale, 1906.

⁵⁵ For W. K. Clifford see M. Chisholm, *Such Silver Currents: The Story of William and Lucy Clifford 1845-1929*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2002.

⁵⁶ F. W. Frankland, 'On the Simplest Continuous Manifoldness of Two Dimensions and of Finite Extent', *Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute* 9 (1876), p.273 [Henceforth *TNZI*]. Frankland suggested a concept of 'manifoldness' of planes and space of multiple dimensions, contrasted to one-dimensional lines.

⁵⁷ *Evening Post*, 23 June 1877, p.2. See F. W. Frankland, 'On the Simplest Continuous Manifoldness of Two Dimensions and of Finite Extent', *Nature*, 12 April 1877, pp.515-517, and his further comments in *Nature*, 24 June, 1880, pp.170-171.

⁵⁸ See William Skey, 'Notes upon Mr. Frankland's paper, 'On the Simplest Continuous Manifoldness of two Dimensions and of Finite Extent''. *TNZI*, 13, (1880), pp.100-109; Frankland's reply, 'The Non-Euclidean Geometry Vindicated: a Reply to Mr. Skey', *TNZI* 18 (1885), pp.58-69; and also George Hogben, 'Transcendental Geometry: Remarks suggested by Mr. Frankland's Paper, 'The Non-Euclidian Geometry Vindicated'', *TNZI* 19 (1886), pp.510-515.

Frankland aroused further interest with a paper to the Philosophical Society in 1879, 'On the Doctrine of Mind-Stuff', in which, drawing upon Clifford's lecture 'On the Nature of Things in Themselves', he set out a critique of the dualism of mind and spirit.⁵⁹ Frankland's 'Doctrine of Mind-Stuff' argued that 'every assertion of physical science... is merely an assertion respecting possibilities of sensation or feeling'; the 'only 'things-in-themselves' are feelings', verifiable by individual perception.⁶⁰ Frankland followed Clifford in arguing that objects are merely abstractions of an individual's consciousness; they are what he described as *ejects*, and that there are no non-personal *ejects*, merely representations of other people's abstractions.⁶¹ In claiming this, Frankland did not deny the usefulness of what he termed mechanical interpretations (i.e. scientific hypotheses), but argued that scientific research stopped at the point of appearances (or the 'outside of things'). The Doctrine of Mind-Stuff, on the other hand, was concerned with analysing the underlying nature of these appearances: '*these feelings, or thoughts [which] are the noumena—the "things-in-themselves"—which underlie the changes in the grey matter of the brain*'.⁶² Thus for Frankland, 'the universe... is a stupendous web of mind-stuff'; the 'most complex of the compound strands are the minds of intelligent beings... down to the elementary strands... which correspond to the motions of inorganic matter'.⁶³

As Ruth Farwell and Christopher Knee note, in the case of Clifford's similar conception of mind-stuff, this formulation may seem odd to modern ears but at the time it was a revolutionary shift in thought. Frankland, like Clifford, was 'defining space in such a way that the representation of the universe and the universe itself are not... indistinguishable'.⁶⁴ It was in fact a much broader conception of space than that put forth by contemporaries such as Riemann, as it 'conceptualize[d] matter itself as no more than a property of space', and what follows from this is a 'geometrisation of physics'. Clifford's thought had huge implications not just for geometry, but the scientific metaphysics of the time. The doctrine of mind-stuff and non-Euclidean geometry challenged the predominant notion of Euclidean geometry as universal and absolute truth, and Clifford's work 'represented frontal attacks on the treasured values and ideas

⁵⁹ F. W. Frankland, 'On the Doctrine of Mind-Stuff', *TNZI* 12 (1879), pp.205-215. Modesty was not one of Frankland's virtues: he claimed to have shared the idea with Clifford in 1870!

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.205.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.207.

⁶² *ibid.*, p.208 [Frankland's Italics].

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.209.

⁶⁴ Ruth Farwell and Christopher Knee, 'The End of the Absolute: A Nineteenth-Century Contribution to General Relativity', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 21, 1 (1990), p.118.

of mid-Victorian Britain'.⁶⁵ Indeed, by the late 1870s Frankland understood the significance of both Clifford and Riemann's reconceptualisation of geometry, and the paradigmatic shift in geometry, conceptions of space and wider metaphysics that this work implied, despite the implications of these theories being unrecognised until decades later.⁶⁶

Frankland's paper 'excited considerable attention amongst the ethical world of Wellington', and as with his advocacy of non-Euclidean geometry his theory was critiqued by members of the colonial intellectual establishment, including C.W. Richmond.⁶⁷ However, despite these criticisms, these works established him as an important member of the Wellington Philosophical Society, and he sat on the Council of that organisation. Frankland was also involved with the circle associated with the journal *Hestia*, which later became *The Monthly Review*, and was published from 1888 to 1890.⁶⁸

As well as various mathematical and philosophical interests, Frankland corresponded with a number of prominent New Zealand political figures, including Sir George Grey, Richard Seddon and Walter Nash. According to Keith Sinclair, Frankland, along with the Reverend Richard Hobday, 'played a large part in Nash's education' after Nash arrived in Wellington in 1909.⁶⁹ Frankland also had a close friendship with H. A. Atkinson, who, unusually for a career politician, became less conservative and more radical as he grew

⁶⁵ Farwell and Knee, 'The End of the Absolute', p.118. Joan L. Richards, 'The Reception of a Mathematical Theory: Non-Euclidean Geometry in England, 1868-1883', in Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin (ed.), *Natural Order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*, London: Sage, 1979, p.156.

⁶⁶ Clifford's work, which can be described as differential or metric geometry, was responded to by mathematicians in late nineteenth century England by projective geometry, which was 'safer' at a metaphysical level. Clifford's metric geometry was subsumed in projective geometry until the early in the twentieth century, when Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity led to the re-emergence of the concept of the geometrisation of physics in 1916. See Farwell and Knee, 'The End of the Absolute', pp. 118-121. And also Ruth Farwell and Christopher Knee, 'The Geometric Challenge of Riemann and Clifford', in D. Flament, J.M. Salanskis and L. Boi (eds.), *A Century of Geometry: Epistemology, History, Mathematics*, Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1992, pp. 98-106.

⁶⁷ The quote is from J. Turnbull Thomson, 'Remarks on Mr. Frankland's Paper on 'Mind-Stuff'', *TNZI* 14, (1881), p.107. C. W. Richmond, 'A Reply to Mr. Frankland's paper on "The Doctrine of Mind-Stuff"', *TNZI*, 12, (1879), pp.215-223. See also *Evening Post*, 29 September 1879, p.2.

⁶⁸ *Hestia* was founded by J Rutherford Blair, who ran Lyon and Blair, a local publishing firm, and later co-founded the Polynesian Society in 1892. *The Monthly Review* was a monthly periodical with articles on philosophy, science and current affairs, to which a number of Atkinsons and Richmonds, amongst others, contributed. Copies of *The Monthly Review* are held at the J. C. Beaglehole Room, VUW.

⁶⁹ See Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1976, p.36. Personal communication with Garry J. Tee, 13 May 2008.

older.⁷⁰ Indeed, as McAloon and Hamer both argue, few colonial politicians pre-1890 wanted to be known as conservative, and most claimed to be 'liberal' in one way or another. However, H. A. Atkinson was intellectually progressive for his time.⁷¹ Bassett claims one of his redeeming qualities was an inquisitive, open mind, and 'as his career progressed he became an inveterate collector of 'fads''.⁷² She suggests that the main intellectual influences on him were J.S. Mill's writings and *laissez-faire* ideas, and that he knew the work of Henry George and Thomas Malthus' economics. Nevertheless, this was tempered by a pragmatic awareness of colonial political and economic realities.⁷³ However, the role Frankland played in H. A. Atkinson's later intellectual development is only briefly acknowledged by Bassett.⁷⁴

One of the few writers who does acknowledge this relationship is James Collier, Herbert Spencer's former research assistant.⁷⁵ According to Collier, the pair were close and spent much time together.⁷⁶ Frankland 'deeply influenced' H. A. Atkinson and 'initiated' him into socialist literature, such as Lawrence Gronlund's *Co-operative Commonwealth* (1884). Based on his conversations with Atkinson, Collier claimed that by 1884 'it is a fact for which I can vouch that the leader of the Conservative party in New Zealand was a straight-out Socialist'. Atkinson contrasted his beliefs with the Spencerian individualism of Sir Robert Stout, and 'was careful to add, as he wound up the conversation, that he favoured a very gradual transition from individualism to Socialism'. Atkinson's socialism, Collier stressed, was of a Fabian variety (though the Fabian Society was not founded until 1884). Frankland's direct influence on Atkinson can be

⁷⁰ For example, see the letter from C.W. Richmond to Alice Blake on H. A. Atkinson's death, 11 August 1892. Richmond stated he was 'in continual disagreement with him [Atkinson] on political questions. I have not his belief in the efficacy of state intervention in all the concerns of life. I hold the ethical basis of socialism to be false—that inequalities in men and therefore in the condition of men are natural...'. Scholefield, *The Richmond-Atkinson Papers*, vol. 2, p.587.

⁷¹ Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals*, p.18 and McAloon, *No Idle Rich*, p.106.

⁷² Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson*, pp.170-171.

⁷³ *ibid.*, pp.108, 170-171. The reference to Malthus and George is from a speech about National Insurance, see fn 78 below.

⁷⁴ Bassett suggests Frankland was a journalist for the New Zealand Times, but seems to be unaware of Frankland's position in the Government Insurance Department. *ibid.*, p.109.

⁷⁵ James Collier, 'Statesmen of the Dominion, Reminiscences and reflections, Sir Harry Atkinson', *The Press*, 13 November 1909, p.7.

⁷⁶ At first glance the relationship is a strange one, but Collier suggests that Atkinson respected learned individuals.

seen in the contributory National Insurance scheme that Atkinson put to the House of Representatives in July 1882.⁷⁷

H. A. Atkinson argued that ‘as the aggregate of wealth increases so does the unevenness of its distribution... the truth must be apparent to all that the line is being made sharper and sharper between the enormously rich and the wretchedly poor’.⁷⁸ He suggested that nothing was being done to prevent pauperism in the colony, and put forth his scheme, which involved compulsory contributions and allowed for illness payment up to age sixty-five, with a weekly annuity after that. His proto-Fabianism is reflected in his argument for state intervention. Expressing his belief in an active state he stated that he ‘entirely disagree[d] with writers of the Herbert Spencer class who would confine the functions of the Government simply to police duties’ and instead declared: ‘what is the meaning of civilization but combination’. The colonial state ‘had already done many things which fifty years ago the greatest Radical would probably have declared beyond the functions of Government’.⁷⁹ Despite his and Frankland’s best efforts, the scheme was defeated in 1882, and when he tried to revive the idea in 1883 in the House, ‘his speech was received with scant attention and ribald laughter’.⁸⁰ Harry recalled his uncle telling him ‘[i]n 1890 [that] he still cherished the hope... that another opportunity would come for him to bring the scheme to life. But he was very conscious of the necessity of carrying the people with him’.⁸¹

Intellectual Lives: Frankland’s Reading Circle

The Atkinson-Richmond familial tradition of debate and discussion continued in Wellington, and Frankland provided a forum and initiated other members of the Atkinson-Richmond clan into socialist and radical literature and ideas, including Harry Atkinson. Frankland lived in Willis Street, and his garden adjoined the Atkinson’s property, and it was there that Atkinson joined his cousins A.R. Atkinson, Maurice

⁷⁷ Collier, ‘Statesmen of the Dominion’, p.7. Both Bassett and Sutch suggest that the main influence was a scheme put forth by Canon W. L. Blackley in an 1878 article ‘National Insurance—A Cheap Practical and Popular Means of Abolishing Poor Rates’, in *Nineteenth Century Magazine*. See Sutch, *Quest for Security*, p.86 and Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson*, pp.102-121.

⁷⁸ Sir H. A. Atkinson, ‘Proposal for a National Insurance Scheme’, speech in the House of Representatives, 10 July 1882, in W. David McIntyre, and W. J. Gardner (eds.), *Speeches and Documents on New Zealand History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, pp.186-189.

⁷⁹ Atkinson, ‘Proposal for a National Insurance Scheme’.

⁸⁰ Bassett, *Sir Harry Atkinson*, p.121.

⁸¹ Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

Richmond, occasionally H. A. Atkinson and others who were 'interested in discussing many social reform ideals'.⁸² At the time Harry Atkinson was in his early twenties and described himself as a 'babe amongst such men'.⁸³ This reading group was a site of much animated debate:

Frankland had a very keen appreciation of the forces in the capitalist controlled world that were arrayed against them. He was also interested in the anarchist theories of Kropotkin & Stepneak & in their personalities, hoping some day to meet them.⁸⁴

As well as the ideas of Kropotkin and Stepniak, the group studied books, including Thomas Kirkup's *Inquiry into Socialism* (1887), Edward Carpenter's *England's Ideal* (1887) and *Civilisation its Cause and Cure* (1889), the *Fabian Essays* (1889) and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). Harry Atkinson specifically remembered reading *England's Ideal*. Originally printed in *To-Day* in May 1884, *England's Ideal* was a scathing indictment of English society and a call for the working-class to work towards a 'new Ideal of Humanity' based on useful work and brotherhood. Carpenter set out his critique by arguing that the 'Ideal of Gentility'— 'to live dependent on others, consuming much and creating next to nothing'—had become irredeemably corrupt and with it the state of wider society.⁸⁵

Rotten at heart, and penetrated with falsehood, her aristocracy emasculated of its manhood, her capitalist class wrapped in selfishness, luxury and self-satisfied philanthropy, her Government offices... gorged with red tape, her Church sleeping profoundly—snoring aloud—her trading classes steeped in deception and money-greed, her laborers stupefied with overwork and beer, her poorest stupefied with despair.⁸⁶

For Carpenter, bourgeois philanthropy, charity and mores were a sham and masked the hypocrisy that wealth and status were built 'upon the back of poverty and lifelong hopeless unremitting toil'.⁸⁷ This was leading to a situation of class-war, because 'it must be our avowed object to destroy' this false ideal, replacing it with a 'new Ideal of

⁸² For A. R. Atkinson and M. Richmond see G. H. Scholefield, *A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, 1940, vol.1, pp.21-22, vol.2, p.242. Atkinson to Roth, 25 May 1954, and 17 February 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁸³ Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Edward Carpenter, *England's Ideal and Other Papers on Social Subjects*, New York: Charles Scribners, 1895, p.5.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.2.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, pp.2, 6.

Humanity' based on individual change, self-reflection, honest toil and social brotherhood. Drawing on *Walden* as an example, Carpenter urged that a simpler life could be attained as a means of 'the redemption of England from the curse which rests upon her'.⁸⁸

Harry Atkinson's participation in this reading group was his first introduction to socialist and radical literature, and began a life-long habit of sustained reading. Importantly, it was a colonial form of the auto-didacticism and self-improvement that Jonathan Rose has examined in his analyses of working class and 'common readers'.⁸⁹ The study of New Zealand working-class reading or indeed of reading culture in general is not particularly advanced and there is a need for further research in this area. However, Atkinson's experience points to a diverse 'ecology of writers' and to an under-explored eclecticism of colonial reading culture—ranging from Russian anarchism to Kirkup's comparative and empiricist expositions of a variety of socialist thought, Thoreau's American anti-modernist fiction, to the English romanticism and communitarianism of Carpenter. This wide reading came to have a hugely influential presence in Atkinson's thought.

Associational Lives: Oddfellowship and Trades Unionism

In addition to reading literature and talking through ideas, Atkinson was introduced to what Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann has described as 'associative sociability'.⁹⁰ There were two dimensions to this. The first was becoming a member of the Manchester Unity Independent Order of Oddfellows (MUIIOF), the colony's largest friendly society at the time. Melanie Nolan has claimed that 'friendly societies were a significant aspect of mutualism and localism that [have] been neglected by labour historians', and this membership was Atkinson's first encounter with fraternal organisations.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp.2, 5, 13, 20, 22.

⁸⁹ See Rose, *Intellectual Life* and also his 'Rereading the English Common Reader'.

⁹⁰ Hoffmann, 'Democracy and Associations', pp.269-299.

⁹¹ Nolan, *Kin*, pp.113, 130-134.

The MUIOOF was reputedly established by emigrants on a ship out to New Zealand in 1841.⁹² From the 1870s onwards there was a rapid growth in the number of lodges and membership of friendly societies in the colony, and by the early 1890s there was an established network of lodges mostly based on British parent organisations.⁹³ The benefits provided by mutualism and the community basis of localism proved attractive to settlers who 'adapted their "old and valued institutions" to their new needs'.⁹⁴ Harry Atkinson was a member of the MUIOOF Antipodean Lodge, based in central Wellington, where H. A. Atkinson and Frederick Frankland were members.⁹⁵ H. A. Atkinson was a high ranking member of the Lodge, while Frankland was Actuary to the Registry of Friendly Societies from 1884.⁹⁶ Although the Oddfellows' benefit functions played an important role in its popularity, Harry Atkinson gained most from the social and fraternal aspect of his membership.⁹⁷ His Lodge was a site of face to face discussion, and he later recalled talking to some of his fellow lodgemen about Edward Carpenter's work, as well as Thoreau's *Walden*.⁹⁸ He remembered that the secretary of the lodge was one of the sources from whom Frankland had gleaned material in assisting H. A. Atkinson with the National Insurance Scheme.⁹⁹

The second aspect of associative sociability was Atkinson's initial experience of trade unionism, working at S. Lukes and Son, an iron and brass foundry, boilermaker and shipbuilding firm in central Wellington, which employed up to 150 people. Together with some workmates he was involved in the foundation of the Wellington branch of the

⁹² Erik Olssen, 'Friendly Societies in New Zealand, 1840-1990', in Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Social Security Mutualism: The Comparative History of Mutual Benefit Societies*, Berne: Peter Lang, 1996, p. 177. See also Jennifer Carlyon, 'Friendly Societies 1842-1939: The Benefits of Membership', *New Zealand Journal of History* 32, 2 (1998), pp.121-142.

⁹³ Olssen, 'Friendly Societies in New Zealand, 1840-1990', pp.178-183. In 1891 there were 129 Manchester Unity IOOF lodges in New Zealand with 10,708 members; Wellington district had 13 lodges and 1,083 members. Manchester Unity was the largest society in the colony, though interestingly the Ancient Order of Foresters had more lodges (23) and members (2235) in the Wellington District. In total there were 357 lodges with 26,739 members throughout New Zealand. This was approximately 12% of the adult male population. See *Statistics of the Colony of New Zealand for the Year 1891*, Wellington: Government Printer, 1891, p.283.

⁹⁴ Olssen, 'Friendly Societies in New Zealand, 1840-1990', pp.179, 181-182.

⁹⁵ Sir H. A. Atkinson's membership of the Oddfellows is passed over by Bassett.

⁹⁶ Sir Harry Atkinson was awarded a most honorable purple degree on 6 June 1889. See Minute Book, 24 April 1873-21 January 1891, MSX-5090 in Independent Order of Oddfellows. Manchester Unity. New Zealand Branch, Wellington District, 1853-1963, 1998, MS-Group-0789, ATL.

⁹⁷ The importance of fraternity is a point made by a number of authors in regard to friendly societies. See Marcel van der Linden, 'Introduction', in Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Social Security Mutualism: The Comparative History of Mutual Benefit Societies*, Berne: Peter Lang, 1996, pp.19-20.

⁹⁸ Atkinson to Roth, 25 May 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL

⁹⁹ Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL

Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) in the wake of the London dock strike of 1889 when 'much trade union spirit was evidenced in New Zealand'.¹⁰⁰

Like friendly societies, trade unions were formed in New Zealand from the 1850s onwards, though not legally recognised until the adoption of the Trade Union Act in 1878. The growth of trade unions and other workers associations in the colony was uneven and sporadic. Agitation for an eight-hour working day had arrived with Pakeha settlement, but it was not until the 1870s that the first trade unions were formed. A decade later seamen, tailors and printers had organised, Trades and Labour Councils established in the main urban centres and the Knights of Labour active by 1887.¹⁰¹ Indeed, the period from 1889 saw a large increase in union formation and a significant increase in membership. And, as Atkinson claimed, the dockers' strike certainly was one reason for this, with its impact demonstrated by colony wide fundraising activity in support.¹⁰²

However, the effect of the dockers' strike on popular consciousness was more a function of the acceleration of imperial communication—due to the installation of telegraph cables and the establishment of what Simon Potter has called an 'imperial press system'—and there were other factors involved in the upsurge of trade unionism in the colony.¹⁰³ As Olssen and Richardson point out, prior to the 1880s structural conditions of the colonial economy limited union growth.¹⁰⁴ By 1881, barely 40% of the population was based in urban areas, and within that setting workplaces were most often small, employing fewer than 100 workers.¹⁰⁵ Rural workers were scattered across small farm holdings, and a serious effort to unionise them was not undertaken until 1907 in Canterbury. However, craft unions were established in the period up to 1880 and, like friendly societies, they were based on and often affiliated to British institutions.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ The literature on early colonial unionisation is sparse. J. D. Salmond's, *New Zealand Labour's Pioneering Days*, 1950, based on his 1924 PhD thesis, remains the standard account. See also Bert Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand: Past and Present*, Wellington: A. H. & A. W. Reed, 1973, pp.3-10. For the Knights of Labour see Weir, 'Whose Left/ Who's Left?'

¹⁰² Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, p.10.

¹⁰³ Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Erik Olssen, and Len Richardson, 'The New Zealand Labour Movement, 1880-1920', in Eric Fry (ed.), *Common Cause: Essays in New Zealand and Australian Labour History*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986, p.2.

¹⁰⁵ David Thorns and Charles Sedgwick, *Understanding Aotearoa/New Zealand: Historical Statistics*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1997, p.54.

Olssen and Richardson contend that these early unions' 'loyalties were to their trade and their locality and they thought in sectional rather than class terms'.¹⁰⁶

As noted earlier, from the 1880s the growth of unionism accelerated. Trades and Labour Councils were established to further encourage unionisation and to centralise local activity, and efforts were made to link these groupings, by organising colony-wide conferences. The increasing focus on export industries from the mid 1880s stimulated the growth of unskilled work and economic downturn, unemployment and poor working conditions prompted the drive to organise, combine and protect workers' rights. Efforts to mobilise these workers, particularly in the transport and mining sectors, were led by migrants, including J.A. Millar with the Seamen's Union, and John Lomas, who agitated for coal-mining unionism on the West Coast of the South Island.

In this regard New Zealand became what Neville Kirk has described as a 'frontier of radicalism' and a node in a trans-oceanic zone of radicalism.¹⁰⁷ Earlier the Chartist 'trade of agitation' spread to the colony, but this was accelerated in the mid to late 1880s with the circulation of New Union ideas from Britain and the effect of trans-Tasman efforts to organise workers, such as miners and shearers, who became affiliated to Australian organisations.¹⁰⁸ This culminated in 1889, with the establishment of the Maritime Council, led by Millar and Lomas; the first colony-wide union.¹⁰⁹ The effect of these developments in the late 1880s was a vast expansion in union membership. Estimates of trade union numbers for this period are unreliable, but Bert Roth estimated that in 1888 there were less than fifty trade unions in the colony, with 3,000 members. In 1889 this number rose to 75 unions, with 20,000 members, and by October 1890 he suggests more than 200 unions. His figure of 63,000 members at the same time, as he notes, is 'undoubtedly an exaggeration', and a contemporary source

¹⁰⁶ Olssen and Richardson, 'The New Zealand Labour Movement' p.2.

¹⁰⁷ Neville Kirk, 'Why Compare Labour in Australia and Britain?', *Labour History* 88 (May 2005), p.3

¹⁰⁸ For example see Paul Pickering, 'Chartism and the 'Trade of Agitation' in Early Victorian Britain', *History* 76, 247 (1991), pp.221-237. Roth in *Trade Unions in New Zealand* suggests that the International was a spur during these periods, though its influence, compared to the already mentioned factors, is negligible. The trans-Pacific impact of the Knights of Labor was substantial however, see above.

¹⁰⁹ Olssen and Richardson, 'The New Zealand Labour Movement', pp.2-3.

estimated 25,000 by the end of the year—though much of this momentum was lost following the ill-fated Maritime Strike of August to November 1890.¹¹⁰

Atkinson's new union was founded during this peak, in May 1890. However, it was not the first engineers' union in Wellington. A short lived branch of the ASE was formed in 1879, and there was a rival and longer established Society of Engineers.¹¹¹ As with many of the unions founded during this period, the impetus for the union came from the Australasian Council of the ASE which appointed a deputy in Wellington to arrange the meeting. Atkinson was one of four people who were proposed for membership.¹¹² If his friendly society was the largest in the colony, the union he belonged to was one of the smallest, with only eleven members at the end of 1890, thirteen in 1891, and twenty by 1893. He resumed his membership of the ASE when he returned to New Zealand in 1896, but later joined the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS).¹¹³ He remained a committed and staunch unionist for the whole of his adult life.

Conclusion

Harry Atkinson's involvement in friendly societies and early experience of trades unionism were an introduction to artisan radical culture, and illustrates early international and transnational influences in his associational activity. Born into an important colonial settler family, he was introduced to familial traditions of freedom of religious thought, intellectual debate and discussion, as well as an involvement in prohibition and women's suffrage. However, it was Frederick Frankland, himself from a significant family, who introduced Harry Atkinson to the world of radical and socialist

¹¹⁰ Accurate trade union numbers were not kept until 1896. Roth's estimates are in *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, pp.10,168. By 1889 only 12 trade unions were registered under the Trade Union Act, and 31 by 1890. The figure of 25,000 is from 'Trades Unions: Their Number and Strength', *Evening Post*, 10 April 1890, p.3. The article suggests a total of 21,230; 9000 of these, consisting of Wharf Labourers, Seamen and Firemen, Trimmers, Cooks, Steward, and Carriers, were affiliated with the Maritime Council. 25,000 was estimated by the end of the year, which is a more realistic assessment than 63,000. Roth's number mean nearly one third of the male European adult population over the age of 15 was a member of a union at the time. Population data from *Results of a Census of the Colony of New Zealand Taken for the Night of the 5th April 1891*, Wellington: Government Printer, 1891.

¹¹¹ Notes and clippings: Engineering unions [ca1851-1900], 94-106/37/01, in Roth Papers, ATL.

¹¹² *Evening Post*, 13 May 1890, p.2.

¹¹³ Amalgamated Engineering Union: Membership book, 1896, 94-106-79/15, in Roth Papers, ATL.

ideas, books and reading, that continued to play an important part in his future endeavours.¹¹⁴

In 1890 Atkinson's mother passed away and the same year he completed his apprenticeship at S. Lukes and Sons. He then left New Zealand in mid 1890, before the great Maritime Strike of September 1890, and prior to his Uncle's final electoral defeat, by John Ballance and a grouping of politicians under the Liberal banner in January 1891. Upon his arrival in Britain he worked at a shipbuilding and engineering firm in Dumbarton, Scotland, then in Goodfellow's drawing office in Hyde.¹¹⁵ At this stage he was a typically well-read, skilled trade unionist, if from a prominent colonial family. However, he began a second, atypical apprenticeship in 1892, not in a trade, but rather in the emergent world of English ethical socialism, closely working with John Trevor as general secretary of the fledgling Manchester and Salford Labour Church.

¹¹⁴ Frankland left Wellington in 1890, to work as an actuary in London then New York where he continued to take a keen interest in communal experiments, including the Labour Church. He returned to New Zealand in 1902 following his father's death when he received a substantial inheritance and retired to Foxton. Now a man of leisure, he wrote on an iconoclastic range of topics and served on a variety of local bodies. He returned to New York circa 1914 and passed away there on 23 July 1916. Details from Roth, 'Frankland, Frederick William', p.747.

¹¹⁵ Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954, Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

Chapter Three: The Manchester and Salford Labour Church

This chapter details Atkinson's ethical socialist apprenticeship with John Trevor and the Manchester and Salford Labour Church from late 1891 to 1893. Atkinson was immersed in the work of the Church, and highlighted are key characteristics of the period that Atkinson experienced first hand, gaining not only practical organisational experience, but also broadening and deepening his own conception of socialism. He was introduced, literally and figuratively, to varieties of socialist thought and key figures. Indeed, Atkinson, unlike many of the people involved with the Labour Church, did not experience an 'existential break' on his journey to the movement but by the end of his year with Trevor he had shifted from the middle-class progressivism and artisan radicalism he was introduced to in Wellington. He had become a convert to the 'Religion of Socialism'.¹

The chapter begins with a biographical sketch of John Trevor, paying particular attention to his reasons for founding the Labour Church. It then situates the foundation of the Labour Church within the wider context of the British socialist revival of the 1880s onwards with a focus on the 'New Life' socialism, of the period. Following this is a more detailed examination of Trevor's belief in 'God in the Labour Movement' and how his thought relates to the 'crisis of faith' apparent in late nineteenth century Britain. After this is a discussion of the activities and organisation of the Manchester and Salford Labour Church, and the role that Atkinson played as foundation secretary of the Church from 1892 to 1893. The main source is the *Labour Prophet*, the newspaper of the Labour Church movement, which is useful for reconstructing Atkinson's time in Manchester and expounding John Trevor's philosophy, in place of absent primary sources for Trevor.²

¹ The term 'existential break' is Carl Levy's, see his 'Introduction', pp. 1-34.

² *The Labour Prophet* from Modern Record Centre, University of Warwick, 1892-1893 & 1895, MSS. 143/5/1/1-2, Working papers on Rev. John Trevor (1855-1930), founder of the Labour Church- MSS.143, Modern Records Centre, Warwick University (MRC); 1894, 1896, 1897 from Manchester Archives and Local Studies, Manchester Central Library.

John Trevor

John Trevor was born in Liverpool in 1855, the only son of a linen draper, Frederick Trevor and his wife Harriet.³ He was orphaned at age nine and sent to Wisbech to live with his maternal grandparents, who were members of a strict Calvinist sect known as the Johnsonian Baptists.⁴ Trevor's earliest childhood memories were 'associated with the fear of hell' and his experience of the sect had a pronounced influence on his later life: 'his search for an acceptable faith... may be understood in large measure as a reaction against the religious fundamentalism of his childhood associated with the sexual repression of his youth'.⁵ After completing his education he was articled to an architect in Norwich in 1871. However the first of many physical breakdowns occurred in 1877. To recuperate he travelled to Australia then on to the United States in 1878.

His time in the America was crucial to later developments. In Chicago he met a pair of English Unitarian ministers who suggested he visit Meadville Seminary in Western Pennsylvania. Following their advice he spent a year training for the Unitarian ministry, and during this period also visited the Oneida Community in New York. Importantly, he was introduced to the ethical movement, and the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Felix Adler, William Mackintire Salter and Walt Whitman. He would later say these authors 'made the greatest contributions to my religious life which have come to me from literature'.⁶ Whitman in particular was a major presence in Trevor's thought: for him Whitman's writings were 'my bible, my Book of Life'.⁷

Trevor returned to England in 1879 and studied at Manchester New College in London for a year as further preparation towards working for the Unitarian Church. However, he again grew dispirited and went back to his architecture practice in Folkestone. There he married Eliza Cripps, a first cousin, in 1881, with whom he had four sons. He moved his

³ The best biography of Trevor is John Saville, and Richard Storey, 'Trevor, John (1855-1930)', in Joyce M. Bellamy and John Saville (ed.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography Volume VI*, London: Macmillan Press, 1982, pp. 249-253; See also Trevor's autobiography *My Quest for God*, London: Labour Prophet Office, 1897.

⁴ The founder of the sect was John Johnson, see S. L. Copson, 'Johnson, John (1705/6-1791)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14894>> [accessed 2 April 2009].

⁵ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.4; Saville and Storey, 'John Trevor', 1982, p. 249

⁶ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.198.

⁷ John Trevor, 'Walt Whitman', *Labour Prophet*, February 1895, p.17. On the wider influence of American romantics on the British labour movement, see Mark Bevir, 'British Socialism and American Romanticism', *English Historical Review* 110 (1995), pp.878-901.

family to Ballingdon, Essex, in 1884 and after three years, where he was involved with trying to organise an agricultural workers union and a mat-makers union, he shifted back to London to again study at the New College. In November 1888 he became assistant minister at Little Portland Street Chapel, London, and worked with P.H. Wicksteed, who became Trevor's life-long mentor and supporter.⁸ Trevor shifted to Manchester in June 1890 when he was made minister of the Upper Brook Street Free Church.

Despite Wicksteed's support and his ministry at Upper Brook Street, Trevor's faith continued to vacillate, as did his belief in the ability of traditional religion to confront the social problems of the time. In Manchester his loss of faith was compounded by exposure to the socialist movement. Trevor attended Socialist League meetings and befriended a number of members, including William Bailie 'an Irish, Atheist, Communist, Anarchist and Revolutionist'.⁹ It was with this practical, personal experience of socialism that he 'began to see its significance more clearly'.¹⁰ and intensified his detachment from the Church. In Trevor's writing about this time there are pronounced feelings of despair and helplessness—'I felt the four walls of the Church in Manchester were like the four walls of a grave, and the roof like the earth above... Like Christianity in my earlier days, so now this Church was a prison to my soul'.¹¹

Trevor was 'still brooding over the question of "what to do?"' when he attended the National Triennial Conference of Unitarian Churches in London in April 1891 and also sympathetically observed the work of the Salvation Army. Both Wicksteed and Ben Tillett spoke at the conference on 'The Church and Social Questions'. Wicksteed argued that questions of social reform and industrial organisation should be seen from the perspective of workers, and 'that culture, and beauty, and knowledge are pagan and inhuman, so long as they are the privilege of a caste and are built upon the toil of a subject race excluded from their enjoyment'.¹² Tillett 'burst on the audience like a titan', and claimed that the working-classes were alienated from religion, not because they were irreligious, but because 'they followed the lead of secularists and atheists...[who]

⁸ For P. H. Wicksteed, see C. H. Herford, *Philip Henry Wicksteed: His Life and Work*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1931.

