

The SPARK

For workers power and international socialism

ISSN 1177-074

February 2012



**CMP/ANZCO lockout
Sonny Bill Williams
Solidarity with sex workers
Transphobia
Report from Egypt
Lessons from Occupy
Auckland ports dispute**

\$1-\$2

Editorial/Publication info

Becoming a Sustaining subscriber

Subscriptions to The Spark are available for \$16.50 a year, this covers the costs of printing and postage. At present the writing, proof reading, layout, and distribution is all done on a volunteer basis. To make this publication sustainable long term we are asking for people to consider becoming 'Sustaining subscribers' by pledging a monthly amount to The Spark (suggested \$10). Sustaining subscribers will be send a free copy of every Workers Party pamphlet to thank them for their extra support.

To start your sustaining subscription set up an automatic payment to 38-9002-0817250-00 with your name in the particulars and 'Sustain' in the code and email your name and address to byroncclark@gmail.com


Monthly magazine
published by:



The Spark February 2012,
Vol.22, No 2, Issue No 250

Coordinating Editor

Byron Clark and Jared Phillips

Assisting Editors

Ian Anderson, Jared Phillips, Mike Kay

Layout:

Joel Cosgrove

Front Cover:

Joel Cosgrove & Phillipa Clark

Get The Spark each month

Within NZ: \$16.50 for one year (11 issues) or \$33 for two years (22 issues)

Rest of the World: \$20 for one year or \$40 for two years

Send details and payments to:

The Spark, PO Box 10282

Dominion Rd, Auckland

or

Bank transfer:

38-9002-0817250-01

Name:

Address:.....

.....

I have enclosed:.....

Editorial

The Spark got a mention in the mainstream media recently when the *Waikato Times* asked for a comment on a new energy drink from Spark co-ordinating editor Jared Phillips. The new 'Seize the Power' energy drink can features the iconic image of Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara and the slogan 'energise and revolutionise'.

The *Waikato Times* article was not an analysis of how revolutionary imagery has been co-opted for marketing- the ubiquitous Che image is just the most prominent example, see Kiwibank's 'join the movement' ad campaign or the TV commercial that shows a popular uprising by iced tea enthusiasts- but a light piece of filler. One reading the article could come away thinking that this was the most pressing issue for socialists in New Zealand, but rest assured that after this sentence you will find no more mentions of energy drinks in this magazine.

In this issue we reprint an article by Simon Oosterman reporting on the Ports of Auckland strike and then look at how the lock-out at ANZCO shows the need for the right to strike. We also have an article about sex work and how it should be looked at by socialists.

Guest writer Nada Tawfeck provides a first-hand account of the situation in Egypt a year after the popular uprising that deposed dictator Hosni Mubarak. Last year those uprisings spread across the region in what's now known as the Arab Spring, but the movement didn't flow south to Africa- until now; a general strike recently took place in Nigeria, spurred by austerity measures that drastically raised the cost of living. We also continue our coverage of the Occupy movement in this country.

The second part of our series by Kelly Pope examining the relationship between work and mental health appears in the second half of the magazine, along with two other theoretical articles, one examining queer oppression with regard to Libra's commercial featuring a transgender woman, and the other a look at the meaning of Sonny Bill Williams in a sports column by Joel Cosgrove. Of course, theory without practice is a dead end, also in this issue is an 'activist calendar' listing events happening around the country in the next few months.

Donations and bequeathments

The Workers Party is non-profit and relies on financial support from progressive people, supporters and members for all its activities including producing this magazine. To financially support us please deposit to 38-9002-0817250-01 with your initials and surname (or anonymous.) Large and small, regular and one-off donations are all appreciated and listed in The Spark from time to time.

The Spark magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Workers Party, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

Why wharfies are striking – in their own words

Simon Oosterman

Original post and photos at <http://www.hdadhd.com/2012/01/11/wharfies-on-the-wharfie-strike/>

The media have given plenty of space to Ports of Auckland management, but nobody has canvassed the opinions of those most affected by the company's decisions, the workers. Here we get behind the news to the men, their wives and the children affected by the Ports of Auckland actions and proposals.

For the background to the dispute read the Maritime Union of New Zealand and Council of Trade Union fact sheet and the Port of Auckland's industrial dispute updates.

The Thorton family: "They want drones when we are actually parents"

Shaun Thorton, 43, drives a straddle at the Ports of Auckland where he has worked for 18 years. He met his wife Leah at the port where she worked before becoming a fulltime mum looking after their four kids: Ben (9), twins Max and Amy (5) and Nina (4).

"We want predictability so we can have a family life," he says. "We only get one weekend off every third weekend meaning I work 35 weekends in the year. I'm striking for the kids."

Leah interrupts: "and for the marriage".

"Shaun's work is a nightmare for me and the kids," she says. "Dad only went to two soccer games last year and couldn't come to the preschool Christmas party. We've learnt to live with it but it's far from perfect."

"It's clear from the ports casualisation plan that they want drones, when we are actually parents. You can't sustain a family as a casual and deal with the everyday stuff parents have to put up with. One of



our kids has a chronic illness and another is getting progressively deaf in one ear. I should be able to count on partner to help out with hospital visits and specialist's visits.

"Everyone complains about irresponsible teenagers going out on town and they wonder where their parents are. They are here and in other unsociable jobs. The only other option to this work is working on the minimum wage.

"It astounds me that they are trying to increase productivity by ruining our work life balance – do they want people sleeping on the job?" she says. "Can I complain to the company about not having annual leave or sick days?"

The Wallace family: "It's not just husbands affected, it's our families too"

Mark Wallace is a stevedore at the Ports of Auckland. He worked his way up from a casual to a permanent crane driver over 18 years. Mark and wife Katrina have two children, Ashley (9) and Rebecca (7).

"I'm trying to protect my family life," he says. "The company wants the right to tell me at midnight, eight hours before a shift, that I don't have the shift anymore.

How can I plan a family life around that?"

"The company goes on about caring for its employees, but they treat us like shit. We've given them the best container rates ever. If they really cared about us, we'd be inside working. We had to strike at Christmas just to get time off with our kids."

Katrina, is a self-employed dress-maker who works from home.

"I brought the kids down to the picket show solidarity with my husband," she says. "But it's not just husbands affected, it's our families too. The company's proposed changes would be hard for me and the kids. I couldn't take on huge jobs because I wouldn't know day-to-day what Mark would be doing. I wouldn't even be able to count on him to pick up the kids from school."

The Witehira family:

"Keeping family time is more important than a pay rise"

Jermaine Witehira, 31, got his first ever job at the Ports of Auckland where he

Industrial struggles

has been working as a stevedore for 14 years. Jermaine and wife Destiny have three children, Gabrielle (5), Karine (2) and Jayda (1)

"I'm doing this for my family and my mates," he says. "A 10% pay rise isn't worth the new casual roster system – family time is more important than a pay rise."

