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'TURNING TRAMPS INTO TAXPAYERS' - THE DEPARTMENT
OF LABOUR AND THE CASUAL LABOURER IN THE 1890s.

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in History at Massey University

Peter John Gibbons

1970

To my parents.

PREFACE.

This thesis (or essay, since it is in scope and shape an exploratory essay rather than a monograph) studies an aspect of the growth of Government administration in New Zealand. The thesis suggests that a major expansion of administration took place in the Liberal period, 1891-1914, and within this general context analyses the work of one Government Department, the Labour Department; showing how that Department tackled the problem of unemployment in the 1890's, and how its administration tended gradually to control and to coerce recalcitrant elements among the unemployed. The Labour Department has been taken, in effect, as a 'test case'.

The direction of the study might be shown more clearly by reference to J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit.¹ Bilbo and the Dwarves, it will be recalled, made the acquaintance of a mountain which sadly contained the dreaded Goblin King and his minions; it also contained (happily for the continuance of the story) many tunnels, ranging from a Great Hall down to little apertures in the bowels of the hill. Here we may call the mountain the Liberal period, the Great Hall - which we investigate hurriedly - the Liberal bureaucracy, one of the lesser halls is the Labour Department, and then one of the tunnels off that is the unemployment business of the Department's work.

Like Bilbo, I did not have time or room to investigate all the other

1. For those not initiated, see J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit, Third edition (London, 1966), pp. 51 and following.

tunnels on the way - I simply took one that led down. Unlike Bilbo I did not find a 'precious', no 'mainspring' of the Liberal period, no ring to bind them all, although in the concluding section I have tried to describe a glimpse of one. But it has been an interesting journey. I should point out here that some of the related topics that have no detailed place between these covers I have been examining further, especially the Labour Department generally in the Liberal period, the co-operative system, and the effect of prosperity on the general citizenry to 1914.

A few other matters may be briefly noted here. The quotation used in the title, 'turning tramps into taxpayers', is out of H.D. Lloyd's Newest England, from page 199.² The 'List of Sources' at the end of the thesis, is merely that, and not a bibliography; the only books listed are those to which reference has been made in footnotes. It is pertinent to draw the attention of future researchers to a certain circumscription in the sources of this thesis. The thesis was prepared in a secondary centre with limited source materials, supplemented by brief periods of research in Wellington. Neither libraries nor newspaper offices in Palmerston North have holdings of local newspapers for the period 1890 to 1897.³ The absence of archival documentation is not wholly due to my locale; the early records of the Department of Labour were destroyed by fire in 1952.⁴

2. H.D. Lloyd, Newest England (New York, 1900).

3. G.H. Scholefield, A Union Catalogue of New Zealand Newspapers, second edition, revised by J.D. Wilson and J.S. Gully (Wellington, 1964) p. 44. I have checked at the Palmerston North Public Library and the Massey University Library.

4. See P.S. Cocks, 'Archives', An Encyclopedia of New Zealand, ed. A.M. McLintock (Three Volumes, Wellington, 1966), I, p. 80. I have checked this statement with librarians at the National Archives, Wellington.

One of the more pleasant aspects of writing a thesis is the assistance readily offered by so many people. I would thank first of all Professor W.H. Oliver, who first suggested an examination of the attitudes of the first head of the Labour Department, Edward Tregear, and who subsequently supervised the thesis - as well as superintending the 1969 Massey history honours class study of the Liberal period, during which sessions many of the implications of this thesis were thrashed out. My gratitude is due to other members of the History Department of Massey University: Mr G.V. Butterworth for several references; Mr B. Poff, who lent me a paper of his on nineteenth century English administration and the ideas of O. MacDonagh;⁵ Dr W.P.N. Tyler for reading the first draft and pointing out deficiencies in organisation, infelicities of style and rank obscurities.

My thanks go to three members of Massey University English Department: Mr P. Alcock, who helped put Tregear in his literary context and who lent me two of his articles in typescript; Dr W. Broughton, who provided information on sources of Tregear's life; and Miss Claire-Louise McCurdy. Librarians have been patient and kind; I offer my thanks to the Librarians of the Palmerston North Public Library; of the General Assembly Library; of National Archives, especially to Miss J. Hornabrook; of the Alexander Turnbull Library and to the staff of the photographic section of that library; and of Massey University Library, especially to Miss Margaret Rodger, head of the Reference Section.

Members of the 1969 history honours class at Massey have assisted in

5. O. MacDonagh, A Pattern of Government Growth, 1800-60 (London, 1961). MacDonagh's main ideas appear on pp. 15-21, and pp. 320-50.

the gestation of this thesis with both trenchant criticism and enthusiastic encouragement over a considerable period. I would thank Messrs L.H. Barber, R.H. Voelkerling, P.K. Charan, M.K. Fitzgerald, T. Kenyon, and K.L. Stewart, and Miss Susan Bindoff. Other helpers with tea and sympathy, discussion and interest, have been: Mr M. Turner, Mr P. Berquist, Miss Prudence Fullarton, Miss Diane Wills, Miss Joan Boddy, and Mrs Susan Wenmoth, all of Palmerston North; and Mr H.T. Van Roon, Mr M. Calder, Mr W. de Beurs, and Mr and Mrs J.D. Peoples, all of Auckland.

In a more general way, my gratitude is due to those historians of Auckland University, 1964-66, and Massey University, 1969, who taught me some of the techniques and delights of history; and to my fifth-form history class at Edgcumbe College in 1968. The latter were not great scholars (even a trifle unwilling) but they reminded me again that history can be fun after some academics and sixth-formers had made it seem quite dreary.

My parents I have thanked in another place. It is fitting to conclude by thanking those who typed this thesis: Miss Heather Reid and Mrs Margaret Brogden of Massey University, for typing portions of the first draft; and Mrs Gail Ring of Palmerston North, who has typed successive drafts and this final version, showing interest and enthusiasm throughout. Any credit for neatness and accuracy of presentation belongs to her.

Massey University History Department,
March, 1970.

P.J. Gibbons

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

AJHR	<u>Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives.</u>
<u>Journal</u>	<u>Journal of the Department of Labour.</u>
'Letters from Men of Mark'	Letters from Men of Mark in New Zealand to W.P. Reeves, in London. Photocopy in Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, of original MSS held in the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.
NZH	<u>New Zealand Herald.</u>
NZBC Tape	Tape recording, held in the Archives of the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation, Timaru, of a radio programme, 'The Forgotten Man', compiled by Basil Clarke, first broadcast in April 1961. The programme recorded memories of Edward Tregear by his daughter, Mrs Vera Robinson, and his three grandchildren, Mrs Vera Tregear Middlebrook, Mrs Bessie Dobbs, and Mr H.T. Robinson.
PD	<u>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates.</u>

See also the Note on Citation, on the following page.

NOTE ON CITATION.

In order to render footnotes as clear and as readable as possible some deviations from orthodox and/or traditional methods of citation have been made. For instance, some of the abbreviations normally italicised (i.e., underlined in typescript) are not italicised in this thesis. For the same reason the abbreviation *ibid.* is nowhere underlined. Volume numbers for the Parliamentary Debates are given as Arabic numerals to increase ease and speed of reference. For that reason also I have included before the volume number the year of the volume. References to the Debates, therefore, are in the same style as in K. Sinclair's William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian. Alternatively there seemed little point in cluttering up references to the Appendices with volume numbers. Where a reference is given to the Appendices, *ibid.* is used in the subsequent footnote only when the reference is to the same paper. The style 'Report' appears in several places; this is to refer to Edward Tregear's annual report (as secretary of the Labour Department) to the Minister of Labour laid before the House of Representatives. In the years 1891-1895 the numbering of pages in his 'Report' is Arabic-style; from 1896 onwards the secretary's 'Report', and the reports of Labour Agents and Inspectors, are numbered in the Roman-style. The page numbering of the Journal is by month for 1893 and 1894, and consecutively throughout the year in 1895 and later. In view of this change, the simplest and clearest reference is simply to month and year, so that the volume numbers have been omitted.

I recognise all that has been done, all that is doing for the advancement of our race and its intellectual improvement. Nay, I would help it on, because I believe the Right should be done, fearless of consequences; but I see fast closing around us one wing of the great net in the augmented power of the State over personal action. Let me exemplify my meaning. If we take the individual at his earliest stage - that of the infant - we find that law first compels the registration of the babe; then its vaccination; then its education. Grown to manhood he must have some means of support. If he marries it must be registered and in set form; when he dies the certificate of his death and burial are produced before authorities. This close inspection by the State-power is growing with every hour Closer and closer round every act of our lives, our births, our labours, our pastimes, our marriages, our deaths, will the web of the State be drawn. Not necessarily for evil this; for good, that is, for the "greatest good of the greatest number"

- Edward Tregear, 1887¹

1. E. Tregear, "The Union." Motion: "That a state of high civilisation ...", (Wellington, 1887), p. 5.

I INTRODUCTORY; THE RISE OF THE LIBERAL BUREAUCRACY.