⁹ John Trevor, 'The Founding of the Labour Church', *Labour Prophet*, March 1893, p.18.

¹⁰ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.220.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² Trevor, 'The Founding', p.18.

understood and sympathised with their sorrows, and could point to a remedy beyond the knowledge of the churches'. He followed this with a call 'to provide churches where the people could get what they needed, and warned ... workers would provide churches for themselves'.¹³ Both speeches made a tremendous impression on Trevor, and reinforced his doubts about the established church, if not resolving what his course of action would be. He returned to Manchester 'frightfully stimulated, yet still blind and miserable'.¹⁴

The following week Trevor preached on Tillett and Wicksteed's speeches to the conference, 'more impatient words, which led nowhere'.¹⁵ However that evening a chance encounter with a parishioner coalesced Trevor's doubts and resulted in the formation of the Labour Church. The parishioner, a working man, had stopped attending services at Upper Brook Street and after a long conversation 'I said that if he could not find a home in that Church, it was no home for me; and that we must get one started to which we could go together'.¹⁶

Trevor lay awake that night and came upon the idea of forming a 'Working-man's Church'. After talking the matter over with William Baillie, Trevor resolved to form the Church and he announced his intentions in a letter in the Upper Brook Street Free Church Calendar. He gave a sermon on 'The Formation of a Labour Church' and wrote an article 'The Proposed Labour Church', which was published in the Unitarian journal *The Inquirer*. £40 was raised in preparation and '[t]housands of handbills were distributed by three working-men friends'.¹⁷ A choir and band were formed, and hymn sheets were printed in preparation for the first Labour Church service on 4 October 1891.

The foundation service was held at the Chorlton Town Hall. Trevor's sermon criticised traditional religions for not supporting the working classes and called for a working-class 'religious movement of their own outside the churches, which should allow them to live a righteous and godly life, and yet secure the freedom for which they lived'.¹⁸ Later

¹³ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.239; 'The Founding', p.18.

¹⁴ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.239.

¹⁵ Trevor, 'The Founding', p.18.

¹⁶ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.241.

¹⁷ Trevor, 'The Founding', p.19.

¹⁸ Quote from *Workman's Times*, 9 October 1891, in Saville and Storey, 'Trevor, John', p. 250.

services in 1891 featured Robert Blatchford and Ben Tillett as guest speakers and drew large crowds. The fledgling Labour Church had proven to be a success but Trevor's position with the Unitarian Church became untenable and, with the implicit support of Wicksteed, resigned from his ministry at the beginning of 1892.

New Life Socialism and The Religion of Socialism

The Labour Church became a flag-bearer for a period from the 1880s onwards that Stephen Yeo and others have described as marked by 'New Life' socialism, and the emergence of the 'Religion of Socialism' in the early 1890s.¹⁹ Yeo's important article does not define the 'Religion of Socialism' *per se*, but rather offers a broad overview suggesting a number of important preoccupations of the time as well as some defining characteristics. He makes the case that it was a period of 'special dynamism'—the 1890s 'was no backwater in the history of British socialism. Nor was it a mere tributary feeding into a supposed mainstream—"the origins of the Labour Party"'.²⁰

Rather, Yeo argues for the recognition of the religious nature of the socialism of the period, within a wider context of the British socialist revival from the 1880s onwards—a period of intense social agitation, cultural and associational activity, and industrial and political action. Edward Carpenter recalled:

the Socialist and Anarchist propaganda, the Feminist and Suffragist upheaval, the huge Trade Union growth, the Theosophic movement, the new currents in the Theatrical, Musical and Artistic worlds, the torrent of change even in the religious world—all contributed so many streams and headwaters, converging as it were to a great river... One felt that something massive must surely emerge from it all.²¹

¹⁹ Yeo, 'A New Life', pp.5-56. See further the clarifications in his 'Towards 'Making Form of More Moment Than Spirit': Further Thoughts on Labour, Socialism and the New Life from the Late 1890s to the Present', in J. A. Jowitt (ed.), *Bradford 1890-1914: The Cradle of the Independent Labour Party*, Bradford: University of Leeds Centre for Adult Education, 1980, pp. 73-88, and also Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis*, London: Pluto Press, 1977.

²⁰ Yeo, 'A New Life', p.7. While Yeo's discussion is useful to gauge the depth of feeling at the time—during the time Atkinson was in Manchester it was a common and diffuse trope or metaphor, a number of historians have criticised his work as being too broad, and for lumping a wide variety of beliefs and ideas together. For criticisms of Yeo's work see Royden Harrison, 'The Religion of Socialism', *History Workshop Journal* 5 (Spring, 1978), pp.214-127; Mark Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', 1999, p.219 and Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

²¹ Edward Carpenter, *My Days and Dreams*, 1918, p.246, quoted in D. D. Wilson, 'The Search for Fellowship and Sentiment in British Socialism, 1880-1914', MA Thesis, University of Warwick, 1971, p.4.

New union organizing and agitation reinvigorated the industrial wing of the movement, and propagandists, poets and journalists of the caliber of William Morris, Edward Carpenter, Keir Hardie and Robert Blatchford were proselytizing about the ills and evils of capitalism, compared to the hope and promise of socialism. An expansion of socialist groups and associations during the period was combined with large scale activity characterised by a number of key features, particularly an intensity of feeling and aspiration illustrated by a preponderance of individual ‘conversions’ to the movement.²² The nature of conversion was crucial, and involved personal and spiritual transformation: ‘[f]ollowing conversion, being a socialist at this time involved a whole change in way of life... the process was more like joining a sect than a church’.²³ Furthermore, there was a pronounced ‘language and style of religiosity’ in both spoken and written form.²⁴

Yeo argues that ‘New Life’ socialism—for at least a short period from the late 1880s to the mid 1890s—was marked by a number of unities: firstly, the unity of different elements of the labour movement, such as the mixed membership of different socialist bodies; co-operation and shared activities between groups; and a number of active associations that were not affiliated to national bodies.²⁵ Secondly, there was unity ‘between activities normally held separate in the culture’ —ideas about socialism as a ‘whole way of life’, reflected, for at least the converted and active members, a nexus of politics, leisure, religion, welfare and day to day activities.²⁶ Finally, an important context that Yeo stresses is the sense of openness and dynamism of the time. The Independent Labour Party was formed in 1892-3, but the Labour Representation Committee was not founded until 1900 and its associated electoral machinery was emergent and had not taken shape. Yeo contrasts the possibility and potential of the period with later financial

²² Yeo, ‘A New Life’, p.9. Democratic Federation established 1881; Fellowship of the New Life 1883; Social Democratic Federation (SDF), Socialist League and Fabian Society 1884; Second International 1889; Independent Labour Party (ILP) 1892-93. *Justice* was first published in 1884; *Commonweal* 1885; *Clarion* December 1891; *Labour Leader* 1894. For a contemporary illustration of the growth and variety of organisations, see Joseph Edwards (ed.), *The Labour Annual 1895: A Year Book of Industrial Progress and Social Welfare*, Manchester: Labour Press Society, 1895.

²³ Yeo, ‘A New Life’, 1977, pp.10-13.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.17. For examples of contemporary sources which expounded the Religion of Socialism, see William Morris, ‘The Manifesto of the Socialist League’, *Commonweal*, February 1885, pp.1-2. <<http://marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1885/manifst1.htm>> <accessed 8 March 2007>; H.D. Lloyd, *The New Conscience; or, the Religion of Labour*, London: William Reeves, 1888; Ernest Balfort Bax, *The Religion of Socialism: Being Essays in Modern Socialist Criticism*. 2nd ed, London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1890, particularly the essay ‘Socialism and Religion’, pp.48-53.

²⁵ Yeo, ‘A New Life’, pp.35-36.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.37.

constraints, the expenses of running political campaigns, the institutionalisation of socialism and the specter of ‘socialism in one country’.²⁷

The result of this was a form of socialism which emphasised universal fellowship and personal spiritual transformation as the best way forward towards the ‘New Life’.²⁸ A stress on fellowship led to a predominance of associational activity, while transformation or conversion was most explicitly manifested in the call to ‘make socialists’, with education and self-education seen as a form of agitation. If, as both Yeo and Bevir note, conversion is a striking aspect of autobiographies of the period, also striking is the strong autodidactic culture and the gospel of self-improvement and self-education.²⁹

Many of the leading figures from the period, such as Blatchford, Keir Hardie, Ben Tillett and Tom Mann were born into poor working-class families, worked from a young age and were self-taught, undertaking intense programmes of reading. Tillett, for example, recalled working on the London docks where he ‘tried to save money, and starved to buy books... struggling to learn Latin, and even trying to study Greek, lending my head and aching body to the task after my day’s work’.³⁰ The material read was broad—it was not all dry theory, but drew from a diverse range of authors and traditions, particularly North American and British romanticism. Two of the most important writers during this period were William Morris and Edward Carpenter, who based their critique of capitalism on moral and ethical concerns, equal to, or more important than, economic analyses.³¹

However, the ‘sentimentalism’ of the period should not be overstated.³² There was a dose of continental European theorists and republican, Chartist and plebeian democratic traditions, and an emphasis on ‘strong’ democratic claims and reforms. This encompassed, for example, debates about democratic forms and electoral

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp.31-32.

²⁸ See D. D. Wilson, ‘The Search for Fellowship and Sentiment in British Socialism, 1880-1914’, MA, University of Warwick, 1971, and also L. J. W. Barrow, ‘The Socialism of Robert Blatchford and The “Clarion” 1889-1918’, PhD, University of London, 1975.

²⁹ Rose, *Intellectual Life*.

³⁰ Tillett, *Memories and Reflection*.

³¹ On this point, see E.P. Thompson’s work on William Morris, particularly, ‘Romanticism, Moralism and Utopianism: The Case of William Morris’, *New Left Review* 99 (Sept-Oct 1976), p.105.

³² A weakness of D.D. Wilson’s 1971 thesis is that he simply equates ethical socialism with ‘sentimentalism’. On the problem with this characterisation, see Kevin Manton, ‘The Fellowship of the New Life: English Ethical Socialism Reconsidered’, *History of Political Thought* XXIV, 2 (Summer 2003), pp.282-304.

representation. Ideas concerning leadership, referendums, proportional representation and Labour's political independence were common topics in pamphlets, books and periodicals of the time.³³ As Barrow and Bullock argue, '[f]or many socialists, issues of economic theory were not necessary matters of fundamental principle. Issues of democracy were'.³⁴

The Labour Church: God in the Labour Movement

Trevor was deeply imbued with the idea that socialism was religious, but not in a traditionally Christian Socialist sense. As Mark Bevir has pointed out, mainstream Christian Socialists had a variety of outlets through which to funnel their social concerns at this time.³⁵ He argues that Trevor's beliefs are a prime example of immanentism—a response to the 'Victorian crisis of faith', a crisis influenced by moral doubts and the emergence of Darwinian evolution theory alongside the literary and historical critique of the Bible.³⁶ This immanentism conceived of a God working in the here-and-now, who 'dwells in the world, revealing himself through an evolutionary process, rather than acting as a transcendent figure'.³⁷ However, Trevor uniquely saw God at work in the Labour movement; his distinctive form is apparent in the foundational idea of the Labour Church:

...it is our solemn conviction that the spirit now working in the hearts of the people towards emancipation is essentially a religious spirit, and that in the great social awakening of our times we have the basis for a new conception, not only of our relations with each other, but also of our relations with the God of all life.... GOD IS IN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT... The great religious movement of our times is the movement for the emancipation of labour.³⁸

³³ See Logie Barrow and Ian Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement, 1880-1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, and also Ian Bullock, 'Socialists and Democratic Form in Britain, 1880-1914: Positions, Debates and Conflicts', PhD, University of Sussex, 1981.

³⁴ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas*, p.38.

³⁵ Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', p.229.

³⁶ See also Mark Bevir, 'Welfarism, Socialism and Religion: On T.H. Green and Others', *The Review of Politics* 55, 4 (Autumn, 1993), pp.639-661. Bevir calls these developments the 'death of the bible', and his discussion of immanentism is a challenge to the secularisation thesis predominant in labour history. For Trevor's reaction to Darwin and where he notes the vast effect of Darwin's work, see *My Quest for God*, p.243

³⁷ Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', pp.221-225.

³⁸ *The Labour Prophet*, Jan 1892, p.4 [emphasis in original]. Atkinson sent a copy of this first issue to Wellington's *Evening Post*, which acknowledged receipt on 18 March 1892.

In establishing the Labour Church, Trevor sought 'a religion that would place a man and a Church side by side with God, as fellow workers with him in unfolding the progressive life of Humanity'.³⁹ While Trevor believed in the necessity of providing a religious basis for the working classes, his underlying belief was that the Labour Church should stand not 'so much for a class as for a principle', and hence he changed the name from the 'Working-man's Church' to the Labour Church.⁴⁰ This idea and the critique of established religions for forsaking their social role were promulgated in Labour Church sermons and throughout the pages of the *Labour Prophet*.

For example, the first page of the first issue of the *Labour Prophet* featured an article by Philip Wicksteed, 'Is the Labour Church a Class Church?', in which Wicksteed distinguished between the necessary (food, shelter, clothes) and the important—'the exercise of his [man's] human faculties, knowledge, enjoyment, fellowship, love, active interchange of thought and feeling with man, joyful communion with nature and with God'.⁴¹ This was not a class impulse, but rather, a 'fight against classes on behalf of society itself', and ultimately a 'claim [for] a fair share of life for those who do a fair share of labour'.⁴² In the same issue Tom Mann asked: 'The Labour Movement: Is it inspired with an ethical principle?'.⁴³ Mann criticised the hypocrisy of churches that 'pretended to preach the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man' but defend social inequality:

to-day may be witnessed attendants at church and chapel who obtained power over their brothers, and who drive and oppress and tyrannise over brothers and sisters, and are counted among the 'faithful,' whilst those they have deprived of fair conditions are looked upon as outcasts.

Thus, Mann argued, traditional religion 'upholds privilege and monopoly', and the clergy are an accomplice in the degradation of the working classes by capitalists and monopolists. The solution for Mann was the labour movement, which was altruistic and 'a movement to correct the present maladjustment in the industrial world'.⁴⁴ The role of the Labour Church in the movement was to help 'each of us individually to daily

³⁹ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.233.

⁴⁰ Trevor, *My Quest for God*, p.224.

⁴¹ P. H. Wicksteed, 'Is the Labour Church a Class Church?', *Labour Prophet*, January 1892, p.1.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Tom Mann, 'The Labour Movement: Is it inspired with an Ethical Principle?', *Labour Prophet*, January 1892, pp.5-6.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.5.

endeavour to more clearly realise all that is contained in the potent words, the Fatherhood of God'.⁴⁵

Indeed, what distinguished Trevor's conception of the Labour Church from the long-standing Christian Socialist tradition was most succinctly put when he asserted that in London and Manchester he 'had worked with those who, in their church life, were most anxious to set aside class distinction. But they had not succeeded. *They were attempting the impossible*'.⁴⁶ A Fabian-style policy of 'permeation'—or working from within the established Churches—was, based on Trevor's own experience, bound to fail. At least in the early years, it seemed that the Labour Church would become the mass movement that Trevor, Wicksteed, Tillett, Mann and others were calling for.

The role that the Labour Church played in the nascent labour movement of the time is debated. For earlier historians such as Eric Hobsbawm, K. S. Inglis and Stanley Pierson the Churches were transitional organisations and contributed to divesting Northern workers from their Liberal political ties. Generally it is argued that increasing secularisation and the establishment of the Labour Party in 1906 the Churches became 'anachronisms'.⁴⁷ However, recent approaches have stressed a more important and subtle role. For D.D. Wilson, '[i]t was through the Labour Church that many of the ideas of the sentimental socialists pervaded the ranks of socialist and labour organisations; the ILP in particular'.⁴⁸ Both Bevir and Yeo reject the secularisation theses. Bevir sees the Labour Churches and Trevor's thought as a unique manifestation of the immanentism of late nineteenth century Victorian England, as well as being driven by characteristics—such as fellowship and self-improvement—of the particular forms of socialism of the time.⁴⁹ Yeo suggests that Trevor's outlook, as expressed in *My Quest*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.6.

⁴⁶ Trevor, 'The Founding of the Labour Church' [my italics]. Herbert Cason, founder of the Labour Church in Lynn, USA, was one of the main proponents of the difference between the Labour Church and Christian Socialism. See, for example, 'What we Believe', *Labour Church Pamphlet no.3*, extract in *Labour Prophet*, June 1894, p.76. For a history of English Christian Socialism, see Peter d'A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914: Religion, Class and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

⁴⁷ See E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Chapter VIII: The Labour Sects', in *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. 2nd ed, New York: Praeger, 1963, pp.142-145. K. S. Inglis, 'Chapter 6: The Labour Churches', in *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, p.249. See also his, 'The Labour Church Movement', *International Review of Social History* 3 (1958), pp.445-460 and Stanley Pierson, 'John Trevor and the Labour Church Movement in England, 1891-1900', *Church History* 29, 4 (Dec, 1960), pp.463-478.

⁴⁸ Wilson, 'The Search for Fellowship'.

⁴⁹ Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', pp.217-45.

for God, is an archetypal example of 'New Life' socialism and that Labour Church activities and organisation shed light on the socialism of the period. He proposes that 'rather than looking at the Churches through the movement, it may be instructive to look at the movement through the Churches'.⁵⁰

The Labour Church: Practising the 'Religion of Socialism'

We have no idea how Trevor and Atkinson met, nor what they thought of each other. Trevor later stated that Atkinson 'joined us at the beginning of January last for the purpose of gaining an opportunity of studying the Labour movement'.⁵¹ If this indeed was Atkinson's goal, then he came across a perfect case study—a burgeoning movement led by a highly charismatic, yet deeply flawed leader, who introduced him to the leading exponents of British socialism of the time.

The main activity of the Labour Church in Manchester was the Sunday afternoon service, where speakers from labour organisations and others sympathetic to the cause spoke on a broad range of issues. From February 1892 evening services were held, as were open-air meetings in various parts of Manchester. The first Labour Church services took place at Chorlton Town Hall, which seated 400 people. However, the second service of 1891, featuring Robert Blatchford, drew a large crowd so the venue was changed to the People's Concert Hall, which accommodated 2000 people. Occasionally for high-profile speakers such as Tom Mann, the Large Free Trade Hall was used. It held in excess of 4000 people—an indication of the size and scale of the burgeoning movement.

The form of services varied across Labour Churches, and the lack of surviving records makes comparison difficult.⁵² However, what can be ascertained is that the rejection of established churches led to a rejection of traditional forms of worship. The anti-doctrinal and anti-theological character of the Labour Church meant that there were no set rules for services, but Manchester was unique in that it followed a common form established with the first service in October 1891.⁵³ The foundation service began with an overture

⁵⁰ Yeo, 'A New Life', p.34.

⁵¹ *Labour Prophet*, January 1893, p.4. Presumably Atkinson attended some of the 1891 services, where he was introduced to Trevor.

⁵² The only Church where records survived is the Bradford Labour Church. They were drawn upon by D.F. Summers and K.S. Inglis for their studies.

⁵³ Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', pp.225-226.

played by a violin orchestra, then followed with a short prayer, a song, a reading from a poem and a chapter from the Old Testament, and a hymn, 'England Arise', by Edward Carpenter. Trevor then spoke on the 'Programme of the Labour Church'.⁵⁴ In 1895 Trevor sought to codify the form of service: '(1) Hymn (2) Reading (3) Prayer (4) Solo or Music by the Choir (5) Notices and Collection (6) Hymn (7) Address (8) Hymn (9) Benediction'.⁵⁵ However, this was not taken up by all Churches; the most common activity was the singing of hymns, and then an address.⁵⁶

P. H Wicksteed, Trevor's mentor and patron, gave the first Labour Church service in 1892 and spoke on 'Dante's Vision of Hell and Heaven'. Wicksteed wrote about his experience in the *Manchester Guardian*, and provides us with one of the few first hand accounts of a Labour Church service during the time Atkinson was secretary. Wicksteed emphasised the spontaneous nature of the service, the religious character of the gathering and described the People's Concert Hall as a 'dingy, drafty and not over-reputable hall'.⁵⁷ At this early stage, the Labour Church was becoming increasingly popular, with a broad appeal amongst local working class patrons. Wicksteed noted his estimated six to seven hundred attendees 'were of all classes, but the great bulk I took to be workmen'.⁵⁸ The question of the composition of Labour Churches is a difficult one, but a later observer in 1894 reported that '[e]very variety of type was represented, the shrewd stunted weaver, the powerful labourer, square and set with heavy toil, dapper and intelligent men who might be clerks and shop-men'.⁵⁹ Women attended, but not in numbers—the problem of their lack of attendance was often noted by Trevor in the *Labour Prophet*.⁶⁰

The focal point of services was the address, given by Trevor or a guest lecturer, and the range of perspectives and topics illustrate the diversity of the movement of the time. As

⁵⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 5 October 1891, p.6.

⁵⁵ Trevor quoted in Yeo, 'A New Life', p.34.

⁵⁶ For example, Gordon Gray to Rev G.W. Brassington, 27 March 1963, MSS.143/2/2/2, Working papers on Rev. John Trevor (1855-1930), founder of the Labour Church- MSS.143, MRC: 'I only came in contact with two Labour Churches, at Stockport and at Stirchley, Birmingham, but they were in no sense "churches!" They held meeting at which hymns were sung, from the Fellowship Hymnal of the Society of Friends and an address was given; their speakers were invariably Labour leaders'.

⁵⁷ Philip H. Wicksteed, 'The 'Labour Church' in Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 11 January 1892, p.8.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ Quote from *The Spectator*, 21 April 1894, pp.533-535 in Yeo, 'A New Life', p.29.

⁶⁰ For Trevor's complaints, see *Labour Prophet*, February 1892, p.16. Tom Mann wrote an article 'The workman's wife' after a conversation between him and Trevor regarding the lack of women at services, *Labour Prophet*, February 1892, pp.9-10.

Bevir suggests, '[t]he emphasis on a new life of the spirit explains why Labour Churches so often provided platforms for speakers advocating other new humanitarian causes'.⁶¹ Furthermore, the services had an educational role—preaching to the converted and trying to reach the unconverted in an attempt to make socialists. The topics of addresses can be broken down into six broad categories: the programme and philosophy of the Labour Church; calls for social justice; moral and ethical problems; practical aspects and political programmes of socialism, trade unionism and labour representation; ethical, philosophical and religious aspects of socialism; and recreational, educational and cultural topics, including biographical and historical studies.⁶² Apart from Wicksteed and Trevor, many other individuals spoke at Labour Church services during the period Atkinson was secretary, and the array of ideological perspectives highlights the interchange of personnel between different groups that is characteristic of the period. A number of prominent local and national figures were involved, and the list of speakers for the year reads like a who's who of British Socialism.

Robert Blatchford gave the second Labour Church address in October 1891. He was already well known in the Manchester area for his columns in the *Manchester Sunday Chronicle* written under the pen-name 'Nunquam'. A few months later in December 1891 he and a group of friends established the socialist weekly newspaper *The Clarion*. Blatchford, who edited the paper, and other *Clarion* writers were influential promoters of 'New Life' socialism during the 1890s, and stressed the importance of self-education and fellowship, imbuing their brand of socialism with a conviviality rarely seen before or since. Two other figures involved with the Church from an early stage were Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, leaders of the London Dock Strike of 1889 and at the forefront of the 'new' trade union movement.⁶³ Tillett and Mann both came from backgrounds of sincere religious belief prior to converting to socialism and Tillett, in particular, despite not referring to the Labour Church in his autobiography, was an vigorous convert to the 'Religion of Socialism'. Mann was the most popular speaker at services, drawing crowds of up to 4000 people and, as indicated above, contributed copy to the *Labour*

⁶¹ Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', p.226.

⁶² This grouping is an amended version of a longer discussion of topics in D. F. Summers, 'The Labour Church and Allied Movements of Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', PhD Thesis, Edinburgh University, 1958.

⁶³ See Tom Mann, and Ben Tillett, *The "New" Trades Unionism: A Reply to Mr. George Shipton*, London: Green & McAllan, 1890.

Prophet. Both addressed moral and ethical problems as well as more practical concerns.

The question of independent labour and political representation was addressed by Keir Hardie before and after his election as a Member of Parliament in July 1892; and by R. B. Cunninghame Graham, the first socialist elected to the British Parliament.⁶⁴ Other trade union activists and labour agitators spoke, including Fred Henderson, Leonard Hall, Tom Wing, Pete Curran, Dan Irving and Alfred Settle. Edward Carpenter espoused his form of communitarian and humanitarian ethical socialism on a number of occasions, and Fabian perspectives were provided by members of that society, including George Bernard Shaw.⁶⁵ Stanton Coit represented a link between the British ethical movement, which was closely aligned to the socialism of the period, and Trevor's interest in the American Society for Ethical Culture. Despite the Church struggling to attract women members, there was no shortage of women speakers, such as Katherine St John Conway and Edith Lees Ellis.⁶⁶ Finally, a number of churchmen sympathetic to the aspirations of the Labour Church preached, including the Unitarian Minister Harold Rylett.

While the address was the main aspect of Labour Church services readings, music, hymns and songs were an important component. Indeed, Chris Waters has shown music played a central role in the culture of late nineteenth century British socialism—music was seen to be an important refining influence, an 'intellectual pleasure' and source of inspiration, thought by many socialists to be the potential basis for a new socialist culture—exemplified in the proliferation of socialist and labour hymn, song and chant books published during the 1880s and 1890s.⁶⁷ Trevor claimed the importance of music in Labour Church services was 'to uplift all those who are capable of being moved by sweet sounds into quite a new world of beauty, romance, purity and power'.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ See Cedric Watts, 'Graham, Robert Bontine Cunninghame (1852–1936)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33504>> [accessed 26 May 2009].

⁶⁵ 'The Lesson of the General Election' and 'Socialism and Human Nature', 7 August.

⁶⁶ Other women who gave addresses were Mrs Saunderson and Miss McMillan. Of the 38 speakers for the year, 4 were female.

⁶⁷ Waters, *British Socialists*, pp.97-130. William Morris earlier published *Chants for Socialists* in 1885 and Edward Carpenter wrote *Chants for Labour* in 1888. The *Labour Church Hymn and Tune Book* was first published in November 1893, a second revised edition was published in 1896. Atkinson kept two Labour Church hymn sheets, the originals are in The Labour Church-Papers, MS Papers 94-106-15/21, Roth Papers, ATL.

⁶⁸ *Labour Prophet*, June 1893, p.50.

Furthermore, whilst a 'joyous pleasure', the act of singing was a form of fellowship, consolidating the sense of 'oneness' that Edward Carpenter, amongst others, emphasised as a key attribute of 'New Life' socialism.⁶⁹

Music and song contributed to the intensity of feeling and aspiration that Yeo suggests was an important feature of socialist activities in the 1890s. An atmosphere of quiet (and during song, not-so-quiet) revivalism marks participants' recollections of Labour Church services. Wicksteed affirmed this in his observation of the service he addressed and described a 'purposeful air' amongst 'eager souls that were drinking in every word and sound' during 'the most genuine and spontaneous religious service in which I have ever engaged'.⁷⁰ An attendant at a service in Manchester in 1894 vividly recalled 'quiet depressed men, and men with burning discontented eyes'; the power of Trevor's oratory was such that '[c]lose to me one night, sat a mean, ill-grown worker with sad eyes, to which at certain words of the preacher he furtively lifted his worn hands again and again to clear away the tears'.⁷¹ Other participants reported a sense of duty and solicitude when recalling their time with the Church.⁷² If Trevor was unique in his belief in an immanent God, he was not alone in feeling the presence of 'true religion' at Labour Church services—a feeling which contributed to the vitality of the Labour Church movement, consolidated its position within the wider labour movement and confirmed for participants the righteousness of the Labour Church's mission.⁷³ The intensity of feeling experienced at Labour Church services affected Atkinson deeply too—this is further discussed in the next chapter.

⁶⁹ See Yeo, 'A New Life', p.35.

⁷⁰ Philip H. Wicksteed, 'The Labour Church in Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 11 January 1892, p.8. Atkinson, unfortunately, never wrote about his impressions of the services.

⁷¹ Quote from *The Spectator*, 21 April 1894, pp.533-535 in Yeo, 'A New Life', p.29.

⁷² William Temple, later Archbishop of Canterbury, attended Labour Church services at the turn of the twentieth century, and recalled in 1907 '[t]hey are not all Christians (in metaphysics) at that Labour Church, but I have seldom felt so near the presence of pure religion'. For this and other participants' descriptions of their experience at Labour Churches, see Summers, 'The Labour Church', pp.91-92. A. M. Thompson ('Dangle', of *Clarion* fame), was similarly drawn to the Church: 'Never, until the formation of the Labour Church did I conceive it possible for me to be associated again with a 'religious' body; for religion had become so identified within my observation with black clothes, kid gloves, tall silk hats, and long faces, that it and I appeared to have parted forever', A. M. Thompson, 'Our New Religion', *Labour Prophet*, November 1893, p.105.

⁷³ Philip H. Wicksteed, 'The Labour Church in Manchester', *Manchester Guardian*, 11 January 1892, p.8.

Intellectual Lives: The *Labour Prophet*

The Labour Church sponsored a number of other activities. An important aspect of this work was the publication and dissemination of print material and in January 1892 the first issue of the *Labour Prophet*, the Church's monthly newspaper, was published. The *Labour Prophet* was a clearing-house for the Labour Church movement, featuring details of Church activities in Manchester and elsewhere. It contained articles by Trevor and others expounding the philosophy of the Church and other issues related to the labour and socialist movement of the time. Trevor edited and established the newspaper 'not only to meet the demand for a propagandist organ for the furtherance of our own mission, but also more generally to represent the religious life which inspires the labour movement'.⁷⁴ The newspaper was not a profit making venture. It sold for one penny, and was published with an initial print run of 2000 copies which grew to 4000 to meet increased demand.⁷⁵ Atkinson took over publishing duties of the newspaper when the Labour Church Institute was established in July of 1892.⁷⁶

The front page of the newspaper included a byline quote from the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini, 'Let labour be the basis of our civil society' and usually featured an article or profile of a prominent individual involved with the labour movement.⁷⁷ Service speakers, Wicksteed, Blatchford, Tillett, Mann and Hardie all contributed, as did the churchmen Harold Rylett and T.A. Leonard, and Katherine St. John Conway, Margaret McMillan and Edith Lees Ellis. Throughout 1892 the paper featured criticism of capitalism, and social and industrial conditions; the question of independent labour representation; women's role in the movement; and various forms of communal settlements were explored. Reports appeared of the local struggles of some unskilled workers, whom the Labour Church supported in efforts to organise and unionise. But above all, and despite his protestations that the movement was about more than one man, it was Trevor's newspaper, and his writing made up the majority of copy. Trevor, like others, put forward the philosophy of the Labour Church, and expounded his beliefs concerning the ethical and moral character of the Labour movement. He wrote of his hopes and concerns for the Church, offered practical advice, such as how to speak in public, and wrote a series of fictional stories and parables.

⁷⁴ *Labour Prophet*, January 1892, p.4.

⁷⁵ *Labour Prophet*, February 1892, p.16.

⁷⁶ Atkinson to Roth, 20 Jan 1953, Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁷⁷ Except for the first issue, which had the quote, 'God is our King', and an illustration.

Unlike other newspapers, such as *The Clarion*, the activities of other socialist groups were not reported in detail unless they intersected with the work of the Church. However, one of the few regular columns in the *Labour Prophet* was 'Labour-land', which discussed developments in Europe and the United States.⁷⁸ Indeed, there was a particular focus on events in North America with articles about the Knights of Labor, and profiles of Trevor's favourite authors, Whitman, Thoreau and Emerson. Finally, the regular 'Labour Church Record' provided a calendar of monthly services, members' meetings, open-air meetings, protests and demonstrations; it reported the activities of other Labour Churches within and, eventually, outside the United Kingdom. Thus the *Labour Prophet* provides one of the most useful measures of the development of the Labour Church movement, and assists in the reconstruction of the activities of the Manchester and Salford Labour Church and its work in the local community.

Associational Lives: Other Labour Church Activities

The influence of the late nineteenth century idea of socialism as a 'whole way of life' meant that Labour Church activities extended beyond services into politics, leisure, welfare and day-to day activities. The Church sponsored a broad range of activities because Trevor believed that '[t]he first thing to be done in developing any organisation is to get the members together for social intercourse, and to inspire them with a common purpose and a common life'.⁷⁹

Monthly social evenings were held during the winter, and rambles were organised during summer months. The social evenings involved refreshments, a dance, concert or whist drive, or all three, and were important for encouraging social interaction between members.⁸⁰ They provided a means of common identification, and an outlet for workers who may have been alienated by more typical forms of working-class recreation:

⁷⁸ Written by J. E. Houldsworth the first column carried a quote from 'Trade Unionist': 'The real world we live in is not England or France, America or Germany, but Labour-land'. Unlike other socialist periodicals of the time, the *Labour Prophet* paid surprisingly little attention to colonial affairs. The exception to this were reports regarding William Lane's Cosme and New Australia experiments, which coincided with the interest in communal settlements. However, donations to the Church from Australia were reported in November 1892, and there were reports about plans for the establishment of an Australian Labour Church in Melbourne in October 1892. Frederick Frankland donated £1 1s, detailed in the Church's accounts, *Labour Church: Subscription List and Statement of Receipts and Payments for Year ended Sept. 30th, 1892*, MSS143B/4/9, Working papers on Rev. John Trevor (1855-1930), founder of the Labour Church- MSS.143, MRC.