"The company says we earn \$91k a year – I've never earned that in the 14 years I've been here. I get around \$64k but I have to work 24 hours overtime and that costs my family."

Destiny says Jermaine doesn't see his kids because he leaves for work at 5:30am and gets back at 11:30pm.

"Being a young family is hard enough, but with his hours it feels like I'm a solo mum," she says. "If the company gets what it wants I'll have to put my kids in day care and get a job. The thing is that the job would probably only just cover day care costs and I'd have to find a job that worked around casual hours."

Brandon Cherrington

Brandon Cherrington, 38, has worked at the Ports of Auckland for 1½ years. He is a permanent part-timer and is only guaranteed 24 hours a week. Brandon has a 1½ year old daughter.

"This strike is all about our families," he says. "We are here supporting the boys to keep and improve our conditions. With the company's [proposed] new flexibility, they want us to be on call and I won't be able to plan activities with my daughter anymore."

Shaun Osbourne

Shaun Osbourne works at the Ports of Auckland. Because he is a casual employee, he hasn't had a single guaranteed hour in the eight years he has worked there.

"My shifts are allocated the day before I go to work," he says. "I could get anywhere between eight and 48 hours a week which could be in the morning, afternoon or graveyard or a combination of the shifts. I won't be crossing over. We've got to make sure permanent workers don't end up like us casuals."

Wayne Wolfe

Wayne Wolfe, 58, works as a stevedore at the Ports of Auckland. He has worked on the ports for 35 years. Wayne has three adult children and two grandchildren, including a two-week old baby. Wayne is an executive member of Local 13 of the Maritime Union.

"Many of these young fellas are casuals and have had busted up marriages be-

cause of their casualised hours," he says. "When I first joined, conditions were brilliant and I am doing my best to leave it that way."

Ron Bell

Ron Bell, 53, is a stevedore at the Ports of Auckland. He will have worked on the waterfront for 31 years this coming April and has been union since he was 17. He has four daughters Jac (20), Katherine (18) and twins Samantha and Amanda (15). He is an executive member of Local 13 of the Maritime Union.

"I just want our guys to keep their jobs on decent hours and not get shat on waiting by the phone 24 hours a day," he says. "People before us made our conditions what they are today and they should stay that way."

Ken Ziegler

Ken Ziegler, 49, has worked as a stevedore at the Ports of Auckland for 12 years. Ken is the main provider for his son Carlos (10). He is an executive member of Local 13 of the Maritime Union.

"It's really simple," he says. "The company is trying to casualise the entire workforce to keep labour costs down."

Napo Kuru

Napo Kuru, 27, has worked as a casual lasher at the Ports of Auckland for four years.

"I'm on \$16 an hour as a casual and can get anywhere between 16 and 30 hours a week," he says. "We have the same fight as the permanent boys. They want everyone to be cheap which will drive down everyone's pay."



The Thorton family: "They want drones when we are actually parents"

CMP/ANZCO dispute shows need for freedom to strike

By editors of *The Spark*

In late October 2011 over one hundred workers belonging to the New Zealand Meat Workers Union and employed at the ANZCO-owned CMP mutton processing plant in Marton, in the Manawatu area, were locked out by the company. The company was demanding that the workers take between 20%-30% losses of remuneration. The workers and their site organisers were not prepared to sign on to individual agreements and accept the cuts. Locking-out was a highly aggressive action from the company as lockouts are usually used as a retaliation to strike action. The workers hadn't taken strike action but the company used locking-out as an ultimatum against those not prepared to accept the cuts. The lockout continued until December 23 when the workers voted to go back to work even though – we understand – they still faced some lesser conditions to those that existed prior to the lockout. The workers and site organiser involved are among the staunchest in the workers movement in the country, however ultimately the company was unable to be defeated.

Employer confidence in current environment

The lockout and the aggressive ultimatum-ist way in which it was carried out has given a clear indication of employer confidence within the current industrial relations and political environment. Speaking on National's industrial relations policy ahead of its release for the 2011 election John Key said frankly and

publicly, "The unions won't like it" thereby announcing that unions will have to face more attacks as a follow up to National's first-term attacks such as probationary employment, sick leave changes, union access changes, and changes to reinstatement possibilities after unjustifiable dismissal is proven.

However, it is not just the government which has lead employers to this relatively secure position from which they can attack. Strategies used by trade unions over the last two decades have led to a weakening of union combatancy.



Primarily this has occurred through the adoption of partnership and productivity strategies agreed between unions and employers. Whilst such strategies may – at certain periods – lead to some economic gains, what they also do is reduce the organisational literacy of the movement.

The CTU has been central to promoting the partnership and productivity strategy in the 1990s and 2000s, however it did play a reasonable role in this dispute, particularly in the area of fundraising within which it helped to co-ordinate large amounts of donated money collected through unions, worksite collections, street collections, and so forth. An overall outcome of the dispute has

been that the employers have seen that the union movement will pull together against particularly aggressive employers. This pulling-together also had an international character, with Unite in the UK making donations to the dispute and putting pressure on British retailers of ANZCO meat.

Freedom to take industrial action

While our members participated in picketing of McDonald's stores (McDonald's is a major purchaser of ANZCO meat), and in a few cases helped with organising such pickets, it must be said that this was not the type of activity which could bring a convincing victory for the CMP workers. The CMP plant was not within the McDonalds supply chain and therefore the pickets largely had a symbolic role to raise awareness about the dispute.

Combined industrial action is what will be needed in future struggles to support workers against employer offensives like this one. Other meat workers from around the Manawatu were consistently present, in a tightly organised way, at the CMP picket. It is this sort of solidarity which the workers movement needs to translate into solidarity industrial actions against connected companies in such disputes. The Labour Party, back in 2000, legislated for harsher sanctions against workers who engage in sympathy actions. Solidarity striking must be put back on the agenda in New Zealand's unions.

Sex work

Don't talk to me about sewing machines, talk to me about workers' rights!

A Call to Action for Socialists from a revolutionary hooker.

By Greta de Graves

The question of how to relate to sex workers (in this article, I will use the term 'sex worker' to refer to workers in commercialised sexual encounters, including, but not limited to prostitutes, strippers, go-go dancers, and pornographic actors of all genders) has been a topic of contention for many Marxist and other radical activists, and the New Zealand left has not been exempt from this struggle. The rationales that I have heard as to why the left is often ambivalent towards sex worker struggles are diverse, ranging from "all commercialised sex is inherently sexist and politically incorrect – it is a tactical mistake to 'normalise' sex work" to "sex workers are unintelligent and non-political – it would be a waste of our time and energy to politically align ourselves with them."