Denis Glover once claimed that

democracy in New Zealand is not a positive thing: it's by regulation, not by right. We are all hedged and circumscribed by "whatever you're doing, don't." There's a law or a by-law against it. And of course, one half of the community is avidly watching the other half to footfault them on some silly infringement.¹

These views are often aired by New Zealanders about their bureaucracy, though the statements are perhaps rarely as harsh and compact as Glover's. The quotation (and similar statements) implicitly or explicitly raises three definite attitudes towards bureaucracy:

1. that New Zealanders are self-conscious about their bureaucracy;
2. that New Zealanders are irked by the power regulations 'hold' over their lives;
3. that New Zealanders are prepared to use their bureaucracy for controlling 'recalcitrant' conditions or neighbours.²

The second and third attitudes may seem to the observer to be paradoxical, logically at any rate; but it is stressed now that the attitudes are commonly

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1. D. Glover, Hot Water Sailor (Wellington, 1962), pp. 113-14. See also, K. Sinclair, A History of New Zealand, first edition (Wellington, 1961), pp. 266-67.
 2. R.J. Polaschek, Government Administration in New Zealand (Wellington, 1958), p. 287; see also, R.S. Milne, ed., Bureaucracy in New Zealand (Wellington, 1957), pp. 9-10.

coexistent. That is to say: a New Zealander may often cry for control of this or that facet of local or national life, and in almost the same breath revile a 'faceless' civil servant for subjecting him to petty restrictions. This thesis will examine how these 'poles' can (in one instance at least) be on the same axis. The polarities we can label (in a kind of shorthand) as 'alleviation' - of conditions that need rectifying in order to promote justice and equality - and 'control' or 'coercion'.

The axis for these poles nowadays is what might be described as a 'consciousness of bureaucracy', and often a self-consciousness about it. Possibly - and this is extremely speculative - this self-consciousness partly comes about because of the ambiguous attitude (alleviation-control), the 'love-hate' relationship New Zealanders are sometimes dimly aware they have towards their bureaucracy. More probably the consciousness of bureaucracy is simply due to the frequent and continual exposure of the average man to the ramification of regulation, registration and legislation, the effort required to attend to all the form-filling duties of the respectable citizen. The expansiveness and complexity of our statute law is notable for a nation of this size and newness; and statute law is but the most visible, or most obvious, portion of the 'rules'.

So parallel with a 'consciousness of bureaucracy' is the fact of a bureaucracy. Whether this bureaucracy is actually more extensive proportionately than elsewhere, whether New Zealand is more highly regulated than other societies of a similar standard of accomplishment, is a moot point, and one which will not be decided here. But a civil service (to be less perjorative, and to narrow the word 'bureaucracy' to some extent) of some size has been grown in this country, a sturdy plant which someone presumably planted at some discoverable time, or at least nurtured to strength over an identifiable

period.

This thesis examines the growth of one of these 'plants', one branch of the civil service, over a period which appears to be crucial in the general growth of the civil service. The department is that of Labour, and the period is from the accession of the Liberal Government to around the start of the Great War. Apart from some generally illustrative statistics later in this introductory chapter much of the evidence of rapidity of growth will be implicit, and no comparative quantification is attempted.

Having in this first section outlined the quantitative and qualitative change of administration, the bulk of the thesis will examine how in the Labour Department 'alleviation' measures passed perceptibly into ideas of 'control' and 'coercion', and this will be analysed in relation to the work of the Department³ in solving the problem of unemployment in the Liberal period. These propositions, or theses, may therefore be spelled out as:

1. the Liberal period saw a remarkable growth-change in administration, both quantitative and qualitative;
2. the Department of Labour in the period illustrated the growth-change;
3. the work of the Department, especially in the measures taken or proposed over unemployment, epitomises that feature of the 'new bureaucracy' which tempered ideals of alleviation with ideas of control.

Much of the evidence offered is not specifically related to the above

3. 'The Department' refers throughout the thesis to the Labour Department, unless another is specified.

propositions, but is to provide information on the early history of the Department of Labour and its unemployment measures. No apology is necessary for such a statement: little enough has been written of administrative history, and practically nothing of value of the minutiae of many measures of the Liberal Government. We have had a great deal of political history and our more strident ideologies are fairly well mapped. It would be salutary for historians to remind themselves that in the 'ordinary life' of the people the public servant has been the most proximate 'politician', and that there is more to policy than manifestoes and fiscal measures. We misunderstand Clio if we think her to be only a political muse.

+ + + + +

New Zealand was settled paternalistically, and its administration has been largely paternalistic. Control, regulation: these have always come from the Government - what we now call the State. For a number of reasons, the importance of the State increased rather than decreased the larger settlement became. The State supplied troops in the early squabbles with the Maoris; the State had the credit to expand, to employ. The context of the creation and decline of the provincial system also assisted in the growth of central administration. The miniscule Provincial Governments assumed from the even tinier municipalities many functions that might have been given to borough councils. Then, when the central Government took over from the provinces in 1876 the provincial powers were assumed; even if control and administration were shared between local inspectors and central supervisors, the power of the purse was in Wellington.

Around the time of the abolition of the provinces, the central Government

was taking a much greater part than before in the life of the country. Where powers had previously been assumed, they were now created. 'It was Vogel with his massive works programme, his Government Life Insurance Department, and Public Trust Office', decided Polaschek, 'who did most to recast the functions of government, and create new departments to meet the requirements of a new country'. But, as Polaschek goes on to say, such expansion was small compared with the increase that came in administration from 1891 onwards.⁴

There are many reasons for the great expansion of administration after 1891. Retrenchment and depression had truncated development of many measures in the 'eighties, and there was a backlog of administration for the Liberals to make up. The civil service was to some extent an arm of the Liberal Government, an opportunity for patronage through 'temporary' clerkships: the clerk 'repaid' his masters by ensuring that he extended the Liberal consensus through administering with efficiency and benevolence, and he passed back to his masters news of where the consensus was breaking, where the law was deficient.⁵

Siegfried decided that 'public sentiment' had grown so accustomed to regulations that 'it thinks of nothing but new spheres for intervention'.⁶

4. Polaschek, Government Administration, pp. 34-35.

5. It is no accident, but a reflection of the increase of administration under the Liberals, that the political party growing up after 1900 to replace the Liberals took the name 'Reform', partly at least because it intended to reform the Public Service. On the latter point see, W.J. Gardner, 'The Rise of W.F. Massey', Political Science, XIII, number 1 (1961), p. 26.

6. A. Siegfried, Democracy in New Zealand, trans. E.V. Burns (London, 1914), p. 122.

People were asking: if Government life insurance is a success, why not fire and marine? Why could the State not arrange the carriage of sea-going goods and passengers as well as of letters and parcels? If Government advances were helpful to farmers, why could they not be extended to businessmen? It is not speculated that these questions were asked; they appear, as early as 1897, in the Cyclopedia of New Zealand, which added:

It may confidently be anticipated, therefore, that the Civil Service of New Zealand, large as it now is, will go on for ever increasing in bulk and improving in efficiency.⁷

Siegfried put the initiative down to 'public sentiment'. He said of New Zealanders:

their land is small, the Government is close at hand; it seems that one has only to stretch out one's hand to grasp it, and to dictate to it laws and regulations.⁸

But as Milne suggests, although this type of idea helps 'to explain the disposition towards state activity in New Zealand', the idea can be projected too far.⁹ The present writer suggests that personalities may be important. The abuses in New Zealand in the 'eighties were publicised, the discontent marshalled - perhaps considerably fanned - by a host of reformers: Grace Neill, Kate Evans, Rutherford Waddell, W.P. Reeves, Edward Tregear. They were the articulate consciences of the nation.

Some of these people were politicians: Reeves, T.E. Taylor. Others appeared in the public service. Tregear of the Labour Department is probably

7. Cyclopedia Company Limited, Cyclopedia of New Zealand (Six Volumes, Wellington and Christchurch, 1897-1908), I, pp. 115-16; see also, pp. 336-37.

8. Siegfried, Democracy in NZ, p. 57.

9. Milne, Bureaucracy in NZ, p. 13; Siegfried, Democracy in NZ, pp. 54-57.

the most notable in the second category. B. Macgregor, who was in charge of asylums, G. Hogben of the Education Department, and Percy Smith, the Surveyor-General were notable contemporaries. I have here to generalise from the particular; nevertheless the point must be made. If these men were like Edward Tregear (and superficially at any rate this seems to have been so) they were reformers and humanitarians, scholars and theorists, men with precise minds, fussy, fastidious; and they, and others like them, worked their quiet revolutions in the civil service far from the hustings and the fickle electorate. As idealists they attempted to remake society, piecemeal if necessary, by channelling, directing, controlling the recalcitrant elements.

Personalities are important, but not to the total exclusion of other factors. W.H. Oliver has made an examination of several 'rural statutes' of the last quarter of the century, of which some examples 'seemed to suggest that an unsung Tregear was at work in the rural sector, masterminding a transition from permissive to coercive legislation'. The process he found on further enquiry was very much an increase of controls in response to threatening situations - in this case the ravages of rabbits, codlin moths and suchlike. Nevertheless, 'the examples do suggest an intensification of the regulatory impulse in a harshly coercive form in the 1890's'.¹⁰

The administrative change in the Liberal period was both quantitative and qualitative. Tentative factors in the appearance of the latter - personalities or specific needs - have just been outlined; and this is where

10. W.H. Oliver, Towards a New History? (Hocken Lecture, 1969) (Dunedin, 1970), p. 17.

the quantitative change might well be illustrated. Quick if superficial affirmation of the growth in administrative complexity during the Liberal period is offered by the increasing size of official publications in the Liberal period: one simply needs to glance at the increasing breadth of the spines of the Gazette to gain the required effect. Or perhaps at an appendix provided by Polaschek in his Government Administration in New Zealand. In the latter book the list of departments begun in the Liberal period is nearly as long as the list of those existing in 1891; and among the new departments are those of Agriculture, Labour, and Health.¹¹

The Department of Labour began in 1891 with one man. By 1913 there was a Secretary, a Chief Inspector of Factories, several full-time Factory Inspectors (including one for females), Inspectors of Awards; and all their office staffs to deal with the paperwork - a mountain of 32,543 letters and telegrams in or out of the Wellington office in the twelve month period of 1912-1913. Salaries in that year were nearly £15,000; to which must be added another £600 in allowances to policemen who acted as employment agents and factory inspectors in almost every little hamlet in the country.¹²

The pyramid is deeper and broader yet. By 1912-1913 there were 86,578 workers who came under the Factory Acts. In each of the 13,375 factories in which they worked there would be affixed to the wall a set of regulations concerning work space, hours, and holidays. Here the quantitative shades into the qualitative change. From time to time the worker would see a Factory Inspector who might ask about conditions and pay-rates. The worker

11. Polaschek, Government Administration, pp. 294-96.

12. For the statistics in this paragraph and in the one immediately following, AJHR, 1913, H-11, pp. v, xxiv, 91.

would be required to eat his lunch in a certain room, designated by legislation; and likewise, he would not be permitted to work beyond certain hours, nor during his statutory lunch hour. Virtually every day the worker would be conscious of the administrative apparatus protecting him and regulating him.