⁷⁹ John Trevor, 'Labour Church Organisation', *Labour Prophet*, May 1893, p.41.

⁸⁰ Whist was a popular nineteenth century card game.

‘though the attendances might reach several hundred, a newcomer would not long remain a stranger, cliques were rare, and disorderly conduct practically unheard of’. As Summers notes, there was a financial aspect to such events, with fundraising a motive.⁸¹ The attendance at socials was broad, with families, wives and children encouraged to attend, but most of those attending were ‘[y]oung people in their twenties...and it was at these socials that many young couples met and began to walk the road leading to matrimony’.⁸² There is no indication in the primary material how Atkinson met his future wife Rose Bell, but it is likely that their introduction and courtship began at one of these events.

Members’ meetings and various classes were organised and took place at the Labour Church Institute, a large house in central Manchester which the Church rented in June 1892. The weekly meetings were held to organise conferences on topics such as political action and practical work, how to attract women members, and general church campaigns and business. Members also gave papers and discussed and debated a variety of topics—Atkinson contributed addresses on ‘The Labour Movement in Australia and New Zealand’ in June and ‘Happiness’ in August.⁸³ ‘Mental development’ was provided by a weekly political economy class taught by J.S. Mackenzie, and a women’s class by Kate Dodd, both lecturers at Owen’s College. Brass band performances, choir practices and singing lessons were also held at the Institute.⁸⁴ The Labour Church was also involved with activities within the wider community. This took two forms. Firstly, the Church helped organise local area workers who went out on strike. Secondly, it took part in activities with other socialist bodies and in demonstrations.

Over the course of 1892 the pages of the *Labour Prophet* actively solicited support for a number of workers in small industries out on strike. The first of these groups was the Bromsgrove nailers, whom Trevor visited in January 1892. A fundraising event was held for them in mid January and collections were made at services, raising money towards

⁸¹ Summers, ‘The Labour Church and Allied Movements’, pp.110-114.

⁸² *ibid.*, p.114.

⁸³ See *Labour Prophet*, June 1892, p.48 and August 1892, p.64. Unfortunately, neither copies nor details of these talks have survived. Trevor rarely attended or organised these meetings.

⁸⁴ The range of activities are detailed in John Trevor, ‘Labour Church Organisation’, *Labour Prophet*, May 1893, p.41.

their strike pay. At the conclusion of the strike Trevor assisted them with setting up a co-operative society.⁸⁵

In April Trevor and Atkinson worked closely with another group of striking workers in the mat-making trade. This was a small trade in Manchester, with thirty men and twenty women, some of whom were members of the Labour Church. The workers, who previously tried and failed to unionise, went out on strike in protest against poor wages. Trevor reported on their struggle in the *Labour Prophet*, claiming their 'deplorable condition makes it worthy of our interest' and sought donations to aid their strike pay.⁸⁶ A mat-makers union was formed in late April connected to a trade society. Trevor was made treasurer and handbills were printed detailing donations and expenses as well as an appeal for further fundraising.⁸⁷ By May the workers won wage increases from most of the employers, except for the largest firm. So it was decided to raise £100 to purchase machinery and material, 'to prevent striking workers from being idle', Atkinson donated £5 towards this.⁸⁸

Atkinson took over the treasurership of the union in June, when Trevor retired to the countryside. He wrote their reports in the *Labour Prophet* and was responsible for further fundraising efforts. Preparations were made for establishing a co-operative society, with J. Nuttall of the Co-operative Wholesale Society enlisted as secretary.⁸⁹ This was registered in late June, and Atkinson sat on the organising committee.⁹⁰ The strike which lasted eighteen weeks came to an end in August; some of the mat-makers were at their old workplaces, and others were employed in a co-operative works. Fundraising led by the Church was highly successful, raising £200 in capital for the co-operative society and £150 over the course of the strike, paying out £144 to workers as

⁸⁵ John Trevor, 'A Visit to the Bromsgrove Nailers', *Labour Prophet*, February 1892, pp.14-15, and *Labour Prophet*, April 1892, pp.30-31. This mirrored Trevor's early efforts to organise agricultural labourers in Ballingdon.

⁸⁶ 'Manchester Mat-Makers', *Labour Prophet*, April 1892, pp.26-27. Trevor provided an insight into his personality in this article: 'I have always foreseen... that I should sooner or later get mixed up with a strike, and I have felt bad about it. I shrink from strife. Contention is terrible to me'. p.27.

⁸⁷ 'The Manchester Mat-Makers' Strike Against Starvation Wages', April 1892, MSS.143B/4/5, Working papers on Rev. John Trevor (1855-1930), founder of the Labour Church- MSS.143, MRC, and also *Labour Prophet*, May 1892, pp.38-39.

⁸⁸ 'Manchester Mat-Makers', *Labour Prophet*, June 1892, p.48.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.56.

⁹⁰ *Rules of the Manchester Mat Makers' Co-Operative Society Limited*, Manchester: Co-operative Printing Society Limited, 1892, MSS.143B/5/1, Working papers on Rev. John Trevor (1855-1930), founder of the Labour Church- MSS.143, MRC. See also H.A. Atkinson, 'Manchester Mat-Makers', *Labour Prophet*, August 1892, p.64.

strike pay. The Mat-Makers Union joined the Gasworkers and General Labourers Union 'placing themselves in a strong position with regard to any future action they may take'.⁹¹

The Gasworkers and General Labourers Union, led by Pete Curran, was one of a number of socialist groups and trade unions that the Labour Church co-operated with during 1892 in the shared organisation of outdoor services, parades and demonstrations. In June a rally in conjunction with the Gasworkers took place at Stevenson Square, with Trevor conducting a service, and Curran and others addressing the crowd.⁹² Outdoor services were held occasionally at the Ordell Fair Ground in Salford. One of the largest of these events was in August when Keir Hardie addressed the meeting, speaking to 'thousands of people who had assembled'.⁹³

However, the largest event the Church was involved with was a parade and rally held to celebrate May Day. Organised by the SDF and 'representatives of the 'New Unionism'', twenty one associations paraded from Stevenson Square to Alexandra Park with colourful banners, union ensigns, symbols and music as thousands of Mancunians lined the route of the parade, cheering and applauding the various groups. The Labour Church contingent marched near the front of the parade, led by a banner with the words 'God is our King', and the Labour Church band played the hymn 'A day's march nearer home'. As the parade neared Alexandra park, 'something like the fervour of enthusiasm' took hold of observers and the 'scene partook of a holiday character'. At the venue, six platforms were set up for different speakers, across the thirty acres of park space, with an estimated 60,000 people present. Speakers from a variety of groups held forth at each of the platforms—chairmen included Robert Blatchford, W.K. Hall, and Sidney Webb. Platform three 'attracted perhaps the largest audience of the demonstration', and was chaired by Trevor, with the main speaker R. B. Cunninghame Graham. Trevor told his audience that the massive turnout demonstrated a 'new awakening' and 'an indication of the coming life of the great labour party' in Britain. Declaring that 'their war was against the whole system of industrial slavery as it now existed', he appealed for his audience 'to engage in the work of the emancipation of labour on behalf of working manhood and, in particular, working womanhood... and

⁹¹ H. A. Atkinson, 'Manchester Mat Makers' Society Limited', *Labour Prophet*, September 1892, p.72.

⁹² 'National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 June 1892, p.12.

⁹³ 'Labour Demonstrations in Manchester: Speeches by Mr Hardie, M.P.', *Manchester Guardian*, 29 August 1892, p.7.

Speaking of his aims and goals, he hoped that the history of the movement was 'not of a bloody revolution', but 'a revolution as the result of a vast body of men putting everything aside for the sake of the emancipation of their fellows'.⁹⁴

The success of these May Day celebrations encouraged Trevor to work with other socialist groups to form the Manchester and Salford branch of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Trevor believed that the rapid popularity of the Labour Church could be a 'possible danger' and obstacle to forming a national Labour Party:

the Labour Church might consider itself the Labour Party, and claim for itself independent political action. To remove this danger I proposed, last May-Day, the formation of an Independent Labour Party for Manchester and Salford, with Robert Blatchford for its President. The Labour Church is eager for political action—the more the better. But it desires to enter the political arena as an auxiliary force, and not as itself a responsible political organisation.⁹⁵

Trevor maintained the role of the Labour Church as providing a moral or ethical element to the labour movement, but he was also in favour of an independent labour party. He helped organise a meeting between the leading socialist groups in the Manchester and Salford area with the aim of forming a local branch of the ILP. On 14 May 1892 Atkinson and Trevor, as representatives of the Labour Church, took part in a meeting in Robert Blatchford's office, and formed the Manchester and Salford ILP, alongside representatives of the SDF and the Fabian Society. Atkinson later claimed that '[a]lthough Blatchford did the writing, much of the inspiration came from John Trevor. He it was who had the idea that the different elements in the movement towards Socialism in Manchester at that time should be got to work together'.⁹⁶ A public meeting was held a few days later, with Blatchford as chairman, and Trevor and W.K. Hall spoke to 'a very large attendance of people of the working class' and 'the proposal received a very large amount of support'.⁹⁷ Trevor and Blatchford were amongst the delegates for Manchester who attended the First General Conference of the ILP at Bradford on 14 January 1893.⁹⁸ A Labour Church service was held in conjunction with this inaugural

⁹⁴ Details and quotes from 'The May-Day Meetings: The Manchester Demonstration', *Manchester Guardian*, 2 May 1892, p.6.

⁹⁵ *Labour Prophet*, April 1893, p.28.

⁹⁶ H.A. Atkinson to H.V. Herford, 5 April 1930, in C. H. Herford, *Philip Henry Wicksteed: His Life and Work*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1931, p.227.

⁹⁷ 'Manchester and Salford Independent Labour Party', *Manchester Guardian*, 18 May 1892, p.8.

⁹⁸ *The Independent Labour Party: Report of the First General Conference*, Glasgow: Labour Literature Society, 1893, at Labour History Archives and Study Centre, Manchester.

meeting, with 5000 people attending—an illustration of the close connection the Labour Church had with the ILP in the early 1890s.⁹⁹

Leaving the Labour Church

1892 had been a heady year of progress and expansion for the Labour Church movement, with ten new churches established in England and Scotland, and over three hundred members in Manchester and Salford.¹⁰⁰ Atkinson was engrossed in his work for the Church—on his resignation Trevor reported that '[h]e hoped while doing the work of general secretary to find time for reading also; but this, owing to the unselfish manner in which he entered upon his duties, he soon found to be impossible'.¹⁰¹ Atkinson was responsible for all Church correspondence and general enquiries from people wanting to establish Churches. From May he dealt with all *Labour Prophet* correspondence, the distribution of other print material, and took on the role of treasurer for the Manchester Mat-Makers co-operative society.¹⁰² He also co-ordinated Pioneer work, for those people living in areas where a Church had yet to be established, and was in charge of local organisation.¹⁰³

However, despite the success of the first year of the movement, all was not well with Trevor. In May, following the ILP meetings, Trevor was struck with a bout of ill-health, as he 'found it impossible to do the writing he had in hand in Manchester', and thus he went to the country for three months, returning to Manchester for Sunday services.¹⁰⁴ Atkinson took up the increasing workload due to this, and Trevor acknowledged as much: 'My own want of physical strength has imposed additional burdens upon him which he has borne most readily'.¹⁰⁵ Trevor's mental and physical condition continued to deteriorate, and in the November issue of the *Labour Prophet* he announced he was

⁹⁹ Bevir, 'The Labour Church Movement', p.217.

¹⁰⁰ *Labour Prophet*, January 1893, p.8. Open air meetings were held in London, and Churches were established in Bolton, Oldham, Sheffield, Bradford, Halifax, Dundee, Plymouth, Birmingham, Barrow and Lancaster.

¹⁰¹ *Labour Prophet*, January 1893, p.4.

¹⁰² For example, see details in the *Labour Prophet*, July 1892, pp.52, 56. After Atkinson resigned the general secretary had correspondence and membership duties taken from him—a pointer to the amount of work he undertook. See John Trevor, 'Reorganisation in Manchester', *Labour Prophet*, January 1893, p.8.

¹⁰³ *Labour Prophet*, May 1893, p.41.

¹⁰⁴ *Labour Prophet*, July 1892, p.56.

¹⁰⁵ *Labour Prophet*, January 1893, p.4.

‘oppressed with headache’, and so ‘[a]fter a year at the front, I feel myself compelled to retire for a time’.¹⁰⁶ This led to the re-organisation of the Manchester and Salford Church, and the secretary became responsible for the wider movement, with the Church in Manchester made financially independent. The re-organisation, and the increasing workload due to Trevor’s increasing absence, possibly contributed to Atkinson’s decision to resign his position at the end of 1892.¹⁰⁷

Atkinson had completed his apprenticeship and his contribution to the work of the Church was recognised by Trevor who ‘express[ed] my deep gratitude to Mr. Atkinson for the way in which he has made the cause of the Labour Church his own... His honesty and his generosity are both phenomenal, and have proved invaluable qualities in the position he has had to fill’. Showing a characteristic that was still apparent when he returned to New Zealand, Atkinson:

toiled indefatigably early and late for the success of our work, [and] by the marked genuineness and geniality of his character he has done much to maintain the most cordial relations between the Labour Church and the various Socialist organisations of Manchester and Salford.

Indeed he ‘deservedly earned the esteem and gratitude of all members of the church’, and would ‘leave many friends behind in Manchester and Salford’.¹⁰⁸ In his valediction for Atkinson, Trevor suggested that Atkinson was moving on to Cambridge for a year’s study. However, instead he shifted to London, where Trevor visited him and reported that ‘he now dwells in the bosom of philanthropic respectability’.¹⁰⁹ Atkinson undertook fundraising for the Church—this was unsuccessful, due to complaints that the Church assisted striking workers.

Atkinson attended the inaugural Labour Church Union Conference, held at the Labour Church Institute from 22 to 23 July, as a London delegate, and moved a number of motions which show some divergences from Trevor’s conception of the Labour Church, and particularly its explicitly religious rhetoric. The conference debated the constitution and organisational basis of the Labour Church Union. The Union was based on five principles, drawn from the Labour Church principles, and Atkinson objected to the third

¹⁰⁶ *Labour Prophet*, November 1892, p.84.

¹⁰⁷ For details of the establishment of an extension fund, and the independence of the Manchester Church, see the *Labour Prophet*, December 1892, pp.92-93.

¹⁰⁸ *Labour Prophet*, January 1893, pp.4-8

¹⁰⁹ *Labour Prophet* May 1893, p.38.

and fourth principles. The third principle stated: 'That the Religion of the Labour Movement is not Sectarian or Dogmatic, but Free Religion, leaving each man free to develop his own relations with the Power that brought him into being'. Atkinson moved to delete the whole clause, but was not seconded; he then suggested leaving out the phrase after 'Free Religion' but the amendment was defeated. The fourth clause read: 'That the Emancipation of Labour can only be realised so far as men learn both the Economic and Moral Laws of God, and heartily endeavour to obey them'. Atkinson moved that the word 'God' be substituted with 'Life', which led to a long discussion, but was again defeated, and both principles were accepted as originally read. Following the adoption of the principles, the objective of the Union was set forth as 'The realisation of Heaven in this life by the establishment of a state of Society founded upon justice and love to the neighbour'. He further proposed that the first clause, 'The consolidation and development of the Labour Church Movement by Missionary enterprise', should have the words 'missionary enterprise' deleted, but again this was lost.¹¹⁰

With these motions Atkinson was showing signs of the secularising impulse that became apparent when he founded the Socialist Church in Christchurch. Though Atkinson took on John Trevor's belief in socialism as ethical and moral, he was in the process of casting away the immanentism, religious rhetoric and symbolism that Trevor, despite his crisis of faith, could not. This secularising impulse, and Atkinson's divergences from Trevor, are expanded on in the next chapters.

Little else is known about Atkinson's time in London—there are no further mentions of him in the *Labour Prophet*, and his correspondence with Bert Roth adds no details. In September 1893 Atkinson, then aged twenty-five, married Rose Claridge Bell, a 19 year old from a working class family in nearby Chrolton. Trevor officiated at the wedding, which was held at the Upper Brook Street Free Church. This was the beginning of a life-long partnership of over fifty years. Rose supported Atkinson's work after they returned to Christchurch, and was also a committed member of the Socialist Church and involved with a number of feminist organisations in Christchurch.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ *Labour Church Union: Minutes of Conference Held in the Labour Church Institute, 3, St. John's Parade, Byrom Street, Manchester, July 22nd and 23rd, 1893*, in *The Labour Church- Papers*, 94-106-15/21, Roth Papers, ATL.

¹¹¹ See Certified Copy of an Entry of Marriage, General Register Office, London, application number Y010019, 22 May 1991 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL. Atkinson was listed as a mechanical engineer, Rose as a spinster. The only primary material regarding Rose is from World War One when she supported people who were charged with resisting conscription. See Rose Atkinson – Notebook, 1914-1915, ATL-82-213-06 in Roth Papers, ATL.

Conclusion

The Atkinsons returned to New Zealand in November 1893. By this stage Harry had shed his familial tradition of middle-class progressivism and was now, in his own words, 'a confirmed socialist'.¹¹² His ethical socialist apprenticeship, and resulting informal education in Manchester, was broad and deep. In just over a years work with Trevor he experienced an alternative socialist culture. Driven by a conception of the coming 'New Life', the 'Religion of Socialism' was one of hope and optimism, so that when he left the Labour Church, despite Trevor's ill-health, the future seemed bright.

Atkinson had been exposed to a powerful moral critique of capitalism and an ethical conception of socialism, rather than a militant, revolutionary Marxism. Socialists and socialisms of the period stressed the importance of education and self-education, fellowship and cultural activity. But Atkinson was also involved in industrial organisation and political activity, as well as more practical matters of routine administration. Immersed in his work with the Labour Church, he experienced first-hand the colour and symbolism of protest and demonstration, and the ritual and rhetoric of Labour Church services. He met, listened to and spoke with a broad array of socialist intellectuals, activists and agitators, becoming familiar with a wide spectrum of socialist forms, ideas and ideologies in meetings, services and other work.

Atkinson took on Trevor's concept of the labour movement and socialism as moral and ethical—but, as his objections at the Labour Church Union conference suggest, not quite Trevor's immanentism. He held this conception of socialism as religious for the rest of his life. However, the socialism of Robert Blatchford and *The Clarion* played an increasingly important part in Atkinson's efforts in Christchurch, as would the ILP. The traditions and organisational forms he experienced were transferred, adapted and transformed in the colonial context. Despite severing his formal ties with the British labour movement when he returned to New Zealand he remained informally connected to comrades in Manchester and to wider transnational networks of socialist people, print material and ideas.

¹¹² Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

Chapter Four: The Christchurch Socialist Church, 1893-1899

Rose and Harry Atkinson returned to New Zealand on 29 November 1893, landing at Wellington the day after the general election that resulted in Richard Seddon's return as Premier.¹ The colonial political situation had significantly changed while Atkinson was away in Manchester. The Liberal government, elected in 1890, had survived a first term in office and during their second term, from 1893 onwards, continued their legislative programme of industrial, social and economic reform. These reforms drew a number of overseas observers to the colony; during this period New Zealand became known as a 'social laboratory' and a 'workers' paradise'.

The Atkinsons settled in Christchurch in 1894. Harry worked as a fitter at the Addington Railway Workshops and he and Rose became involved with the Progressive Liberal Association (PLA), a 'rebel' Liberal Association closely associated with local prohibitionists. It was not until June 1896 that Atkinson founded the Socialist Church. With the establishment of the Socialist Church Atkinson sought to put into practice some of the skills he gained in his apprenticeship with Trevor in Manchester. Indeed, while his association with Frederick Frankland and his familial connections introduced him to radical and socialist authors and ideas and fraternal and labour organisations, he was not converted to the socialist cause until his journey to the United Kingdom and his practical experience with Trevor.

Drawing on a variety of sources this chapter reconstructs the activities of Atkinson and the Socialist Church up to the outbreak of the Boer War in October 1899. Following Bruce Scates and Stephen Yeo, the question: 'what was it like to be a member of the Socialist Church?' is explored by examining Socialist Church publications, the Herbert Roth collection at the National Library of New Zealand and other contemporary print publications, particularly the Christchurch *Star*, the evening edition of the *Lyttelton Times*.²

After describing the colonial political situation of the early 1890s, the local context of Christchurch is sketched out. By 1893 it was a city with a long tradition of radicalism, and this is surveyed, including groups the Atkinson's were involved with: Our Father's

¹ Atkinson to Roth, 1 March 1954, Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

² A full print run of the *Lyttelton Times* is not available in Wellington. For the period 1896-1899 microfilm copies of *The Star* were used; for 1900 to 1906 copies available on *Papers Past*.

Church, Fabian Society and PLA. The chapter then analyses Atkinson's reasons for founding the Socialist Church, and examines in detail the church's activities. Finally, the ways that Atkinson remained connected to wider socialist networks are highlighted, particularly the visit of Ben Tillett to Christchurch in 1897.

New Zealand, 1890 onwards: A 'Working Man's Paradise'?

While Atkinson was overseas a number of important developments occurred, foremost amongst them the ill-fated Maritime Strike of 1890. The strike began in August when the Maritime Council called a general strike of affiliated unions in solidarity with its Australian counterpart, which was in dispute with the Australian Steam Ship Owners' Association. Approximately 8000 workers were involved in New Zealand, roughly twelve percent of the colonial labour force, after the Union Steam Ship Company 'adopted an aggressive stance... and seemed to welcome a showdown'.³ Free Labourers Associations were established by the employers and seasonal unemployment meant there was a surplus of labour to replace the striking workers, while unions involved had neither the financial reserves nor the organisational strength necessary to sustain their action. In early October the Maritime Council began advising affiliated unions to resume work. The calling back of the seamen in late November marked the end of the strike, resulting in a significant defeat and seriously weakening both the Maritime Council and the nascent colonial labour movement. The Maritime Council went out of existence, the Trades and Labour Councils barely survived in the main cities and there was a large decline in affiliated unions. As Roth observes, '[m]ost of the new unions collapsed in the early nineties, and where individual branches survived, the national organisations usually went out of existence'.⁴ The consequences of the Strike and the effect of the 1890 election on the colonial labour movement remain debated in the historiography.⁵ A predominant interpretation of the aftermath of the strike is that the employers' victory was short-lived. The result of the strike caused the labour movement to 'turn to politics' and align with the Liberal party helping the latter to victory in the 1890 election that resulted in John Ballance becoming Premier in the Liberal Government that took office

³ Olssen and Richardson, 'The New Zealand Labour Movement', p.4. See also Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*.

⁴ Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand*, pp.17-18.

⁵ The 1890 Maritime Strike has not been subject to recent revision, unlike 1913 and 1951. See Nolan, *Revolution*, 2005 and David Grant (ed.), *The Big Blue: Snapshots of the 1951 Waterfront Lockout*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2004.

in January 1891. Richard Seddon took over leadership of the Government following the death of Ballance in 1893.

There is further historical debate concerning the degree to which the Liberal Government represented a break with earlier colonial governments.⁶ William Pember Reeves, himself Minister of Labour from 1891 to 1896, claimed the 1890 election victory was the result of an alliance between middle-class Liberals and the Labour movement, arguing Liberal reformers supplanted the 'old Oligarchs' who previously governed the colony.⁷ This notion of 1890 as a most significant break was the predominant historiographical perspective until around the late 1960s, when 'a new orthodoxy emerged which discounted the genuineness of colonial democratic ideology and denied that anything much changed in 1890'.⁸ David Hamer suggested the notion of a turning-point is the result of historians taking Liberal parliamentarians' rhetoric at face value. He stressed the contingency of political positions at the time, the similarities between Government and opposition policies, the problem of 'party' and lack of national political platforms and organisation. Finally, he argues particularly important was the impact of electoral changes introduced at the 1890 election, specifically the abolition of plural voting and the influence of one-man one-vote in marginal seats.⁹

Certainly the rise of the Liberals represented a political realignment, with the development of a disciplined party political system and no coherent Parliamentary opposition until around 1908. On taking office in 1891 the Liberals undertook a number of regulatory reforms, but even by 1893 the political situation remained fluid and more tenuous than historians such as Reeves suggested. Ballance, Premier from 1891 to 1893, was wracked by worries about the fragility of the Liberal parliamentary majority, and by 1893 Seddon had yet to stamp his authority on the party and the population at large. The first term of the Liberal Government was primarily concerned with land reform, 'self-reliance' (i.e. trying to limit overseas borrowing) and, to a lesser extent, the

⁶ See McAloon, *No Idle Rich*, pp.105-124; Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals*.

⁷ For example, see Reeves, *The Long White Cloud*, pp.280 onwards on the notion of the Liberals supplanting the Old Oligarchs, and his *State Experiments*, vol.1, pp.74-76, on the alliance between the middle-class and the labour movement.

⁸ McAloon, *No Idle Rich*, p.105. Recent general approaches suggest a 'settler social contract', e.g. Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp.98-102, while James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 2001, sees the Liberal government as a transition between progressive colonisation and recolonisation, see pp.38-52. On continuities see Martin, '1890', pp. 21-51.

⁹ Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals*, pp.13-36.

question of female suffrage. However, the parliamentary term from 1893 to 1896 saw the Liberals entrench their power and enact significant legislative reforms, including the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1894 (IC&A Act), Old Age Pensions in 1898, and Workers Compensation for Accidents Act in 1900. These ‘state experiments’ drew the attention of overseas observers and the effect was the emergence from around 1893 of a widely diffused notion, both locally and internationally, of New Zealand as a ‘social laboratory’.¹⁰

Return to New Zealand

After arriving back in Wellington, the Atkinsons stayed with family members and Harry spoke at a Forward Movement meeting, where he discussed the aims and objects of the Labour Church and its rapid expansion across England and Scotland.¹¹ There were other speakers at the meeting, and the Rev. G. H. Bradbury reported on his recent visit to Christchurch ‘bringing news of a strong movement which is afoot there with the view of bringing the principles of religion to bear upon political affairs’.¹² This possibly piqued Atkinson’s interest in the city, and he and Rose settled there in 1894. Atkinson was employed as a fitter at the Addington Railway Workshops, one of the largest industrial sites in the city. Atkinson’s associative sociability also continued. He and Rose became involved with the Progressive Liberal Association, where he gave an address on the Labour Church in August 1894.¹³ The Progressive Liberals were a break-away group from the local Liberal Association, and one of a number of radical groups in Christchurch at the time—a city with a rich associational tapestry and by 1894 a long-standing heritage of liberal progressivism and plebeian radicalism.

‘Radical Christchurch’, 1850s-1890

Originally settled by colonists under the auspices of the New Zealand Company in the 1850s, by the early 1890s the foundational vision of Christchurch as an example of Wakefieldian ‘Systematic Colonisation’ was replaced by the economic reality of what

¹⁰ Visitors included American, British and European individuals, including H.D. Lloyd, Albert Metin, Andre Seigfried and Beatrice and Sidney Webb. For examples of claims about the ‘social laboratory’, see Melanie Nolan, ‘The Reality and Myth of New Zealand Egalitarianism: Explaining the Pattern of a Labour Historiography at the Edge of Empires’, *Labour History Review* 72, 2 (2007), pp.114-115.

¹¹ *Evening Post*, 11 December 1893, p.2.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ ‘Canterbury Progressive Liberal Association’, *The Star*, 18 August 1894, p.7.

Trevor Burnard has described as an 'artisanal town': a regional hub with economic growth driven by production for export markets and internal consumption.¹⁴ Plumridge argues that the form of industrial development in the city led to workplace and residential segregation: '[a]s early as the 1870s, the inner and north-west suburbs of Christchurch were dominated by families of professional people', while working-class houses and industry were:

forced on to land that was opened up to the south of the original city side.... By 1900, the suburbs in an arc from Addington in the southwest through Sydenham to Woolston in the southeast were probably the biggest industrial areas in New Zealand. By 1903 Christchurch was the largest ironworking and manufacturing centre in the country.¹⁵

Because of this urban geography of class segregation, Plumridge believes that there was a resultant 'occupational, industrial and material differentiation across suburbs and classes, as well as a visible cultural differentiation that fed into the development of a separate and distinct local working-class culture and consciousness by 1900'.¹⁶ According to her this segregation and differentiation explains the rise and success of political labour in the city.¹⁷ Yet Christchurch was a place where—despite the intentions of the city's founders—radical activity took place from as early as the 1850s. An account which focuses too heavily on the spatial differentiation of classes after 1900 neglects both the degree to which earlier and long-lasting radical associational and organisational ties and bonds were formed in the local community, and the role artisanal radicalism, middle-class liberal progressivism and other forms of political agitation and association, such as suffragism and prohibition, played in shaping political developments.¹⁸

McAloon's survey of 'Radical Christchurch' shows the variety of forms of plebeian radicalism in the city from the early 1850s.¹⁹ Like the colonial labour movement,

¹⁴ Trevor Burnard, 'An Artisanal Town—The Economic Sinews of Christchurch', in John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall (ed.), *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography*, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000, pp.115-138.

¹⁵ Plumridge, 'The Necessary but Not Sufficient Condition', p.132.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.133.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.131.

¹⁸ This is not to suggest that Christchurch's urban geography or working-class cohesion was not important, but other factors, such as work processes and changes in technology, all influenced the development of socialism in the city, as did local conditions such as periods of unemployment. On these points, see McAloon, 'Working Class Politics'.

¹⁹ McAloon, 'Radical Christchurch', pp. 162-92. Atkinson is not mentioned in McAloon's chapter, many other 'graduates' of the Socialist Church are.

discussed in chapter one, developments in Christchurch were uneven and organisations were often short-lived and followed the boom and bust pattern of the colonial economy. The period from the 1850s to 1880s was influenced primarily by artisan radicalism tinged with republicanism. The agitation for an eight hour day and expanded workers' rights and unemployment were important factors driving the establishment of organisations.²⁰ For example, a Constitutional Society was founded in the early 1850s, as was a Working Men's Freehold Land Association. The establishment of a Working Men's Association in the 1860s and the Working Men's Mutual Protection Society in January 1871 were responses to periods of sustained unemployment.²¹ Local trades unions were organised during the 1870s which, despite initial bursts of activity, were short-lived. Similarly, a Canterbury Trades Council was established in 1874 but collapsed the same year.²²

The 1880s onwards saw a significant growth in organisations both locally and colony-wide and organisations survived longer than their predecessors. McAloon suggests four main strands were apparent at this time: radicalism, liberalism, feminism and utopianism.²³ There were divergences in the aims, goals and memberships of these various groups, but there were also often convergences, mixed membership and interlinked or joint activities. The beginnings of the Lib-Lab alliance became apparent, as did the enduring connection of radicalism, liberal progressivism and regional political activity with a number of local politicians campaigning on the basis of sympathy to the aspirations of labour.

The Working Men's Political Association, founded in 1881 and active until 1885, was the first in a number of local electoral associations, with a Liberal programme that included some plebeian radical demands and acted as a quasi Trades and Labour Council (TLC), with a delegate representing the organisation at the first colonial TLC conference

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.163. On unemployment agitation see James Thorn, *The Formation and Development of Trades Unionism in Canterbury: A Centennial Lecture Delivered under the Auspices of the Christchurch Branch of the Workers' Educational Association in the Trades Hall, November 7 1950*, Christchurch, 1950, pp.6-8.

²¹ The chairman of this group, James McPherson corresponded with the First International and warned prospective immigrants about conditions in New Zealand. He also wrote a pamphlet in 1872, *Why the Working Men of New Zealand Should Become Internationalists*, and distributed Marxian literature—the first known appearance of Marxist thought in the colony. See H. O. Roth, 'How Marxism Came to New Zealand', *Political Science* 5 (1953), p.56.

²² Thorn, 'The Formation and Development', pp.8-9.

²³ McAloon, 'Radical Christchurch', pp.164-174; Thorn, 'The Formation and Development', pp.11-27. See also H. M. O. Coates, 'The Labour Movement in Canterbury, 1880-1893', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979.

in Dunedin in 1885.²⁴ A Canterbury Labour Union was formed in 1887 and became the foundation colonial chapter of the Knights of Labour later that year. The 'democratic spirit' of the late 1880s and early 1890s was present in Christchurch and there was a boom in trade unions, as the ideological ferment of the 1890s was accompanied by organisational ferment. Many unions were established and often affiliated to either British or Australian organisations. In response, the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council (CTLC) was re-formed in 1890, following the lead of the earlier Dunedin TLC, founded in 1881.²⁵

An important development at this time was the solidification of the 'alliance between Trades Hall and the Liberal Party'.²⁶ In 1887 the Canterbury Electors Association was established, the brainchild of William Pember Reeves. This association campaigned in support of the Stout-Vogel ministry and all seven candidates were returned at the 1887 election, including Reeves.²⁷ It was dissolved shortly afterwards and in 1890 the People's Political Association was founded to fill the void and worked with the CTLC and formed a joint committee to endorse candidates. Five of their seven candidates were successful in city and suburban electorates, again including Reeves.²⁸ However, dissatisfaction with the Liberals, particularly over their refusal to support prohibition led to the foundation of a rival electoral group, the Progressive Liberal Association in 1893. Harry and Rose Atkinson were active members of the PLA and it is discussed in more detail below.

Not all associations were labour based or concerned with parliamentary politics. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was established in Christchurch in 1885 and was a precursor to a number of prohibition and feminist organisations. Indeed, Christchurch became the heart of the colonial women's suffrage movement that

²⁴ Thorn, 'The Formation and Development', pp.11-13.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp.17-27. For the history of the CTLC see Clark, 'A History of the CTLC', 1993.