Such attitudes (voiced to me by experienced and hard-working activists) are in direct conflict to my experience as a sex worker. My experiences that lead me into the sex industry conformed to every sad stereotype prevalent in popular culture – I was left in a huge amount of debt at the break-up of an unhealthy relationship, and was struggling to come to terms with the suicide of a close friend. I experienced poor mental health and was unable to find work that would allow me to pay off my debts and fit in with my existing job and study. I felt depressed, un-attractive and had a low sex drive. I didn't believe that anyone would ever love or even sexually desire me – a crazy, neurotic failure – ever again.

And then a friend told me that she was thinking of working as a prostitute – and it occurred to me "well, why couldn't I do that?" While I had a fairly sheltered upbringing, I had always had a fascination with what I perceived to be the glamor-

ous "underworld" that sex workers occupied. Of course, the reality proved to be far different. In my experience, the vast majority of consumers of commercial sex in New Zealand can only be described as normal. Of different races, different personalities, different apparent socio-economic and educational backgrounds, different ages, some married, some single, but none of them the type society would classify as "deviant," or who would

“It is our political responsibility to ensure that New Zealand sex workers are entitled to the same benefits as any other New Zealand workers...

arouse suspicion in their friends, families and colleagues that they paid for sexual services.

While the circumstances that saw me beginning to work as a sex worker conformed to stereotypes of the woman in desperation – my experience of doing sex work has been completely different. To make myself completely clear; I enjoy being a hooker. I make enough money to support myself, I have overcome a huge amount of shyness and self-esteem issues, I feel comfortable with my body, and I feel appreciated and fulfilled in my work. I have met some fantastic people in the sex industry – workers, pimps and clients.

That is not to glamorise or gloss over the bleak realities of this job, of which, even

in a country such as New Zealand where sex workers have their legal right to work recognised, there are many. A life-style of quick cash and unstable incomes. Violent clients, misogynist clients. Rape. Debasement. The experience of intense social stigma when your job is discovered by friends and family members.

These stress-trigger problems are exacerbated by the working environments experienced by sex workers. Imagine every time you showed up to work, your boss demanded that you pay a small amount for the privilege of working for him – say \$30 each time you worked, ostensibly to cover the materials necessary to do your job. Now imagine that each shift you worked was a minimum of 9 hours long (sometimes up to 12 or 13 hours) without a system of formalised breaks, and that you weren't allowed to leave the premises to get food, pick up your kids from school, or make a phone call. If you got sick, or had to leave because of childcare or other family commitments, you had to "buy-out" of your shift, no matter how legitimate your excuse. That you were pressured into performing unsafe and illegal acts by your employer on a routine basis. That your employer insisted that you were an "independent contractor" and thus not covered by work-related ACC, not able to have tax deducted by PAYE, not able to join a union, not automatically signed up to Kiwisaver, and not able to secure a wage for all those hours you spend sitting around waiting for clients. These aren't third-world horror stories touted by anti-trafficking activists, but commonplace occurrences in brothels in Wellington, New Zealand.

This is why, whatever our views on the commodification of sex, of the objectification of human bodies, that we should align ourselves with sex workers. It is

our political responsibility to ensure that New Zealand sex workers are entitled to the same benefits as any other New Zealand workers – the right to take rest breaks, the right to be part of a union, the right to work in an environment in keeping with OSH guidelines, the right to a fair and transparent disciplinary and disputes process, and the right to say no to any person or practice in their jobs that they feel violates their physical or emotional safety and well-being.

Sex workers provide services to people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, married people, single people, lonely people, sex addicts, and many others. To dismiss this work as unimportant, and to refuse to stand in solidarity with sex workers, is a disservice to working men and women everywhere. While perhaps an uncomfortable reality, the fact is that sex workers are mothers, daughters, brothers, fathers, sons, sisters and fellow activists, and for

too long, many on the left have refused to acknowledge this. For too long, the left has ignored the realities of working life for women and men who work in the sex industry – because the idea of commercialised sex makes them uncomfortable, or because they do not see sex work as a valuable form of work.

Beginning a discourse between activists and sex workers around worker's rights is a difficult task. When talking to sex workers, it is important to treat us as any worker – self-organising, politically aware and self-determinate, not as passive victims. Don't equate sex trafficking, a real problem of local and international significance, with legal and consensual prostitution – just as you wouldn't equate coerced/slave forms of domestic work with compensated domestic work. The commodification of sex and sexuality that exists under capitalism is manifested in transactional sex – but it is not limited to the sex industry, and it is as offensive

to suggest that individual sex workers are contributing to their own oppression by practising sex work as it is to suggest that any worker who works for a capitalist boss contributes to his/her own oppression.

So long as activists continue to ignore and minimise sex workers' struggles, the status quo continues. The New Zealand Prostitute's Collective, while advocating for the rights and safety of sex workers as well as providing practical help such as access to condoms, medical care, clean needles for drug users etc, can only place so much pressure on major sex industry operators while they are under-resourced and operating in isolation. To stand in solidarity with hookers, strippers and porn stars, we must put aside our preconceptions of sex work and the people who practice it, and stand together for a culture that is anti-rape, pro-education and queer-positive, where all workers can demand safety, fair treatment and solidarity.

A post-revolution Egypt: an inside look from an outsiders eyes

Nada Tawfeek is an Egyptian born activist currently residing in New Zealand. She wrote this article for The Spark after spending two months in Egypt.

As the plane I was on approached Cairo, and I could finally see the pyramids after a good 24 hours of flying from New Zealand, I couldn't help but wonder how different Egypt would be; whether it would already have changed or not. A part of me expected to step out of the plane to a brand new post revolution Egypt but the other part of me thought it would find the familiar hectic Egypt. Not long after leaving the airport I discovered that both my expectations were real. Although everything in Egypt looks the same as before the January revolution, the atmosphere is strangely different. Every radio station plays songs about the revolu-

tion and building a better Egypt, every Egyptian TV presenter now has a show about politics, the average Egyptian who most likely had no interest in politics a year ago could now talk about the different parties at length, and the closer the elections day got the more extreme this would seem.

The night before the Election Day was one of the most exciting days for many Egyptians since the revolution. Everywhere I went I heard young people talk about how they were incredibly proud that their generation got to witness a day like this, and older people talk about how this was the first time they had ever voted in their whole life. This day for many Egyptians was a challenge. Finally people felt that their voices were going to be listened to and that their vote would ac-

tually count, and people weren't going to let this opportunity pass no matter how anxious they were. The fact that this was the first time most people were going to vote made the new experience one they were slightly scared of because no one knew what to expect. People were afraid that the old government and its supporters might have a plan in place, but the excitement overcame the fear.