Legislation and bureaucracy brought the 'Liberal consensus' not only to factory workers, but to shop assistants, shearers, seamen - nearly everyone in fact.¹³ If there was no applicable Act when a problem arose, a law was soon drafted and usually passed. A good example of the belief in the appropriateness of legislation can be found in the Debates of the 1896 Parliament. Seddon had learned that the Charitable Aid Boards were exploiting some unfortunate unemployed by making them carry around the city streets heavy sandwich-boards for advertising. In a healthy burst of indignation the Premier declared: 'the finer feelings of a man revolted at seeing his fellow-man put to such a purpose', and he threatened immediately that he would bring forward a Bill to put an end to the abuse.¹⁴

The tendency towards statutory permissiveness requested for departments is exemplified by the Labour Department. In his very first 'Report', 1892, the secretary, Tregear, wrote:

It has been found by the experience gained during the first year of action that further powers are needed before this Department can be worked in a manner likely to fulfil its best functions.

13. See, H. Roth, Labour Legislation in New Zealand: A Bibliography (Auckland, 1964), passim.

14. PD, 1896, 94, p. 233.

Taking his cue from the Labour Department Bill which Reeves, his Minister, had unsuccessfully introduced in the House, the secretary decided it was necessary that inspectors be empowered 'to demand information, and obtain it, if necessary, by legal enforcement'.¹⁵ He was to make this request for statutory powers a number of times over the next few years.¹⁶

In the meantime, Tregear got results more readily by tidying up existing law, and begging for its extension in all possible directions. The Factory Inspectors, at a Conference in 1898, asked 'That not only factories and workshops should be kept clean, but that an Inspector should have the power to compel cleanliness, &c., in the yards, enclosures, &c., adjoining a factory'. It was a never-ending process. No sooner was the Employment of Boys and Girls without Payment Prevention Act passed in 1899 than Tregear was insisting that 'the measure should, however, be widened'. 'I sincerely trust', he implored in 1901, 'that the Bill of last year regulating clerical labour in offices will again be laid before the House.... Only the firm hand of the State can secure permanent improvement'. In 1903 he wanted the Shearers' Accommodation Act 'extended to large farms and sawmills'.¹⁷

The administrator had victories to go with his pleas. An example of such a 'victory' may be quoted here, for it shows also how firmly the head of the Labour Department believed that only the State could 'secure permanent improvement', how poorly he regarded local and traditional authorities, and how highly he esteemed centralised agencies, unfettered

15. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 2.

16. See, for instance, AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 2; 1895, H-6, p. 6.

17. AJHR, 1898, H-6, p. iv; 1900, H-11, p. v; 1901, H-11, p. iii; 1903, H-11, p. vi.

by parochial (in the narrower and wider senses of the word) interests.

The passage was written in 1902.

There is reason for congratulation in the improved statute which Parliament presented last session to the colony as the Factories Act. Many of its provisions are distinctly in advance of any previous legislation. I may instance particularly those dealing with hygiene and cleanliness. It is now possible with the aid of the Health Department to keep not only factories, but the localities adjoining factories, in a healthy condition Nor did local authorities, either by their own impartial efforts or by alacrity shown in meeting requests of the Factory Inspectors, prove themselves capable of understanding the gravity of the situation, or the necessities of the industrial population. When, however, the newly constituted Department of Health came into existence, its appreciation of the fact that vested interests are small matters compared with the public welfare brought its officers as powerful allies to the aid of the Inspectors of Factories and has earned the gratitude of the Department of Labour.¹⁸

In the following year, 1903, the Labour Department Bill, which had lain idle since the early days of Reeves' ministry, was finally passed into law. There was a minimum of debate.¹⁹ It was virtually an enabling Act since the Department for many years previously had happily discharged its functions as now enumerated:

- (a) To administer the labour laws of New Zealand;
- (b) to acquire and disseminate knowledge on all matters connected with the industrial occupations of the people, with a view of improving the relations between employers and workers;
- (c) to collect and publish all reliable information relating to or affecting the industries of the colony and rates of wages; and

18. AJHR, 1902, H-11, p. iii.

19. PD, 1903, 127, pp. 383-90.

- (d) to perform such other duties as may from time to time be prescribed by any Act of the General Assembly.

The information that could be sought was detailed to some extent in the next section. Sub-section (c), however, gives an indication of the power bureaucracy was requiring in this period. The Department was empowered to

Obtain from all persons able to furnish the same such further and other information in respect to the collection of Customs duties and their effects on the conditions and operations of labour and the industries of the colony.

In other words, virtually anything the Department wished to know, it could legally find out; an extensive power. There was as a bonus a penalty clause, which allowed for a fine if information was not furnished after an appropriate interval or if the information was discovered to be false: twenty pounds.²⁰ The Act was apparently basically as drafted by Reeves a decade before, and Tregear very much approved of it for he wrote to his former minister in September 1903, 'The Labour Department Bill is yours - I have persuaded Mr Seddon to wake that sleeping beauty with a kiss'.²¹

It was an era of officials, especially inspectors. If you were a settler under, say, the Improved Farm settlement scheme, you had to suffer the inspection of the Lands Department Ranger; if you worked in an engineering business, you would be approached periodically by Inspectors of Machinery. In 1907-08, 1333 visits were made by Inspectors under the Shearers and

20. Statutes of New Zealand, 1903, pp. 102-04.

21. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 29 September 1903.

Agricultural Labourers Act of 1907. The year Inspectors of Scaffolding were appointed, 1908, they made 1344 examinations in Auckland, another 900 in Wellington.²² And how casually the officers might be appointed. A question was asked in the House in 1892, on behalf of the member for Waimate, whether Mr Reeves would establish an agency of the Labour Bureau in that district. Reeves replied that he thought there already was an Agent at Waimate, but if there was not 'he should have pleasure in appointing one'.²³

The 'administrative revolution' did not go unnoticed. W.F. Buckland, an Auckland M.P., introduced to the House in 1892 a Washers and Manglers Bill, in which he satirised the style of legislative detail and bureaucratic control evident in early Liberal labour legislation. He proposed that

"soiled linen of all varieties, articles of apparel, and the various household utilities that are capable of renovation, improvement, and restoration by the application of hot or cold water in conjunction with soap or other like ingredient, accompanied by a violent and continued rubbing between the hands, or in some equivalent artificial piece of machinery," should be treated only by licensed washerwomen and manglers, subject to the authority or supervision of the Minister of Public Works, Minister of Labour, Auditor-General, and an army of inspectors, etc.²⁴

A legislative councillor said in 1896 that the country was overrun with Inspectors - for sheep, cattle, dairies, rabbits, and now orchards. 'The question would be how they were going to inspect the Inspectors.'²⁵ When the New Zealand Herald examined the Liberal programme of 1896, it observed

22. AJHR, 1908, H-11, p. xii; 1909, H-11, p. ix.

23. PD, 1892, 76, p. 503.

24. Cyclopedia of NZ, II, p. 766.

25. Quoted by Oliver, Towards a New History?, p.19; PD, 1896, 96, p. 802 (L. Walker).

sourly that the proposed measures would lead to 'a few more inspectors, and... another useless meddling with industry'. About the same time a member in the lower House was issuing an anachronistic warning.

Great caution should be exercised in regard to these labour bureaux, otherwise the institution would imperceptibly grow, and afterwards it would be very difficult for anyone to bring it down again. The great secret with departments like these was to prevent them growing beyond all control.²⁶

26. NZH, 10 June 1896; FD, 1896, 94, p. 258 (W. Crowther).

II A BUREAU FOR LABOUR AND A BUREAUCRAT.

There has been unemployment in New Zealand since the time of large-scale colonisation: in the settlements of the New Zealand Company labourers were soon complaining that the Company had not kept its undertaking to find work for all; and if private employment was not forthcoming, there should be an expansion of public works to provide relief for those out of a job. And as long as the search for a viable economy continued, as long problems of unemployment lasted. If not too much trust is placed in the reliability of the figure, it is worthy of notice that in Dunedin in 1861 there were over a thousand signatures on a petition presented to the Provincial Council requesting employment.¹ For a district of limited population that number represents large-scale unemployment. The discovery of gold forestalled possible inflation of the problem; and subsequently Vogel's policy carried many (if not all) areas of New Zealand to some sort of prosperity and a reasonable level of employment was retained.

A 'reasonable level' of employment was by no means what we would today describe as full employment. There were always, in prosperity or depression, large numbers of unoccupied men, but they did not necessarily feel obliged to sign petitions or complain about their inability to keep continuous employment.

1. W.B. Sutch, Poverty and Progress in New Zealand, second edition (Wellington, 1969), p. 63.

For if America was regarded as a land of opportunity, New Zealand was a country of opportunities. Migrants came for a variety of reasons; the vast majority arrived because of the anticipated economic opportunities, or at any rate they expected on arrival that these opportunities would be available.