²⁶ McAloon, 'Radical Christchurch', p.170.

²⁷ At the time Reeves was the editor of his father's paper the *Canterbury Times*, and became the most influential local figure on the colonial stage until his departure to London when made Agent-General in 1896. A student of classical history and contemporary political thought Reeves, under the pseudonym 'Pharos', wrote a series of articles for the *Lyttelton Times* on socialist and communist thought in 1890 that were popular amongst local radicals. See Pharos, *Communism and Socialism: Their Dreams, Their Experiments, Their Aims, Their Influence*, Christchurch: Lyttelton Times Office, 1890.

²⁸ McAloon, 'Radical Christchurch', p.170 has further details of 'official' and independent Liberal politicians during the period 1890-1899.

won full voting rights in 1893.²⁹ In 1892 the Canterbury Women's Institute (CWI) was founded by Ada Wells and Alexander Bickerton, and Christchurch was the site of the first National Council of Women (NCW) conference, held in April 1896.³⁰ For the most part the history of the women's suffrage movement and the labour movement have been written separately; however, Harry Atkinson had a broad conception of the labour movement and he '[did] not think Women's organisations, the WCTU as well as the [Canterbury Women's] Institute should be overlooked in any treatment of the Labour Movement of those days'. One reason for this recognition was that Rose, along with other friends, was heavily involved with the WCTU and CWI which 'engaged a great deal of her time'.³¹

Though the Socialist Church was the first organisation to label itself 'Socialist' in the colony, as this overview suggests, there were certainly a number of other groups which, if not strictly socialist, were certainly influenced by forms of socialism and were radical in their political aims, both in the Canterbury region, and throughout the colony. However, a focus on radical groups only tells part of the story of broader colonial social processes. The period of the 1860s onwards saw the expansion of civil society and the development of a vibrant tapestry of local and colonial associational and intellectual life. There were many other active groups in Christchurch in 1896, the year the Socialist Church was formed. A survey of the Christchurch *Star* from October to November 1896, excluding mainstream churches, sports/recreation and art groups, found more than twenty five different associations active in the city.³² There was also a wide range of religious bodies. The *Evening Post* in October 1896, reported that '[i]t cannot be said there is any want of variety in the creeds' adhered to in New Zealand, as 'there [were]

²⁹ See Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1972. The WCTU is another example of a transnational organisation, see Ian R. Tyrell, *Woman's World/ Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union In International Perspective, 1880-1930*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

³⁰ For Bickerton, see below. For the NCW see Betty et al Holt, *Women in Council: A History of the National Council of Women of New Zealand*, Wellington: The National Council of Women of New Zealand, 1980.

³¹ Atkinson to Roth, 12 April 1953 Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL. See also Nadia Joanne Gush, 'Cultural Fields of the Canterbury Plains: Women and Cultural Citizenship in Canterbury, c. 1890-1940', PhD thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2007, which examines the influence of John Ruskin, William Morris and the arts and craft movement.

³² These were: the Liberty League, Working Men's Co-operative Society, Oddfellows, Mutual Improvement Society, WCTU, Temperance Guild, Canterbury Liberal Electors Association, Temple of Truth, Christchurch Prohibition League, Trades and Labour Council, Liberal-Labour Political Council, Ladies Lodge, Theosophical Society, Women's Political Association, Surplus Labour League, Philosophical Institute, Salvation Army, Progressive Liberal Association, Literary Institute, Druids, Orange Order, Canterbury Women's Institute, Good Templars, YMCA, Women's Social and Political League, Caledonian Society and the Fellowship Guild.

over 100 different religions' listed in the census returns of that year.³³ The 1890s was a milieu not just of radical ferment, but of general associational ferment, with a variety of groups coalescing to form an emergent colonial civil society.

Progressive Liberal Association (1893-1904)

Shortly after settling in Christchurch Harry and Rose Atkinson became acquainted with the local radical culture and they fell in with what Atkinson described as a 'very vigorous set'; a circle of people associated with three groups: the Progressive Liberal Association, Our Father's Church and the first Canterbury Fabian Society.³⁴

The PLA was formed in September 1893 after splitting with the local Liberal Association over its liquor platform—bogus membership tickets were allegedly issued for a meeting that repealed the Liberal Association's plank supporting the direct veto and W. W. Collins was entered on the Association's election ticket. Both 'disgraceful' incidents enraged prohibitionist members who believed that Collins and the Secretary who organised the alteration of the platform were in the liquor industry's pocket.³⁵ In response the PLA was formed and contested the 1893 election.³⁶ Leading the indignation, and the newly formed Association, was Tommy Taylor, who along with the brothers Frank and Leonard Isitt built up a power-base in the local prohibition movement from the late 1880s. Taylor claimed to have taken the 'keenest and most energetic... workers' of the Association with him to the new group.³⁷

Taylor's work with the Progressive Liberals raised his local profile and brought him to political prominence. He became a major thorn in the side of William Pember Reeves

³³ 'Some Census Returns', *Evening Post*, 30 October 1896, p.4. 'There are 3391 Buddhists and Confucians... 43 Mohammedans and 102 Theosophists, 2 Zorostrasrians, and 1549 Hebrews. There are 250 Mormons, 376 spiritualists, and 491 Swedenborgians. Several of the names given might have been grouped together—such as Unitarian, Church of God, Our Father's Church, Students of Truth, &c. There are 221 Quakers...' For historians' neglect of colonial religion, see John Stenhouse, 'God's Own Silence: Secular Nationalism, Christianity and the Writing of New Zealand History', *New Zealand Journal of History* 38, 1 (April 2004), pp.52-71.

³⁴ Atkinson to Roth, 1 March 1954 Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

³⁵ On the split, see C. Campbell, 'Parties and Special Interests in New Zealand 1890-1893', MA Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1978, pp.61-63. Little has been written about the Progressive Liberals. The quote is from Tommy Taylor to Robert Stout, 20 September 1893.

³⁶ 'Progressive Liberal Association', *The Star*, 22 September 1893, p.2. In the City seats at the 1893 election the Liberal Association polled 39.2% of votes. Of their three candidates, W.P. Reeves and W.W. Collins were both returned. The three Progressive Liberal candidates polled 32.1%, but only one was returned, G.J. Smith. Figures from C. Campbell, 'Parties and Special Interests', 1978, p.63.

³⁷ Taylor to Stout, 20 September 1893 quoted in Campbell, 'Parties and Special Interests', p.62.

and other Liberal politicians less inclined to outlaw the liquor industry. Taylor was a controversial and charismatic figure, an outstanding stump speaker and involved with many local radical groups. He engendered intense loyalty amongst his followers, but equally garnered strong opposition. Atkinson recalled him and the Isitt brothers as 'well loved & well hated men'.³⁸ Taylor emigrated as a child to Christchurch with his parents and entered training for the Methodist ministry as a teenager, but 'his minister decided he was too unorthodox and argumentative'—two personal traits that marked his adult political career.³⁹ With Leonard Isitt he formed the Sydenham Prohibition League in the late 1880s and began his local political career with election to the Sydenham Borough Council in 1891. He was elected to the House of Representatives at the 1896 election and became one of the leading radical critics of the Liberal government.

The 1890s was marked by a shift in the nature of colonial politics—particularly, the development of party politics. The PLA was an active interest group, and one of a number of electoral associations both in the Canterbury region and colony-wide.⁴⁰ However, the platform of the Association was one of radical liberalism rather than outright socialism and was similar to that of the Liberal Association it split from, with land questions a primary concern.⁴¹ Taylor used the Association as base for his electoral activities, though there were other radical Liberals involved, notably H.G. Eil.

The PLA was the entry-point for the Atkinsons' introduction to Christchurch plebeian radical culture and local politics. Atkinson was attracted to the group because of its anti-liquor policy and was a committed and active member until it was wound down around 1904. Indeed, Atkinson told Roth that he was not interested in Taylor and the Isitt brothers' 'religious bias', but instead believed the veto and local option polls on the liquor question were a form of direct democracy:

A revolutionary change in the matter of Alcoholic Liquor Licensing Control had been brought about by the Act of 1893 which made possible the abolition of the liquor traffic in the parliamentary committee by popular direct vote. A wide spread demand for the improvement of voting methods & extension of popular rights resulted from the new law & the imperfections brought to light in the polling results... *The*

³⁸ Atkinson to Roth, 1 March 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

³⁹ The quote is from A. R. Grigg, 'Taylor, Thomas Edward 1862 - 1911', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>> [accessed 12 November 2007]. See also Nellie Macleod, *The Fighting Man: A Study of the Life and Times of T. E. Taylor*, Christchurch: Dunbar and Summers, 1964.

⁴⁰ For a regional analysis of various electoral associations active during the 1893 election, see Campbell, 'Parties and Special Interests'.

⁴¹ 'Progressive Liberal Association: The Platform', *The Star*, 22 September 1893, p.2.

*prohibition movement became a movement for radical popular control in many directions.*⁴² [my italics]

This is a perspective often not recognised in the New Zealand literature on the prohibition movement, which for the most part has characterised it as a form of middle-class puritanism or social control.⁴³ A political interest in ‘radical popular control’ and debates about forms and reforms of democracy continued to be key concerns for Atkinson. However, while supportive of prohibition he was uneasy about the way the movement developed: ‘[i]n 1893, the temperance movement, which was predominantly appealing for the control of personal drinking habits and customs, had slipped its leash & was running hard for a political control of the very source of the evil’.⁴⁴

Our Father’s Church (1894-1899)

The Atkinsons were also involved with Our Father’s Church and the first Canterbury Fabian Society, both led by the former Anglican churchman Reverend James O’Byren Hoare. Little has been written about O’Byren Hoare and his groups, but until his death in 1914 he was a ‘well-known resident’ in Christchurch, active in many of the radical organisations in the area, and is the figure most similar to John Trevor in the local context.⁴⁵ Indeed, Atkinson believed that O’Byren Hoare was a driving force behind the emergent socialist sub-culture in Christchurch as:

[h]is whole attitude & the spirit emanating from his work entered into the political life that was developing directly through the Progressive Liberal Association, the Prohibition League, the Fabian Society, Socialist Church & others besides & also

⁴² Atkinson to Roth, 1 March 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL. For the history of liquor licensing polls see Neil Atkinson, *Adventures in Democracy: A History of the Vote in New Zealand*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003, pp.101-108.

⁴³ For the social control argument, see Anthony Grigg, ‘The Attack on the Citadels of Liquordom: A Study of the Prohibition Movement in New Zealand, 1894-1914’, PhD Thesis, University of Otago, 1977. However, Paul McKimmey’s earlier MA thesis contends that prohibition activists’ beliefs were sincere, though ‘respectability’ is a key theme. See his, ‘The Temperance Movement in New Zealand, 1835-1914’, MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1968. The most recent work on the liquor question, Paul Christoffel, ‘Removing Temptation: New Zealand’s Alcohol Restrictions, 1881-2005’, PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2006, pp.61 onwards, provides a good overview of the historiography and points out that the majority of referenda in New Zealand’s history have been concerned with the availability of alcohol.

⁴⁴ Atkinson to Roth, 15 June 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL. The distinction between temperance and prohibition is often conflated in the historical literature. Atkinson was a straight-out prohibitionist, but acknowledged that the veto did not require total abstinence—the position McCullough took. Atkinson chided Roth for suggesting that socialists ‘were in an opposite camp’ from prohibitionists, and reminded him that ‘a considerable number including leading socialists... supported the prohibition movement’.

⁴⁵ The quote is from his obituary in *The Sun*, 19 August 1914, p.4.

struggling from within to move the Trades & Labour Unions to strike out with political programmes & declare for socialist measures.⁴⁶

O'Bryen Hoare came out to New Zealand in 1865 as incumbent at St. John's Anglican Church in Christchurch, after he graduated with a BA (1859) and MA (1864) from Cambridge University.⁴⁷ He returned to England in 1871 and became vicar of Weston in Hampshire and in he 1880 was Organising Secretary for the Church of England Temperance Society. A year later he came back to New Zealand when he was made incumbent of St. Paul's in Papanui. During the 1880s he became involved with a number of local bodies, radical groups and trade unions, including the prohibition and early closing movements, and the tailoresses' strike of 1889.⁴⁸ By the early 1890s he was becoming increasingly frustrated with the Anglican Church but continued to work within it—if pushing the limits of patience of his superiors and his flock. He gave a number of sermons that upset some parishioners, including 'Capital and Labour' and 'Communism', and drew comment in the local press.⁴⁹ Further controversy followed when he took a leading role in the Christian Ethical Society in 1891, began a series of lectures on 'Our Father's Church' in 1892 and stood as an independent Liberal on the Progressive Liberal Association's 1893 election ticket.⁵⁰ However, his formal break with the Anglican Church did not come until 1894 when he resigned his position at St. Paul's and was dismissed from the ministry by Bishop Julius in 1895—though he claimed his conversion to socialism occurred much earlier, during his stint in England in the 1870s.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Atkinson to Roth, 12 April 1953, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁴⁷ Hoare was born in Hampshire to a wealthy family in 1835 and educated in private schools until attending Cambridge University. Biographical details from a number of sources. See, particularly, his profile 'Mr. James O'Bryen Dott Richard Hoare, M. A. (Cambridge)' in *The Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, Vol. 3., Christchurch: Cyclopedia Co., 1903, p.205; Bert Roth to Rev. G. W. Brassington, 19 November 1965, /2/2/8, Working papers on Rev. John Trevor (1855-1930), founder of the Labour Church- MSS.143, MRC. Thanks to Peter Lineham and Wayne Facer who generously shared their research notes concerning O'Bryen Hoare.

⁴⁸ Other interests included the SPCA, prisoner rehabilitation and criminal justice system reform, and the St Johns Ambulance. He later chaired Socialist Party meetings. Hoare's position on prohibition changed from support of total prohibition in the mid 1880s to a more moderate temperance. By 1893 he too argued in favour of the democratic potential of the prohibition polls.

⁴⁹ See *The Star*, 11 August 1890, p.4 and 25 August 1890, p.4.

⁵⁰ The Christchurch *Press* reported during the election campaign that 'In politics Mr Hoare claims to have been a consistent "Liberal" all his life. His liberalism, however, as enunciated from the platform... would be more fittingly described as purest socialism of the worst type', 22 November 1893 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 11, ATL.

⁵¹ See J. O'Bryen Hoare, *Why am I a Socialist?*, Lyttelton Times Co. Printers, Christchurch, c.1904-1905, pp.6-8, in Harry A. Atkinson- Pamphlets- Religion, Socialism- Box 2- Items 51-59- Folder 7, Canterbury Museum. Hoare relates an apocryphal story of meeting a childhood friend (the son of his family's cart-driver) who came begging; 'The aim of Socialism is the substitution of "right" for "privilege"', p.1. Siegfried mentions the influence of Darwinian evolution on Hoare, a dash of SDF Marxism is also apparent in his writings.

Hoare was now free from what he told Andre Siegfried was the ‘formalism... narrowness and individualism’ of the Anglican Church, and with independent means, he was able to pursue his various causes with more vigour.⁵² Hoare assembled a circle of followers attracted by his ‘lofty ideals and splendid personality’ and established Our Father’s Church on a permanent basis in 1894, founded the first Canterbury Fabian Society in 1896 and spoke at the first meeting of the NCW on the ‘Evils of Landlordism’ and ‘The Treatment of Criminals’ the same year.⁵³

Our Father’s Church was based on an organisation of the same name established by another radical Unitarian churchman, John Page Hopps, in London around 1880. Hopps was ‘known as a compelling preacher and social activist’. Influenced by Comte’s idea of a ‘religion of humanity’, Hopps founded Our Father’s Church to ‘transform and transcend his own congregation to unite people from all denominations in spiritual development and social sympathy’.⁵⁴ Hoare most likely met with Hopps during his time in England in the 1870s, drew heavily from his ‘Seven Ideals’ and distributed Hopps’ pamphlets back in Christchurch.⁵⁵ Our Father’s Church began as a series of lectures given by Hoare in 1892-93 before it was established on a regular basis in 1894, with the first Sunday meetings held in 1895.⁵⁶

Like Trevor’s Labour Church, Our Father’s Church was based on a critique of established religions, but, following Hopps, Hoare did not seek to break with religion completely—the object of the Church for Hoare was ‘to testify to the idea of merging all the churches in one brotherhood, all acknowledging the fatherhood of God’.⁵⁷ A book depot was set up at hired rooms and the Church was split into two branches—a ‘metaphysical club’ for ‘the special study of Mental Science’ and a ‘school of

⁵² Andre Siegfried (trans E. V. Burns), *Democracy in New Zealand*, London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd, 1914, p.320.

⁵³ Siegfried, *Democracy in New Zealand*, p.321. On his involvement with the NCW see Betty Holt et al, *Women in Council*, 1980, pp.15-16. Earlier Hoare was a regular speaker at WCTU meetings, see Grimshaw, *Women’s Suffrage*, p.38.

⁵⁴ See R. K. Webb, ‘Hopps, John Page (1834–1911)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49458>> [accessed 3 August 2008].

⁵⁵ One is amongst Atkinson’s material, see J. P. Hopps, *Our Father’s Church: The Ideal*, n.d, in Atkinson Pamphlets- Box 2- Items 51-59- Folder 7, Canterbury Museum.

⁵⁶ see J. O’Byrne Hoare, *Our Father’s Church: A Course of Lectures*, Russell & Willis, Christchurch, 1892.

⁵⁷ The quote is from *The Star*, 28 July 1894, p.5. For the critique of religious bodies, see Hopps, *Our Father’s Church*. Hoare was later a founder of Christchurch Church Socialist League in 1913, see Plumridge, ‘Labour in Christchurch’, p.223.

brotherhood' which examined sociological questions.⁵⁸ The main activity was weekly meetings where both branches of the Church would come together to listen to an address delivered by Hoare, usually on metaphysical or theological rather than political questions and topics, followed by discussion. In the 1903 *Canterbury Cyclopaedia* Hoare claimed 300 members for the Church, though Siegfried reported less than fifty at the time of his visit.⁵⁹ The Church also organised other social activities such as picnics at Bickerton's Wainoni estate and raised funds for various charitable causes. The Atkinsons were certainly sympathetic to this group as a number of Hoare's pamphlets are amongst Atkinson's archival material in Christchurch.⁶⁰

Canterbury Fabian Society (1896-1897)

Hoare also played a leading role in establishing the first Canterbury Fabian Society, which began public meetings in April 1896. According to Hoare:

This Society is but a weakly bantling... with no very certain future before it. Why it exists at all, it is not easy to say. It appeared in obedience to the wish of a few men who were touched by the Social spirit that "is in the air" and wanted—they did not quite know what—a Club, an Association, a Society, a something to bring them together.⁶¹

The society had a membership of around forty people, but this was expected—as Hoare explained, it was modelled on the English society so 'it could scarcely be popular'.⁶² Again, weekly meetings were held and Hoare served as secretary and gave the majority of lectures on political questions and measures of social reform.⁶³ Other prominent radical figures took part including William Ensom, who was chairman. Despite Hoare's enthusiasm, his characterisation of the Society as a 'weakly bantling' proved to be correct and it was short-lived, with the last reported meeting in September 1897.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ *The Cyclopaedia of New Zealand, Vol. 3: Canterbury Provincial District*, Christchurch: Cyclopaedia Co., 1903, p.205.

⁵⁹ Siegfried, *Democracy in New Zealand*, p.319.

⁶⁰ Atkinson- Pamphlets- Box 2- Items 51-59- Folder 7, Canterbury Museum.

⁶¹ O'Bryen Hoare, 'New Zealand Fabian Society' in *New Zealand Liberal & Labour Associations' Directory*, Christchurch: Russell, Willis & Aiken Printers, 1897, p.8.

⁶² O'Bryen Hoare, 'New Zealand Fabian Society', p.8.

⁶³ See Mr. O'Bryen Hoare, *What is Socialism? Being the Substance of an Address delivered to the New Zealand Fabian Society*, Christchurch: Henry & Co. Printers, n.d, c.1896. This is the only surviving print publication of this group.

⁶⁴ *The Star*, 9 September 1897, p.3.

Foundations of the Socialist Church, 1896-1899

By 1896 both Harry and Rose Atkinson, with their involvement with the Progressive Liberals, Our Father's Church and the Fabian Society, had been introduced to some of the foremost radical figures in Christchurch, such as Tommy Taylor and O'Bryen Hoare and became active members of the city's ecology of radical associations. The Progressive Liberal Association provided an outlet for political activity, and Our Father's Church provided a dissenting form of religion. However, none of these groups were of the type of socialism that the Atkinsons experienced in Manchester. Indeed, local groups, even by the mid 1890s remained dominated by artisan radicalism and middle-class progressivism.⁶⁵ Atkinson's Manchester experience remained to the fore in his thinking and he determined to found another, more explicitly socialist organisation, drawing on his experience working with Trevor. In doing so he became a mentor and conduit for a number people and provided an outlet for socialist activity and agitation. The Socialist Church played a key role in the the development of a socialist sub-culture in the city, supplanting, if not entirely replacing, earlier forms of artisan radicalism by the turn of the twentieth century.

Atkinson's Socialist Church was not the first offshore Labour Church. Earlier the movement spread across the Atlantic—the *Labour Prophet* printed a series of articles focusing on labour in the United States, and a Labour Church was established by Herbert Cason in Lynn, Massachusetts, in late 1893. In Australia, a disaffected Anglican churchman, Rev Archibald Turnbull formed Our Father's Church in Tasmania in 1895 and a Labour Church in Melbourne in 1896, which existed until Turnbull's death in 1899.⁶⁶ The spread of the Labour Church beyond the northern English textile towns usually cited as the Church's sphere of influence is rarely acknowledged by British labour historians. These international Labour Churches, and the transnational dimension of the Labour Church movement, have been the subject of little scholarly attention.

⁶⁵ As did, for the most part, other organisations in the colony. See *New Zealand Liberal & Labour Associations' Directory* for the range of groups in the colony in the mid 1890s.

⁶⁶ See Burgmann, *In Our Time*, pp.116-117. Canadian Labour Churches were founded in the early decades of the twentieth century, in Toronto in 1909 and Winnipeg in 1918. See Melissa Turkstra, 'Constructing a Labour Gospel: Labour and Religion in Early 20th-Century Ontario', *Labour/Le Travail* 57 (Spring 2006), pp.112-113 and Joanne Carlson Brown, 'The Form without the Power? Wesleyan Influences and the Winnipeg Labour Church', *Historical Papers 1994: Canadian Society of Church History* (Annual Conference, University of Calgary, 6-7 June 1994), pp.65-84.

The Socialist Church was founded in May 1896, but the first report of it appeared in the *Star* in June 1896: a public meeting in Cathedral Square, where a resolution was passed in sympathy with miners on strike at Reefton on the West Coast.⁶⁷ The Church had been operating for a short time prior to this, as Atkinson was a solitary preacher in the Square in the earlier months of the year until he was joined on the stump by Jack McCullough. Atkinson never explained to Bert Roth his reasons for forming the Church at the particular time he did, but a number of factors can be suggested.

A cynical motivation was ascribed by Albert Metin who visited the Atkinsons in Christchurch, during his tour of the Antipodes in 1899:

a young craftsman, recently arrived from England, set out to make a little propaganda. Being vaguely Christian socialist by conviction, he set up a small group known as the Socialist Church. 'The word "Church", he told me, 'will let the adjective pass, for the workers here are very religious and have a great mistrust of socialism'.⁶⁸

Atkinson was unaware of these remarks until informed of them by Roth in the 1950s, as Metin's book was not published in English until 1977. In response, Atkinson was indignant about the suggestion he had set out to dupe people over the nature of his project: 'I could not have said anything so temporising or fatuous or so far from the truth or so out of line with my outlook in the effort to give life to a Socialist Church movement'. After wondering if 'it [was] due to his being a Frenchman that he... picked up this queer idea of what I... said?', Atkinson continued:

Trevor had argued the case out with himself as to whether it should be a Socialist Church or a Labour Church & chose what he considered the wider term. In my effort here I plumped for the term Socialist. The word church was not added it was fundamental as embodying the religious ideal. In my view socialism in this religious sense is as much a spirit as a goal.⁶⁹

However, Atkinson diverged from Trevor, dropping his immanentism and idea of 'God in the Labour Movement':

Like Trevor I was imbued with the idea that it was important to recognise that in itself the effort for betterment inherent in the labour movement was religious. Trevor called it God in the Labour Movement. I did not express myself that way, but the

⁶⁷ The Church celebrated its third anniversary with a social covered in *The Star*, 6 May 1899, p.6. The first mention is in *The Star*, 15 June 1896, p.3.

⁶⁸ Metin, *Socialism without Doctrine*, p.54.

⁶⁹ Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

feeling was similar, that the movement was deeply & in a very real sense religious. Otherwise it was nothing leading nowhere, like incoherent ravings & bad temper.⁷⁰

Though the religious rhetoric and ritual of the Labour Church was abandoned by Atkinson's secularising impulse, the intensity of feeling he experienced at Labour Church services was not and influenced a life-long belief in socialism as religion. For him, socialism was a religion because it imparted an intensity of feeling to its converts, maintained that intensity and hence motivated people to work towards a common or shared goal.⁷¹

If Trevor was the initial inspiration, Atkinson was increasingly influenced by the socialism put forward by Robert Blatchford and *The Clarion* movement, and this points to another transnational intellectual factor in his establishment of the Socialist Church. Blatchford was one of the most prominent British socialists of the period, having published *Merrie England* in 1893—a concise summary of arguments for and against socialism, written in plain English for working people and reported to have sold over two million copies.⁷² Today a neglected figure, 'many years later the Manchester *Guardian* wrote that for every British convert made by *Das Kapital* there were a hundred made by *Merrie England*'.⁷³

The mid-1890s were, as Yeo has argued, the high-point of 'New Life Socialism', and Blatchford was one of a number of writers to produce tracts about the 'Religion of Socialism' at this time.⁷⁴ 'The New Religion' was a short article published in *The Clarion* in April 1896 and expanded to pamphlet form in 1897.⁷⁵ In the article Blatchford, writing under his pseudonym 'Nunquam', argued against 'economics as the basis of

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ 'The labour movement similarly is essentially & highly religious if conceived of as a system of life based on a just & humane appreciation of every man's worth... the chief purpose of a church organisation [is], the developing & strengthening of the feeling & impulses towards the ends that matter & are recognisable to the members of the Church... So we have the crux of religion summed up in terms of desired direction & intensity of feeling'. *ibid.*

⁷² See Laurence Thompson, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1951.

⁷³ R. C. K. Ensor, 'Blatchford, Robert Peel Glanville (1851–1943)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31924>> [accessed 20 Jan 2009].

⁷⁴ Yeo, 'A New Life'. Other writing on the 'Religion of Socialism' at this time includes Katherine St. John Conway, and J. Bruce Glasier, *The Religion of Socialism: Two Aspects*, Manchester: Labour Press Ltd, c. 1897.

⁷⁵ See Nunquam (Robert Blatchford), 'The New Religion', *The Clarion*, 25 April 1896, p.153, expanded to pamphlet form, *The New Religion*, Clarion Pamphlet, No.20, London: Clarion Newspaper Company, 1897. Both Blatchford's and Conway and Glasier's pamphlets were viewed at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester.

Socialism'. Rather, he believed that '[t]he true basis of Socialism...should be an ethical one', and set out the necessity for socialists to preach a 'Religion of Altruism' and a 'Religion of Socialism' as necessary tenets to drive socialist activity:

If Socialism is to live and conquer, it must be a religion. If Socialists are to prove themselves equal to the task assigned to them, they must have a faith; a real faith, a live faith, a new faith. The faith in a glorious destiny of the human race; the faith that demands of its votaries love and sacrifice... Such a faith cannot be bred from selfishness, nor can it be nourished upon economics.⁷⁶

Atkinson subscribed to and was an avid reader of *The Clarion*. As we will see later in the next chapter, he distributed and disseminated the newspaper in Christchurch. And he was prompted to form the Socialist Church by Blatchford's article.⁷⁷ Yet the presence of Blatchford in Atkinson's intellectual development points to divergences with Trevor. Atkinson chose the deliberately narrower term for his group, and promoted ideals of fellowship and autodidacticism over Trevor's notion of 'God in the Labour Movement'. For Atkinson, the 'Religion of Socialism' was a personal ethic of responsibility and a 'whole way of life', a conception that stressed the importance of education, self-education and the necessity of preaching socialism. He believed, like Blatchford, that fellowship and associational activity embodied the virtues of socialism.⁷⁸

There were other transnational influences. One closer to home was the communistic and utopian experiments of the Australian, William Lane, and his New Australia and Cosme colonies in Paraguay.⁷⁹ Both Cosme and New Australia were reported in local newspapers and O'Bryen Hoare gave a lecture explaining the failure of New Australia because 'men of the wrong stamp had conducted it'.⁸⁰ However, while Lane's colonies were an example of 'practical communism' it is often unremarked that Lane's classic 1892 utopian novel *The Working Man's Paradise* is prefaced with the aim of 'bring[ing]

⁷⁶ Nunquam, 'The New Religion', *The Clarion*, 25 April 1896, p.153.

⁷⁷ Excerpts of the article were published in the *Socialist Church Monthly Leaflets*, see below.

⁷⁸ For example, see L. J. W. Barrow, 'The Socialism of Robert Blatchford', 1975; Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement*, 1996.

⁷⁹ 'Lane's experiment I think perhaps it should have some credit in your book, perhaps as publicising socialist ideals, despite the fact that it fell to pieces', Atkinson to Roth, 25 May 1954 Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL. Lane is another figure with entries in two different national biographies. Unlike many others, his later influence in New Zealand was not as a socialist agitator but as a right-wing, racist and pro-war lead writer for Auckland's *Herald* from 1900, where he settled after the failure of communal experiments. See Paul Goldstone, 'Lane, William 1861 - 1917', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, <URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>> [accessed 15 July 2008].

⁸⁰ 'New Australia', *The Star*, 12 June 1895, p.4.

to a single man or woman a clearer conception of the Religion of Socialism'.⁸¹ Clearly the impact of the 'Religion of Socialism' in the 1890s was also an Antipodean phenomenon, though there is much further research to be done on this topic.

While there were transnational effects, there was the interplay of local political and economic factors guiding Atkinson's decision to form the Socialist Church. An obvious though unstated reason is a frustration with the State Socialism and dominant Liberalism of colonial politics. By 1896 most of the Liberal Government's progressive legislation and regulation of work and labour had been passed, and early in that year William Pember Reeves left the country having become Agent-General in London. Certainly, Atkinson's association with Tommy Taylor and the Progressive Liberals exposed him to Taylor's radical critique of the Liberals and especially Seddon's 'Tammanyism'.⁸² But there was also an element of what Miles Fairburn termed the 'insider's critique' of the Arcadian 'Labourer's Paradise'.⁸³

This was related particularly to regional economic conditions and unemployment, or what was called the 'surplus labour question'. Despite the worst of the long depression being over, towards the end of 1895 and through the middle of 1896 a number of, at times rowdy, 'surplus labour' demonstrations and protests were held in Cathedral Square and Hagley Park.⁸⁴ A Surplus Labour Association was established, which became the Surplus Labour League in February 1896, and was led by Ebenezer Early, a foundation member of the local Knights of Labour. Deputations from this group visited local MHRs, and 130 men signed a letter to Seddon asking for his action in helping them find work.⁸⁵ A series of Surplus Labour conferences were held from May to July 1896, and the plight of the unemployed was highlighted by Tommy Taylor, who voiced their complaints in election speeches.⁸⁶ Other active members included O'Bryen Hoare and William Ensom, and people who were involved with Socialist Church, including

⁸¹ See 'Preface' in John Miller (William Lane), *The Workingman's Paradise*, Brisbane: Edwards, Dunlop and Co., 1892.

⁸² By June 1896 Atkinson was a member of the Progressive Liberal's executive committee. See the report of their AGM in *The Star*, 24 June 1896, p.3.

⁸³ Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and Its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society, 1850-1900*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1989.

⁸⁴ For public demonstrations see *The Star* 13 and 14 December 1895, pp.3, 5, and throughout July 1896.

⁸⁵ *The Star*, 27 February 1896, p.2.

⁸⁶ The conferences are reported in *The Star*, 16 May 1896, p.7; 23 May 1896, p.7; 30 May 1896, p.7; 5 June 1896, p.4; 12 June 1896, p.1; 9 June 1896, p.1; 26 June 1896, p.1; 3 July 1896, p.1.

Louisa Blake and Miss Hookham.⁸⁷ Again, though there is no direct evidence that Atkinson was involved, he would have been well aware of these protests, which probably increased his distance politically from the Liberal Government and made him more sceptical of Liberal rhetoric which portrayed colonial New Zealand as a 'working-man's paradise'.

Atkinson was also spurred on by a newly formed friendship with Jack McCullough. In the early months of 1896 Atkinson took the stump in Cathedral Square and caught McCullough's attention—he became Atkinson's first, and perhaps most notable, convert to the Socialist Church:

One day... someone squatted outside the rails and spoke into the pit under the locomotive at which I was working and the voice said, 'Do you know what it is like to want to hug a man?' I don't know what I answered. I remember I was rather embarrassed. The voice continued; as I peered out through the spokes of the wheel: 'that's what I felt like, listening in the square on Sunday'. This flattering reference to my lone performance in supporting the idea and purpose of a Socialist Church, a true Irishman's blarney, fetched me. His name was McCullough. I would find him in the tinsmith's shop, and I did. I don't know how sorry he may have been, but thereafter there were two of us doing our best expounding to our lights, every Sunday afternoon.⁸⁸

McCullough and his wider kin network have been examined in detail by Melanie Nolan in numerous publications, though her work tends to focus more on his activities after 1907 when he was elected Workers' Representative on the Arbitration Court.⁸⁹ By the time the pair became acquainted, McCullough was enmeshed in the work of the local branch of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), and over the next ten years McCullough extended his influence to the point that there is general consensus amongst historians that he was the leading figure in the Christchurch labour movement in the early decades of the twentieth century.