The elections became the center of conversation, complaining about how far away the school you were going to vote in became a popular conversation starter before the election, and afterward it was replaced by how long you stayed in the queue. Some of the people I spoke to stayed for over 4 hours in line waiting to vote – but none of them were complaining, in fact everyone seemed to really

International news



A photo taken by Nada in Cairo

enjoy the day. All in all the day was a success, the army were incredibly helpful at making sure everyone was safe and comfortable, The turn up was huge (60% turn up) and to top it all of the weather was fantastic. The votes were out the day after, the majority being for the Islamic parties, which most people felt was fair.

In the days following the elections the mood started to change. A sudden wave of havoc hit Egypt again. Some people started protesting against the fact that the army were still in control and called for a faster shift of power, but this time the protests were a lot different to the ones that happened in Tahrir Square. A number of people started burning the Egyptian institute; which is an extremely historically valuable library full of old books and maps that represent Egyptian history. Many people were confused at how anyone could try to destroy such a building and why they would. People started to question whether this was a

plot by the old regime to create havoc or whether the army was behind this, many conspiracy theories were spoken about. The institute's director, Mohammad-Alsharnoubi was seen crying on TV and everyone was generally saddened by the loss of such an important building. The main question asked in all media channels was; "who are these people?" There was no real answer but people calling in on political shows seemed to want the army to intervene and ensure everyone ruining public buildings got arrested.

The army did intervene- violently. Videos of soldiers beating individuals were on every news channel and rapidly spread on the Internet. Everyone was extremely confused, no one knew whether the violent people caught on camera were actually the army or not, rumors spread that these were people dressed as soldiers rather than soldiers themselves. Egypt, if you watched the news, looked like it was on fire, but many other incidents like

this had happened during the year and people knew that eventually everything would settle. After a while everyone calmed down and political parties agreed that everyone should keep safe and stay at home until the elections were over and the army could finally pass the power on to the elected government.

The blood and pain of anyone who suffered for the revolution would never be forgotten; people still keep the families of those hurt since January in their prayers. After the Egyptian institute incident things seemed to calm down. New years marked a new start for Egypt, Tahrir square was full of people again but this time to celebrate. Singers, actors, sheikhs and priests all gathered to celebrate and pray for a new and safe year while the crowds cheered for them and for Egypt. Ever since then things have been considerably stable and personally I'm pretty optimistic at what the future holds for Egypt.

Occupy Nigeria leads to general strike

Despite its obvious inspiration from the Arab Spring, the global Occupy Movement is most prominent in relatively wealthy countries. This does not mean the movement has not appealed to those in the global south- often Occupy protests have not taken place in these countries because social movements with their own identities were already in progress when people in New York started camping out on Wall Street. Rather than being sneered at however the Occupy Movement has been welcomed as a showing of solidarity. Indian activist Arundati Roy told an audience in New York;

“The Occupy movement has joined thousands of other resistance movements all over the world in which the poorest of people are standing up and stopping the richest corporations in their tracks. Few of us dreamed that we would see you, the people of the United States on our side, trying to do this in the heart of Empire. I don't know how to communicate the enormity of what this means.”

The show of solidarity with activists in the developing and under developed world could be why socialists and labour activists in Nigeria decided to adopt the name ‘Occupy Nigeria’ for the protests they began in January this year.

Background

There are many reasons for Nigerians to protest. Despite being one of the worlds biggest oil exporters (the largest in Africa) much of the population lives

on less than US\$2 a day. Corruption is rife in the government, infrastructure is badly maintained and food prices are on the rise. Despite all this, mass protests were not expected by many commentators. “even though Nigeria is just a few hours flight from Egypt or Libya, no one believed for a moment that the winds of change would reach Africa’s most populous nation.” wrote Michael Bociurkiw, a Canadian journalists who was in Nigeria during the Arab Spring.

That all changed when the Nigerian government announced on January 1st that

“Nigeria has borrowed vast amounts of money to fund the infrastructure required to obtain and export its oil reserves, yet it sees very little of the wealth that stems from the oil industry.

it was ending a fuel subsidy resulting in a doubling of fuel and transport prices. The result of this was that many Nigerians could not afford to get to work, or power the generators that are relied on because of a blackout prone electricity system, The ending of subsidized fuel was the spark that set things aflame .

Protests and general strike

Following the announcement protesters shut down petrol stations and blockaded highways. Nigerias union movement called for an indefinite general strike on January 9th. Chris Uyot of the Nigeria Labour Congress told the BBC “We

have the total backing of all Nigerian workers on this strike and mass protest”. Thousands gathered daily in Gani Fawehinmi Park in Lagos. The gathering in the park featured speeches by labour leaders and civil society activists, as well as, artists’ performances.

After a week the general strike achieved a partial victory, with president President Goodluck Jonathan announcing a cut in fuel prices, although it fell short of the previous subsidy.

The role of imperialism

The reason behind the ending of fuel subsidies was repaying public debt. Christine Lagarde, head of the International Monetary Fund, visited Nigeria in December and around the same time the World Bank sent its executive director Nguzi Okonjko-Iwela to take over as the country’s finance minister. She was also made co-ordinating minister of the economy, a portfolio created especially for her.

Nigeria has borrowed vast amounts of money to fund the infrastructure required to obtain and export its oil reserves, yet it sees very little of the wealth the stems from the oil industry. Much of the media converge has pointed out the cost the general strike has had to the economy- estimates range in the billions- but rarely is it noted that the average Nigerian hasn’t missed out on any of this money, instead the ones missing out are Shell, Chevron, Agip and Total.

Further reading: <http://kasamaproject.org/2012/01/17/occupy-nigeria-takes-on-nigerias-occupiers/>

ANZCO/CMP Lockout - 65 days on the picket line.





Occupying an impasse: learning from mistakes?

By Ian Anderson and Joel Cosgrove

All great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice... first as tragedy, then as farce. - Karl Marx

Karl Marx, 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

October 15th has a double significance in this country, as both the day of the 2007 invasion of the Ureweras, and the day the global 'Occupy' movement arrived here in 2011. On October 15th 2011 thousands were mobilised across the country; turnout in Auckland was particularly impressive, while the hundreds who showed up in other centres were largely new to 'the usual suspects' (such as myself.) Smaller occupations cropped up in New Plymouth, Marton, Invercargill and elsewhere, showing the resonance of this new political language. Numbers have fluctuated since. Commentary by Socialist Aotearoa accuses the left of 'vacillating,' however the reality is that occupiers have vacillated in general; while Occupy Auckland mobilised thousands on its first day, its current battle with attempted eviction involves a relative hard core. We have to learn from this downward trajectory: what happened and why?

Different situation

While it undeniably resonates, Occupy does not draw in the breadth of support here that it does in the US. This in large part follows from different economic conditions; while this country is relatively sheltered from the global

financial crisis, in the US it rapidly destroyed significant chunks of the middle-class. Mass foreclosures provide Occupy Wall Street, and the other US occupations, with a steady stream of radicalised forces. There are concrete forces pulling people into being involved, whereas New Zealand has seen a more moral aspect to many people's involvement.