Opportunities were available in the flux of unplanned or half-planned settlement, where every man was a tradesman and every man a labourer, and the migrant who was willing to try seemed to have all the opportunities he desired before him. In New Zealand a man might farm, seek gold, run a store or a hotel, become a carpenter, live off Maori hospitality, learn surveying, or fight the rebellious natives. In his peripatetic career he might scrounge off the countryside or his fellows. In short, he might do as he wished. He might not become rich, but he might begin a new occupation whenever he felt too poor. So the settler was often out of work, spending what he had earned in his previous employment, or simply unemployed while tramping the countryside, for if he wanted a change of scenery, or if he was out of work in a depressed area, there were always hope, opportunities, employment in the neighbouring province.

The opportunities for a 'labourer of fortune' narrowed as the country was settled. Services and trades became more specialised, businessmen consolidated their enterprises and their profits. As each community grew to some sort of rough maturity, entrepreneurs and labourers were more visibly distinguished. The general labourer could no longer turn his hand to all manner of occupations in an increasingly sophisticated society. During this settling process came the depression of the 'eighties. New Zealand had been depressed before, but never uniformly; if the depression had arrived in telescoped fashion - striking areas in succession rather

than simultaneously - part way through the decade the grey financial blanket had settled like an uneven shroud over the country. Opportunities were no longer in the next province, because it was depressed as well. There was little credit, less work.

In Christchurch the meetings of the unemployed began in May 1879, when 100 men attended, of whom it was claimed three dozen had not worked since harvest ended. In June 200 attended a meeting, in September 400; and in Dunedin that latter month there had been a meeting of Otago unemployed.² In many parts of New Zealand it was as McIntock described Otago: 'unemployment was no longer a threat but a reality'.³

Yet the situation was never entirely static. In Canterbury (to take just one example) conditions were better in 1881 and 1882, but worsened in 1883, and the following year unemployment was even more widespread.⁴ In 1884 the Christchurch Immigration Officer had 558 applications for employment between May and October; of these 412 were from labourers, the other main group being thirty-three carpenters.⁵ There was an improvement again in 1885.

How high was the level of unemployment? Probably in many areas it was somewhat but not greatly in excess of what it had been in the previous decades, although the situation was obviously worsening. But there were, apart from

2. W.H. Scotter, A History of Canterbury (Christchurch, 1965), III, p. 60; A.H. McIntock, The History of Otago (Dunedin, 1949), p. 713.

3. McIntock, Otago, p. 699.

4. Scotter, Canterbury, III, pp. 61-62.

5. AJHR, 1884, Session II, H-23.

the generally dispiriting context of depression, new factors which made the problem assume larger dimensions. First, it was obvious that if there had not actually been a drift of population from country to town, there were at least many seasonal workers now wintering in the cities; and this situation was made more acute by agricultural mechanisation (reapers, for example).⁶ Secondly: depression in certain trades was throwing many skilled workmen out of employment, and these men often raised the standards of complaint over lack of employment behind which casual and unskilled labourers formed; which is why it was said, 'the cry about the unemployed is a product of the towns'.⁷ Thirdly, and perhaps most emphatically, the great 'exodus' to Australia (now the equivalent of opportunity in the neighbouring province) led to a crisis of confidence within the country.

We're off to bright Australia
 Far o'er the singing waves.
 Why should men live in Maoriland
 To be forever slaves.⁸

All kinds of solutions were devised and suggested to deal with the problems of unemployment and exodus. Many thought land settlement was the answer: break up the big estates, buy Maori lands, extend the Village Settlements scheme. Considerable currency was given by the Atkinson Ministry to a pamphlet by G.M. Park, The Unemployed and the Remedy, in which Henry George's single-tax theories were applied to New Zealand.⁹ These 'solutions',

6. PD, 1887, 57, pp. 715 (R. Stout), 800 (F.H. Fraser).

7. Ibid., p. 779 (M.J.S. Mackenzie).

8. A. D[esmond], 'The Exiles of New Zealand', in Shanties by the Way, ed. Rona Bailey and Herbert Roth (Christchurch, 1967), p. 80.

9. G.M. Park, The Unemployed and the Remedy (Wellington, 1886); PD, 1887, 59, p. 529 (A.A. Stuart-Menteath and G.F. Richardson).

however, were either too radical for the parliaments of the 'eighties, or (more usually) were inflated by optimism to the point of impracticality. In so far as they admitted that there was unemployment, and that it was a problem if it did exist, the Government of the day usually thought of public expenditure and public works as the most legitimate palliative.

Governments in the 'eighties sometimes voted money for relief-works, and when there was money available for construction of roads and railways it was usual policy to engage the unemployed men first.¹⁰ But there was not much money for railways generally, and very little specifically for relief-works. From 31 March 1888 to 31 May 1889, £37,000 was expended on relief-works. £27,000 of this was spent in Canterbury and Otago. Such disproportion led an Auckland newspaper to complain later: 'In the South... they have always... a large body of "unemployed" on hand. They utilize them to get their railways and other public works completed'.¹¹ Vincent Pyke, a Southern member, complained in Parliament, on the other hand, that public works in his area had become a hospital for the unemployed - 'for the dilapidated, the lame, the lazy'.¹² Although relief works were a very small effort and only a minute part of total public works construction, there was a slight absorption of men in the winter when unemployment was worst, or most obvious. In April 1888 there were 345 men on these relief works, and the number climbed steadily to 809 in October, falling away to 172 in April.¹³

10. PD, 1889, 64, p. 201 (E. Mitchelson).

11. NZH, 2 May 1891.

12. PD, 1887, 57, p. 341.

13. AJHR, 1889, D-9. In addition to Government relief-works there were examples of local relief-works.

The 'eighties appeared to have come to a climactic halt; yet when the 'Sweating Commission' was over and the Maritime Strike settled, when the election was past and the new ministry in office, the exodus continued and the unemployed remained. As a farmer said of the unemployed: 'We cannot boil them down like surplus sheep, and how to get rid of them is becoming a national question'.¹⁴ After January 1891, it was the Liberal Government that had to face national questions and, being heavily corseted by labour representation, the new administration was expected to deal with the problem of unemployment with more diligence than the previous ministry.

In May 1891 [Reeves later recalled] a deputation headed by the members for Wellington waited upon the Prime Minister.... Times were dull, many hands were idle perforce, and the deputation came to urge that something should be done to relieve the congested labour-market and deal with the unemployed in their city. The Premier had with him in the room a colleague [this was Reeves himself], to whom, as the discussion went on, the suggestion was made that the government should use its officials to furnish reports from the country districts where there was any demand for workmen. The Minister caught at the hint, and at the Premier's request took the matter in hand.¹⁵

According to Sinclair's biography of Reeves, the suggestion of a labour bureau was made to Reeves by Kennedy MacDonald, a Wellington Liberal and businessman.¹⁶ It is more than likely that, with the obvious examples in the United States, the idea was mooted often by different people; and as Government or as commercial enterprises employment bureaux had operated in New Zealand over many years. From the 1850's, immigration officials had

14. New Zealand Farmer, 1895 (August), p. 284 (Letter from W. Wapstraw).

15. W.P. Reeves, State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand (Two volumes, London, 1902), II, pp. 216-17.

16. K. Sinclair, William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian (Oxford, 1965), p. 132.

acted as 'employment agents' in New Zealand, directing new arrivals to both private and public jobs. There had been a labour bureau set up by the Stout-Vogel Government in Christchurch and Dunedin in 1887; in Parliament G.F. Richardson later drew attention to this when it was claimed that the Liberals' bureau was a novel idea. Richardson also pointed out that he had been responsible for 'having put an end to it', which he considered a creditable action. His ministerial colleague, E. Mitchelson, the Minister for Public Works, apparently thought better of the idea, and had told the House in 1887 that, in order to relieve distress in the north, he was communicating with the Mayor of Auckland with a view to establishing a labour bureau.¹⁷

Labour bureaux in New Zealand went back much further than 1887: the first examples were coffee houses in Wellington as early as February 1841, which were advertised as available for that purpose.¹⁸ Employment agencies as commercial undertakings functioned at various times. In Gisborne, for instance, Mrs Morrison ran a Servants Registry Office in 1881. Servants could get good places, it was claimed, though none were recommended unless they had good characters.¹⁹ A labour bureau was in operation in Canterbury during the Maritime Strike of 1890, to draft the country labour into town, thereby filling the strikers' places.²⁰ That same year the 'Sweating Commission' had recommended the setting up of an organisation to collect statistics, and also that 'all labour offices in the colony be registered

17. Scotter, Canterbury, III, p. 63; PD, 1892, 78, p. 364 (Richardson); 1887, 58, p. 552 (Mitchelson).

18. Sutch, Poverty and Progress, p. 46.

19. Poverty Bay Herald, 8 April 1881.

20. J.D. Salmond, New Zealand Labour's Pioneering Days, ed. D. Crowley (Auckland, 1950), p. 88.

and regulated under Act of Parliament'.²¹

At any rate, we do know that it was at the meeting of the Premier with the unemployed deputation that Ballance and Reeves first made public their idea of a proposed labour bureau. The Premier began by admitting that the Government had some responsibility towards the problem of unemployment: 'The Government recognised that a certain duty devolved on them to keep the people in work, but they could not find employment at their trades'. He offered road-making for the artisans. 'Speaking generally, he thought a cure for the attraction of labour to the towns was to be found in the village settlements.' Ballance then promised to set up a 'minister of Industry', to keep statistics and assist labour, and he linked this with the crisis of the continuing exodus.²² (George Lewis, who came from New South Wales in 1893 to investigate the workings of the Labour Bureau, reported to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly that concern over the loss of 'desirable settlers' to Australia had been a determining factor in Ballance's decision.)²³ When Ballance had finished, 'Mr Reeves added officials in the country districts should be employed in keeping a register of the available work and sending an intimation to other parts of the colony'.²⁴