McCullough was born in Belfast in 1860 but grew up in Liverpool, where he got his primary education, then began a seven year brass-working apprenticeship. At the completion of his apprenticeship he emigrated with his family to New Zealand in 1880 and brought to the colony a familial tradition of unionism—his father was a seaman and trade unionist, a member of the Orange Order and the Presbyterian Church.

⁸⁷ The conference report in *The Star*, 26 June 1896, p.1, has a list of delegates.

⁸⁸ Roth, 'In Memoriam', p.19.

⁸⁹ See Nolan, *Kin*, pp.61-63 and 'Jack McCullough', 1985.

McCullough's employment was affected by the long depression of the 1880s and he held a number of jobs. These included working as a seaman in Sydney, where he came to admire the 'fraternal altruism' of his workmates after initially being 'horrified and disgusted by [their] drunken and blasphemous' behavior.⁹⁰ McCullough later claimed this experience was epiphanic as it 'helped [him] to understand and appreciate comradeship, cooperation, the necessity and advantage of trade union organization'.⁹¹ Indeed, it was this shipboard working experience that made him question and reject the religious dogmas he learnt from his father and the Presbyterian Church. McCullough's conversion to socialism, like that of many at the time, was a religious experience. It occurred on Christmas Day 1882, as he listened, while holed up in his bunk, to the Lyttelton Brass Band play 'Hark While the Angels Sing'.⁹²

The next year, in 1883, McCullough got regular work as a tinsmith at the Addington Railway Workshops—a fertile radical site where many members of the Socialist Church were recruited, but he spent most of the 1880s raising a young family. It was not until the formation of the Canterbury branch of the ASRS in 1889 that McCullough became involved with local trade unionism. During the 1890s he came to prominence at his workplace, and towards the end of the decade in wider Christchurch trades union activity.

McCullough's introduction to Atkinson in 1896 was important for three reasons. Firstly, the Socialist Church provided McCullough with a means to undertake socialist agitation outside of the conservative confines of the CASRS, that had become apparent following the 1890 Maritime Strike.⁹³ Secondly, and related to this, the Socialist Church's political rationale contrasted with that of the ASRS which was politically close to the local Liberal Association; members were required to support Liberal candidates at the polls. The Socialist Church was a unique group among the various radical organisations in Christchurch at the time: 'instead of opinionated or enlightened inactivity, the Socialist Church's official doctrine was the gospel of socialism which it preached on the streets. It sought to achieve socialism by political means'.⁹⁴ Finally, Atkinson was an intellectual

⁹⁰ Nolan, 'Jack McCullough', pp.4-5.

⁹¹ McCullough in the *New Zealand Worker*, 21 December 1927, quoted in *ibid.*, p.5.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Nolan, *Kin*, pp.58-60. When the railways were put under direct government control in 1894 railway workers were treated as government employees and faced the same restrictions on political activity as civil servants.

⁹⁴ Nolan, 'Jack McCullough', p.17.

conduit for McCullough, as he introduced McCullough to a breadth of socialist literature and set him off on a course of sustained reading that he kept up for much of his life.⁹⁵ Through McCullough, this knowledge or informal socialist curriculum was passed on to other people. The pair's initial encounter on the floor of the Addington Railway Workshops was the beginning of a long and fruitful fifty year friendship.

Associational Lives: Open-Air and Members' Meetings

Spurred on by McCullough's energy and Atkinson's Manchester experience, the Socialist Church began in earnest in May 1896. However, the Christchurch Socialist Church took a different form to its English forbear and activities were undertaken on a lesser scale due to the smaller population of Christchurch. Instead of a Sunday service, weekly members' meetings were held where addresses on a variety of topics were given by members and books and ideas were exchanged, debated and discussed. Unlike the Manchester Labour Church, where Trevor maintained a 'cultus' and ordered ceremony, in Christchurch it was a more secular affair similar to many of the smaller British Labour Churches: 'there was no Bible, no pulpit, no priesthood but the priesthood of believers: each Church had simply a chairman with no special status'.⁹⁶ Despite this, like the Labour Church the necessity for preaching socialism was at the heart of the Socialist Church's work and Atkinson believed this was its main function. Saturday or Sunday afternoon open-air meetings were held in Cathedral Square, where Atkinson and McCullough took the stump.⁹⁷

Bruce Scates has argued that in Australia outdoor public spaces—parks and reserves—were crucial sites, 'central to the oral culture of nineteenth-century radicalism... The park was 'the people's reserve', where the right to speak and be heard was largely unchallenged by the authorities'.⁹⁸ The role of oral culture and public spaces were similarly important in the New Zealand context. Critical to the radical sub-culture of Christchurch were a number of 'people's reserves'—such as Hagley Park and the Addington Showgrounds—where individuals spoke to large and small crowds, to

⁹⁵ See Nolan, *War & Class*, p.27 and throughout from McCullough's reading from 1908 to 1921.

⁹⁶ Inglis, 'The Labour Church Movement', p.449.

⁹⁷ 'I still hold to my feelings as to the importance of this aspect of the necessary work of preaching socialism', Atkinson to Roth, 1 March 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁹⁸ Scates, *A New Australia*, p.28. The City Council in Christchurch did in fact try to ban speaking in Cathedral without permits in March 1898. The Socialist Church was one of a number of groups that challenged this breach and the council soon relented. See *The Star* 28 March 1898, p.2.

sympathetic and not so sympathetic audiences. However, the most important site for open-air meetings during the 1890s and early twentieth century was not a park but rather Cathedral Square in central Christchurch. Every weekend speakers from a variety of causes would orate atop carts under the light of oil-burning lanterns and try to convince curious onlookers of the rightness of their cause. At the heart of the urban experience of the city, Cathedral Square was a hive of activity. One contemporary described how it was:

in miniature the town, the colony, and if the scale were infinitesimally small, the world itself. It is the centre of all those long, sleepy streets, stretching in unbroken straight lines away to the belt of trees, except where the river curvets about... In the Square itself, which is, in fact, a may-cornered polygon, are the big business offices of auctioneers, land agents, coal merchants, brokers and insurance agents. Before one window loungers stop to gaze at the latest attempts of local artists... What a variety of human life there is in these buildings, each bit jostling the other—one of the largest hotels in town, an odd brown-faced wooden structure, well known to travellers; the back of the Times office, the offices that reel off invisible threads to speed the wanderer over land and seas... the hall let for balls, where on festive nights the dancers' shadows float across the lighted windows—business, pleasure, religion, travel, art—all beginning to sprout up here.⁹⁹

Politics too had its place: 'on Saturday night... [a]ll the pathways are thronged, and impassioned street orators and evangelists [hold] forth to indifferent throngs'. Amongst the 'drum beats' of the Salvation Army, prohibitionists accusing pro-liquor speakers of corruption and election candidates speaking to crowds of hundreds of people, could be found members of the Socialist Church.¹⁰⁰ Both Atkinson and McCullough recognised this space as an effective site for preaching the gospel of socialism and disseminating socialist propaganda in the hope of winning new converts.

From 1897 regular Saturday night meetings were held where the pair spoke on a variety of topics, sometimes joined by other prominent people, such as Tommy Taylor. Atkinson claimed that they spoke 'most often, I think, to very few'.¹⁰¹ However at a meeting in September 1897 it was reported that 'a considerable number of persons listened to socialistic address[es]', while other reports refer to 'mass meetings'; so it seems the Church was able to draw a crowd.¹⁰² There are unfortunately few records of

⁹⁹ Edith Searle Grossman, 'In Cathedral Square', *Otago Witness*, 14 June 1900, p.64.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* Originally these were held on Monday evenings; however, from August 1897 addresses in Cathedral Square were delivered on Saturdays, followed by indoor meetings. See *The Star*, 25 August 1897, p.3 for details of arrangements.

¹⁰¹ Roth, 'In Memoriam', p.19.

¹⁰² *The Star*, 20 September 1897, p.3; see *The Star*, 12 October 1897, p.3 for a report of a 'mass-meeting'.

the content of the addresses, nor even of their general topics. However, speeches were occasionally reported. For example, in early 1897 Taylor spoke about Socialism, the Socialist Church and the religious aspects of Socialism, and gave another address on the 'adviseableness of socialising our institutions' later the same year, while in September 1898 'the advantages of the public ownership of the means of life' were considered.¹⁰³ Contemporary issues were the main focus of these meetings, rather than theory or literature and resolutions were occasionally passed—in October 1897 a meeting urged the Government to find work for unemployed men and women, and a month later a resolution 'hail[ed] with joy' the establishment of the Wellington Socialist League'.¹⁰⁴ These meetings were also a pulpit where political opponents were attacked and discredited. Jim Thorn's earliest memory of socialist activity was as a 16 year old in 1898:

[I was] strolling through the Christchurch Cathedral Square on a Saturday night, as the custom was, when I noticed a large crowd listening to a speaker orating from an old time carrier's cart in front of Warners Hotel... Mr J.A. McCullough... He had a loud voice and was getting a good hearing... For some misdemeanour which I cannot remember but which had given great offence to the Trades Union movement... [G.J. Smith, a local Liberal MHR]... was being vigorously denounced...

¹⁰⁵

While the value of disseminating socialist ideas in a public forum was the main reason for these meetings, they were also an important means of introducing others to socialist ideas and inspiring conversion to the socialist cause—indeed, this was proved early on as it was here that McCullough heard Atkinson's 'sole performance' and was inspired to join. Again, there are few sources to highlight this, but one such example is the cartoonist David Low, who grew up in Christchurch before emigrating to Australia in 1911. Low's informal education in socialism progressed in the early years of the twentieth century as he:

...graduated from bookishness to free-and-easy exchange of ideas with persons—occasionally even with personalities. Regular attendance at the Saturday night open forum held in a cart with flaring oil torches in Cathedral Square brought me into contact with the speakers and earned me at last the privilege of addressing familiarly as 'Dan,' [Sullivan] 'Jack,' [McCullough] and 'Will' [Kraig?] local Radicals...¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *The Star*, 1 February 1897, p.2, 12 May 1897, p.3 and 12 September 1898, p.2.

¹⁰⁴ *The Star*, 12 October 1897, p.3, 27 November 1897, p.6.

¹⁰⁵ James Thorn, 'Recollections', *The Standard*, 16 May 1946, p.4.

¹⁰⁶ David Low, *Low's Autobiography*, London: Michael Joseph, 1956, p.41.

Another benefit of open-air meetings for the speakers themselves was informal training in the art of oratory.¹⁰⁷ While a site of agitation and propaganda, the Square was a place where rudimentary skills of rhetoric and speech-making were learnt and honed. This included developing an argument, dealing with interjections and thinking on one's feet, as well as steeling oneself to speak in front of a sometimes hostile crowd. Both bravery and fortitude were required: to promulgate socialism in a public forum could be unpopular and an unpleasant experience. Atkinson told Roth that '[a]lthough not reporting correctly the *raison d'être* of the Socialist Church [Albert Metin] was right in saying that 'Socialism' was almost a term of abuse'.¹⁰⁸ The 'throng' would have been made up by as many hecklers as sympathetic individuals. Furthermore, not only were verbal threats faced, but threats to employment, livelihood or worse. McCullough in particular was warned off speaking due to his position with the Railways:

I stood up in this square & dared to express my view on Social and political questions. I will never forget the words of warning given to me [by family members] ... I have had men in this square declare that a man like me... coming out as I have done with a view to make people discontented should be put into jail for my pains.¹⁰⁹

Despite these threats, the Socialist Church continued to hold open-air meetings and Cathedral Square was a key site for developing important skills that would be put to use in later life in a variety of places: at mass demonstrations; at electoral rallies and political party and trades union meetings; and, eventually for some such as McCullough and Jim Thorn, in parliamentary debating chambers.

After open-air meetings were concluded members of the Socialist Church held their weekly members' meetings. Again, the Square was an important site and in surrounding buildings the Socialist Church often gathered, as did many of the other radical associations at this time:

[t]his quarter is honeycombed with the meeting places of clubs and associations for propagating all manner of new religions and "latest ideas." Up long flights of stairs,

¹⁰⁷ Scates, *A New Australia*, p.26.

¹⁰⁸ Harry Atkinson to Roth, 15 June 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

¹⁰⁹ Jack McCullough, 'Notes from a speech', n.d, quoted in Nolan, *Kin*, p.63.

past tea rooms, and above shop windows of tailor, umbrella-mender, hairdresser, and woodcarver, are the nests of all the newest theories.¹¹⁰

The Socialist Church's weekly members' meetings were another 'channel of dissemination' and introduced members to a variety of forms of radical and socialist knowledge. If the skills of public oratory were learnt in the open air, during the indoor meetings new thinkers, ideas and theories were encountered and mental skills were sharpened and refined in a more encouraging, if sometimes vigorous, autodidactic atmosphere. There are few extant first hand accounts of Socialist Church meetings; however, the Christchurch *Star* reported on the Church's activities in its 'Local and General' columns and from this source activities can be sketched out.

For most of 1896 the Church's main activity was open-air meetings, but from February 1897 regular members' meetings were held and a number of measures were taken to institute the Church on a formal basis. One of the first steps was the election of an executive committee, consisting of Jack McCullough, A.G. Muir as Treasurer and Atkinson as Secretary.¹¹¹ The objects of the Church were also ratified:

The Socialist Church aims at promoting a fellowship amongst those working for the organisation of Society on a basis of Brotherhood and Equality.

It affirms the Principle that only as we learn to lead purer and better lives can we benefit by any measures of Social Reform.

It does not pretend to satisfy the whole religious wants of any person, but is founded in the belief that its principles are such as should form an integral part of every man's Religion.¹¹²

The establishment of clubs associated with the Church was mooted, though this did not go ahead, possibly due to a lack of members, and the question of obtaining a permanent meeting and reading room was discussed.¹¹³ Importantly, new members of the Church were enrolled with membership 'open to any man or woman in sympathy

¹¹⁰ Edith Searle Grossman, 'In Cathedral Square', *Otago Witness*, 14 June 1900, p.64. The first meetings of the Church in February 1897 took place at Atkinson's house at 341 St Asaph Street. From March a number of venues were then used, including the Oddfellows Hall and the WCTU Rooms in Gloucester Street, before Hobbs' Building in Cathedral Square was settled in. The Church used the Art Gallery for lectures, as did Our Father's Church. From 1900 the main venue was the Refreshment Rooms on Gloucester Street. For a short time 'Socialist Church Rooms' at the Opera House were listed as a meeting space.

¹¹¹ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflets* are in Socialist Church Records 1897-1903, 94-106-14/14, Roth Papers, ATL. Details of committee from *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.2, March 1897, p.1.

¹¹² *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.1, February 1897, p.1.

¹¹³ *The Star*, 25 August 1897 and 2 June 1897.

with the Objects of the Church'.¹¹⁴ The Church attracted a number of converts during this time and members included James McCombs; the Henderson sisters Stella, Elizabeth and Christina; Louisa Blake and William Ensom.¹¹⁵

Socialist Church guests were invited to read papers and lead debate; the Church promoted an open platform for speakers 'so long as they speak to further our cause'.¹¹⁶ While Christchurch did not have the same calibre of labour intellectuals and speakers as in Manchester, a number of prominent individuals were involved on occasion, including H.G. Ell and the maverick Professor of Chemistry at Canterbury College, Alexander Bickerton, who founded a communal homestead in an outlying suburb in 1896, the Wainoni Federative Home.¹¹⁷ In one case there was overlap as Ben Tillett spoke at meetings in 1897 and 1898.

A typical members' meeting began with the election of a chairperson as there was no permanent chair but rather, following the 'democratic ethos' of the Labour Church, the position was voted in at each meeting. The chair was not always taken by male members of the Church; often one of the female members would be elected. The main activity was then the reading of a paper by members or a guest. This was followed by a lengthy and at times animated discussion, at the conclusion of which a resolution was passed expressing the Church's opinion on the matter under consideration.¹¹⁸ Atkinson extracted Labour Church songs and produced a small leaflet, *Socialist Church Hymns*, from which socialist hymns and songs, or what the *Star* called 'Socialistic Battle Anthems', were sung from.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.1, February 1897, p.1. See *The Star*, 23 February 1897, for the enrollment of new members.

¹¹⁵ Rose Atkinson was also involved.

¹¹⁶ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, No.2, March 1897, p.1.

¹¹⁷ For more on Bickerton and Wainoni see Alexander W. Bickerton, *A Federative Home: "Wainoni"*, Christchurch: Lyttelton Times Office, 1899; William Metcalf, 'Federative Home', *Communal Societies* 24 (2004), pp.25-46; R. M. Burdon, *Scholar Errant: A Biography of Professor A. W. Bickerton*, Christchurch: Pegasus Press, 1956.

¹¹⁸ This was a similar form to Fabian Society meetings where radical and socialist authors were also encountered. For example, at an October 1896 meeting O'Bryen Hoare read a short extract from Edward Carpenter's book, *Towards Democracy* and gave an account of the development of the English Fabian Society and 'eulogised the work of Sidney Webb, Bernard Shaw and others', *The Star*, 8 October 1896, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ See *The Star*, 27 May 1898; Socialist Church Hymn Sheet in New Zealand Parliamentary Library Further Papers, 1903-1946, MS-Papers-6258, ATL.

These meetings were an Antipodean form of what Carl Levy has termed 'arenas of education and self-education', and an important site for the transmission of ideas and the circulation of means of political, social and economic reform.¹²⁰ The concerns of meetings over the period 1896 to 1899 were wide ranging and can be broken down into six categories: the aims and goals of socialism; the relationship between socialism and Christianity; forms of socialism and the relationship of socialism to other social theories and movements; topical issues and contemporary colonial politics; 'practical experiments' and political and economic reforms; and debates about democracy and citizenship.

In discussion of the aims and goals of Socialism in general, and the Socialist Church in particular, Atkinson often took the lead. In early 1897 he spoke on 'Why we want equality', 'The aims of Socialism and means to their attainment', 'What we have to do' and, in late 1899, about 'The Religion of Socialism', of which unfortunately no extant copy was traced.¹²¹ Papers were read by others on 'The best way of promoting Socialism', and 'The basic principles of Socialism', whilst M.J. McLennan spoke on 'Ideals'.¹²² The relationship between Socialism and Christianity was explored in a number of papers by speakers such as Mr Riddle and W. Reitz Jr who questioned 'Is Socialism the Outcome of Christianity?'.¹²³ Explicit critiques of local Churches were not common in meetings; however, Bishop Julius' 1898 speech on 'Labour Wars', in which he set out a sympathetic viewpoint towards trade unions and the conditions that caused strike action, was intensely debated at one meeting. A number of members applauded his efforts and the meeting resolved that 'it is the duty of all clergymen to devote a large proportion of their time to the study of economic questions and present-day social injustices'.¹²⁴

However, meetings were not confined to the ethical socialism promulgated by the Socialist Church, or to the relationship between socialism and Christianity. The informal curriculum of meetings included other forms of socialism, radicalism and religion, thereby having an educational role in introducing members to a variety of ideas

¹²⁰ Levy, 'Introduction', p.22.

¹²¹ Topics recorded in *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.2, March 1897, p.2, *The Star*, 10 April 1897, p.7; 6 May 1899, p.6; 16 September 1899, p.5.

¹²² *The Star*, 8 January 1898, p.5; 17 January 1899, p.4; 26 August 1898, p.1.

¹²³ *The Star*, 4 October 1897, p.2; 8 July 1898, p.3; 4 August 1897, p.3.

¹²⁴ Bishop Julius' speech on 'The Labour Wars' is reported in *The Star*, 14 February 1898, p.2 and the Socialist Church meeting is in *The Star*, 18 February 1898, p.3.

and radical traditions and points to the ideological diversity of the period. For example, W. Gibbons contrasted the predominant colonial state socialism with collective socialism, while W. Sykes raised the topic of 'Human Nature and Socialism'. Professor Bickerton spoke at a number of meetings on his interests, including a lecture on 'Scientific Communism'.¹²⁵ James McCombs spoke about the relationship between 'Theosophy and Socialism', a movement he was personally involved with before converting to socialism.¹²⁶ 'The Single Tax and Socialism' was a popular subject, and land taxes were often raised as a means of ameliorating social ills.¹²⁷ Broader discussions took place on topics such as 'Man and the Machine'; and Miss Henderson, drawing from the work of the French historian and politician Louis Blanc, spoke on 'The Evils of Competition'.¹²⁸

While the 'world of ideas' was the primary focus of meetings, another important aspect was contemporary colonial politics and society. These ranged from general topics, such as A.G. Muir's talks on 'Facts for New Zealanders' and 'The Trend of New Zealand Politics', to more specific issues, such as the 'loan and discount business'.¹²⁹ A pertinent contemporary topic was the Old Age Pensions Bill and over the course of 1897 a number of meetings confirmed the Church's support of this measure and criticised the Legislative Council for discarding it.¹³⁰ Debates about Federation with Australia were ongoing, with Stella Henderson and other members speaking on this subject from September to October 1899.¹³¹ The Second Anglo-Boer War was another

¹²⁵ Gibbons spoke on 8 March 1897, Sykes on 15 March 1897, see *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.2, March 1897. Bickerton's lecture was noted in the *Star*, 12 May 1897, he gave an untitled address on 22 March 1897, *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.2, March 1897.

¹²⁶ *The Star*, 2 September 1897. McCombs was active in the local Theosophy movement in the 1890s. The relationship between Theosophy, spiritualism, 'New Life' socialism and plebeian radicalism was closer than is usually acknowledged during the late nineteenth century. For example, Annie Besant was a Fabian socialist before converting to Theosophy. James McCombs dabbled in theosophy in the early 1890s. For further details, see Logie Barrow, *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians 1850-1910*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986 and Mark Bevir, 'Annie Besant's Quest for Truth: Christianity, Secularism and New Age Thought', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 50, 1 (January 1999), pp.62-93.

¹²⁷ For example, *The Star*, 28 February 1898. The relationship between single taxers and socialists in New Zealand at this time was not as close as that in Australia as argued by Scates in *A New Australia*, 1997. This was due to the dearth of Single Tax organisations in New Zealand in the mid to late 1890s. However, the land tax was a common political platform amongst candidates across the Liberal and radical spectrum of the period. See chapter one for the influence of Henry George in New Zealand.

¹²⁸ *The Star*, 11 March 1898, p.3, 27 September 1897, p.3, probably Stella.

¹²⁹ Muir spoke on 29 March 1897, see *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.2, March 1897; 'The Trend of New Zealand Politics' was advertised in *The Star*, 7 October 1899, p.5; 'Loan and Discount' is in *The Star*, 25 August 1897, p.5

¹³⁰ *The Star*, 20 November 1897, 18 December 1897, 20 December 1897.

¹³¹ *The Star*, 26 September 1899, 2 October 1899.

topic that the Church spent time on in October 1899; this is examined in further in the next chapter.

In response to problems that were detailed at these meetings a number of 'practical experiments' and other means of political and economic reforms were put forward. The Church passed resolutions supporting certain Liberal legislation and measures. State control of industries was proposed in early 1897.¹³² Louisa Blake was a leading proponent, and called for 'State Control of the Liquor Traffic', reform of the liquor industry and the 'elimination of private profit from the sale of drink'. However, her arguments in favour of temperance did not sit well with prohibitionist members of the Church and, despite a 'long and warm discussion', few members supported her stance.¹³³ Blake also gave an address entitled 'Conciliation', which encouraged 'workers to withdraw their gaze from the shadow' of the IC&A Act and focus on fundamental reforms, 'such as the abolition of the 'wage' system... and the sweeping away of the capitalistic system as it now prevails'.¹³⁴

Communal experiments were often seen as the answer to the 'fundamental problems' of capitalist society and so historical and contemporary examples were studied such as the Ruskin and Cosme Colonies.¹³⁵ Common, and what were considered more 'practical', solutions were the establishment of state industrial settlements and farms. Atkinson urged the creation of such farms and industrial colonies on a co-operative basis in April 1897, and at a number of meetings in 1898.¹³⁶ A series of conferences on state farms and industrial settlements were held around the same time, with delegates from a variety of radical organisations present, including the Fabian Society, Progressive Liberal Association, CTLC, CWI, Engineers Union and the Socialist

¹³² *The Star*, 20 September 1897, 10 April 1897.

¹³³ *The Star*, 4 November 1898, p.3. Although Atkinson was a prohibitionist, as were many other members of the Church, this is one of the few examples of the prohibition question being directly addressed at a Socialist Church meeting. This issue was dealt with in other associations, such as the Progressive Liberals and the WCTU.

¹³⁴ *The Star*, 27 May 1898, p.3.

¹³⁵ *The Star*, 17 June 1899, p.7.

¹³⁶ *The Star*, 10 April 1897, p.7, 25 March 1898, p.4, 18 April 1898, p.1, 20 May 1898, p.4. State farms had earlier been promoted by W.M Bolt, and Mr Le Grove, see the report of the Fabian Society meeting in *The Star* 26 August 1897, p.3, at which they both spoke. Bolt, a prominent Dunedin freethinker, promoted a State Farm Bill after being appointed to the Legislative Council in 1892.

Church.¹³⁷ These proposed solutions won a wide appeal amongst local groups, and the CTLC passed a resolution in favour of establishing state farms and sent material from the conference to the Minister of Lands.¹³⁸

Related to these proposals were wider debates about the nature and working of democracy. Keen interest was taken in the extension of the municipal franchise, forms of direct democracy and electoral reform. Again, Blake took a prominent role in these discussions and addressed the Church on ‘Social System versus Social Anarchy’, in which she expounded on the need to introduce the initiative and the referendum in local and colonial politics. The Church debated the merits of various voting systems and forms of proportional representation, such as the Preferential Voting Bill in 1897. The limited nature of the Municipal franchise was a regular talking point over the period 1896 to 1900. Jack McCullough inveighed against the property qualifications that he claimed ‘represented only bricks and mortars and vacant sections’ and spoke about the need for a socialist municipal programme—a project the Church focused on in 1901 and dealt with in further detail in the next chapter.¹³⁹

Finally, the question of full industrial, alongside political, rights for women was addressed on a number of occasions. One meeting studied ‘Some Facts and Figures about Women as Workers in New Zealand’ and members advocated trade union ‘organisation amongst women workers, with a view to checking any attempt that might be made to introduce the ‘sweating’ system’. A different approach to the problem was taken by Stella Henderson, who based her speech ‘The Industrial Position of Women’ on the need for increased educational opportunities and argued for Government intervention, the extension of the school age, and technical education as the means of gaining greater equality for colonial women.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Other organisations with delegates were the Women’s Political Association, the Plumbers and Gasfitters’ Union, the Society for Social Ethics and the Typographical Association. For a report of the conference, including the unanimous resolutions in favour of state farm schemes, see ‘State Farms and Industrial Settlements’, *The Star*, 3 June 1898, p.1.

¹³⁸ CTLC meetings reported in *The Star*, 7 June 1898, p.4 and 16 August 1898, p.1.

¹³⁹ *The Star*, 2 April 1898, p.6, 18 December 1897, p.3, 18 March 1898, p.4.

¹⁴⁰ *The Star*, 6 May 1899, 22 January 1898. Stella Henderson personally experienced the ‘disabilities of women’. After graduating with an LLB she became a journalist and was made *Lyttelton Times* parliamentary reporter. The exclusively male press gallery did not allow her to use parliamentary press facilities, thereby causing an outcry.

Intellectual Lives: Books, Reading and Print Publications

Certainly, the range of topics featured at Socialist Church members meetings was broad, and reflected local political and economic concerns as much as wider ideological influences. However, while these questions made up the basis of most meetings, sometimes a passage from a book was read, and various socialist writers and ideas became the subject of face-to-face debate. Thus these gatherings were a site where literature and ideas were encountered and disseminated. Members of the Church, much like participants in Frankland's reading group in Wellington, were a sociable reading community.

Books read at Socialist Church meetings ranged from topical works to theoretical or more general writing about socialism. Critiques of the financial system and currency reform were frequent material: in August 1897 the Church heard chapters from books by John Lord Peck, *The Kingdom of the Unselfish* and Seymour Norton and Robert Cowdrey, *The Men of Money Island*, whilst Lord Farrer's *Studies in Currency* was studied.¹⁴¹ The work of progressive Churchmen was occasionally drawn on. For example, Louisa Blake's speech on liquor control was based on arguments in the Reverend John Burgess' *The Gothenburg Principle; or Drink Traffic Reform*.¹⁴² Henry George's writing did not feature in any meetings, though his ideas about the single tax were well known. However, Edward Bellamy's work did, but not the usually cited *Looking Backwards*, rather extracts from *Equality*.¹⁴³ Karl Marx's ideas were examined, with a meeting devoted to the section on 'Value' in *Capital*.¹⁴⁴ Essays written by Fabian Socialists were prominent, with G.B. Shaw's 'The Economic Basis of Socialism' and Sidney Webb's 'Socialism, True and False' both debated.¹⁴⁵

However, these examples do not completely represent the wide 'ecology of writers', nor the 'constellation of ideologies' that influenced Atkinson and other members of the Socialist Church. In this regard we can turn to two print publications produced in 1897.

¹⁴¹ John Lord Peck, *The Kingdom of the Unselfish*, 1889, Seymour Norton & Robert Cowdrey, *The Men of Money Island or The Primer of Finance*, 1891. Reported in *The Star* 4 August 1897, p.3, 25 August 1897, p.3, 25 October 1899, p.1.

¹⁴² Rev John Burgess, *The Gothenburg Principle: or, Drink Traffic Reform*, 1896, in *The Star* 4 November 1898, p.3.

¹⁴³ Edward Bellamy, *Equality*, 1897, reported in *The Star*, 25 March 1898, p.4.

¹⁴⁴ *The Star*, 16 October 1897, p.5.

¹⁴⁵ *The Star*, 8 January 1898, p.5, 17 June 1899, p.7.

Indeed, literature was not just read and talked about as Atkinson, drawing on his experience publishing the *Labour Prophet*, attempted to establish two viable propaganda organs—a *Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet* from February to April 1897, and a newspaper *The Socialist* from August to October 1897. Each publication had a different function and form, but both contain the clearest written statements of the aims and goals of the Socialist Church, as well as comment on local and international politics. Significantly, both featured extracts from a further variety of socialist and radical writers, and represent the pastiche, or syncretic, nature of ideological influences of the period and hint at an ‘informal canon’ of Socialist Church literature.¹⁴⁶

Three *Monthly Leaflets* were published in 1897. These were four page A5 sized pamphlets that mostly set out the objects and rationale behind establishing the Church and were used as a form of recruitment material, passed out at open-air meetings in the hope of encouraging new members.¹⁴⁷ The front page of the leaflet was consistent across issues and featured two quotes—‘Work is Worship’ and ‘Religion is Principle’—as a byline which was followed by ‘The principles by which we guide our lives constitute our Religion’. The altruistic principle behind the Church was emphasised by a quote from John Ruskin: ‘There is a true Church wherever one hand meets another helpfully, and that is the only holy or Mother Church which ever was, or ever shall be’. The objectives of the Church were set out, and were followed by an open call for members and a passage. For the first two issues the extract was a verse from a hymn from the Labour Church Hymnbook; written by John Greenleaf Whittier and Gerald Massey. The third leaflet featured an extract from William Morris’ *A Dream of John Ball* and emphasised the importance of sociability and fellowship for the Church’s work: ‘Forsooth, brothers, fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell: fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death: and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship’s sake that ye do them...’¹⁴⁸

The second page carried a longer extract from a Labour Church hymn, and again featured Morris amongst the authors, with his poem ‘The March of the Workers’.¹⁴⁹ ‘Socialist Church Doings’ were listed, detailing the topics of the months scheduled

¹⁴⁶ The term is Matthew Beaumont’s. See his ‘William Reeves and Late-Victorian Radical Publishing: Unpacking the Bellamy Library’, *History Workshop Journal*, 55 (2003), pp.91-110.

¹⁴⁷ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflets*, no.1, February 1897, no.2, March 1897, no.3, April 1897.

¹⁴⁸ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.3, April 1897, p.1.

¹⁴⁹ Originally published in *Commonweal*, February 1885, see *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.2, March 1897.

members' meetings and various miscellany were advertised—a call for readers to send in newspaper clippings 'of interest to Socialists... and so help on the cause', the availability of Socialist literature for sale and a request for a suitable meeting room.¹⁵⁰

The final pages offered further extracts and writings. Some of these short pieces were written by Church members. In 'The Truth About Socialism' 'W.M' put forward the Church's definition of Socialism: 'system and peace in industry, commerce and trade instead of chaos, anarchy and continuous...war'; and what Socialists wanted: 'to nationalise the land and all the instruments of production, distribution, and exchange' in the interests of the people of New Zealand.¹⁵¹ The article advised curious individuals to read Blatchford's *Merrie England*, *The Clarion*, and Henry Hyde Champion's *The Root of the Matter*.¹⁵² An article, 'Why Another Church?', possibly written by Atkinson, set out the reasons for forming the Socialist Church, put forward a mild rebuke of local Christian Churches for not focusing on social issues and stressed the practical and educational function of the Church's work. The purpose of the Church was 'not to haggle over knotty points of theology or metaphysics, but to bring a practical, every-day religion into the lives of the people', and was composed of 'people of all classes in life, who realise the necessity for a Church preaching the Gospel of Socialism'.¹⁵³ For the most part, however, these leaflets relied on extracts from better known authors. Blatchford's 'Socialism must be a Religion' was reprinted in the first issue. Later issues included writings from John Ruskin on 'Human Nature', 'Socialism and Public Spirit' from the Fabian Essays, an extract from J.C. Kenworthy's *From Bondage to Brotherhood* and a discussion of 'The Two Classes' by George Meredith.