Things are not peachy in the land of sleeping hobbits either. While our comparatively limited financialisation, and close relationship with the booming Australian economy, keep our economy stable for now – real wages have fallen 25% in the last 30 years. Inequality is second highest in the OECD. Instead of mass foreclosures, a steady build up of pressure is developing within the housing market, with the rate in the first 6 months of 2011 being 1008 as opposed to 230 mortgagee sales in 2007, a pattern identified in the US before the crash. We've seen over five billion dollars of mainly working class savings, frittered away in a silent tragedy affecting hundreds of thousands of people, in the US everyone was affected, in New Zealand it has been the working poor. Our sleepwalk leads either towards an awakening or a cliff, towards socialism or barbarism.

Political character of Occupy

People's attraction to Occupy stems partly from its "non-political" nature, that is non-parliamentary and non-party political. In 2011 NZ had its lowest turnout since women got the right to vote in the 19th Century, so this rejection of formal politics certainly resonates. The politics of Occupy come through in support for locked out meat workers, for evicted

public housing residents in Glen Innes and Pomare, for the homeless – it's a movement that sides with the working class when it matters.

There are limitations to the (anti)politics of Occupy. Raising existing divisions within "the 99%" is frowned upon. Myths and hierarchies that run throughout society, such as victim-blaming attitudes toward people who bring up sexual abuse, are reproduced. The initial understanding of the 99% concept is for a homogenous unity of the majority that leaves those not straight, white, pakeha, either having to keep quiet for the sake of unity or being consciously or unconsciously pressured to leave.

Idealism makes this harder to address. The notion of "horizontalism," of networks that go across rather than top-down, in effect mean attempting to wish away concrete power structures. The consensus process (replaced with 90% majority in some places) means that a conscientious majority cannot respond to immediate situations, for example destructive behaviour. Protracted processes of 'defence' for destructive behaviour (sometimes conceived in a quasi-legal language) outweigh concerns such as respecting those who've been harassed, with a reactionary minority able to filibuster.

In Wellington in the middle of December, after the majority of people had left, the focus changed to concentrating on the issues facing the homeless, who unlike other occupiers have nowhere else to go. The issues faced by those with mental health issues, recent releases from jail or other situations that leave them without shelter are serious and are not dealt with enough. The political collapse of occupa-

tion, and the solidarity and goodwill felt at the start, has isolated occupiers, leaving them vulnerable to attacks by the state, seen already in the repeated attacks on Occupy Auckland.

Some insist on the form of commune-style camps over the content of organising communities. After a number of women and queers left over destructive behaviour, one person stated at a General Assembly: "Occupy Wellington is this campsite, and if you leave the campsite you leave Occupy Wellington." This is very different from saying "we are the 99%."

What next?

Councils and cops are finally coming down hard on the occupations, after appearing for a while to put up with or actively condone the various occupations. It is an important principle to support all progressives under attack. Right now,



councils are bypassing the legal process, arresting people and releasing them an hour later with no charge. The key strategy right now seems to be the straight up theft of occupiers tents and personal possessions, in an effort to make their lives

as difficult as possible.

However, the state is not the primary risk in the long term; occupations in the US have outlived many evictions; the real risk is that we don't learn from our mistakes.

An ode to camping at Occupy Wellington

Anne Russell is an independent journalist who was involved with Occupy Wellington from its initial beginning until near the end.

The campsite where Occupy Wellington once stood looked a little forlorn when I went to pick up my tent. I hadn't slept in Civic Square for many weeks, and had stopped visiting since we sent out the press release that Occupy was more than a campsite, but my tent had protested through thick and thin, despite not knowing what it wanted. I could see no familiar faces among the people milling about between tents, but then I spotted

15-year-old Wes, nicknamed Snoopy in one of the General Assemblies so long ago. I gave him a huge hug. "Wes! Where you been at? I haven't seen you around here for ages!"

"At home. I love my bed," he said. We walked over to my tent and found a person crawling around in it. I opted to go for a walk until they'd packed up, since I was effectively in strangers' territory. When I returned, my tent and bedroll were in a neat pile next to the gardening box, which still had a healthy crop of silverbeet and red flowers. I hoisted my belongings, waved at the people I vaguely knew, who wished me a merry

Christmas, and walked off. I passed the whiteboard, once full of information, now blank but for "Occupy Wellington is still here" scrawled across it. I walked away from camp down the Civic Square steps for the last time. And that was that, I suppose.

It's hard not to feel sad that Occupy Wellington had such a hard time working out the logistics of camping together. Many of the Occupiers I know still miss it—one Occupy friend said to another over Facebook that he kept "sliding back hoping to find it again but it's not there anymore." All of us needed the place, one way or another. For me, it was a place

Occupy

I went first thing in the evening after work. Although I rarely stayed overnight there, it was a real home—Civic Square became somewhere I could show up unannounced and know there was something there for me. There were interesting people to talk to, but there were also guitars to have a go on, or places to sit and read if I wasn't in a sociable mood.

Everyone who got deeply involved in Occupy Wellington knew it was about the people, and it's been said many times that we are whanau. There were only a handful of campers who I would always hug as greeting, but there were many I would stop and talk to for a bit, or admire from a distance as someone I knew. I liked this space of friendly acquaintances—it was reassuring that even though I didn't know many of these people too well we could still hang out together.

It wasn't all wonderful, of course, or we'd still be living there. Gale force winds kept most of us from camping, and some poorly socialized occupants ended up making others feel unwelcome. We didn't really have the resources to deal with that stuff properly, as wider society sure hasn't given us tools for preventing sexual harassment and alcoholism. For better or worse, this made it something like an extended family meet-up. For every creepy misogynist uncle that everyone wanted to get away from, there was a second cousin who you only hung out with once a year at Christmas dinner but always liked talking to.

And everyone found some immediate family. A few people I'd met in passing once or twice elsewhere became people who I'd walk around town with for hours climbing trees or collecting food for Occupy. We probably never would have got that close if not for hanging around a campsite organizing politics. I still keep in touch with them.

This social side mattered as much as the political side. At other activist meetings I've been to, you put your political hat on for a few hours, awkwardly shuffle around for a bit afterwards talking to people and then go home to your real life. At Occupy we put our political hats on for the Free University and then sat around eating gelato afterwards, or went

wharf-jumping.