Two days later, on 18 May, the New Zealand Herald correspondent waited on the Premier in order to clarify the previous statement. A Minister, said Ballance, would be in charge of the new statistical office, but there would

21. AJHR, 1890, H-5, pp. v-vi.

22. NZH, 16 May 1891.

23. G. Lewis, Labour Bureau in New Zealand (Legislative Assembly of New South Wales, Sydney, 1893), p. 1.

24. NZH, 16 May 1891.

not be a special portfolio. He talked further about the projected Bureau. 'At present there is no machinery for registering the available labour for any industry, the amount of labour required in any given locality, the character of the labour wanted, or the amount of suitable labour seeking employment in any given district or trade.' Ballance also suggested what was to become one of the major phobias (it is an appropriate word) of the new Department: that there were some unemployed who did not really wish to find a job; such men, he warned, would no longer be able to justifiably say they did not know where work was available.²⁵

Shortly thereafter, on 27 May, a brief notice appeared in the Gazette, to the effect that the Governor took pleasure in appointing Edward Tregear to the position of Assistant Draughtsman in the Wellington Office of the Department of Lands and Survey. This may well have been the appointment to the new Bureau, disguised or regularised for the time being as an appointment in another Department; for those days were still very much ones of retrenchment, and the Seddonian patronage that created positions readily and arbitrarily was yet to come.²⁶ Tregear, in his own account, stated:

Mr Ballance and Mr Reeves, both personal friends of mine, thought that I was the best suited man in the service to fill the position of chief [of the Labour Bureau], and I was consequently transferred to Wellington and given control of the Department.²⁷

25. NZH, 18 May 1891.

26. New Zealand Gazette, 1891, I, p. 594. His appointment as 'Secretary of the Bureau of Industries' was issued on 19 January 1892, 'such appointment to date from 1st June 1891'. Gazette, 1892, I, p. 90.

27. Fair Play, I, number 13 (January 1894), p. 7 (Interview with Tregear).

PLATE I.

Edward Tregear, head of the Labour Department
1891-1911. This photograph was probably
taken in the 1890s.

(Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.)



At this point it is appropriate to sketch the character of Edward Tregear. He was permanent head of the new Bureau - soon to be renamed the Department of Labour - for twenty years, and because of his character and his administrative autonomy his influence was both overwhelming and formative. It is not intended here to write a full biography, but to look at his background and some of his attitudes, especially those which appear, however obliquely, in his career as head of the Department.²⁸

He was born 'of one of the most ancient and distinguished families of Cornwall' in 1846 and educated in London, finally becoming a civil engineer.²⁹ In 1863 (three years after the death of his father, a sea captain with the P. and O. Company) he migrated to New Zealand with his mother and two sisters. One account says Tregear was 'dissatisfied with the uneventful life of the Old Country, [and] he determined to emigrate to the colonies in order to find more scope for his restless spirit'; his daughter recalled that he came to New Zealand in order to make a reasonable living.³⁰

He settled first in a small house at Warkworth, near Auckland, and later went surveying at the Thames and Coromandel goldfields. He served

28. References are given to quotations over the following five paragraphs, but the material generally is not footnoted. The account of Tregear's background is compiled from the following sources: 'Tregear, Edward', in A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, ed. G.H. Scolefield (Two Volumes, Wellington, 1940), II, p. 395; H. Roth, 'Tregear, Edward', in An Encyclopedia of New Zealand, ed. A.H. McIntock (Three volumes, Wellington, 1966), III, pp. 446-47; Unsigned biographical entry, Cyclopedia of NZ, I, pp. 145-46; Unsigned article, 'Forgotten New Zealander', New Zealand Listener, 14 April 1961; J.C. Andersen, 'Obituary. Edward Tregear', Journal of the Polynesian Society, XL, (1931), pp. 244-46; J. Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders. No. 13. Edward Tregear, Pioneer, Scholar, Humanitarian', New Zealand Railways Magazine, IX, number 1 (April 1934), pp. 17-21; NZBC Tape; NZH, 7 December 1916 (Notice of the death of Edward Tregear's mother); and the interview with Tregear, cited in n 27 above.

29. Cyclopedia of NZ, I, p. 145.

30. Ibid., p. 145; NZBC Tape.

in the Maori wars near Tauranga, where he was under fire, twice won the New Zealand medal, and rose to the rank of Captain. Appointed a sub-inspector of the Native Constabulary, he took a contingent of Waikatos into the Orakau area and on this 'frontier' he maintained the peace while surveying and building roads. According to Cowan, 'Tregear used to say that those adventurous times along the frontier were the best days of his life'.³¹

Next he was running his own business - a sawmill - between Raglan and Rangiriri in the mid-'seventies. It was not a financial success, and he moved to Taranaki where 'he acted as engineer for several road boards and two towns, and was carrying on a flourishing business'.³² (It could be exciting as well as flourishing. A telegram from Tregear found among the official papers of the period tells of one frontier incident. His partner was out with a survey party, and left the cook behind in camp. When the survey party returned they found their chef shot - by a Maori, as Tregear assumed and as was later found to be the case.)³³ In 1880 he was appointed surveyor to the Royal Commission on Native Reserves. About that time he joined the Lands Department permanently, 'to a certain extent through the influence of Sir William Fox and Sir Francis Dillon Bell'.³⁴ The rest of the decade he spent surveying in various parts of Wellington Province.

Tregear had, then, a varied life: England, goldfields, wars, pioneering generally. Yet such activity did not preclude a rather stupendous amount

31. Cowan, 'Famous New Zealanders ...', p. 18.

32. Cyclopedia of NZ, I, p. 145.

33. AJHR, 1878, G-11, p. 1.

34. Fair Play, loc. cit.

of writing and study. While on the frontier in the early 'seventies he observed closely and carefully the Maori people, in whose language and life he ever after took considerable interest. Although he wrote on all manner of Polynesian subjects language was his speciality, and he put his tidy mind to the compilation of a seven-hundred page Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary, published in 1891:³⁵ philology continued to fascinate him, and he published articles and smaller dictionaries later.

He collected honours like unemployment figures. He was a Justice of the Peace, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, of the Royal Historical Society, of the Imperial Institute, of the Anthropological Institute, of the London Philological Society, a Member of French, Italian and Peruvian learned societies, and an officer of the French Academy. This last decoration made him rather sore that the British Government had not also recognised him suitably.³⁶

Tregear was in fact deeply sensitive about more than decorations. He wrote poetry of uneven and infrequent merit, and it is worth looking at closely for the clues it gives to his character. Two supplementary images that appear again and again in his verse are those of 'enclosure' and 'sleep' or 'peace'. For example:

Then did they wreathe thee round ...
And hide thee in the radiance.

Enfold me with thy whiteness unto peace.

Passed through the brink to Beyond, to the
infinite rapture of peace.³⁷

35. E. Tregear, Maori-Polynesian Comparative Dictionary (Wellington, 1891).

36. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 22 November 1896.

37. E. Tregear, 'The Lady of Flowers' and 'Mina Maning', in "Shadows" and other verses (Wellington, 1919), pp. 5, 6, 9.

He did not care for 'Endless drifting of human sands, / Blown for ever through weary lands', preferring 'velvet sleep for the tortured faces, / Slumber of soul ... / Peace'³⁸ Tregear (if he did not have a death-wish) certainly repeats images of 'returning to the womb' from a great world-weariness. There is a pantheistic desire to be at oneness with the earth, an instant 'when the parent-lives / Fade out and hide with the things that were'.³⁹ Tregear liked rest, quiet, and orderliness; the desire for the latter is also evident in a passage of his prophetic novel published in 1895.⁴⁰

From those who met him during the twenty years of his secretaryship there is little but praise. F.W. Rowley, who was later a distinguished permanent head of the Department, said Tregear had 'a generally lovable disposition'. Tom Mann, the British labour leader, visited Tregear in 1902, and found him 'most polite and helpful, as I believe he always was to all who called on him'. H.D. Lloyd evidently thought highly of him. The only equivocal note was sounded by Beatrice Webb, who thought him 'a big, brawny, zealous, muddle-headed sort of person'.⁴¹ It was his idealistic socialism that particularly did not impress her: Tregear seems to have envisaged the apocalyptic arrival of the ideal state, and in later life it

38. E. Tregear, 'The Desert', in *ibid.*, p. 20.

39. E. Tregear, 'The Children', in *ibid.*, p. 7.

40. E. Tregear, Hedged with Divinities (Wellington, 1895), pp. 82 ff.

41. F.W. Rowley, The Industrial Situation in New Zealand (Wellington, 1931), p. 11; T. Mann, Tom Mann's Memoirs (London, 1923), p. 167; H.D. Lloyd, Newest England (New York, 1900), p. 247; S. and B. Webb, Visit to New Zealand in 1898 (Wellington, 1959), p. 35.

led him, albeit briefly, into the political arena.⁴²

Tregear's attitude towards workmen, or towards the lower classes generally, was an ambiguous one. Certainly he spent a large part of his life and energy - as secretary of the Labour Department, and as President of the Social Democratic Party - in the cause of the labouring classes. His daughter recalled, 'many a time my father's heart was wrung with pity' for the unemployed, and his grandson said he had an 'almost feminine consideration for others'. He gave his own money to the needy on occasion.⁴³ An example of his financial assistance was a loan to the Australian writer Henry Lawson when the latter was without money on one of his visits to New Zealand.⁴⁴

Yet much of the motivation for half-a-lifetime of labour for the 'toilers' of society must have come either from his desire for orderliness or from his idealistic socialism, for the generality of labourers were often distasteful to him. He described the British workman (as he recalled him) as an 'unmitigated ruffian', though he admitted that if Reeves's accounts were true, the workman of the 1890s had 'doubtless improved much'. When in North Auckland as a Royal Commissioner investigating the Kauri Gum industry he

42. For an account of his later political activity see, B. Gustafson, 'The Advent of the New Zealand Labour Party, 1900-1919', unpublished M.A. thesis, Auckland University, 1961, pp. 31, 47, 53, 99-100, 107-09, 127, 310.