The Socialist, on the other hand, had a different purpose to the *Monthly Leaflets*.¹⁵⁴ Atkinson had in mind the example of *The Clarion*. Indeed, he wrote to Blatchford at the end of 1896 and asked for permission to reprint copy for a newspaper, 'The Socialist Review, or something of that sort, an organ for the Socialist Church'.¹⁵⁵ In this regard,

¹⁵⁰ Following Blatchford's advice to keep a scrapbook of press clippings. See Robert Blatchford to Harry Atkinson, 20 March 1893, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

¹⁵¹ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.1, February 1897 p.3.

¹⁵² *ibid.* H. H. Champion, *The Root of the Matter; being a series of dialogues on social questions*, 1895.

¹⁵³ *The Socialist Church Monthly Leaflet*, no.1, February 1897, pp.3-4.

¹⁵⁴ *The Socialist*, vol.1, no.1, August 1897, vol.1, no.2, September 1897, vol. 1, no.3, October 1897 are held at the Alexander Turnbull Library. *The Socialist* was not the first socialist newspaper in the colony; *Forward* was printed for a short time in Auckland in the early 1890s.

¹⁵⁵ *The Clarion*, 20 January 1897, quoted in Nolan, *Kin*, p.62.

The Socialist aimed to be a 'clearing-house' for the nascent colonial labour movement. In the first issue, Atkinson, who edited the paper, wrote that he aimed 'to make a perceptible impression on the public mind, to be a factor in welding the progressive forces of the Colony into one strong phalanx under the banner of Socialism'.¹⁵⁶

Only three issues of *The Socialist* were printed, monthly from August to October 1897, with a cover price of one penny.¹⁵⁷ Extracts from the 'informal canon' of socialist authors featured, although less so than in the *Monthly Leaflets*—again this included Blatchford, Morris, Fabian Society material and 'Words to the New Zealand Worker' by Ben Tillett. While Atkinson used front-page editorials to elaborate his definition of Socialism, the majority of the copy consisted of 'reports from the front', with correspondents in Auckland and Wellington and opinion-pieces. 'Bubblyjock', who according to Bert Roth was Captain Manning of the inter-island ferry, wrote a regular column that commented on local, national and international events, with a particular focus on the need for municipal reform.¹⁵⁸ A wide range of topics were dealt with by other contributors, from the treatment of criminals to colonial industrial disputes, calls for reform of the monetary system and critiques of usury and capitalist 'individualism'. Most significant was the regular column by 'Fabian Black', an unknown author, whose column in the inaugural issue was the first published writing in New Zealand to argue for the establishment of an independent labour party 'keeping itself entirely distinct from either existing political party'. He also suggested that socialists concentrate on running for office in municipal campaigns and working for election on 'every local body in the colony'.¹⁵⁹

Despite Atkinson's and others' best efforts, however, the publication of *The Socialist* was as short-lived as that of the *Monthly Leaflets*. While Atkinson succeeded in giving *The Socialist* a broad, colony-wide focus, his efforts at making the newspaper financially viable were less successful. Atkinson continued to believe in the necessity of a socialist

¹⁵⁶ *The Socialist*, vol.1, no.1, August 1897, p.1.

¹⁵⁷ It is unknown how financially sound the paper was as there are no cash records for the Socialist Church for this period.

¹⁵⁸ For Bubblyjock's identity, see Roth, 'In Memoriam', p.19. The same article claims that G.W. Forbes subscribed to the newspaper, though where Roth got this information from is not referenced, and no subscription lists have been located.

¹⁵⁹ *The Socialist*, vol.1, no.1, 1897, pp.3-4. 'Fabian Black' also wrote occasionally for *Fair Play*.

newspaper and he raised the issue again, unsuccessfully, with various national bodies in 1902.¹⁶⁰

Transnational Ties: Ben Tillett in Christchurch, 1897-1898

Through reading and print publications the Socialist Church was connected to wider national and transnational networks of ideas and agitation. However, these connections were not solely maintained via the circulation of print material. The transnational flow of people was a significant phenomenon and the visit of Ben Tillett to the colony from February 1897 to July 1898 was a stimulus for action. This visit has been passed over for the most part by historians, who have instead focused on the visits of Beatrice and Sidney Webb in 1898 and the impact of syndicalist inspired sojourners and émigrés post 1900.¹⁶¹

Tillett came out to New Zealand on orders to rest and recuperate—years of work left him physically and mentally exhausted and a recently lost libel case stretched his finances. He recalled that when he arrived he was ‘as impecunious in pocket as I was starved of strength’.¹⁶² Tillett landed in Dunedin in late February and, after some time convalescing at Lake Wakatipu, arrived in Christchurch in mid March, where he stayed with the Atkinsons, re-establishing the friendship they made in Manchester.¹⁶³ A welcome social was held at the Opera House, organised by local radical groups.¹⁶⁴ Louisa Blake chaired the event, which featured socialist songs, recitation and refreshments, interspersed with speeches by Tommy Taylor, O’Byren Hoare and others.¹⁶⁵ A week later he travelled to Wellington, then Auckland and further social

¹⁶⁰ See circular letter from Atkinson to various groups, 15 February 1902 and responses in Socialist Church Records, 94-106-14/14, Roth Papers, ATL. Atkinson contacted groups in Wellington about this. See ‘Labour Journal Question’, *Evening Post*, 31 Jan 1902, p.4. A lack of finance remained the largest obstacle, and was cited by both the Christchurch SP and the Wellington TLC.

¹⁶¹ For the Webbs, see David Hamer (ed.), *The Webbs in New Zealand 1898: Beatrice Webb's Diary with Entries by Sidney Webb*, Wellington: Price Milburn for Victoria University of Wellington, 1974.

¹⁶² Tillett, *Memories and Reflection*, p.199, Jonathan Schmeer, *Ben Tillett*, 1982, pp.112-115. See also Duncan Bythell, ‘Tillett, Benjamin (1860–1943)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36522>> [accessed 16 May 2007].

¹⁶³ ‘Mr Ben Tillett: Reception in Christchurch’, *The Star*, 15 March 1897, p.4, states that Tillett was staying with ‘J.C. Atkinson’. This is an error, as later reports say he was staying at St Asaph Street, where the Atkinson residence was.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Mr Ben Tillett, ‘Social’ at the Opera House’, *The Star*, 16 March 1897, p.4. A reception committee was formed in February 1897, made up of representatives from the Socialist Church, CTLC, Boilermakers’ and Carpenters’ Unions, PLA, Ballance Liberal Association, Fabian Society, CWI and Women’s Political Association, see *The Star*, 1 February 1897, p.2.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Mr Ben Tillett, ‘Social’ at the Opera House’, *The Star*, 16 March 1897, p.4.

events were held in his honour.¹⁶⁶ After spending some time at the mudbaths in Rotorua, where he ‘boiled [him]self consistently with the rest of those taking the cure’, he returned to Christchurch in April.¹⁶⁷ However his travel took its toll and:

On reaching Christchurch I became a sick man again. Labour friends and the Atkinson family... gave me a home and a nursing that was... a four-months’ struggle between life and death.¹⁶⁸

Aided by the Atkinsons, Tillett slowly regained his strength and by mid June he was able to lecture in Christchurch and spoke about social conditions in England, as well as the development and setbacks facing the labour movement there. The religious and ethical tinge to his rhetoric remained and in most speeches he emphasised the brotherhood of man and the fellowship of socialism. He then began a speaking tour, visiting Dunedin, Southland and Wellington. However, this circuit was not undertaken solely for educational purposes, but also to strengthen his personal financial situation, with tickets selling for 6d a head; Tillett’s reputation as an eloquent and dynamic stump-speaker preceded him, and the majority sold out.¹⁶⁹ Tillett was a major stimulus for the Socialist Church’s activities—it was during this period that much of the Church’s print material was produced, and he partook in Socialist Church activities; he spoke to a members’ meeting and an open-air meeting on ‘Socialism’.¹⁷⁰

Following this he travelled to Australia from July to October 1897.¹⁷¹ On his return to New Zealand his health had improved markedly and he told the *Lyttelton Times* ‘his heart affection took a most favourable turn, and he now only suffers slightly from

¹⁶⁶ These details, and material from outside Christchurch, are from Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 29, ATL.

¹⁶⁷ Tillett, *Memories and Reflection*, p.200.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.199. He continued ‘If my gratitude could repay in love, in a overwhelming sense of obligation I would have repaid in mighty tribute to those good souls who nursed me back to life. But all the rewards of money, kind or tribute could never repay these dear souls who watched over me during the lingering months of illness’.

¹⁶⁹ These speeches were reported in daily newspapers and some were printed as pamphlets, e.g. ‘The Labour Movement at Home and Abroad: Address by Ben Tillett...’, Wellington: Stewart Printers, 1897 at HD8390 T576 L, J.C. Beaglehole Room, VUW.

¹⁷⁰ His address was published as a pamphlet, ‘Socialism: being an address to comrades given before the members of the Socialist Church and their friends in Christchurch, on 5 July 1897’, Christchurch: T.E. Fraser, 1897, at Roth Pamphlets 02-086, J.C. Beaglehole Room, VUW. The open-air meeting was advertised in *The Star*, 16 July 1897, p.3.

¹⁷¹ He returned February to June 1898. For the Australian leg of his tour, see K.S. Inglis, ‘Ben Tillett in Australia’, Melbourne University Historical Society Conference, August 1951, MSS.74/6/2/60, Papers relating to Ben Tillett (1860-1943), trade union leader and socialist [Ian Mackay papers], MSS. 74/6/2/52-80, Modern Records Centre, Warwick University.

bronchial asthma'.¹⁷² Tillett returned to New Zealand at the same time that British engineers were locked out by employers following their demands for an eight hour day and he set to work organising demonstrations in support of the locked out workers. A demonstration was held in Wellington, and in mid October the Christchurch ASE announced its intention to hold a public meeting. Atkinson was made secretary of the organising committee and preparations went ahead.¹⁷³ The demonstration, led by Tillett and held on Labour Day, was the first time that Atkinson was involved in a protest action in New Zealand.¹⁷⁴ Four hundred people marched through the streets of the city, making their way to Hagley Park. Around 6,000 people assembled to listen to speakers, including Tillett, who argued the righteousness of the engineers' eight-hour cause, saying that the 'battle the engineers were fighting was that of labour here as well as their own'.¹⁷⁵ Substantial fundraising, both locally and colony-wide took place over the course of the lockout. £46 was collected from the meeting and in Christchurch just over £244 was raised.¹⁷⁶ Later *The Star* remarked that the fund-raising activity in support of the engineers in Europe, New Zealand and the United States showed 'how real and effective the solidarity of labour is becoming'.¹⁷⁷

After the successful demonstrations, Tillett continued to give lectures, including a talk on 'The Humanity of Christ' which Atkinson chaired.¹⁷⁸ He joined in an 'Indignation Meeting' organised by the Progressive Liberals, attended by 1500 people, protesting the Legislative Council's striking out of the Old Age Pensions Bill, where he moved the abolition of the Upper House, accused the upper house of corruption, and claimed it was, like the House of Lords, 'a house of prigs, peers and parasites'.¹⁷⁹ Tillett spent most of his remaining time in the Antipodes in Australia, from February to June 1898, returning for a month to give a further lectures and partake in Socialist Church activities.

¹⁷² Extract in the *Evening Post*, 18 October 1897, p.5.

¹⁷³ *Lyttelton Times*, 19 and 20 October 1897, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 29, ATL.

¹⁷⁴ Atkinson to Roth. 15 June 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

¹⁷⁵ 'Demonstration in Christchurch', *The Star*, 25 October 1897, p.4.

¹⁷⁶ The Christchurch total is from *Lyttelton Times*, 3 February 1898 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 29. Colony-wide £517 was contributed to the engineers' cause, see the *Evening Post*, 26 January 1898, p.6.

¹⁷⁷ 'The Solidarity of Labour', *The Star*, 11 December 1897, p.5.

¹⁷⁸ Reported in *Lyttelton Times*, 13 December 1897, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 29, ATL.

¹⁷⁹ 'Old Age Pensions: Indignation Meeting', *The Star*, 22 December 1897, p.2.

This included speaking at a Socialist Church meeting on 'Preventable Poverty' attended by 80 people—the largest reported for the Church.¹⁸⁰

By the time Tillett departed New Zealand in July 1898 his physical and mental health had recovered. He told a reporter on his departure that 'he felt better, was better, fed better, slept better and weighed better' than when he arrived. The lecture circuit he undertook meant his financial situation was also more secure. Tillett praised the generous treatment he received from his hosts, and believed that there was 'a better future for trades unionism than in Australia', but he perceptively noted that 'the great stretches of the country had prevented anything like a national movement' developing.¹⁸¹ At times during his lectures around the country what his biographer Jonathan Schneer called his 'hectoring tone' came out. Occasionally he 'twitt[ed] the people with apathy' criticised the 'rotten and thieving' state of municipal affairs and argued that while labour legislation had done much to alleviate the misery and poverty prevalent in the old world, he could 'not pretend that the money vampire was absent, even from New Zealand'.¹⁸²

Indeed, for the most part Tillett's message was a searing indictment of capitalism in general, and a passionate promulgation of the economics and ethical reasons for supporting socialism. Philip Snowden much later wrote that at stump-speeches in England 'workers thronged to [Tillett's] meetings in their thousands, and they came away having seen a vision of a new Earth'.¹⁸³ Many workers in the Antipodes experienced a similar vision during his visit. But Tillett too was affected by his travels. On his return to England he became a supporter of the compulsory arbitration that he witnessed in the New World, and 'from 1899 he brought forward an annual motion at the TUC in favour of their introduction in Britain'.¹⁸⁴ During the 1890s the transnational movement and influences of people and ideas was a dynamic, two-way process.

¹⁸⁰ 'Preventable Poverty', *The Star*, 22 July 1898, p.1. He spoke on 'Industrial Democracy' at the Opera House, *The Star*, 25 July 1898

¹⁸¹ 'Mr Ben Tillett: His Impressions of New Zealand', *The Star*, 29 July 1898, p.2.

¹⁸² Schneer, *Ben Tillett*, p. 114, 'Mr Ben Tillett: Address at Wellington', *The Star*, 18 July 1898, p.3. 'Industrial Democracy', *The Star*, 25 July 1898, p.4. 'Preventable Poverty', *The Star*, 22 July 1898, p.1.

¹⁸³ Tillett, *Memories and Reflection*, p.9.

¹⁸⁴ Bythell, 'Tillett, Benjamin'. See also *Report, Trade Union Congress*, 1901, pp.67-70 quoted in James Holt, 'The Political Origins of Compulsory Arbitration in New Zealand: A Comparison with Great Britain', *New Zealand Journal of History* 10, 2 (1976), p.105.

There were other ways Atkinson maintained his connections to the British labour movement. He corresponded with Labour Church secretaries and former comrades, thus keeping in touch with developments in the Labour Church movement.¹⁸⁵ The establishment of the Socialist Church was reported in the *Labour Prophet* in 1897 and was formally recognised as one of the already diminishing number of branches.¹⁸⁶ Atkinson sent copies of *The Socialist* to editors of British socialist newspapers, and was mentioned in both *The Labour Prophet* and *The Labour Leader*, Keir Hardie's newspaper and unofficial organ of the ILP.¹⁸⁷ Atkinson also had the opportunity to communicate to the wider British labour movement, with an article on 'Social Reform in New Zealand', which was published in the 1899 edition of the *Labour Annual*. He set out demographic and economic statistics, the conditions of local working life, and the increasing role of the Government in all facets of the New Zealand economy. While he did not gloss over life in a colony in which he admitted that socialism was not 'numerically strong', he pointed out 'the general conditions of life for workers are superior to those in the older European communities'. But echoing the Progressive Liberal's radical critique of the Seddon government, he claimed that 'The immediate outlook is black: things administrative are rotten: Tammany is growing'.¹⁸⁸

Conclusion

For the most part the period from 1896 to 1899 was a successful one for the Socialist Church. Atkinson succeeded in bringing a number of new converts to the cause of the Socialism; and the Church became an important part of the local radical culture. Writing in *The Socialist*, 'Bubblyjock' stated that 'the number of genuine Socialists in New Zealand is no mean quantity. We are a growing party. We are—with the exception of a few small bodies in the large centres—unorganised and disintegrated atoms, floating around in the ether of that new spirit which is leavening society'.¹⁸⁹ The Socialist Church was an attempt to bind these atoms, and Atkinson had established the group by

¹⁸⁵ See for example the letter from the Secretary of the Bradford Labour Church to Harry Atkinson, 9 September 1901, Socialist Party Research Notes, 94-106-14/16, in Roth Papers, ATL.

¹⁸⁶ The Socialist Church was listed as a Labour Church branch in the *Labour Prophet*, October 1897, p. 128

¹⁸⁷ Receipt of *The Socialist* reported in *Labour Prophet*, October 1897, p.123

¹⁸⁸ H.A. Atkinson, 'Social Reform in New Zealand', in Joseph Edwards (ed.), *The Labour Annual 1899: A Year Book of Industrial Progress and Social Welfare*, Manchester: Labour Press Society, 1899, p.48. (Re-published in *British Political Sources: Political Party Year Books*, no. 60, The Harvester Press, Brighton, 1971).

¹⁸⁹ *The Socialist*, vol.1, no.1, August 1897, p.2.

drawing on his experience with John Trevor in Manchester. Yet the Socialist Church took a different form to Trevor's Labour Church because of Atkinson's own preference for a secularised form of association which emphasised the values of fellowship and the importance of propaganda as promulgated by one of his favourite authors, Robert Blatchford.

This chapter has detailed the social practices and associational sub-culture that members of the Socialist Church experienced during this time. The importance of preaching Socialism was a spur to holding open-air meetings in Cathedral Square, whilst an 'informal education' occurred at members' meetings, driven in part by local politics, but also through books, reading and a variety of ideological influences. This 'informal canon' was highlighted both at meetings and in the Church's publications. Yet the Church, while focused on local issues and questions, was connected to wider transnational circuits of ideas and agitation through the circulation of reading material and people—particularly by the visit of Ben Tillett, who was an important stimulus to action for the group, and whom Harry and Rose Atkinson nursed back to good health.

However, as we will see, from the turn of the twentieth century there were changing priorities for a number of members of the group and divergent pathways towards the shared goal of Socialism were becoming apparent and by 1899 Jack McCullough was vice-president of the CTLC, and his efforts turned as much towards industrial organisation as preaching socialism on the streets. Despite this there was much to be satisfied with in the progress of the early years of the Church. But as Atkinson's report in the Labour Annual suggested, the 'outlook was black'.¹⁹⁰ More than just frustrations with the Liberal Government drove this feeling. The Anglo-Boer War was clouding their horizon, and it would be the first time—but by no means the last—that Atkinson and his comrades experienced the consequences of taking a principled but unpopular anti-war stance.

¹⁹⁰ Atkinson, "Social Reform in New Zealand", p.48.

Chapter Five: The Christchurch Socialist Church, 1899-1905

On 11 October 1899 the opening shots of the Second Anglo-Boer War were fired, bringing years of simmering tension between the British Government and the Boer Governments of the Orange Free State and Transvaal to a head. Despite many months of negotiation, conflict was seen by participants on both sides as inevitable, and earlier in September New Zealand's Premier, Richard Seddon, offered troops to the British side and volunteers were recruited. By the time of the declaration of war a New Zealand contingent was ready to sail and took part in the first of a number of conflicts that saw New Zealanders serving the cause of Crown and Empire in the first half of the twentieth century. Initially, the Boer threat was seen as a minor inconvenience and local newspapers, like their British counterparts, wholeheartedly supported the drive for war. Amongst the general population in the colony a similar fervor was felt. Thousands of volunteers signed up for duty and by the time the conflict ended in May 1902 ten contingents and 6500 men served in the war in South Africa.¹

One of the few groups in New Zealand to voice opposition to the war was the Socialist Church.² The Church's attitude, expressed in resolutions passed at meetings, was unpopular with the public and some members—Atkinson recalled that it 'broke us up internally to some considerable extent'.³ However, the Church continued to be active until July 1905. This chapter examines the Socialist Church's activities from late 1899 to 1905 and discusses the Church's meetings and concerns during this period. Unlike the previous chapter, this period features the only surviving Socialist Church records—a minute book, from April to July 1901 and a cash-book, from December 1901 to July 1905. Other sources are scarcer. Fewer members' meetings and no open-air meetings were reported in *The Star*, and so the archival record, like chapter three, is for the most part based on 'broken threads'. But the Church's activities can still be traced out. Particular attention is focused on two important concerns: the question of the 'disabilities of civil servants' in 1903 and the creation of a socialist municipal programme in 1901.

¹ John Crawford and Ian McGibbon, *One Flag, One Queen, One Tongue: New Zealand, the British Empire and the South African War*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003.

² Some Churchmen as well as Tommy Taylor were amongst prominent opponents. Taylor lost his seat in the House of Representatives in the 1899 election. One reason for this defeat was his typically outspoken opposition to the war.

³ Atkinson to Roth, 12 April 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

The Second Anglo-Boer War

The outbreak of war in South Africa in October 1899, like other contemporary political issues, became a topic of interest for the Socialist Church. Two meetings were devoted to the war and a public lecture entitled 'For the Honour of the Flag' was held at the Art Gallery. The Church took a consistently anti-war stance, with speakers arguing that 'many internal reforms were required before Great Britain could consistently undertake to educate by means of aggressive warfare'.⁴ The question of support for, or opposition to, war is one that often splits socialist groups—for the Socialist Church this conflict was no different.⁵ Members of the Church did not agree unanimously on the resolutions that were passed condemning British motives and the prosecution of the war and this stance alienated a number of members. The Church also faced pressure from the Christchurch press. The usually sympathetic *Lyttelton Times* and *The Star* were both critical, with a *Times* editorial blasting members as 'Perverse Socialists'.⁶

More uncomfortable for McCullough, Atkinson and others was that support for the war at their workplace, the Addington Railway Workshops, seemed to be as strong as amongst the broader population. In 1900 a parade was organised by railway-workers to celebrate the relief of Mafeking. *The Star* reported that, except for the Jubilee Day parade, the 'procession was the largest which has ever traversed the streets of Christchurch'. Banners with pictures of the Queen and other military 'heroes' were marched through the streets, many 'Long Tom' guns, large artillery from the workshops and 'other guns... fired at intervals'. All the Liberal MHRs spoke—W.W. Collins, H.G. Ell, and G.W. Russell who told the assembled crowds that 'there had never, in the history of the colony, been such a demonstration as that which was held... a demonstration which had been inaugurated entirely by working men'.⁷ Because colonial troops in South Africa were recruited solely from volunteers, members of the Church did not suffer any penalties for their opposition worse than the glare of public opinion and

⁴ Meetings reported in *The Star*, 12 October 1899, p.1, 17 October 1899, p.4. The lecture was advertised in *The Star*, 14 October 1899, p.5.

⁵ In Britain Ben Tillett and Robert Blatchford supported the Boer War, in Blatchford's case he took his standard position of supporting soldiers. Tom Mann and Keir Hardie were in the opposition camp. See Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899-1902*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.

⁶ *Lyttelton Times*, 17, 18 October 1899 in NZSP printed material, c1901-1910, 94-106-14/20, in Roth Papers, ATL. The *Otago Witness* critically commented on Socialist Church resolutions accusing members of 'faddism', see 'Passing Notes', 26 October 1899, p.3.

⁷ 'Great Procession in Christchurch: The Addington Workshops' Demonstration', *The Star*, 22 May 1900, p.1.

harsh words from workmates. The exact number of members who left the Church is unable to be ascertained, as no membership list exists. Certainly though, the Church suffered losses. Its numbers were reduced in the early 1900s to 'the few stragglers who were trying to hold the Church in being'.⁸

However, the Boer War did have one positive offshoot for the Socialist Church—it introduced to socialism a disillusioned young serviceman, Jim Thorn. Born and educated in Christchurch, Thorn served as an apprentice moulder after aspirations for a law clerking career were destroyed by his domineering conservative father, a master butcher from whom he was later estranged. In late 1899 Thorn volunteered and served with the Third Contingent in South Africa, where he witnessed the deaths of civilians. This experience soured him, and he became a committed pacifist. Thorn returned to Christchurch and secured work as an assistant furnaceman at the Addington Railway Workshops and began training as a Presbyterian lay preacher. He was first introduced to socialist ideas when the Presbyterian literary and debating society he belonged to asked him to lead a discussion on Christian Socialism.⁹ He recalled he 'realised he knew nothing about the subject' but was lent Blatchford's *Merrie England* by his foreman, himself a socialist (perhaps McCullough). Like many others, Thorn was struck by Blatchford's prose and the arguments put forward—he 'read it and became a convert'.¹⁰

Yet Thorn's conversion was not quite complete. He retained the tinge of Presbyterian religiosity inherited from his father, and embarked on a course of reading Charles Kingsley's writings and other Christian Socialist literature. His conversion to the socialist cause came shortly afterwards at the hands of the Socialist Church, when he was invited by Jack McCullough to read a paper on 'Christian Socialism' to a members' meeting in mid 1901.¹¹ Thorn wrote on a number of occasions about this initial encounter, and provides the only extant first-hand accounts of a Socialist Church

⁸ Jim Thorn to Bert Roth, 16 July 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 24, ATL.

⁹ Jim McAloon, 'Thorn, James 1882-1956', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>> [accessed 13 August 2007]. For his later life, see Margaret Thorn, *Stick Out Keep Left*, Auckland: Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books, 1997.

¹⁰ James Thorn, 'Recollections', *The Standard*, 16 May 1946, p.4.

¹¹ James Thorn, 'The Editor Personally: On Things in General', *New Zealand Worker*, 12 October 1927, p.5. When exactly Thorn became involved is unknown. He appears in Socialist Church minute books from April 1901, but the meeting that he gave his paper to is not recorded in the same source. In a later article he suggests it was not until 1903 that he read Blatchford—this is clearly his memory playing up, see 'Recollections', *The Standard*, 16 May 1946, p.4.

meeting. He recalled '[t]he meeting was a queer mixture of atheists, Fabian Socialists and radicals, but all of them idealists':¹²

The Church met in a back room of George Barty's fruit shop... and there were about a dozen present. Having read a very excellent (as I thought) paper, I was treated to some ferocious criticism, and got the impression that I had strayed into a hornets' nest of very angry and disagreeable people. It was a sort of baptism of fire, a running of the gauntlet. I suppose it did me good to be told, as I most emphatically was, that I did not know what I was talking about.¹³

One of the members who stung him was Atkinson, 'who subjected my paper... to what I thought was an unfeeling criticism... [and] made a point which horrified my poor understanding'. After Thorn's paper, Atkinson spoke about 'the popular tendency to make a crime of unconventional thought', and used the example of how Christ was considered heterodox by Roman authorities, and thus a criminal. Thorn was shocked: 'I thought he was charging Jesus with Atheism, and regarded him as a blasphemer of the most outrageous kind!'¹⁴ However, his shock soon turned to understanding and his encounter was a learning experience that won him over. He was another of the Church's enthusiastic converts. Shortly afterwards he became a key member of the Church and of Christchurch's trades union movement and one of the leading lights of the colonial labour movement in the period leading up to the First World War.

Associational Lives: Socialist Church Activities, 1900-1905

As the above recollections suggest, Socialist Church members' meetings carried on throughout the period 1900 to 1905. However, both these and open-air meetings were held with less frequency. No open-air meetings are reported in *The Star* and members' meetings were held fortnightly. The form remained the same as that sketched out in the chapter four, though the focus of debate shifted towards more 'practical' concerns. The following section examines general topics the Church concentrated on before providing details of the two important concerns of this period—agitation to remove restrictions on civil servants' political activity and the formulation of a Socialist Municipal Programme.

¹² Jim Thorn to Bert Roth, 16 July 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 24, ATL.

¹³ James Thorn, 'The Editor Personally: On Things in General', *New Zealand Worker*, 12 October 1927, p.5.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.4.

Questions about socialism and Christianity and the relationship of socialism to other social theories attracted less attention in the period post 1900. Still, a number of papers were read on general topics pertaining to socialism, such as on 'Socialism and Co-operation'.¹⁵ There were comparative papers on social conditions in England and New Zealand in H. Clark's paper on 'Socialism', while Professor Bickerton maintained his connection to the Church and compared English and New Zealand pastoral land values.¹⁶ However, the Church was primarily driven by contemporary political events. Explanations of the Anglo-Boer War were commented on, with papers being read on 'Imperialism and Socialism' by Messrs Tasker and B.C. Smith, while George Barty spoke on 'Imperialism' and 'War'.¹⁷

Unemployment remained an issue tackled by the Church and William Ensom led a meeting on 'the unemployed difficulty', referring back to farm and industrial settlements and the conferences on the subject held in 1898.¹⁸ The Church resolved to work in conjunction with other local groups, with a 'view to promoting united political action with other bodies'.¹⁹ The problem of currency reform was also debated at meetings and proposed as one solution to the unemployment problem. Papers were read by Barty, who advocated the abolition of interest, and Mr Tasker, who suggested that 'non-interest bearing paper money should be issued direct by the state to the people'.²⁰ Continuing this theme, in 1901 the Church organised a public lecture by William Sievwright, husband of the feminist Margaret Sievwright, on 'Money as an Institution of Society'.²¹

Books and literature rarely feature in the extant sources for this period. Where they do it is in terms of their availability for distribution. McCullough told members that the American newspaper *The Appeal to Reason* was offering discounted rates and 'strongly recommended the paper', while another meeting resolved to subscribe to *The Clarion*

¹⁵ 6 August 1900 in Socialist Church- Minute Book, 1900, 94-106-07/02, in Roth Papers, ATL [Henceforth *Socialist Church Minute Book, no. 1*].

¹⁶ 13 May 1901 in Socialist Church- Minute Book, 1901, 94-106-07/03, in Roth Papers, ATL [Henceforth, *Socialist Church Minute Book, no. 2*].

¹⁷ 17 July 1900, 23 July 1900 and 6 August 1900 in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no. 1*. Unfortunately, only the topics are listed with no detail of their content.

¹⁸ 3 September 1900 in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no. 1*.

¹⁹ *The Star*, 6 September 1900, p.3.

²⁰ 17 September 1900, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no. 1*.

²¹ 'The Monetary System: A Lecture by Mr Sievwright', *The Star*, 8 January 1901, p.1. Margaret Sievwright was one of the founders of the NCW.

for a three month period.²² Only one author is mentioned explicitly, H. D. Lloyd, whose views on New Zealand in a column in the American newspaper, *The Coming Nation*, were poorly 'received and considered ridiculous and harmful'.²³ At the same meeting a letter written by James Mackay, Chief Clerk at the Department of Labour, was met with trenchant criticism.²⁴

The Church partook in other activities, including celebrations of Labour Day—a holiday granted by the Liberal Government in 1899, as 'a sweetener designed to reinforce the Lib-Lab tradition' and to celebrate the alliance between organised Labour and the Liberal party.²⁵ The Church joined many of Christchurch's labour and radical organisations with a decorated van entered into the 1900 event.²⁶ It also participated in the 1901 parade but took a more tendentious approach. Drawing on the symbolism of artists such as Walter Crane and similar to contemporary cartoons published in the *Labour Leader*, the Church's van flew a banner with imagery and rhetoric that became increasingly common in labour related protests and demonstrations throughout the twentieth century. The van 'displayed a pictorial representation of Labour at the plough, carrying Atlas-like upon his shoulders, the world, wheron sat triumphantly the customary obese capital[ist]'. The script on the banner read:

Labour is mocked,
Its just reward is stolen;
On its bent back
Sits idleness encrowned.²⁷

With 'Baby Races and Bicycle Races' as attractions this explicitly political stance did not sit well with the mainstream press. The Church's message was met with scorn by *The Star's* reporter who described it as 'a cynically primitive view of the order of things' and a 'somewhat bitter doctrine of faith'.²⁸ The Church did not participate in any further

²² 17 July 1900, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.1* and 1 April 1901, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*.

²³ 23 July 1900, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.1*. This was prior to the 1903 publication of Lloyd's first book on New Zealand, *Newest England: Notes of a Democratic Traveller in New Zealand*.

²⁴ 23 July 1900, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.1*. The minute books unfortunately provide little detail of meetings.

²⁵ Clark, 'A History of the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council', p.56.

²⁶ *The Star*, 4 October 1900, p.3.

²⁷ 'Labour Day. The Dignities and Indignities. Baby Shows and Bicycle Races', *The Star*, 10 October 1901, p.1. For a picture of the emblem, see Clark, 'A History of the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council', pp.57-58.