Was there something wrong with this, that Occupy didn't spend its whole time working on activist causes? Perhaps. Certainly the remaining community in Civic Square doesn't appear to be particularly engaged in politics—my friend who lived there said half of them barely knew what Wall Street was. Everyone, however, needs some down time, and we took it. The vitriol Occupiers got from some of the press and public for the audacity of camping in a public place was rather surprising. Non-Occupying taxpayers (I and many other Occupiers work fulltime) only want to pay for things if there's a sign of productivity, it seems. But what is productivity? Jobless and homeless people who sit meditating in a park, or spend the day talking to strangers about politics, contribute much less to environmental damage than those who work fulltime for McDonald's—or, indeed, than those who threaten to mine our national parks. These unemployed folk are arguably more productive, since they're less destructive.

It's a funny idea that the mere possession of a job is a marker of productivity. A fulltime mother is 'unemployed' in the formal economy, but you'd have to be strikingly ignorant to tell her she's lazy. Anyone who's looked after a two-year-old knows it's a hard day's work, and yet the government somehow casts it as a

less demanding occupation than being employed at a call centre. There is much resolve and determination to be found in the ranks of the 'unemployed', and some extreme laziness and apathy in the commercial workforce. I got my own job through the sweet power of nepotism, and while I have a certain aptitude for it I came here by luck, not effort. I sit down all day at this job.

One wonders why, in the developed Western world, we are so determined to think that life is, or has to be such hard work. In an agrarian society, at least a lot of hard work had a survival purpose. But in this age of advanced agricultural technology, food production should be easy; clothing and shelter too. We have a phenomenal number of conveniences available to us—compared to our ancestors we barely know we're alive.

This isn't chiding people for complaining about 'first world problems', for such problems still hurt whether or not people are starving in Somalia or being tortured in the US. Rather it is the question: why are we setting ourselves up for half these problems in the first place? In fits of despondency about the state of the world, I have always thought the worst thing about All The Problems is that it doesn't have to be this hard. There is no actual need for 52% of New Zealand women to be made to feel dissatisfied with their body. There is no need for workers to go



One project was to photograph people with personal statements about what Occupy meant to them.

home from 8 hours at a department store and barely be able to talk to their families from physical and emotional exhaustion. As William Sloane Coffin said, “even if you win the rat race, you’re still a rat.”

What most of us need, what we are crying out for, is community. The Wellington Occupiers were the ones who admitted this openly, or at least were those lucky enough to have the time to do so. We defied the naïve cynicism that people are inherently greedy assholes, and that life’s a bitch. We’re still working with each other on what common ground we have. Whether or not the Occupiers succeeded at living together in Civic Square, we should get some credit for trying. This society hasn’t taught people how to get along in the same space, so we had to improvise. We’re going to try negotiate something similar again next year, in a more developed form.

I would like to thank Occupy Wellington, from the bottom of my heart, for everything it has accomplished so far. My love for the movement transcends the people who I met at Civic Square, though I love a lot of you too. It transcends the campsite itself, although that had some pretty excellent moments. By Occupy Wellington I don’t mean the collection of people who camped, or even those using the Occupy brand. I mean every person helping out the locked-out CMP Rangitikei meat workers, every church leader who stands with us against economic inequality, every student challenging the idea that people are inherently bad. The huge optimism coming from anyone who can see all the problems in this world and try to fix them shows real intellect and integrity. It steps far beyond the complacent negativity that corporate giants and their government lackeys seem to subscribe to.

I wonder if in a few years I will come back to this article and facepalm at its early-20s earnestness. Perhaps it states the obvious. Perhaps, much like Occupy itself, it is rendered ‘incoherent’ by trying to cover too much ground. But the Occupy movement has been an emotional time for all of us as well as political, and I wanted to get that across. Earnestness isn’t so bad. We live in a culture that



A placard from day one of Occupy Wellington.

pushes earnestness aside with a sardonic sweep of the hand, without looking to see if it says anything important. David Foster Wallace wrote on irony:

“The next real literary “rebels” in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of anti-rebels, born oglers who dare somehow to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse and instantiate single-entendre principles. Who treat of plain old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction. Who eschew self-consciousness and hip fatigue. These anti-rebels would be outdated, of course, before they even started. Dead on the page. Too sincere. Clearly repressed. Backward, quaint, naïve, anachronistic...Maybe that’s why they’ll be the next real rebels.

“Real rebels, as far as I can see, risk disapproval. The old postmodern insurgents risked the gasp and squeal: shock, disgust, outrage, censorship, accusations of socialism, anarchism, nihilism. Today’s risks are different. The new rebels might be artists willing to risk the yawn, the rolled eyes, the cool smile, the nudged ribs, the parody of gifted ironists, the “Oh how banal.” To risk accusations of sentimentality, melodrama. Of overcredulity. Of softness. Of willingness to be suckered by a world of lurkers and starers who fear gaze and ridicule above imprisonment without law. Who knows.”

So at the risk of being soft, I would like to say: Occupy Wellington, you are beautiful and I love you, and I couldn’t leave you if I tried. I’ll see you all for a fresh round of activism next year.

#transphobictampons: It's Not Offensive, It's Oppressive.

Kassie Hartendorp, Workers Party member and member of the Queer Avengers activist group

At the end of 2011, an advertisement for Libra tampons was pulled from air after members from the queer community called out the company for its transphobia. Many argued that the company was sending a strong message to those who did not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth, that they were not as 'authentic' as their biological counterparts. The issue was framed as being problematic for only a small amount of 'oversensitive' members of the trans community but the advertisement can be linked back to the way that negative images work to oppress many on the gender and sexuality spectrum.

Featured on Australian and NZ television, as well as the Libra website and Youtube, the advertisement featured two women applying their make-up in a bathroom at a club. One is clearly a cis-woman¹ and the other appears to be a drag queen. The two embark on a competition to see who the 'real woman' is by both putting on mascara, lipgloss and adjusting their breasts. The contest is 'won' when the cis-woman pulls out her Libra tampon causing the drag queen to storm off defeated, due to her apparent biological deficiency – the fact that she cannot menstruate like her cis counterpart.

Comments flowed in on the Libra Facebook page and various news, blog and social networking sites accusing Libra of being, at best ignorant, at worst, blatantly transphobic and misogynist. Those who spoke out were labelled as

being 'too sensitive' and disregarded the issue as 'political correctness gone wild.' The main discourse being used, or ways of talking about the advertisement were framed around the idea of 'personal offense.' Some gender variant people made the argument that they were not offended, which implied that the whole issue was moot. The drag queen appearing in the advertisement made the public announcement that she saw no need to apologise and saw the problem as coming from a 'small portion of the trans community' who have 'chosen to view the ad as a personal attack.'