43. NZBC Tape. His grandson's comment is very similar to the description of an American visitor, who found Tregear possessed 'a gentle courtesy and a consideration almost feminine'; Stanley Kingsbury, Edward Tregear: A Character Sketch (n.p., magazine article held as a pamphlet by Alexander Turnbull Library, 1911), p. 326.

44. W.H. Pearson, Henry Lawson among the Maoris (Wellington, 1968), p. 186.

found the average gum-digger 'always an outcast and a vagrant even near Auckland or the villages ... a wild beast'.⁴⁵

Tregear's influence as a bureaucrat was greatly due to his freedom from ministerial interference, and with this autonomy his personal attitudes were easily able to colour his official hues. His first minister held many similar views on labour and employment: Reeves seems to have left Tregear to fill out the detail for measures which they largely agreed upon. Tregear was the dutiful lesser figure in other matters: he once described himself as 'a Dogberry'.⁴⁶ He did not lose his independence with a new regime. 'As a minister', says Burdon, 'Seddon insisted on supervising every detail of administration under his charge.'⁴⁷ When Seddon first became Minister of Labour in 1896 he did supervise fairly fully. Tregear told Reeves:

At first I found him difficult, because he insists upon going into every detail himself his thorough, bluff, way has a charm of its own, and he enters so thoroughly into matters that he carries one along with him.

This control did not last very long. Four months later Tregear wrote: 'I never get a word with him [Seddon], except on Sundays, when if there is anything really important I get him for half an hour'. It made a difference, of course, that the House was by then in session. By May 1901: 'I haven't seen him [Seddon] twice in the last six months - practically I am the Minister of Labour'. When Tregear did (however spasmodically) see Seddon it appears that the civil servant did most of the talking. He recalled after Seddon's

45. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 31 August 1896; 1 April 1898.

46. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 31 August 1896.

47. R.M. Burdon, King Dick (Christchurch, 1955), p. 140.

death that the Premier 'would sit for hours listening to me, to what he called my "dreams", but they were dreams that he did not forget to make use of'.⁴⁸ In other words, Tregear's control was virtually untrammelled by either his ministers, the significance of which can hardly be underestimated.

This, then, was the character and the situation of the man who began the Department of Labour⁴⁹ in June 1891, in one 'small room' in the large wooden Government office-block that still stands in Lambton Quay. Tregear was for the first few weeks without assistance, until joined by James Mackay, clerk, in August.⁵⁰

In June also the proposal of a Bureau went before Parliament, presented by Ballance in a small section of his Financial Statement. He briefly talked of the need to collect statistics, to redeploy the labouring force, and to find out what unemployment really consisted of. For effect and rather dubious illumination he added a short account of the London poor.⁵¹ Because much else in the 'Budget', especially the projected land-tax, was of such political moment the Labour Bureau went largely unnoticed in the subsequent debate. J.A. Duthie briefly alluded to the proposal without mentioning the Bureau. 'When the late Government left office, and for a long time before', he claimed,

48. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 22 April 1896; 31 August 1896; 7 May 1901; 18 July 1906.

49. The Department was first called the Bureau of Industries, and was renamed the Department of Labour in 1892. I have used 'Department', 'Bureau' and 'Labour Bureau' interchangeably, as was the usage of the 'nineties. The work of the Bureau proper was of course but one aspect of the work of the whole Department.

50. Rowley, Industrial Situation, p. 12; Issued under the direction of the Hon. J.A. Millar, Minister of Labour, New Zealand Department of Labour (Wellington, 1907), p. 5. For Mackay, see Cyclopedia of NZ, I, p. 146.

51. PD, 1891, 71, p. 68; AJHR, 1891, B-6, p. 15.

'we did not have such a thing as an unemployed class.' Now it was said that there were unemployed in all large centres of population. C.H. Mills cautioned:

I notice, that the Government intend to establish labour bureaux in the colony. About this, I would point out, we must be very careful indeed, because, whatever is done, I hope we shall never destroy the self-reliance of the people at large.⁵²

Little criticism of weight or of fury could be levelled against the Bureau when its techniques were still largely unknown. The New Zealand Herald decided in an editorial note on 8 June, 'It is not likely that there will be much opposition to the proposal to establish Labour Bureaux all over the colony', but the Herald thought it (sic) would have to be watched 'or it may develop into mischievous [sic] tendencies'. There was complaint about the possible cost. The Herald also pointed out that the Bureau could hardly hope to place unemployed skilled men, and these men, it claimed, were in fact the main part of the exodus to Australia.⁵³

At any rate, something was finally being done to alleviate the lot of unemployed. A Government which owed its existence at least partly to the votes of the workers, those suffering or likely to suffer from unemployment, had admitted its responsibility to help solve the loss of opportunities for employment, and had set up a Labour Bureau with a pioneer and poet in charge. The forms this alleviation took are described in the next section.

52. PD, 1891, 71, pp. 264 (Duthie), 464 (Mills).

53. NZH, 8 June 1891.

III ALLEVIATION: UNEMPLOYMENT AND REDEPLOYMENT.

'The pressing difficulty at the time the Bureau was inaugurated was the presence of "unemployed" labour in the chief towns of the colony.' So wrote Tregear in his first annual 'Report'. He thought the gathering of the unemployed in the cities was due to the 'centralising tendencies of modern institutions'; to the introduction of labour-saving machinery; to decline in public works expenditure. 'It was necessary that some outward set should be given to the human tide [that is to say, the "exodus" to Australia], and that every facility should be given to labourers to proceed to available work in out-districts.'¹

Two points should be made here about Tregear's work in finding employment for men. First: Lloyd reported that Tregear 'has conceived it to be his function not to provide work for manual workers alone, but, in his own phrase, for all classes of labour, mental as well as physical'.² It may well have been so (although Lloyd was often careless or over-enthusiastic with his material), but there is no other evidence that Tregear thought any further than providing men with picks, shovels, and hard physical work. In 1887 he had said:

happiness in labour must be the lot of the few who have obtained congenial employment This contentment can never be the fortune of the masses

1. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 1.

2. Lloyd, Newest England, p. 251. This may have been taken from Tregear's 1895 'Report', where the secretary was referring to female labour; AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 3.

whose occupations are thrust upon them by necessity and great social pressure.³

Or, presumably, by bureaucratic pressure.

The second point, which follows in large measure from the first, is that although the Department did some work in placing unemployed artisans in the skilled trades to which they had been accustomed, by far the greatest proportion of men assisted were unskilled labourers. Alternatively, skilled tradesmen whose occupation was undergoing rationalisation, mechanisation, or just plain depression, were assisted by the Department towards the unskilled field. This happened, for instance, to a number of printers and bootmakers whose trades were changed by the advent of linotype and shoe-making machinery; as there were no openings printers often became bushmen and bootmakers were turned perforce into roadmakers.

Tregear apparently began his Bureau with a rare energy. 'When I first took charge of the department I used to endeavour to find work at once for every applicant', and he promptly had them transported to those districts where he was informed labour was required. The complaint was then made that towns were being 'flooded' with men who would not work. 'Since then we have been more careful.'⁴

Gradually a system was evolved, partly derived from overseas, of dealing with the applicants for work. Tregear was no doubt aware of the New Zealand precedents of his Bureau, and also the working of the usual commercial agency.

3. E. Tregear, "The Union." Motion: "That a high state of civilisation ..." (Wellington, 1887), p. 6.

4. Fair Play, loc. cit.

His more sophisticated knowledge came from the United States, where several state governments had set up labour bureaux.⁵ The techniques of matching labour with demand had to be adapted to New Zealand conditions.

Labour Agents (generally policemen in small towns) were appointed throughout the colony, nearly two hundred of them in all.⁶ The Agent was responsible for finding out what employment vacancies there were in his district by checking with newspaper advertisements, 'asking around town', and anticipating any increase in demand as seasonal work (such as shearing or bushfelling) became imminent. This information was periodically telegraphed to the Wellington office. The Agent also kept a register of all who applied for work, and these numbers were also sent to head office where the lists of vacancies and surplus labour were matched. A further telegram from head office directed surplus labour in one district to another area where it was required. The general idea of providing for the unemployed therefore rested on the following thesis:

it was ascertained that while the larger towns were plus the labouring classes, the smaller towns and various districts were minus the labour required, even to perform the seasonable requisite work⁷

But if a man was destitute in New Plymouth, of what use informing him that work was available in Napier? Unless he became a vagrant and tramped to the other side of the island he could not reach the work. If he felt

5. Tregear's 'Report' for 1892 has appended a map showing states in the U.S.A. with Labour Bureaux. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. [15]. Reports on these American bureaux are scattered throughout the Department's Journal in subsequent years.