²⁸ 'Labour Day....' *The Star*, 10 October 1901, p.1.

parades, but as Clark points out the van 'was a precursor of the more militant and attention seeking activities labour employed in the future'.²⁹

Transnational Ties: William Ranstead and *The Clarion* Settlers

A more convivial time took place when the Church hosted a welcome social for a group of 200 British socialist immigrants recruited through the pages of *The Clarion* in 1901.³⁰ This group migration was organised and led by William Ranstead who visited New Zealand in 1899. Ranstead was well-known to *Clarion* readers as 'Farmer Bill', and was one of the main financial backers of the newspaper.³¹ Impressed with the Liberal's political and social reforms, he described the colony in *Clarion* articles as a 'Socialist Canaan': New Zealand was the Arcadia he had been searching for during a tour of Commonwealth countries. After glowingly describing the various political, social and industrial reforms of the Liberal government and the wonders of the country's landscape he proclaimed that:

Here there is no aristocracy, no snobbery. There are no very rich people and no poor. I've not met a beggar... or seen one destitute person. There are no slums here, no miserable starving women and no suffering children. Here no sober, industrious man need lack any of the comforts of life³²

His series of articles struck a chord with readers and the newspaper's offices were flooded with inquiries and requests for more information, and a decision was made for a group emigration. Two hundred settlers arrived on four ships between August and November 1900. Ranstead asked for '[s]trong, active men' and intended to establish a co-operative farm settlement on similar lines to the 'New Co-operative Colony' in Paraguay, and further influenced by the ideas of the Garden City movement.³³ Amongst the 'Clarionettes', as the group came to be known, were Fred Cooke, Will Kraig, John

²⁹ Clark, 'A History of the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council', p.57.

³⁰ *The Star*, 4 October 1900, p.3.

³¹ See Kathryn Peacocke, 'Ranstead, William 1859 - 1944', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, <URL: <http://www.dnz.govt.nz/>> [accessed 22 February 2007].

³² William Ranstead, 'The Socialist Canaan, Life and Laws in New Zealand', *The Clarion*, 6 January 1900, in Cuttings and letters re Clarion Settlement, 1900-1903, 0071-16, Ranstead, William, 1859-1944: Papers, MS Papers-0071, (MS Copy Micro 0525 Reels 1 & 2), ATL [Henceforth Ranstead Papers].

³³ William Ranstead, 'New Zealand Notes: A Federative Home', *The Clarion*, 24 March 1900 in Cuttings and letters re Clarion Settlement, 1900-1903, 0071-16, Ranstead Papers, ATL.

Gilchrist and Robert (Bob) Hogg.³⁴ Furthermore, Ranstead's articles were one of the reasons for Tom Mann's visit to New Zealand in 1901.³⁵

The Atkinsons hosted Ranstead on his 1899 visit, introducing him to their wide circle of associates and he was stirred by the radical activity of the city. In an article in which Ransted described time spent with Professor Bickerton at Wainoni, he claimed:

in no other country is there more intellectual activity...almost every other man and women was interested in politics, conducted a Church, was connected with a newspaper, or had a mission.³⁶

However, the Clarionettes hopes for a co-operative settlement were dashed shortly after their arrival, with the Government unwilling to issue a collective land title. The settlers dispersed throughout the colony and established Clarion Fellowships in Auckland, Wanganui, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin as a means of keeping in touch with each other.³⁷ Ranstead and his family settled in Christchurch, and became close friends with the Atkinsons. In 1902 he and J.G. Penniket, a member of the Socialist Church, purchased 2700 acres in Rukuhia, Waikato. If the dreams for communal settlement were dashed, Ranstead's Arcadian impulses were realised when he established a successful farm at Matangi, where he lived until he passed away in the mid 1940s. Despite this shift Ranstead continued to act as a sort of Socialist Agent-General and gave advice to many prospective immigrants.

Roth claimed that the Clarionettes' arrival meant that the number of active socialists in the Colony was doubled.³⁸ Atkinson thought their impact was ideological, as they 'added their peculiarities to ours. Amongst them were some with a strong Marxian flavour... due I dare say, to the old SDF connection in the North of England and London'.³⁹ While life in the 'Socialist Canaan' met Ranstead's expectations, a number of the Clarionette settlers did not prosper and some were politicised by their experiences. As the rhetoric of the 'Socialist Canaan' gave way to the harsher reality of

³⁴ William Reed Edge, *Clarion Settlers Per 'Kumara', 'Wakanui', 'Tokomaru', 'Paparoa', And 'Rakai In 1900*, Auckland: Self-published, 1974.

³⁵ Tom Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs*, London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1967, p.129.

³⁶ William Ranstead, 'New Zealand Notes: A Federative Home', *The Clarion*, 24 March 1900 in Cuttings and letters re Clarion Settlement, 1900-1903, 0071-16, in Ranstead Papers, ATL.

³⁷ For example, see *The Clarion*, 30 March 1901, p.99.

³⁸ Herbert Roth, 'The New Zealand Socialist Party', *Political Science* 9 (1957), p.51.

³⁹ Atkinson to Roth, June 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

colonial life, many but by no means all, Clarionettes were drivers of the establishment of the NZSP in New Zealand in 1901-02. The Clarion Fellowships were used as a launch-pad and branches of the NZSP were established in Wellington, then Auckland, Petone and Christchurch.

The foundation meeting of the Christchurch Socialist Party (SP) was held in January 1902, with a public meeting called by the CTLC, which, unlike in other centres, supported the Party's establishment.⁴⁰ Atkinson was asked to assist; however, he turned down these overtures, responding that he was busy with three organisations and had no time for commitment to a fourth.⁴¹ Roth argues that Atkinson was concerned that the SP might eclipse the Socialist Church.⁴² However, McCullough was a proponent within the CTLC and relations between the Socialist Church and the SP were close. Clark claimed that McCullough was the key 'link between these three organisations [CTLC, SP and Socialist Church] and was a channel for the dissemination of their ideas from one group to another'. This is overstating McCullough's role. Jim Thorn was involved with both the SP and the Socialist Church, as was Rose Atkinson; Harry is mentioned in newspaper reports about SP meetings and, furthermore, he began to take a greater interest in the affairs of the CTLC from 1900 onwards.⁴³

One reason for the agreeable relations between groups was a lack of doctrinaire infighting amongst individuals within the nascent socialist sub-culture in Christchurch, unlike in other areas, particularly Wellington. An indication of this is a combined public meeting the Socialist Church and the SP held in 1902, where H.G. Ell spoke on the necessity for introducing the initiative and referendum in colonial politics. As well, delegates represented the Church at a meeting the SP convened in 1905 on 'the question of electing all boards of control by the popular vote'.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ The meeting is reported in *The Star*, 22 January 1902, p.1. Among the speakers were H.G. Ell, G. Laurensen and O'Bryen Hoare. H.R. Rushbridge, President of the CTLC chaired the meeting.

⁴¹ See letter from Denew to Atkinson, 24 October 1901 and Atkinson's response in NZSP Records and Research Notes, 1901, 94-106-14/15, Roth Papers, ATL.

⁴² Roth, 'The Labour Churches and New Zealand'.

⁴³ Clark, 'A History of the Canterbury Trades and Labour Council', p.58; For Atkinson's presence see *The Star*, 16 June 1902, p.3. Rose's membership card is in NZSP Branch Records and Research Notes, 1901-1914, 94-106-14/19 in Roth Papers, ATL.

⁴⁴ *The Star*, 2 May 1902, 18 Feb 1905, p.4.

Political Projects: The Disabilities of Civil Servants

One of the major concerns of the Church in this period was the issue of ‘Disabilities of Civil Servants’—the prohibition on civil servants or government employees from engaging in political activity—which culminated in a petition campaign, presented to Parliament in 1903. This was not based on a concern for members of the civil service in Wellington, but rather personally affected a number of Church members who worked at the Addington Railway Workshops. Because of state control of the railways they were de facto Government employees, and were limited by law in their ability to be involved with political organisations.

Tommy Taylor had raised the issue as early as 1897, in a question in the House of Representatives that stated that a Government employee ‘was warned by his superiors that his connection with a certain political organization—the Socialist Church, to wit—might endanger his position in the Government service’. Taylor was at pains to suggest that no intimidation had occurred, but with the State becoming a large employer he wondered ‘whether it was wise to place any restrictions on Government employes, in the Railways or any other department, taking an intelligent part in the work of a political organization’. Seddon replied that he did not believe it was appropriate for public servants ‘to take a prominent part in political matters’, but that there should not be ‘undue restraint’ placed on them.⁴⁵ As regards such restraint, we have already seen that McCullough was threatened with the spectre of unemployment because of his public speaking in Cathedral Square.

The issue lay dormant until 1900, when the Liberal Government began to take a stricter stance on political activities and the case of J. Grattan Grey, Chief of *Hansard* staff, spurred the Church back into action. Grey wrote an article in the *New York Times* in November 1899 which was critical of colonial involvement in the Boer War and of British motives. He wrote to Seddon claiming that ‘jingoistic hysteria [had] inundated these colonies’ and that Britain was forced into the conflict by ‘a band of greedy and grasping capitalists’.⁴⁶ On 17 July 1900 the House Reporting Committee recommended that he

⁴⁵ Most likely he had in mind Jack McCullough. See *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, October 20–November 12 1897, p.540.

⁴⁶ The article was published in *New York Times*, 26 November 1899. *The Star*, 26 March 1900, p.3 has further details, including correspondence between Seddon and Grey on the issue. Grey was employed as Chief of Staff on a reduced salary, on account of his being allowed to undertake other journalism work. See also the *Evening Post* editorial on the matter, 20 July 1900, p.4.

be dismissed, and his employment was terminated shortly thereafter.⁴⁷ Earlier in the year, the Socialist Church discussed the issue and framed their response in terms of freedom of speech and the rights of citizenship. A meeting in April 1900 resolved that ‘every opportunity and encouragement should be held out to all persons to interest themselves in political and social questions and to express their opinions... freely’, and that no Government employee ‘should be placed under any political disabilities not applying to other citizens’.⁴⁸ On the news that Grey was facing the Parliamentary committee the Church resolved that ‘any censure on Mr Grey would be tantamount to denying to the people of New Zealand in a measure that freedom of speech which is the bulwark of their liberties’.⁴⁹ Implicit in this was the wider issue of a critique of the Boer War, and the hypocrisy of defending British political liberties in South Africa when the Government at home was eroding political and civil rights. And it implied a criticism of the conduct of the Liberal Government itself—particularly, allegations of ‘Tammanyism’ or cronyism, having stacked the Civil Service with allies and politically driven appointments.⁵⁰

The Socialist Church’s campaign culminated in 1903 with a petition campaign sparked off by another controversial sacking from the Civil Service. A. J. McCurdy was a Post and Telegraph Department telegraph operator who also acted as secretary of the Upper Hutt branch of the Farmer’s Union. In mid August 1902 he was requested to resign his secretaryship. He refused and was dismissed by the Postmaster-General, Sir Joseph Ward, for breach of duty and unfit conduct in February 1903. While the Church had little sympathy for the aspirations of the Farmer’s Union this incident again highlighted the precarious position of a number of members, and the Church protested McCurdy’s dismissal. A letter from the Church’s secretary was sent to Ward in February, telling him that ‘all public spirit may be crushed out of our people by the conditions under which they are obliged to earn their livelihood’. Ward replied that the issue had been considered by Cabinet, but he was ‘unable to admit that the desired alteration of the

⁴⁷ *The Star*, 18 July 1900, p.4.

⁴⁸ 11 April 1900 in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.1*

⁴⁹ Reported in *The Star*, 19 July 1900, p.3 and 12 July 1900, *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.1*. A related resolution was moved by Harry Chaplin, and passed unanimously, that all Government employees should be brought under the Arbitration Act, 11 June 1901, *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*.

⁵⁰ This was a theme of Tommy Taylor’s first stint in Parliament, 1893-1899. For example, see T.E. Taylor, *The Shadow of Tammany: The Truth about the New Zealand Police Force, its conditions and its needs*, Christchurch: T.E. Fraser, Printer, 1898. See also Atkinson’s comments in the *Labour Annual* in chapter four above.

existing system would be in the best interests of the service'.⁵¹ Unsatisfied with this response, the Church decided to petition Parliament to hear its complaints.⁵² The petition read:

The Petition of the below-named Trades and Labour Unions and other Associations of Residents in the Colony of New Zealand

Humbly Sheweth that Your Petitioners feel keenly the unwisdom and injustice of maintaining those Rules and Regulations under which members of the Civil Service of the Colony and other officers and servants in the Government Service, suffer disabilities in respect to the free exercise of their rights of citizenship, and that Your Petitioners are of opinion that every encouragement should be held out to all citizens to act an honourable part in the Social and Political life of the community.

Your petitioners Humbly Pray that Your Excellency in Council assembled will so use the powers conferred on you in the various Acts dealing with these matters as to expunge from the Rules and Regulations of the Civil Service and other Departments of the Public Service, every part of such Rules and Regulations as is calculated to hamper, or confine, or direct, or in any way interfere with the actions of public officers or servants, except during those hours when such officers or servants are engaged in the actual duties of their several Departments.⁵³

Copies of the petition were circulated around kindred organisations and, surprisingly, the Progressive Liberal Association refused support.⁵⁴ The *Lyttelton Times* was also vocally opposed.⁵⁵ Fifteen forms were collected, with 60 signatures in total representing members from a range of radical bodies and local trades unions.⁵⁶ These were presented to Parliament over July and August 1903 and the Petitions Committee reported back in October with no recommendation to make.⁵⁷ As Roth suggests, 'the question was quietly buried', if for a few years.⁵⁸ However, Sir Joseph Ward eventually did terminate the employment of a Socialist Church member because of his political

⁵¹ Socialist Church letter to Sir Joseph Ward, 9 February 1903, published in *Lyttelton Times*, 6 July 1903 extract in 'Socialist Church Petition 1903' notes in Socialist Church Records 1897-1903, 94-106-14/14, Roth Papers, ATL.

⁵² For the significance of petitions for social history see Lex Heerma van Voss, 'Introduction: Petitions in Social History', *International Review of Social History* 46, Supplement (2001), pp.1-10.

⁵³ A copy of the petition form is in Socialist Church Records 1897-1903, 94-106-14/14, Roth Papers, ATL.

⁵⁴ *Lyttelton Times*, 3 July 1903, quoted in 'Socialist Church Petition 1903' notes, Socialist Church Records 1897-1903, 94-106-14/14, Roth Papers, ATL.

⁵⁵ See editorial, 'Political Liberty', *Lyttelton Times*, 31 July 1903 in Socialist Church Records 1897-1903, 94-106-14/14, Roth Papers, ATL.

⁵⁶ Signatures were obtained from members of the Coachbuilders Union, A.S.R.S., Metal Workers Union, Tinsmiths Union, Grocers Assistants, Furniture Trades Union, Painters Union, Tanners and Fellmongers Union, C.W.I., A.S.E., Socialist Church and Socialist Party.

⁵⁷ 'Political Notes', *Evening Post*, 10 October 1903, p.5.

⁵⁸ Herbert Roth, 'Petition to Parliament: Political Rights for Public Servants', *Public Service Journal* (November 1956) in Socialist Church Records 1897-1903, 94-106-14/14, Roth Papers, ATL.

activities. Jack McCullough was fired from his position at the Addington Railway Workshops in 1907; this became an important factor in his election as Workers' Representative on the Arbitration Court.

Political Projects: A Socialist Municipal Programme

The other major concern for the Church for the period post 1900 was the drafting of a socialist municipal programme which tied into a general agitation for the democratic reform of local government. Indeed, the state of colonial municipal affairs was often remarked on by visitors from across the socialist spectrum. For example, Beatrice and Sydney Webb commented, in the privacy of their diary, on the 'antiquated franchise', noting that the Liberal reforms of the 1890s did not extend from central to local government.⁵⁹ Ben Tillett's strongest criticisms of colonial society during his time in New Zealand were predominantly directed at the lack of democracy in local government and especially the limited nature of the municipal franchise.

Agitation for the extension of the municipal franchise based on full adult suffrage rather than the contemporary property qualification had been a going concern for the Socialist Church from the mid 1890s, and from 1901 members looked to put forward concrete proposals for municipal reform. This project illustrates the circulation of ideas; how the Church was one node in wider transnational networks, but also indicates an intensely localised form of political activity. Municipal politics was an important arena of reform in the early part of the twentieth century throughout the British colonies, North America and Europe because, as Shelton Stromquist has pointed out: 'city politics addressed immediate, tangible needs of workers and their families that were common to urban, industrial life irrespective of national boundaries'.⁶⁰

Although most attention was paid to the socialist municipal programme during the months of 1901, similar issues were raised at members' meetings throughout the period 1900 to 1905. In July 1900 Mr Bowlker spoke on 'What a Councillor (Town or City) Might Do', followed by a resolution 'that the municipalities should as rapidly as possible become the owners of all lands and houses within their jurisdiction', to prevent

⁵⁹ See Hamer, *The Webbs in New Zealand*, pp.45-47.

⁶⁰ Shelton Stromquist, 'Thinking Globally; Acting Locally': Municipal Labour and Socialist Activism in Comparative Perspective, 1890-1920', *Labour History Review* 74, 3 (December 2009), p.233.

overcrowding, insanitary conditions and rack-renting.⁶¹ In November of that year a resolution took a strong stance against the possibility of the Christchurch City Council selling publicly owned land, saying that '[i]t trusts that no further attempt will ever be made to sell from the people the land that should be theirs for all time'.⁶²

However, the main push for municipal reform came at a meeting in April 1901 when the Church resolved that a municipal programme should be drafted. Over the course of 1901 the programmes of the Progressive Liberal Association, the Christchurch City and Suburban Burgesses Association and the CTLC were studied.⁶³ The Church was particularly impressed with the platform of the CTLC and the Burgesses Association and complimentary letters were sent to both bodies 'wishing them success in their efforts to arouse public interest'.⁶⁴ The Church hosted visitors from other parts of the colony who spoke of municipal activity in their cities.⁶⁵ But, while the municipal programme was a local and colonial concern, it was also driven by international influences. Members studied the platform of the Socialist League of Sydney, and read extracts from a Californian newspaper, *The Challenge*.⁶⁶

The programme adopted by the Church was wide-ranging but primarily concerned with improved and expanded municipal facilities and the amendment of laws governing their powers. Planks included that local bodies should provide rental properties; the establishment of city bakeries, baths and laundries; provide health and free hospital services; and be able to operate any other form of business for the 'public benefit or well-being'. It called for all public services to become public property and be administered by elected boards and for the private contract system for Council works to be ended. The Church suggested the reform of other local bodies, such as Charitable Aid and Hospital Boards.⁶⁷ The municipalisation of land was also proposed: local bodies

⁶¹ 23 July 1900 in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*.

⁶² *The Star*, 29 November 1900, p.3.

⁶³ 1 April 1901 and 14 April 1901 in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*.

⁶⁴ *The Star*, 18 April 1901, p.2.

⁶⁵ E. G. Atkinson from Whanganui and R. Slater from Dunedin attended the meeting of 13 May 1901, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*. Further encouragement was gained by David McLaren's election as an Independent Labour Councillor in Wellington City, see 28 April 1901, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*.

⁶⁶ 1 April 1901, 28 April 1901, in *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*. The Referendum and Initiative was an issue championed in the Pages of *The Clarion* by Alex Thompson ('Dangle'), and supported by Blatchford. See Bullock, 'Socialists and Democratic Form in Britain', pp.87-97.

⁶⁷ The Church later pushed for the representation of women on the Charitable Aid and Hospitals Boards, see *The Star*, 10 December 1902, p.3.

should be able to acquire all land and buildings within their jurisdiction and exercise compulsory powers of purchase.

Members of the Church further believed that the democratic form of municipal politics was in dire need of radical reform. The extension of the franchise was demanded for municipal elections. To democratise the municipal sphere, the initiative and referendums were promoted for local government. These issues echo *The Challenge* and British socialist arguments in support of similar measures.⁶⁸ To further this campaign, the Church sent out questions to parliamentary, municipal and local body candidates throughout the early 1900s. One set, sent to candidates in a Christchurch parliamentary by-election in 1901, is extant and broadly outlines the concerns of the Socialist Church; it contains both legislative and democratic reforms, which were along the same lines as the platform outlined above.⁶⁹ The responses to these questions are unknown, although a later report in 1903 suggests that not all candidates took kindly to such surveys: one candidate replied that 'a public man is supposed to represent all classes of the community', while another replied that he 'consider[ed] it almost immoral to press for parrot-like replies'.⁷⁰

Municipal politics continued to be a concern for the Socialist Church after 1901. The Church worked with other organisations in Christchurch, such as the Burgesses Association and co-operated with the CTLC in holding public meetings in Christchurch before the 1903 municipal elections.⁷¹ The Church also had delegates present at a Socialist Party meeting held in 1905 'to discuss the question of electing all Boards of control by the popular vote'.⁷² Tommy Taylor was also involved. Indeed, the final source about the Socialist Church is a 1905 article that relates an address by Taylor on 'Municipal Enterprise', in which he spoke in favour of the municipalisation of the Christchurch gasworks, an idea that the Mayor was in favour of investigating. *The Star*, presaging later developments, reported on the meeting and, in an editorial, suggested that Taylor's 'utterances showed that if circumstances permitted him to embark in local politics, he would be just as keenly progressive as he has proved himself to be in the

⁶⁸ The reform of local bodies was a topic debated in Britain at the time, see Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement*, pp.146-152.

⁶⁹ These questions 8 July 1901, in *Socialist Church Minute Book*, no.2.

⁷⁰ *The Evening Post*, 4 February 1903, p.4.

⁷¹ CTLC meeting report, *The Star*, 6 April 1903, p.3.

⁷² *The Star*, 18 February 1905, p.4.

wider field of State politics'.⁷³ Taylor was later elected Mayor of Christchurch in 1911, supported by the local labour movement in his campaign.

The Socialist Church's concern with municipal politics was constant throughout the life of the organisation, though emphases changed over time. From 1896 to 1899 the main concern was that of extending the municipal franchise. From 1899 onwards the Church sought to put forward a coherent programme as the basis for a possible socialist municipal platform. However, interest in the reform of municipal democracy remained—agitation about the franchise continued to be a concern, as did the push for the initiative and referendum in a quest for *Clarion* influenced 'Real Democracy'.⁷⁴ These activities go some way to recasting the predominant historiographical characterisation of the Church as 'idealistic' and illustrate concrete political activities.

Why the Church focused on municipal politics rather than supporting independent labour representation in parliament is difficult to answer due to the paucity of sources available for the period. One explanation is an acknowledgement of the strength of the Liberal-Labour coalition at the level of parliamentary politics and particularly the prominence of left-wing Liberals locally. A stronger argument is that municipal politics were a focus because, to put it simply, they did matter. They were an everyday concern in a localised sphere where the attainment of reform was possible without the need for party machinery or financially expensive political campaigns. As Stromquist suggests, municipal political activity 'embodied a politics of local autonomy and grassroots democracy ... an assertively local politics that simultaneously defined itself in internationalist terms'.⁷⁵ The Socialist Church's municipal programme was characterised by an internationalist dimension. Planks were influenced by transnational intellectual currents, and its activities should be seen as part of this wider context, even if formal institutional linkages are not apparent.

New Zealand labour historians have tended to bypass the 1890s and early years of the twentieth century and the municipal concerns of the time, instead focusing on the development of the parliamentary Labour Party, especially after 1908. Yet prior to 1908,

⁷³ 'Municipal Enterprise', *The Star*, 19 May 1905, p.2. See also the City Council's response in *The Star*, 12 and 13 June 1905.

⁷⁴ Barrow and Bullock, *Democratic Ideas and the British Labour Movement*, pp.43-56.

⁷⁵ Stromquist, 'Thinking Globally; Acting Locally', p.235. Stromquist gives prominence to Jim Thorn's role as a transnational agent.

and even 1916, socialists and radicals attempted to prove themselves worthy of governing at the town and city, or municipal, level first. These municipal projects laid the groundwork for later wide-ranging colonial political movements by establishing depth and grass-root connections within the local community.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Michael Savage, 'Space, Networks and Class Formation', in Neville Kirk (ed.), *Social Class and Marxism: Defences and Challenges*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996, pp. 58-86. A number of Christchurch Labour MPs served apprenticeships on the City Council including Elizabeth McCombs and Dan Sullivan.

Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion

But again I would say there are no absolutists anyhow, anywhere. It is the degree of nearness or its remoteness from certain aspects of things that decides the opinions of any of us regarding anything. And our own minds are a bit treacherous at times or liable to be misunderstood by others.¹

This final chapter is interpretative and focuses on broader questions and themes and shows how a reconsideration of the lived experience of Atkinson and his wider circle provides a lens to investigate some important aspects of colonial New Zealand radicalism and socialism, outside the usual foci of trade unions, the workplace and formal labour politics. It begins with an examination of the membership of the Socialist Church and draws out its 'social texture' from the limited sources available. This is followed by a discussion of the 'intellectual lives' of Socialist Church members; how the Church was connected to wider transnational networks and thus facilitated the 'flattening of space' through the distribution of literature and reading material. Following this is an exploration of associational life in 'radical Christchurch'. It is argued that bonds of friendship were a key part of the nascent socialist sub-culture that developed in the city, as was a more general associative sociability. The Church's relationship with other local radical and socialist groups is explored, as is the marked mixed membership of various groups. The chapter concludes with some of the reasons for the decline and demise of the Socialist Church in 1905, and an overview of Atkinson's activities after 1908.

The 'Social Texture' of the Socialist Church

A number of historians have tried to unravel the 'social texture' of the Socialist Church's membership.² There are two positions in the literature. Both Bert Roth and Elizabeth Plumridge suggest that the Church was primarily a middle-class organisation, while Valerie J. Smith claims that its membership was predominantly working-class.³ This question is a difficult one to answer, as no lists survived. However, a pointer to the class backgrounds of members can be garnered from comments Atkinson made to Roth

¹ Atkinson to Roth, 23 January 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

² The exact membership is difficult to gauge, due to the lack of sources. Jim Thorn claims a dozen people at the time he became involved, while the largest reported meeting, Tillett's address to the members of the Church, drew eighty.

³ Roth, 'The Labour Churches and New Zealand'; Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch', p.246 and 'The Necessary but Not Sufficient Condition', p.138; Smith, 'Gospel of Hope or Gospel of Plunder', p.38.

concerning the nature of New Zealand society: 'the mingling of classes is essential to the type of progress & in NZ we have been perhaps more than ordinarily fortunate'.⁴

Roth also asked about the composition of the labour movement in Christchurch and was especially interested in the role 'foreigners' played. This line of questioning irritated Atkinson, who believed Roth was reflecting common newspaper representations of the labour movement consisting of 'foreign agitators'. Indeed, Atkinson made a remark that should give caution to historians who have perhaps over-stated the role of foreign migrants, particularly during the 'militant storm' around 1908: 'A good many of the "foreigners"... did not become socialists until they had been here some time & got the feel of things'.⁵ In the Christchurch movement:

Amongst those helping in the propaganda by the weight of their payments, or presence in one group or another, or by correspondence were people who were middleaged [sic] and elderly, a few enthusiasts much younger doing jobs at distributing leaflets or selling pamphlets or books. Those were almost entirely New Zealanders through & through, but I remember we did have a German supporter or two, one of whom is still to the fore & staunch in the faith, but younger than me. There was a New Zealand socialism.⁶

With this in mind, some impressionistic characterisations of the Socialist Church's membership can be made. Drawing from various sources, such as newspaper reports of the Church's activities, print publications and the cash and minute books, 34 individuals were involved with the Church from 1896 to 1905. Of these 16 have been identified in the table overleaf.

⁴ Atkinson to Roth, 19 May 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁵ Atkinson to Roth June 1953 in *ibid*: 'The view put to you "that the members of the socialist groups were almost entirely foreigners" etc etc, is I think that of one falling in with that opinion expressed by a cynical newspaper press at the time when a few notable people who came here mainly from Australia were making their voices heard on behalf of our bottom dogs & of course were considered an infernal nuisance. I think our friend Semple will have been one of the more powerful of these'.

⁶ Atkinson to Roth, June 1953 in *ibid*.

Name	Age *	Born	Occupation	Education
Harry Atkinson	29	Taranaki	Fitter, ARW	Secondary
Rose Atkinson	22	Manchester		
George Barty	47		Greengrocer	
Louisa Blake	54		Music Teacher	
Harry Chaplin			ARW	
William Ensom	36		Manager, NZ Express Co.	
Mr Fisher (probably J. Fisher)			Brewery Employee	
Elizabeth Henderson	24	Kaiapoi		Secondary
Stella Henderson	26	Kaiapoi	Journalist	MA (1893), LLB (1897)
Henry Hookham	72	London	Retired Farmer	
Will Kraig	26	England	Journalist	
James McCombs	24	County Leitrim, Ireland	Draper's Assistant	
Jack McCullough	36	Belfast	Tinsmith, ARW	Primary
David Pritchard	18	Scotland	Shoemaker	
Mr Tasker			ARW	
Jim Thorn	19	Christchurch	Furnaceman, ARW	Secondary

* Age at first mention in Socialist Church source material

Not identified:

Mr Carlile, W. Gibbons, Miss Hookham, J.F. Hursthouse, Mr J Knott, Mr McAlister, J. McLennan, Mrs McLennan, A.G. Muir, Mr Riddle, Mr W Reitz jr, W. Sykes, James Bowlker, H Clark, J.G. Penniket, W. Powell, M Slater, B.C. Smith, F.S. Yates.

From this we can see that the ‘social texture’ of the Socialist Church lies part-way between characterisations of the Church as middle or working-class; the membership was made up of *both* skilled working-class and lower middle-class with a smattering of individuals who could be described as middle-class. Members came from a range of occupations and class backgrounds, with varying ages and levels of education. Unlike the Labour Church, there was also a substantial female membership who played active roles in the Socialist Church’s work; the Socialist Church was not just a working-man’s group.

Intellectual lives: Connections and Distribution

Another important question this thesis has examined is: how informed of, and connected to, were colonial New Zealand socialists of overseas issues, debates and developments? Again, there are two contrasting arguments. Plumridge claims that in Christchurch the awareness of international thought and ideas was ‘hazy’ and that there was a ‘paucity in the availability of up to date information’.⁷ Olssen, on the other hand, has argued that rank and file members of the New Zealand labour movement in a slightly later period were ‘exceptionally well informed about developments elsewhere’.⁸

It should be clear that the broad argument of this thesis concurs with Olssen and recent scholarship on this topic.⁹ However, recent historiography has almost completely focused on the movement and effects of ‘militant’ ideas and individuals—particularly the flow of North American and Australian ideologies and ideologues after around 1905. This thesis has instead focused on an earlier period, stressed British connections and has emphasised informal transnational relationships. Indeed, Atkinson’s trip to Manchester and his activities upon return exemplifies the transnational flow of people and their effects; particularly the diffusion of associational forms with his establishment of the Socialist Church. Furthermore, Atkinson maintained informal connections and communication with various British socialists and Australian organisations.¹⁰ This thesis

⁷ Plumridge, ‘Labour in Christchurch’, p.262.

⁸ Olssen, ‘Some Reflections’, p.31.

⁹ Bennett, *‘Rats and Revolutionaries’*; Shor, ‘Left Labor Agitators in the Pacific Rim’, pp.148-163.

¹⁰ For example, the Church sent congratulations to the Queensland Labor Party following its success in elections in 1901 and communicated with the Sydney Labour Council emphatically denying published reports that there was no unemployment in New Zealand. See 1 April 1901, *Socialist Church Minute Book, no.2*, and *The Star*, 30 May 1902, p.2.

has also featured the visits and influence of Ben Tillet and, to a lesser degree, William Ranstead.

However, a more important focus has been on the transnational dissemination of ideas and reading material. There have been more studies of radical reading in the United Kingdom than in colonial New Zealand, mainly due to a lack of sources in the latter. Nevertheless many authors have suggested what was read in New Zealand and have singled out some important ideological influences. Barry Gustafson and Kerry Taylor call attention to the importance of *The Clarion* during the 1890s, and this thesis concurs with their emphasis.¹¹ It also agrees with Valerie J. Smith who contends that the ideological influences of the period 1890s to 1906 were predominantly British in origin.¹² On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Plumridge is more focused on whether Marx was well-known amongst Christchurch radicals. She states that 'vague Christian Socialist ideas were pervasive' and that there was a 'sketchy knowledge of the body of socialist theory as a whole and even less of Marx in particular'.¹³ A weakness of these earlier accounts is that they are for the most part impressionistic, or based on later notions of what *should* have been read, rather than empirical studies, of what *was* read.

This thesis has shown how the Socialist Church played an important role in Christchurch importing and distributing socialist and radical literature. A recurring item in the Cash Book for the period 1901 to 1905 is money spent on pamphlets and newspapers—*The Clarion* and later *Commonweal*.¹⁴ Literature was also distributed at members' meetings, advertised for sale, handed out at open-air meetings and was a potent fundraiser.¹⁵ Atkinson too was a conduit, and passed on and introduced literature to other people. For example, he set Jack McCullough off on a course of sustained reading in the mid 1890s. This knowledge, or informal curriculum, was then passed on to other members of the Socialist Church.

¹¹ Kerry Taylor, 'Worker's Vanguard or People's Voice? The Communist Party of New Zealand from Origins to 1946', PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1994, p.24. Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence*, pp.24-28.

¹² Smith, 'Gospel of Hope or Gospel of Plunder', pp.2-3.

¹³ Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch', p.261. To digress somewhat, Plumridge has fallen into the trap of presuming that Marx should have been more well known in the 1890s and early part of the twentieth century than he actually was. Marx was one of a vast array of intellectuals at this time, by no means as influential as he would later become. As Kirk Willis has pointed out, Marx's reception in the United Kingdom was underwhelming in the late nineteenth century. See Kirk Willis, 'The Introduction and Critical Reception of Marxist Thought in Britain, 1850-1900', *The Historical Journal* 20, 2 (1970), pp.417-459.

¹⁴ Socialist Church- Cashbook, 1901-1905, 94-106-07/04, in Roth Papers, ATL.

¹⁵ Other groups, such as Our Father's Church, had book depots.