Aside from the fact that most gender variant people do not 'choose' to feel attacked by advertisements that use their often difficult lives as the butt of a joke by a multimillion dollar corporation, the entire framing of the discussion should be readjusted. Advertisements such as this one should be seen as having an oppressive effect, rather than an offensive one. Labelling a comment, slur or stereotype as offensive, lowers the problem to that of the individual rather than identifying it as a structural problem. Someone could be offended by loud music or bright coloured clothing. An old co-worker of mine felt personally offended every time she saw someone wearing pajama pants tucked into Ug boots to a shopping mall. At the same time, someone can be offended by a woman who strongly speaks out in a male-dominated environment, or a queer couple holding hands down the street. A corporation could be offended when a marginalised community protests against their transphobic advertisement – a CEO could feel personally attacked in much the same way as those being degraded or insulted by their media campaign.

The point here, is that while offense is

an important component in this debate, it cannot be the only way in which we describe and discuss how media and oppression works. As one blogger puts it: "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can mobilize an entire society in violent hate against me." Depicting a gender variant person as being 'less woman' than a cisgendered woman due to the fact she does not menstruate is oppressive towards anyone on the gender spectrum. Reinforcing a gender binary that assumes and expects that you fit into one gender category or the other is oppressive. Profiting off the fear of someone not being able to fit into one of these gender categories is oppressive. These are not personal attacks on individual members of the trans community; it is the product of an oppressive system.

Issues of oppression need to be understood at a material basis – that is, not just social phenomena that happen to random individuals, which only makes sense through a lens of personal experience. Transgender people are the subjects of discrimination when it comes to basic rights such as employment, housing and medical care, as well as being threatened by verbal and physical harassment in their daily lives. This oppression is at its very core, structural as it is reproduced within institutions such as workplaces, hospitals, schools and governmental agencies. While, these oppressive forces can be clearly felt on a personal basis, the way of articulating the problem and arguing against its destructive effects must be done on a wider level that takes our economic and social system into account.

From a Marxist perspective, the reason why members of the queer community face structural oppression is because of the way capitalism structures the family. The modern nuclear family, with its gen-

1. Cisgendered or cis-woman: Identifying as the gender assigned at birth. Equivalent term to "trans," identifying differently to the gender assigned at birth.



dered division of labour, developed under capitalism - many pre-capitalist societies had room for a “Third Gender” and polyamorous family structures. This system relies, to a large degree on imposed gender roles to maintain the economic, social and sexual order. The rise of women’s liberation and queer liberation have challenged this idea of the family as a private, conventional unit. Although family structures have shifted to accommodate these challenges, the state will always play a role in regulating how we live our lives as gendered, sexual beings. Capitalism is often thought of as just an economic system but it should be understood as a social relation that in turn, affects our social relationships. How we relate to each other as individuals, groups and identities is shaped by capitalist logic. These social relations

are reproduced through the capitalist media. While gains have most certainly been made, trans people are often delegitimised, stigmatised, insulted and ridiculed within the mainstream media. The Libra advertisement is just another message that reinforces the pervasive and oppressive ideology that gender variant people are second class citizens. If you ask any transgender person, they will feel the very real effects of this ideology at some point in their lives, if not on a daily basis. Furthermore, it cannot be forgotten that a company is profiting off these very messages because of an advertising industry that uses fear and division as a tool to sell products.

Many members of the queer community failed to recognise the oppressive nature of the message the advertisement sent. If we are going to combat

queer oppression that has negative effects on both same-sex attracted people and the gender variant population, there needs to be a recognition that an attack on the trans community is an attack on us all. We need to shift away from the mode of thinking that blames the individual for taking a ‘personal offense’ at an oppressive act. An advertisement may seem small, but it is one of many building blocks that have over history, built a mighty wall of structural oppression. Unfortunately that one brick isn’t going to cause the whole wall to crumble, but if we can together get a foothold, and find the right tools to start chiselling away at those ruptures, then maybe we can tear it down and build a world in which no-one is treated as second class.

The Dialectical Relationship between Work and Mental Health, Part 2

This article is the second of a four part series by Kelly Pope. The first part can be read online at <http://bit.ly/z9mKIH> or in the December-January issue of The Spark. 'Consumer' in this article refers to a person who currently or has previously used psychiatric services. 'Bourdieuian' refers to the theories developed by French Sociologist Piere Bourdieu and 'taangata whai ora' is a Te Reo term that translates to 'person seeking well-being'.

The instrumental value of employment is that it creates opportunities for mental health consumers to access additional resources to improve their health and wellbeing such as financial resources and supportive social networks. From a Bourdieuian perspective, therefore, employment allows people with experience of mental illness to beneficially increase their social and economic capital. The benefit of these resources has been expanded on in research exploring resilience factors for mental health. One example of this is a 2002 Ministry of Health publication which cites economic security as being crucial for well-being as well as the availability of opportunities. Because of the lower-than-minimum-

wage rate of benefits in New Zealand society and difficulties attaining work without experience, the mental health benefits that come from economic security and accessibility of opportunities is likely to disproportionately benefit those in paid work in comparison to the unemployed.

In terms of the intrinsic value of work in facilitating wellness and recovery, research shows that an 'employed' status is beneficial in that it fosters positive self-image. In her thesis on New Zealand Women's career experiences through mental illness, Annie Southern quotes Neff (2006) that "to be able to work in a work-oriented society is to be 'like' others ... unemployment can only exacerbate feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem". Additional research has found that work can facilitate wellbeing and recovery by providing identity outside of the family unit, enhancing positive self-concept, feelings of mastery through acquiring new skills, feeling of being 'normal', and increasing confidence.

Along with reported improvements in self-esteem and feelings of wellness and competence, clinical improvements have also been shown to be correlated with employment. Hospital admissions and length of stays, relapses, use of medication and psychiatric symptoms can be reduced if people with mental illness are employed. Research that proves the benefit of employment for recovery in this way supports the view that "it is

rehabilitatively useful for people with even severe and prolonged psychiatric illness to be in work" (VandenBoom & Lustig, 1997). This is also supported by a number of consumer definitions of recovery published on the Centre For Recovery Awareness website which equate recovery with occupation – "working is recovery" (Share Centre patron), or with activities that induce feelings of contribution, purpose and meaning – "recovery is living-not surviving" (Recovering Mental Health Client), "volunteering is recovery" (Share Centre patron), "recovery is a purpose outside one's self" (Psychiatric patient).

These occupational understandings of recovery fit with the findings of qualitative research undertaken by Kelly, Lamont and Brunero looking at the recovery experiences of consumers participating in a task-orientated support group, GROW. In this paper, occupation was understood to be "the doing of any activity by a real person at a specific point in time, whereby engagement in the occupation has the opportunity to influence purposefully one's culture" (Kramer et al, 2003, cited in Kelly et al) so did not focus on paid employment, rather capturing the experiences of these volunteer peer support workers. One participant commented on the confidence he had gained saying "If this group of people were willing to accept me as their organiser, maybe I can do a lot of other things as well." Another participant alluded to the potential occupational opportunity has for the recovery of people experiencing acute mental health issues, "I know people in 4A [psychiatric unit], they'd love to be able to swing their legs out of bed and wash the floor and why 'cause they'd have something to do." In terms of paid employment, a Mental Health Foundation Study also based on qualitative data



found that “employment was a positive experience” for the people interviewed (Peterson, 2007).