6. For the location of these Agents, see maps following p. 119 below.

7. Lewis, Labour Bureau in NZ, p. 1.

disinclined to walk, nothing was solved. Tregear sidestepped this problem with 'free' railway passes. There were two types of passes. If a man were prepared to travel to another district where no definite vacancy awaited him, but where it was known or rumoured that jobs were available, he was given his fare by the Department, no strings being attached. Of course, the system was abused. 'Every effort', Tregear protested, 'short of espionage is used to ascertain the bona fides of applicants and to prevent the railway-passes falling into the hands of rogues.' In 1891-92 1000 men received passes and were subsequently employed; the figure for 1892-93 was 750. The average cost was fifteen shillings in the former and sixteen and eight-pence in the later case. No record states how many men received free passes and were not employed. Perhaps the Department did not know - the figures given suggest approximations and their reliability may be questioned.⁸ After 1893 free passes appear to have been discontinued.

A man despatched to a definite job in a definite location was merely advanced his fare. Because it had passed (or in 1891 was about to pass) the Truck Act, the Government could not automatically deduct the fare from the workman's subsequent earnings, so the men gave an undertaking in writing (and in later years filled in a form) promising repayment.⁹ This system, a great deal more sensible (though open to abuse in a limited way), worked fairly well: after only three years the advances had been repaid at the high rate of 84 per cent; in New South Wales at that time, where a similar system was used, repayment was only 44 per cent; the rate of repayment in New Zealand was

8. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 1; 1893, H-10A; compare, Lloyd, Newest England, p. 199.

9. PD, 1892, 78, p. 364 (Reeves); compare, Lloyd, Newest England, p. 199.

subsequently as high as 97 per cent.¹⁰

In order to give the workers encouragement as well as relief, concession coupons were used: 'The system by which Cook's Tourists enjoyed certain advantages of reduced prices ... when journeying for pleasure, has been partially applied to others travelling for necessity'. Coupons entitled the unemployed, usually only while they were in transit to work, to obtain food, lodgings and fares at reduced prices from some firms and establishments. 'Employment being gained, the coupons are no longer allowed to be used, but full prices are charged.'¹¹ The workman was not in fact subsidised by the Department, but by the business world. The worst gap in the coupon system was the refusal of the Railway Commissioners to grant concessions; in later years when the railways were once again under departmental control the concession was a helpful 25 per cent.¹²

The Department published, to disseminate labour news, its own monthly. The Journal of the Department of Labour was first issued in March 1893 as the Journal of Commerce and Labour; the title was changed with the sixth issue, in August 1893. It carried for a time tables and information provided by other Government departments. Its important feature was a monthly summary of reports from most of the Labour Agents in the colony. The bulk of the remainder of each issue, which soon grew to around one hundred pages, was made up of items of news on labour measures in other countries, and by

10. AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 3; Journal, April 1894, p. 89; AJHR, 1915, H-11, p. 43.

11. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 2.

12. PD, 1894, 83, p. 313 (A.D. Willis and R.J. Seddon); NZ Department of Labour, p. 30.

articles of interest on labour problems, reprinted from overseas journals such as The Forum, North American Review, Contemporary Review, and including authors as notable as Henry George and J.A. Hobson.

'It is intended that the journal shall follow somewhat on the lines of "The Board of Trade Journal" issued in Britain.'¹³ The Webbs were unimpressed, but Tregear was proud of his Journal; he insisted that it had 'met with approbation not only in New Zealand but in other lands', and met criticism by claiming that the Journal tried to present articles favouring differing points of view.¹⁴ The editorship was mainly Tregear's, though in the first year of publication he had considerable assistance from Mrs Grace Neill.¹⁵ The Journal had a very limited circulation and it is doubtful whether many unemployed would have read and acted upon the reports it contained from local Agents.

As far as it could the Department attempted to overcome the marital difficulties involved in unemployment and its relief. When employment on Government works was available a system of priorities was applied. Preference was first given to unemployed married men with families, then to widowers with dependent children, to single men supporting parents, and finally to single unencumbered men, the latter selected according to length of unemployment. New Zealanders were generally given priority over men from other colonies.¹⁶ Sometimes a ballot was taken, but on at least two occasions this 'job lottery'

13. AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 5; Journal, April 1893, p. [1].

14. AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 2; Journal, July 1894, p. 2.

15. Cyclopedia of NZ, I, p. 171.

16. NZ Department of Labour, p. 23; Fair Play, loc. cit.

produced equivocal results. A group of Christchurch registered unemployed

When invited by the Hon. Mr Seddon to come and state their case ... took the advice of their agitating leaders, and declined the Minister's unusual request. Then when the Minister selected from the register sixty-six of the most pressing cases to go to work, thirty-four either declined to answer their names or declined to go after balloting for places.

Mr Shanaghan, the Christchurch Agent, had to send ten single men to make up the number.¹⁷ There was a similar occurrence in 1897 at Napier. Thirty-four married men were registered in mid-winter as unemployed. Four places became available on roadwork. When the ballot was called only twelve appeared, and two of the men selected refused to go.¹⁸

The priority system gave rise to complaint at times. F.W. Lang said in the House, 'Men were being sent from other parts of the colony to work ... on the co-operative system. He would not object to this, provided the local men did not require work ... he considered it very hard that they should have to leave their homes and seek work elsewhere'. He had complained about the same matter the previous year. W. Hall-Jones, Minister of Public Works, said that 'only in the very necessitous cases' were married men from outside the district taken on in preference to locals.¹⁹ The Labour Agent in Pahiatua reported a similar difficulty in 1893. Residents said married men of 'low repute' or 'with disreputable families' ought not to be brought in from outside when there were 'steady single men who are struggling to build a nest for themselves'.²⁰

17. AJHR, 1893, H-10, pp. 20-21.

18. Journal, July 1897, p. 582.

19. PD, 1896, 92, pp. 75-76. The co-operative system is described in detail below, pp. 51-52.

20. AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 17.

PLATE II.

A Co-operative Works Camp. The men in the camp
are engaged on railway construction in Taranaki.
The photograph was taken c. 1904.

(McAllister Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington.)



Generally married men were loath to leave their own district. If they went away on the off-chance of employment they had to leave their wives and children to the mercies of the Charitable Aid Board. It was, in a sense, the wives and children that helped keep Christchurch unemployment figures so high: there were no public works near Christchurch, and men transferred to work elsewhere drifted back to Christchurch as soon as their job was over. Wives, on the other hand, wished to stay in the city that was their home. Tregear felt they ought to be compelled to go with the men.²¹ There was provision, at Departmental expense, for wives and families to be sent with the men, but few availed themselves of this offer: only 104 wives (with 280 children) accompanied their husbands in 1893-94, and even less the following year.²² Poverty in the city was doubtless more comfortable for many women than prosperity in a co-operative camp.

The 'half-pay order' provided a measure of security for the lonely wife - and some control over careless husbands. When the married man was employed on Government works away from his wife, he was required, as a condition of being given his job, to sign an order that half his pay should be sent directly to his wife. The amount was made out as a money order in the wife's name so that only she could cash it, and was remitted by the Post Office. According to Lloyd, three hundred wives received a total of \$40,000 in six months through this method; but as Rowley points out, a division which leaves the man with half his pay to squander and his wife with the other half to clothe and feed her children is not especially equitable.²³ At best

21. Journal, April 1894, pp. 1, 5.

22. AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 20; 1895, H-6, p. 35.

23. NZ Department of Labour, p. 23; Lloyd, Newest England, p. 201; Rowley, Industrial Situation, p. 8. Lloyd's figure is given in dollars as it appeared in his book (1900).

it was an improvement on destitution.

The Bureau soon became popular; doubtless it was patronised as eagerly by the rogues looking for free railway passes as by men who desperately wanted and needed employment. In the Lambton Quay building 'the men blocked the corridors and flocked into the office, even pressing upon the clerks at their desks'.²⁴

Other attention was often more critical. The Bureau had tried in July 1891 advertising in the newspapers the districts where it was reported labourers were required. There were, the item said, 150 bushmen and several roadmaking hands needed at Tolaga Bay, 40 bushmen required at Masterton, 40 at Wanganui, 20 at Raglan, while there were other opportunities on the gumfields. The New Zealand Herald pointed out that local reaction might not be happy with this sort of tactic. 'It will be interesting to see if the announcements of this Labour Bureau are agreed to by the persons in the districts referred to, or if they are of the same doubtful nature as Captain Edwin's weather predictions.'²⁵

We may give here an example of local reaction to the work of the Department. The Poverty Bay Herald reported on 17 May 1892 that there was sufficient work for a permanent labouring population of the district, and for some outsiders, in the months to come - an optimistic view with winter approaching. Two days later it noted that twenty-two bushmen were being sent to Gisborne by the Bureau of Industries. Faced with the imminent influx, there was a cautious reconsideration of labour prospects in the area.²⁶

24. Rowley, Industrial Situation, p. 12.

25. NZH, 16 July 1891.

26. Poverty Bay Herald, 17 May 1892; 19 May 1892.

On 23 May the Poverty Bay Herald reported that there was need for 'about a score' of labourers, and that the Maori population (which it was assumed the Labour Bureau had overlooked) could cope well enough with the bushfelling and sheep-shearing. Residents did not want penniless men sent to Gisborne. In fact, the newspaper decided, it was better to have a scarcity of labour than too much; better to have slower development than to have anyone in the district destitute.²⁷ The men duly arrived. There was a fuss because they arrived in Gisborne penniless (as predicted), with nothing to support themselves while they looked for work. Nevertheless, they had all got work. There is a suggestion of 'I told you so' in the Poverty Bay Herald's subsequent report that five of the men had cleared out and taken their equipment with them.²⁸