By distributing and dissemination literature, members of the Church undertook the 'flattening of space' through the circulation of ideas. The Church was a 'channel of dissemination', forming one node in an 'Anglophone transoceanic zone' of radicalism, connecting Antipodean socialists with comrades, debates and developments in the Old World.¹⁶ Indeed, Neville Kirk has illustrated the development of socialist and radical networks of communication and has argued that *The Clarion*, along with the *Labour Leader* and *Justice* 'constituted a vibrant forum for socialist debate across a wide range of issues', not only for British socialists, but for readers throughout the 'Anglo-World of Labour'.¹⁷ This is because socialist newspapers not only focused on domestic British politics, but also had international correspondents and a transnational foci. All these periodicals published letters and articles written both by local socialists living in the colonies and sojourning socialists visiting and observing colonial conditions. These newspapers thus 'highlight the sense of an active and lively flow and interchange of personnel, ideas and debate'.¹⁸ By importing and distributing *The Clarion* and other pamphlets, books and periodicals into New Zealand, the Socialist Church was part of these broader links and processes, and played a role in the two-way exchange of ideas, ideologies, debates and tactics.

While this thesis argues the Socialist Church was one node in the transnational dissemination of literature, the distribution of books, periodicals and pamphlets suggests other investigative tasks beyond the simple flow of material goods. This includes a consideration of the difficult question of the 'intellectual lives' of colonial socialists and the make up of the 'constellation of ideologies' that swayed their beliefs and actions. In this regard, this thesis has emphasised a variety of authors and reading material that made up the mental world of Harry Atkinson and members of the Socialist Church, to try to reconstruct individuals' 'webs of beliefs'. Chapter two focused on Atkinson's reading in Wellington in the early 1890s, moving beyond the commonly ascribed influence of Henry George and Edward Bellamy. Chapters four and five explored the influence of British writers such as Robert Blatchford, William Morris, John Ruskin and others, an admixture of radicalism, plebeian democracy and romanticism with an ethical dimension. While British authors were predominantly favoured, the

¹⁶ John H. M. Laslett, 'Linking the Old World with the New: Recent Studies of Labour Migration, Race and Political Protest in America and the British Empire', *Labor History* 46, 2 (May 2005), p.189.

¹⁷ Neville Kirk, 'The Conditions of Royal Rule: Australian and British Socialist and Labour Attitudes to the Monarchy, 1901-11', *Social History* 30, 1 (2005), p.78.

¹⁸ Kirk, *Comrades and Cousins*, pp.150.

socialists of the period had choices from a variety of other writers. Indeed, another piece of evidence of the range is a reading list published in the second issue of *The Socialist* entitled 'Literature for Socialists and Students of Sociology'. Alongside Blatchford's *Merrie England*, *The Clarion*, Clarion Press Pamphlets, *Fabian Essays* and *Tracts* and Labour Press Books and Pamphlets, was a suggestion to read Hyndman's *Evolution of Modern Capitalism*, Engel's *Socialism: Scientific and Utopian* and Marx's *Capital*.¹⁹ Clearly there was an awareness of Marxian and other types of socialism, and the 'informal' curricula of colonial New Zealand socialists was a broad array of thinkers, ideas and schools of thought.

Reading influenced the work of the members of the Socialist Church in two ways. Individually, books could inspire conversion. *Merrie England* is a most commonly cited work in this respect, while the ethical ideals promulgated by various writers helped to sustain their faith in socialism. Jim Thorn gives a sense of the effect of Robert Blatchford's writing. Precisely because Blatchford's work was intentionally 'un-theoretical' and written in plain English:

[h]is appeal was to ordinary simple decent feeling. Sweetness and mercy, love of beauty, tender understanding, laughter, good books and poetry, pity for the bottom dog and for men and women brutalised by poverty and oppression—it was in this spirit that he attacked the cruelties of capitalism and showed that Socialism was the only answer to the question as to how a nation's resources might be used to the best advantage of its citizens.²⁰

Collectively, as has been shown, reading material was studied and discussed, providing visions of a more just society and ideas for reform. We have seen the influence of overseas material in the Socialist Church's municipal programme, while an ongoing agitation for referendums echoed similar arguments in the pages of *The Clarion*. Reading material also connected people to a wider world of socialism, and had an effect of diminishing the 'tyranny of distance' felt by socialists living on the edges of empire. The dissemination of literature remained an important aspect of Atkinson's work and he continued to import and distribute material throughout the first half of the twentieth century. During World War One 'the Atkinson home in Carlton Mill Road was turned into a veritable storehouse of books and pamphlets'.²¹

¹⁹ 'Literature for Socialists and Students of Sociology', *The Socialist*, vol.1, no.2, September 1897, p.4.

²⁰ James Thorn, 'Robert Blatchford: An Appreciation', *The Standard*, 6 January 1944, p.4.

²¹ Roth, 'In Memoriam', p.20. Atkinson provided Thorn with material to sell as Thorn toured the country agitating against conscription during World War One, see the letters between the pair from early 1916 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 24, ATL.

Associational Lives: A Socialist Sub-Culture?

While the Church was a 'channel of dissemination' for literature after 1896, for Atkinson and his colleagues reading was not just a private, individual practice but a collective sociable practice; shared forms of knowledge and meaning were bonds that connected people within a nascent socialist sub-culture. Thus, this thesis draws attention to the role that the Socialist Church played in the development of a 'tightly-bound' socialist sub-culture in Christchurch from the 1890s onwards, supplanting earlier local artisanal radicalism and Liberal progressivism. Furthermore, this relates to the question: what was it like to be a member of the Socialist Church?

In the period surveyed the Socialist Church and other associated groups developed a distinctive 'world' of their own in Christchurch, with differentiated associational forms and social practices, and particular activities and focal points comprised of political and intellectual concerns which occurred in certain spaces. The nascent socialist sub-culture of which the Church was part was not marked by more typical shapes and forms, such as distinctive clothing, or slang; rather, it was a distinctive associational world. Chapters four and five have charted the varied social practices that members of the Socialist Church partook in. These occurred in different radical spaces; some public, such as open-air meetings, demonstrations and protests, and some in more private confines, such as members' meetings. Indeed, the two main activities of the Church marked its spatial boundaries. One was public speaking in the 'People's Reserve', Cathedral Square. This public activity was part of a world of dissent and demonstration, and the Church and allied groups organised and participated in protests, parades and other public events. The second was more intimate, face-to-face encounters which occurred during the Church's members' meetings, where books, ideas, and political concerns were debated and discussed. What Scates has called a 'sociable community of witnesses' gathered at various venues and took part in the transmission and reception of traditions, ideas and meanings, and sometimes partook in the singing of Socialist hymns and songs.²² A 'sociable community of readers' consumed and circulated informal socialist curricular or knowledge—reading was a bond, through the transmission of ideas and traditions, and the generation of shared values and meanings. The focal concerns of the Church were intensely localised, but influenced by international developments and circuits of people and material.

²² Scates, *A New Australia*.

Yet this sub-culture was not all politics and propaganda. Atkinson told Roth, harkening back to the more jovial aspect of 1890s British Socialism:

A phrase in common use when I was younger in the English socialist [movement] was—'I must justify my existence'. That we should have 'worthy play' is as important I think as 'worth while work'.²³

Socials were held on occasion by the Church to celebrate various anniversaries, such as the third anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Church, and the anniversary of the Labour Church in Manchester.²⁴ Associational activity was a key aspect of 'New Life' socialism, and writers such as William Morris and Robert Blatchford stressed the importance of fellowship and brotherhood. However, Chris Waters has argued that the 'New Life' socialism of the 1890s and early twentieth century was a 'political culture for the lonely' and attracted members of the working class who were alienated by the recreational pursuits (booze, gambling, sports) of their peers.²⁵ Certainly, with their sustained political and associational activity members of the Socialist Church were 'exceptional' in comparison with the majority of other members of the colonial working class. Although this led to their detachment from contemporaries, it also resulted in strong bonds of friendship being developed. Indeed, what is striking about Atkinson's sociability was his involvement with a wide circle of workmates, confidantes and friends.

Bonds of friendship were another key part of the nascent socialist sub-culture in Christchurch and the Socialist Church was a site of fellowship and comradeship. Nolan has that argued the bond between such individuals was class which 'cut across any ethnic groups.... class sociability was an obstacle to religious or ethnic clusters'.²⁶ However, the bond was also shared belief or class consciousness, in a Thompsonian sense of lived experience. Both Harry and Rose acted as conduits and mentors to a number of like-minded socialist individuals. Through his workplace, the Socialist Church, Our Father's Church and the Progressive Liberal Association, Harry Atkinson developed a wide circle of associates and friends; as did Rose, through her work with the Canterbury Women's Institute, the WCTU and the NCW. These friendships were long-lasting. For example, Jim Thorn, when recounting his first encounter with the Socialist Church, told readers that nearly thirty years later: '[s]everal of that little

²³ Atkinson to Roth, June 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

²⁴ *The Star*, 13 April 1898, p.1 and 6 April 1899, p.6.

²⁵ Waters, *British Socialists*, pp.158-159.

²⁶ Nolan, *Kin*, pp.50-51.

gathering still retain their Socialist faith undimmed, and some have been my life-long comrades'.²⁷ Atkinson and McCullough shared strong ties of over fifty years following their fateful meeting on the floor of the Addington Railway Workshop in 1896.

McCullough's final diary entry, written on the day of his resignation as Workers' Representative on the Arbitration Court in 1921, relates how he:

issued the circular letter which I had prepared with the valuable assistance of my real good friend H. A. Atkinson, who is as considerate & more attentive to me than is my own brother. I shall never be able to repay him for all his kindness & the splendid advice & assistance he has so unsparingly given me.²⁸

Friendship took a number of forms, such as mentorship of younger Socialists like Jim Thorn, and strong bonds of friendship were especially important during tough times. They created a sense of solidarity when, for instance, the socialists' opposition to the South African War was met with general public hostility. Despite the difficulties that McCullough and Atkinson faced when taking their public stance, they were both based in Christchurch for their adult lives. By remaining active in the local community and undertaking propaganda and organisational work they helped to build up this nascent socialist sub-culture over the period 1896 to 1905. In doing so, they contributed to the gradual shift away from the dominant local Liberal progressivism of the 1890s and helped shape what became the strongest labour movement in the dominion by the start of World War One. Plumridge has discussed this 'intimate' radical scene in more detail, and these generally good relations between various individuals were long-standing in Christchurch.

Socialism without Doctrine?

While this thesis has focused on the Socialist Church it was not the only group that the Atkinsons and other members were involved with. Atkinson himself was a member of the ASRS, the Progressive Liberal Association, the Christchurch Fabian Society and Our Father's Church. The Socialist Church interacted with many of the other radical, feminist and labour organisations in Christchurch, including the WCTU, CWI, CTLC and later the Christchurch Socialist Party. This practical associational activity points to 'webs of sociability', and is also an insight to Atkinson's character. Trevor commented that in Manchester Atkinson helped to maintain relations with various socialist groups there,

²⁷ Jim Thorn, *New Zealand Worker*, 12 October 1927, p.5.

²⁸ Jack McCullough diary entry, 21 October 1921 in Nolan, *War & Class*, pp.383-384.

and in Christchurch he ensured cordial relations ensued. Indeed, Atkinson told Roth that looking back, 'there were other socialist societies... which we apparently worked [with] in harmony'.²⁹

The main joint activity that the Church took part in was sending delegates to a variety of conferences, sponsored by various bodies, on topical issues and questions. This bespeaks the variety of causes which concerned colonial radicals and socialists. In 1896 delegates attended conferences on Old Age Pensions and Co-operative Settlements; in 1897 there were conferences on Local Government Reform, Prison Reform and International Language (Esperanto). 1898 was less busy, but the main concern was a pair of conferences on Co-operative Settlements and State Farms and Industrial Settlements. In 1900 a prohibition conference was attended by delegates and the Church was represented at a 1905 conference organised by the Socialist Party on the reform of local government. The Church also took part in public talks. Apart from those mentioned in the previous chapters, the Church debated members of the St. Saviour's Mutual Improvement Society on 'Socialism versus Individualism', and organised a joint meeting with a short-lived group, the School of Brotherhood 'to discuss the vexed question of religion to democracy'.³⁰ These various activities often included the CTLC and other labour bodies. According to Atkinson, the Socialist Church was 'in close communion with the trade unions whom they hoped to integrate with their ideals'.³¹

The Church was also in touch with socialists outside Christchurch. David McLaren, one of the leading Wellington socialists occasionally attended Socialist Church meetings, and the Church's secretary often communicated with him and the Wellington Socialist League (later the Wellington Socialist Party). The Church had a cordial relationship with the Dunedin Fabian Society as well. Again, members of this society sometimes attended Socialist Church meetings and vice-versa. Atkinson gave a lecture in Dunedin, speaking on 'The Religion of Socialism', in 1899.³²

²⁹ Atkinson to Roth, 1 March 1954, in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

³⁰ *The Star*, 30 June 1898, p.4. *The Star*, 1 November 1901, p.1. The School of Brotherhood was merged into the SP c.1902.

³¹ Atkinson to Roth, 25 May 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL. In a later letter, Atkinson added that trade unions 'were looked upon by most of us as being firmly established organisations, their economic importance assured & their permanence, once they became entrenched. To the extent they were socialist in their outlook [it was hoped] they would in fact become socialist propaganda bodies', Atkinson to Roth, June 1953 in *ibid*.

³² 'The Fabian Society', *Otago Daily Times*, 26 August 1899.

While the Socialist Church maintained amiable relations with other radical groups in Christchurch, a feature of the Church's membership was that individuals were often members of other local radical groups. The cross-over between these groups—their mixed membership—is a striking aspect of 'Radical Christchurch' of the late 1890s onwards. For example, Harry and Rose Atkinson, William Ensom, James McCombs, the Henderson sisters and Louisa Blake were all involved with the Progressive Liberal Association.³³ Female members of the group took active roles in the CWI, the WCTU and the NCW. Other groups that took up their time were the Fabian Society and Our Father's Church.³⁴ McCullough and Thorn were heavily involved in trades unionism, and Thorn, McCullough and the Atkinsons belonged to the Socialist Party. This mixed membership was commented on by contemporaries. Describing the meeting rooms of Our Father's Church, one writer commented that:

Not far off are the hunting grounds of Progressive Liberals, the Political Association, the Children's Aid, the Women's Institute, the Prohibitionists', the Licensed Victuallers, and a host of other—some, by the way, in deadly earnest and doing good work. One might imagine half the available population belonged to one or other cult. But most of these societies (except the two last-named) are nearly the same people under different names, as a prominent member once explained to me. On Sunday they are Our Father's Church, on Tuesday the Progressive Liberals, on Wednesday the Metaphysical Club, on Thursday the Children's Aid, and on Friday the Women's Institute—a protean arrangement which makes it sometimes difficult to identify them.³⁵

Much later Atkinson told Roth that the reason for this varied associational activity was that 'there were different points of view & a degree of impatience and desire to get socialist propaganda to different stratas of society. Most of us could easily step from one [group] to the other, recognising the necessity for giving certain people their lead, & for searching all and sundry'.³⁶ These examples bring out the permeable membership and relations of radical and socialist groups in Christchurch, and the diverse range of organisations that politically active working people could belong to. This suggests that the notion of colonial New Zealand having a 'socialism without doctrine' is incorrect; it

³³ Harry Atkinson was chairman of the Progressive Liberals in 1901.

³⁴ O'Bryen Hoare wrote a number of pamphlets on Socialism in the early 1900s, published under the auspices of Our Father's Church, most of them are at ATL.

³⁵ 'In Cathedral Square', *Otago Witness*, 14 June 1900, p.64. Albert Metin also mentions this circle 'In Christchurch an active group of idealistic people was criticizing the Seddon party for being made up of politicians, for thinking about keeping in power, for encouraging corruption and immorality and for being against prohibition of alcohol. They wanted to found a new party but lacked a majority'. Metin, *Socialism without Doctrine*, p.73.

³⁶ Atkinson to Roth, 12 April 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

was a socialism and radicalism of many doctrines with a variety of organisations to channel motivated action through.

Indeed, this gives a sense of the more open nature of socialist activity in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century colonial New Zealand, before labour was incorporated into political party machinery.³⁷ Looking back on this time, Atkinson was well aware of the possible contrasts between a particular group's stated aims and an individual's own beliefs. He chided Roth on a number of occasions for suggesting that Single Taxers or prohibitionists were in opposite camps to socialists, pointing out that while sometimes they were, relations were often more fluid than later acknowledged. Realising this could sound contradictory to modern ears, he told Roth that '[p]eople, curiously enough, do hold, simultaneously, diametrically opposed beliefs or beliefs designated by names of diametrically opposed ideas'.³⁸ For Atkinson, faith in socialism was not dogmatic or sectarian—it was a broad conception and one that was marked by admixture rather than theoretical prescriptions. He gives a sense of this when speaking about people working towards Socialist goals:

it is I think a matter for speculation as to the causes of divisions & multiplications of groups working ostensibly for the same end. There is, I daresay you will aggrass an infinity in the grades of meanings attached by different people to the one word & phrase describing an idea. The phrases & facets of socialist ideals must be immeasurable. Everyone makes his own picture, & always in any sizeable organization there is liability for some with clear cut opinions differing from those most emphasised by, and influencing the members of existing organization to start up another to further their own ideas.³⁹

This is a perspective often overlooked by historians examining colonial New Zealand socialism. The overlapping membership of these various groups, in Christchurch at least, problematises the dominant narrative of much New Zealand labour historiography which frames events leading up to the establishment of the NZLP as being dominated by a clash between militant (i.e. the FOL and SP) and moderate factions (TLCs and PLL) organisations and individuals. Though there remains further detailed research to be done in this area, it seems that relations were never as tidy as put forward in this explanatory dichotomy. To take Atkinson as a further example, the Socialist Church would be treated as a moderate organisation, as it did not support revolutionary measures, and thus Atkinson himself is typed as 'moderate' also. Yet he was later a

³⁷ Yeo, 'A New Life'.

³⁸ Atkinson to Roth, 23 January 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

³⁹ Atkinson to Roth, 12 April 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

member of the Federation of Labour from 1911 onwards, and he and Rose were both active members of the Christchurch branch of the Socialist Party. While we should be wary of generalising on the basis of one individual's experiences, Atkinson was surely not unique. Scates' discussion of the development of the Australian Labour Party is apposite here. He argues that:

the early Labor Party was a complex dissentient cluster of factions and belief... radical groups were present at the making of the Labor Party. The community based nature of Labor's political mobilisation represents a cross-class and cross-factional alliance historians have yet to explore.⁴⁰

The way the New Zealand labour movement developed on the basis of cross-class and cross-factional alliances has been explored in recent literature by McAloon, Nolan and Olssen, though not to the extent that Scates has in the Australian case.⁴¹ The Socialist Church's role as a cluster of beliefs has been overlooked for the most part, but by examining it within the context of a wider ecology of radical organisations we see a localised, cross-class, and community-based movement developing during the early decades of the twentieth century in Christchurch.

The Demise of the Socialist Church, 1905

The Socialist Church was disbanded in July 1905. A number of significant individuals passed through its ranks including McCullough, Thorn, James McCombs, William Ensom and Will Kraig. There were a prominent women involved as well, including Louisa Blake and the Henderson sisters—Stella, the colony's first female parliamentary reporter, and Elizabeth, the country's first woman MHR. Sources detailing the reasons for the demise of the Church, like much of this chapter, are scarce, though historians have posited some explanations. Both Roth and Smith argued that the establishment of the Socialist Party in Christchurch at the turn of the twentieth century drew members away from the Socialist Church, while Roth also suggested that the opposition to the South African War partly caused its decline.⁴² As has been noted, this certainly had an effect, but the Church continued on for a number of years after this; similarly, the

⁴⁰ Scates, *A New Australia*, p.83.

⁴¹ Olssen, *Building the New World*; McAloon, 'Radical Christchurch'; Nolan, *Kin*.

⁴² Roth, 'The Labour Churches and New Zealand', pp.361-66; Smith, 'Gospel of Hope or Gospel of Plunder', p.31.

Socialist Party was founded in 1902, but the Church continued until 1905, so this was not the main reason for its demise.

Atkinson himself offered that depleted finances and changing personal priorities were important major factors:

But the fact was that our population would not adequately support all at the same time & one or another had to fall out.... All of us were pretty near the bone in those days. Our activities somewhat changed directions as political & other circumstances changed....⁴³

Possibly there was also a frustration with the Church's focus. Open-air meetings were discontinued from 1900 onwards and the emphasis of the group switched to members' meetings and more mundane committee work, and away from its propaganda role. One of the few sources that spotlights this is a meeting in June 1901, where Jim Thorn, showing the eagerness and impatience of youth, suggested the need for another Socialist organisation, or for the group to change its name. The response, after some debate, was to refer the issue to a committee—it was then buried after this. This may well have confirmed to some members that the Church's time had passed.⁴⁴

However there is another explanation involving another association established in 1905, at the same time the Socialist Church disbanded and, significantly, around the same time the Progressive Liberal Association ceased to exist.⁴⁵ This new group was not the Socialist Party. While functioning in the main centres, and certainly active in Christchurch, the SP had not maintained its momentum after Tom Mann's departure for Australia in 1902. Rather, the Political Labour League (PLL) was formed in September 1904. Atkinson later told Roth that 'I was evidently much interested at the time but had almost forgotten all about it'.⁴⁶ Atkinson, McCullough and Thorn were all keen proponents of this new means of labour representation. Thorn stood as a PLL candidate in Christchurch South and Atkinson was going to stand as a candidate in Riccarton, but withdrew before polling day. Both proposed familiar planks such as the initiative and referendum, no further sale of state land, the establishment of a state bank, local

⁴³ Atkinson to Roth, 12 April 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁴⁴ 10 June 1901 in *Socialist Church Minute Book*, no.2.

⁴⁵ Their final meeting reported in *The Star* is 19 September 1903, p.4

⁴⁶ Atkinson to Roth, 29 December 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL. Atkinson changed work in 1905, becoming a Government life insurance agent. See his evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into Land Settlement and Tenure, *AJHR*, vol.2, C-4, 1905, pp.605-608.

government reform, and the full rights of females—echoing earlier Socialist Church rallying points.⁴⁷ Indeed, it seems there was a ‘shift to politics’ amongst socialist and radical members of the colonial working class in Christchurch, but it occurred much earlier than the foundation of the NZLP in 1916.

In 1906 Harry and Rose Atkinson travelled back to England to nurse Rose’s ill mother, though little is known about this trip. During this time McCullough and Thorn turned their attention towards union organisation, and spearheaded a year long campaign to organise and unionise farm labourers in the Canterbury region. The Atkinsons returned to Christchurch in 1907, and a year later in August Atkinson founded a new organisation, the Christchurch Fabian Society. While the activities of the Fabian Society remained similar to the Socialist Church, with meetings and discussion a focal activity, this shift was significant. Atkinson was well aware of the Fabian Society on his return to New Zealand in 1893, and he had even read their literature before departing. So why take on this particular form at this time? Again, there is little in the way of primary sources to indicate Atkinson’s reasoning, but it seems that Atkinson underwent an intellectual shift away from the ‘New Life’ socialism that drove him ten years earlier to found the Socialist Church. An explanation can be inferred from developments in the United Kingdom at the time, and in particular an increasingly jingoistic tone taken by Robert Blatchford. From around 1907 onwards Blatchford took an increasingly anti-German stance in his writing, accusing Germany of preparing for war against Britain, and eventually wrote a series of articles on the topic for Northcliffe’s stable of newspapers. These were reproduced in New Zealand newspapers.⁴⁸ Atkinson, who became an ardent anti-militarist and pacifist campaigner, quite likely found his own beliefs increasingly diverged with those being promoted in *The Clarion*.⁴⁹ At the foundation meeting of the Fabian Society Atkinson was voted into the Chair, and he

⁴⁷ See Thorn’s election flyer, ‘General Election, 1905: To the Electors of Christchurch South’ in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 24, ATL and Atkinson’s, ‘To the Elector’s of Riccarton’, in MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁴⁸ Blatchford began writing explicitly anti-German columns in *The Clarion* around 1908. See *The Manchester Guardian*, 7 August 1908, p.4. For a local article which reports both Blatchford and Hyndman’s views, see *The Star*, 22 September 1908, p.1.

⁴⁹ Trevor himself is strikingly absent from Atkinson’s work in New Zealand. There is no sign in the archival record that they corresponded. By 1902 Trevor, continually battling mental and physical ill-health, had dropped out of the labour movement to study the ‘sex question’, and returned to the topic of the Oneida Community, before later trying to establish a school to train young people interested in ethical questions. See Saville and Storey, ‘John Trevor’.

proceeded to read the suggested rules for the new group: the Objects of the London Fabian Society.⁵⁰

By now, Atkinson's break with Trevor and Blatchford was, at least organisationally, complete. There remained one connection with Trevor though, after all these years. A member of the new Society was Hugh Trevor, one of John Trevor's sons, who emigrated to New Zealand around 1906. Atkinson took him under his wing in Christchurch, and introduced Trevor to his future wife, the youngest daughter of Reverend James O'Bryen Hoare.⁵¹ While the intellectual influence of the 'Religion of Socialism' of the 1890s may have waned, the bonds and connections of friendship and fellowship were longer lasting.

Postscript: After the Socialist Church, 1908 onwards

In the early years of the twentieth century Atkinson remained tirelessly involved in local politics and protest. In 1908 he, Tommy Taylor and Jack McCullough attracted national attention for their campaign against Sir Joseph Ward's gifting of a dreadnought to the British Navy. The Fabian Society was active until around 1916 and continued as a site for debate and discussion, and an important distributor of socialist and radical literature. According to Roth, '[d]uring the war years it became one of the main sources of supply for socialist propagandists throughout New Zealand'.⁵²

From 1909 Atkinson was increasingly involved with anti-militarist and pacifist organisations, and during the First World War agitated against the introduction of conscription. He was the first vice-president of the Anti-Militarist League, formed in 1911, but he dropped out of active work in the labour movement after 1917.⁵³ Atkinson told Roth '[j]ust what happened in 1914 to us all I do not at present remember. But as in 1900 we were on the unpopular side in thinking war was unjustified'.⁵⁴ This was a form of selective amnesia—the war years would be traumatic ones for Atkinson and his

⁵⁰ For more on the Christchurch Fabian Society, see Roth, 'In Memoriam', p.20 and Roth, 'Atkinson, Harry Albert'.

⁵¹ The couple later relocated to Ohakune where Trevor ran a co-operative cheese factory. Hugh Trevor passed away in 1927. Details from Ruth Trevor to Rev. G. W. Brassington, 17 March 1965.143/3/3/1/3/43 Working papers on Rev. John Trevor (1855-1930), founder of the Labour Church- MSS.143, MRC.

⁵² Roth, 'In Memoriam', p.20.

⁵³ R. L. Weitzel, 'Pacifists and Anti-Militarists in New Zealand, 1909-1914', *New Zealand Journal of History* 7, 2 (1973), pp.128-147.

⁵⁴ Atkinson to Roth, 1 March 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

friends. Heavy punishment was meted out to Thorn, who was charged with seditious speech and stripped of his civil rights under the Expeditionary Members Bill 1918.⁵⁵ The war also had a devastating effect on the family of Jack McCullough.⁵⁶ Indeed, it seems the prosecution of dissent during World War One had its intended effect.

Despite this Atkinson and Rose together worked together for the causes of pacifism, anti-militarism and internationalism well into their later years. Though childless they continued to mentor young radical individuals and were surrogate godparents for generations of activists in Christchurch. Atkinson was a founding member of the League of Nations Union, the No War Movement and the Peace Pledge Union, and later strongly supported the work of the National Peace Council, serving as treasurer in 1936.⁵⁷ Unlike his intellectual mentor Blatchford, who turned to spiritualism, Atkinson became a committed follower of W. W. Collins's rationalism. Later, however, his 'main work for socialism was done in the drawing room of his home rather than in the public square', and he remained a prodigious letter writer to local newspapers. Seven years before his death he published a pamphlet under the auspices of the Ensom Trust, *Economic Humanism*, the only lengthy piece of his writing that is extant.⁵⁸

In 1955 Rose passed away, breaking a marriage that lasted over fifty years and a partnership that shared both socialist faith and deeds. The pain of watching Rose's health deteriorate comes through in the final few letters of his correspondence with Roth. No doubt heartbroken, Harry Atkinson died a year later in 1956 during a visit to relatives in the North Island, his first trip away from Christchurch for decades.

Conclusion: The Father of New Zealand Socialism

This thesis has examined the intellectual and associational activity of Harry Atkinson during the period 1890 to 1905, and the work and key concerns of the Christchurch Socialist Church, which he founded in 1896. Atkinson for the most part has been

⁵⁵ Rose Atkinson visited and consoled young passive resisters imprisoned at Ripapa Island.

⁵⁶ Nolan, *War & Class*. One son died on the front, two others 'went bush'

⁵⁷ His associational activity continued well into his later life. He was also a member of the Labour Party, the Engineers Union, the Workers Education Association, the Howard League for Penal Reform and 'a student of Esperanto and of the Maori Language', 'Obituary- Mr H. A. Atkinson', *The Press*, 7 February, 1956, p.14.

⁵⁸ Roth, 'In Memoriam', p.20. H. A. Atkinson, *Economic Humanism: A Balanced Economy, Distribution Proportionate to Production*, Christchurch: Ensom Trustees, 1949, DU401 1940 9 Box 6 9, J. C. Beaglehole Room, VUW.

overlooked by New Zealand labour historians, and where he has been studied historians have not considered the context of his experience. Hence mischaracterisations of both Atkinson and the Socialist Church have been addressed. Furthermore, the varied networks through which Atkinson was exposed to books and ideas have been illustrated, as has the diversity of his associational activity. The colonial socialism of 1890s New Zealand was not a 'socialism without doctrine'; active individuals engaged in richer intellectual and associational lives than is often acknowledged.

A 'red sheep' of the Atkinson-Richmond Clan, Atkinson was born into a family with strong traditions of freedom of religious thought, local political involvement and agitation for suffragism and prohibition. Through his familial connections in Wellington he took part in artisanal associations and encountered radical and socialist ideas. Frederick Frankland's reading group exposed him for the first time to a constellation of socialist and radical ideas—the writing of Russian anarchists, the anti-modernist American fiction of Thoreau, the romanticism and communitarianism of Carpenter and the empiricism and gradualism of the Fabian Society. While working in Manchester as foundation secretary for John Trevor's Labour Church, he experienced a vibrant socialist culture and personally met and came to know many leading British Socialists including Ben Tillett, Tom Mann, Keir Hardie and Robert Blatchford amongst others. Crucially he also took on Trevor's conception of socialism as ethical and moral. The intensity of feeling that he experienced at Labour Church services drove a life-long belief in socialism as religion.

In Christchurch Atkinson became a key mentor and conduit in an emergent socialist sub-culture that was marked by strong socialist beliefs, but equally strong friendships. In establishing the Socialist Church he provided a vehicle for people such as Jack McCullough, Jim Thorn and James and Elizabeth McCombs who went on to have leading roles in the New Zealand labour movement, while Christchurch was home to the strongest local labour organisation by the time of the outbreak of the First World War. Atkinson's later involvement with pacifism and anti-militarism were forerunners to New Zealand's anti-nuclear and peace movements. In this work he deservedly earned the title of the 'Father of New Zealand Socialism'.

The Socialist Church was part of a broader, transnational ‘world of labour’, shaped by multi-directional flows, contacts and dialogues. But, though inspired by foreign or overseas experiences, ideas and literature, members were driven by local concerns, adapting to the colonial context and local peculiarities. Propaganda and ‘preaching’ socialism were important parts of the Church’s work, but political projects and agitation for social reform were also undertaken. Atkinson and members of the Church practised a particular form of radicalism that was intensely interested in local issues. Municipal government, female equality and the radical reform of democratic institutions were leading concerns. Furthermore, by importing and disseminating overseas literature—newspapers such as *The Clarion*, pamphlets and books—members of the Church remained connected to the ‘world of labour’ despite being on the edge of empire. To use a more modern phrase, they ‘thought globally, but acted locally’.

In the small amount of literature that has discussed Atkinson and the Socialist Church his worldview and the ideas of fellowship, education and self-education put forward have often been described as ‘Christian Socialist’ or vague and inchoate. His beliefs were none of these. Rather it was a conception of socialism of its own time and deserves to be treated as such—a direct result of experiencing ‘New Life Socialism’ in Manchester and of continuing connections to traditions of British socialism which have been passed over for the most part by a focus on the ‘militant storm’ of 1908 onwards, and the foundation of the NZLP in 1916.

In the lengthy correspondence between Atkinson and Roth many topics were covered that go unmentioned in this thesis. It is worth noting though, that in the mid-1950s Atkinson took a certain pleasure in believing that he had played a part, albeit a small one, in ‘the acceptance of the principles of the “Welfare State”’.⁵⁹ Finally, Atkinson gave Roth a précis of his beliefs:

To me Socialism is not a set of dogmas but a living principle, a striving after human betterment under all circumstances. It necessarily stresses particular points at every stage of community life in any part of the world. But it is always a keeping in mind a point of aim on the far-horizon....The animating spirit of the forward push does not belong to any one class. Although seeking to rectify inequities in its path and using the means at hand, the spirit of socialism envisages a higher plane of living for all individuals than merely the gaining of a living.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Atkinson to Roth, 17 February 1954 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

⁶⁰ Atkinson to Roth, June 1953 in Roth Bio Notes, MS Micro 0714, Reel 2, ATL.

Atkinson's ethical-moral conception of socialism was long-held—at the time of writing he was 84 years old. This sort of belief in ethical socialist traditions is too often dismissed as idealism, utopianism or worse in labour historiography. Yet these ethical-moral traditions of socialism sustained a lifetime's work of political concern and social agitation for Harry Atkinson, and countless others.

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