Supporting the idea that work is beneficial to mental health, is research which indicates unemployment “tends to have a significant adverse effect on both physical and mental health” for the majority of people (Acheson, 1998). This relates to long-term unemployment where studies have found substantial deterioration of mental health when measured for minor psychiatric morbidity over the first six months of unemployment and a slight decline for the following two year period. Mental health is also impacted at the time of job loss where the person feels overwhelmed with a sense of hopelessness.

Evidence also exists highlighting that for those moving from unemployment into paid employment, an increase in well-being is likely especially where the position taken on is permanent.

This anecdotal and empirical evidence indicates the benefits of employment, or work in the broader sense, for mental health consumers’ wellbeing and recovery, including the decreased need to use mental health services. In light of this, we may expect that the employment rate for people with mental illness to be level with or greater than that of the general population, as taangata whai ora pursue wellness and recovery. Despite the evidence of benefits associated with meaningful activity and contribution,

unemployment rates for people with experience of mental illness are considerably high. Less than half of the mental health consumer population in New Zealand were in employment at the time of a study by Jenson, Sathiyandra, Rochford, Jones, Krishnan and McLeod. The researchers found the level of employment amongst mental health consumers to be 44%, with approximately 27% being full-time employees.

For a number of reasons such as employment discrimination and its structural basis, this makes people with experience of mental illness to be amongst those disability groups with the lowest levels of employment.

Left calendar

Wellington

Workers Party branch meetings

Tuesdays 6pm
Wellington Peoples’ Centre

Queer Avengers meetings

Thursdays 7pm
Anvil House

Urewera Raids: Trial update and public forum

Friday February 4th, 6pm-8pm
Mezzanine, Central Library

CONTAGIOUS STRIKES: Talk and short film on workers’ struggles in China

Saturday February 4th, 7pm-9pm
46 Frederick Street
Entry by donation

Rally: Oppose Asset Sales

Wednesday February 15th, 2-5pm
Te Puni Kokiri - Ministry of Maori Development, Corner of Lambton Quay & Stout Street

Auckland

Rally: Free The Urewera 4 Defendants! Drop The Charges!

Monday February 13th, 9am-12pm
Auckland High Court

Christchurch

Open Air University: A Day of knowledge at Occupy Christchurch

Sunday February 12 10am-6pm.
<http://www.occupychristchurch.org>



The meaning of Sonny Bill Williams.

The first international Rugby superstar with a wider appeal and awareness beyond rugby fans was Jonah Lomu. While terms such as 'greatest player ever' 'living legend' etc. can be bandied about easily enough, it is generally agreed that the power and influence of Lomu on the international rugby arena was immense. His sheer power, pace and image shocked and awed the interna-



Jonah Lomu represents the fear

tional sporting world. Like with many sportspeople defined as 'The Greatest' it is not just the records that carry weight, it is the extraordinary effect of 'the idea' of the player on the wider viewing public that lifts someone above the shoulders of their fellow competitors.

Sonny Bill Williams (or SBW is he is often referred to in the media) is the second player following Lomu who most clearly fits the bill of 'Superstar'. Yet this is a player who has played for the All Blacks rugby team for only two years, failing in his attempt to attain a starting spot in the team. Boxing aficionado and vulture capitalist Bob Jones has described SBW's capabilities in his boxing side project as being "He can't box. ...but that's hardly surprising given his novice status."¹ In his most recent fight against 43-year-old gospel singing, sickness beneficiary, Alipate Liava'a, he couldn't even score a knockout, cue Jones' negative reaction. However as spectacle SBW is a Superstar. With his sideshow boxing match raising over \$350,000 for the Christchurch earthquake.² Alongside his boxing efforts, his every move is debated and discussed, in a manner far greater and wider than that of either Dan Carter

and Richie McCaw, two All Blacks players, generally acknowledged as two of the greatest players to have played Rugby Union in any country in any time.³⁴

The question then, revolves around the concept of the spectacle and SBW's place within the spectacle. Within this conception of SBW, meaning becomes more abstract and less obvious than say Jonah Lomu whose initial meaning is more obvious, primarily in

the act of scoring tries and particularly in the act of the creation of the monstrous black man using sheer force and power rather guile and deception in the scoring of said tries. Framed around this is the constant go-to within certain rugby circles of the racist conception of Maori/Polynesian players as not being as intelligent or capable of decision-making as 'white' players.⁵ The historic image of Jonah Lomu running over Mike Catt contains all these ideas.

The Meaning of Sarkozy by French Philosopher Alain Badiou is a reference for both the title of this column but also an idea of the meaning of SBW himself and what he represents, what he 'means' on a wider level. One of the key points put forward by Badiou is the idea that the election of French President Nicholas

Sarkozy, on the first part represents the fear of the electorate by electing him and in the second part, fear of that fear in the response of the opposition Socialist Party (the French version of the New Zealand Labour Party) to Sarkozy himself.⁶ Comparisons can be made in the reaction of the Labour Party to the Don Brash led National Party.

Although SBW does not fully represent the immediate physical fear that Jonah Lomu represented. He reflects a deeper more abstract fear. Of professionalism, neoliberalism and the fuller absorption of popular sport into a more commodified form within capitalism. As opposed to Lomu, who is portrayed as a modern day 'noble savage', brutal on the field, but kind and gentle off it. SBW is none of that, since his break with league over the NRL salary cap, he has become an international player for hire. His stay within New Zealand rugby has been marked by a lack of collective team focus, his decisions have been made for his sake only. His contracts have been short-term one year contracts as opposed to the long-term four year contract Richie McCaw signed with the NZRU (New Zealand Rugby Union).

In short SBW represents on one level the perennial fear of the loss of talent-



Sonny Bill Williams represents the fear of the fear

ed players to overseas market, but on the deeper secondary level. SBW represents a break with the amateur ethos held so dearly within New Zealand sporting folklore. The unpaid team player, putting team and country before himself. On both aspects SBW is a rejection of both. And he is feared for that.

1. stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/sport/6293341/Sonny-Bill-an-Arm-puncher

2. 3news.co.nz/VIDEO-Huge-payday-for-Canterbury-Red-Cross-from-SBW-and-Sky/tabid/415/articleID/216501/Default.aspx

3. nytimes.com/2011/10/03/sports/rugby/03iht-carter03.html

4. guardian.co.uk/sport/2011/oct/18/rugby-world-cup-2011-experts-view

5. stuff.co.nz/sport/rugby/news/3759955/Graham-Henry-disgusted-by-racism-row

6. mondediplo.com/blogs/the-real-meaning-of-sarkozy