Parliamentary complaints were many, and the Journal was often the focus of attack. It was several times brought up for debate and inevitably criticised as wasteful expenditure. At times its continuance was in doubt, although it eventually weathered the storms until its demise in the stress of the Great War. Reeves once topically joked, 'I fully expect when I take up the Opposition papers tomorrow to read that the death of the late President Carnot was instigated by the Minister of Labour and fomented by the Labour Journal'. The joke rebounded shortly afterwards when one of Tregear's reprints was construed to indicate Government approval for free love - an article on a Peruvian proto-socialist colony.²⁹ The Journal was

27. Ibid., 23 May 1892.

28. Ibid., 30 May 1892; 31 May 1892. I am indebted to Professor W.H. Oliver for the references in nn 26-28.

29. PD, 1894, 83, pp. 47 (Reeves), 461-479. The article, 'A successful Socialistic Colony in Peru', appears in the Journal, May 1894, pp. 43-48.

in danger as late as 1896. Seddon thought it 'a most useful production', but then apparently had second thoughts for later in the year Tregear wrote to Reeves that the Journal was to stop, since the circulation did not warrant the expense and because it was one of the 'easy points of attack' for members.³⁰

Parliamentary criticism attacked more the wastefulness and gullibility of the Bureau than its existence. Captain William Russell, for instance, claimed that the Bureau was sending into country districts men physically incapable of work, which Reeves denied.³¹ G. Fisher and Duthie were persistent critics.³² Fisher, it was, who complained that the free railway passes made Australians think New Zealand was a land of milk and honey. This charge contained probably an element of truth, and Reeves (or Tregear) eventually had advertisements put in the main Australian newspapers, warning against Australians crossing the Tasman in expectation of work, not to say charity.³³ Duthie's criticism could be acute. He noted on one occasion the Department's claim that 4000 men had been sent into the country; yet there had been no decrease in the population of the towns.

The fact was that there had simply been a little circulation going on. Men had come from the country to get work from the Bureau, and had been sent back again into the country by the Bureau. Men came down to town from the country for a spree, and when their money was done ... they decided to return, and went to the Labour Bureau, and were given a means of returning.³⁴

30. PD, 1896, 94, pp. 248 (G.W. Russell), 249 (Seddon); 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 22 November 1896.

31. PD, 1892, 77, p. 16.

32. For instance: PD, 1892, 77, p. 211, 372; 78, p. 323; 1893, 79, p. 92; 80, p. 203, 459.

33. PD, 1893, 79, p. 92 (Fisher); 1894, 83, p. 44 (Reeves).

34. PD, 1892, 77, p. 374.

The measures of the Department had indeed been a mixture of success and failure. To a certain extent labour was redeployed. In 1891-92, 1730 men were sent to private employment as against only 863 to Government works. There was also a shift of population from the South Island to the North Island, men arriving at the Wellington office from Christchurch and Dunedin, applying for assistance, and being sent to work in the North Island.³⁵ The following table shows from where men who were assisted came:³⁶

North Island	767
South Island	1761
New South Wales	20
Rest of Australia	8
Britain	7

1054 of those assisted were married and these men had 3583 dependent children - or an average of nearly 3.5 dependent children each.³⁷

But unemployment continued. The next year the Department had to assist to work 3874 men, and an even greater proportion (virtually half) were married men. There was more to unemployment than redeployment; the difficulty was not overcome, as the Auckland Agent thought it would be, 'by the judicious issue of a few railway passes'.³⁸

35. AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 17. This continued through the 'nineties. For instance, in 1894-95 954 men were assisted to work in the southern part of Wellington province and 179 of these had come from the South Island; AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 33.

36. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 6. The disparity between the figures for each island is not typical. By 1894-95, 1466 North Islanders were assisted and 1498 South Islanders (AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 35) and thereafter more North Islanders were assisted than South Islanders.

37. Ibid., p. 6. Compare, AJHR, 1909, H-11, p. iii: the computation of 3.48 in the latter table includes not only children but '92 parents &c.' supported by single men.

38. AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 14.

If we look at the 'Occupations' table of the 1891 Census we can see clearly the considerable numbers of men engaged in work which might be precariously permanent, or seasonal, or plainly casual. 13,716 gave their occupation as agricultural labourers. This group included most farm workers who did not own a farm. A large percentage would have been fairly permanent employees, perhaps changing their employers every few years. Many, however, would have been employed only in the harvesting months, at most from October through May, and perhaps not continuously in those months. 13,767 were listed as 'labourer (undefined)'. While it is possible that the two categories might have some common personnel it seems that there were 27,000 men whose occupation was likely to be 'casual'. To this total can be added 10,099 alluvial gold-miners (less nearly 3000 Chinese) and 2544 kauri-gum diggers, for while many of the miners and diggers remained at their 'trade' regardless of prices and conditions, numbers of men turned their hands to gold and gum fossicking for only a season or two; and they would otherwise appear as casual labourers.³⁹

There are other, smaller groups which can be identified as seasonal or casual workers:

Drover, shearer, shepherd etc.	6427
Bushman, axeman, grubber	2536
Construction labourer (railway or road)	2027
Station labourer	1608
Rabiter, trapper, fowler, beehunter	1296

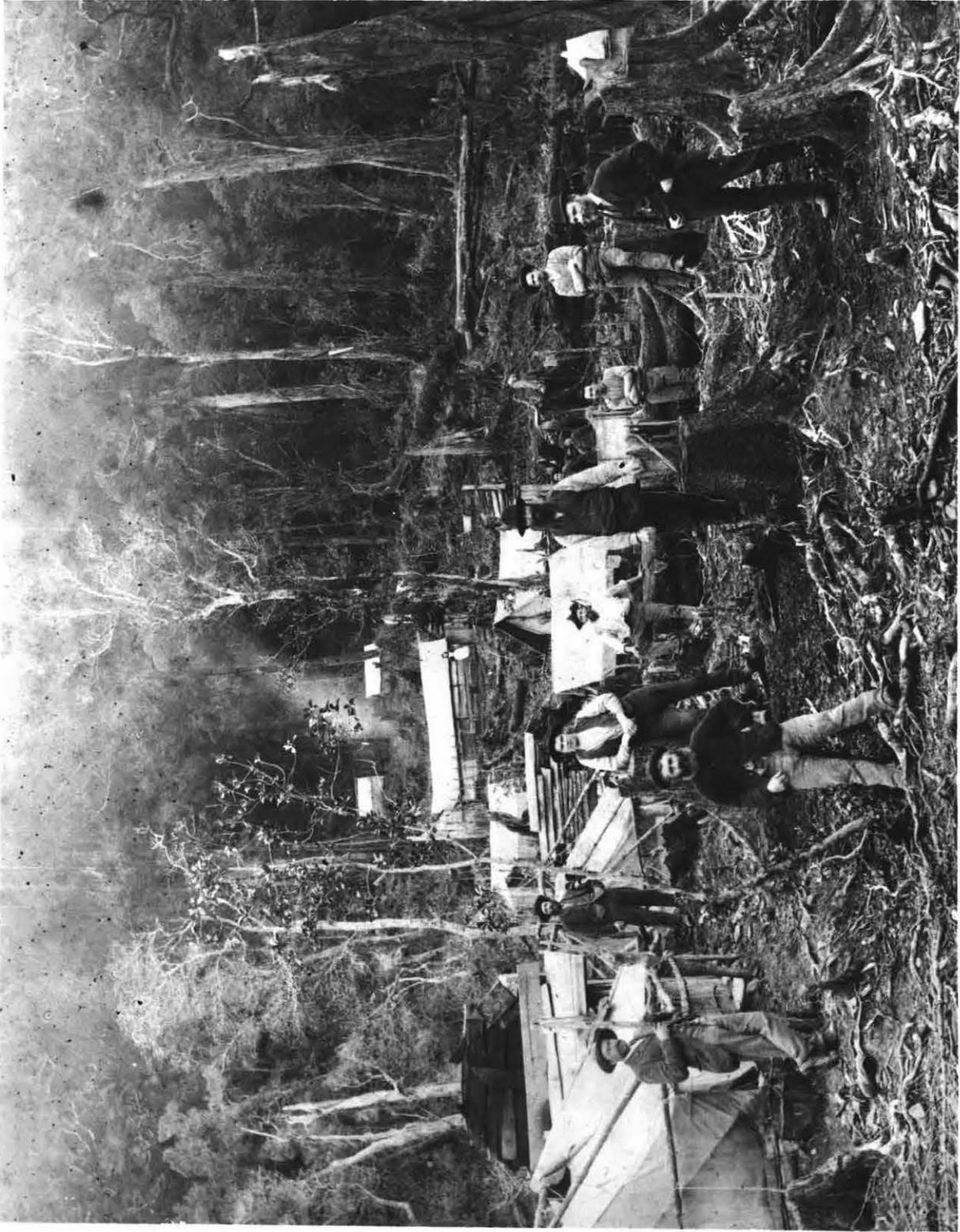
In addition there were several hundred various cooks, flaxmill workers, and

39. Census of the Colony of New Zealand, 1891, pp. 296-303; Chinese miners, p. 304.

PLATE III.

A Bushfelling Camp in the 1890s.

(Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.)



two hundred hawkers and pedlars.⁴⁰

There was of course year by year change in these numbers; they are not arranged against very precise categories, and men would easily drift through the spectrum, from farmhand to rabbitier to shearer to station labourer. As Reeves wrote:

The country people in the colonies move about; most of the real workmen are nomads. I do not mean only the classes whose work keeps them always moving - the drovers, mail-carriers, hawkers, waggoners The harvesters, too, in most farming districts, are not resident labourers Artisans and general labourers seem to share in the readiness to shift their ground.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the figures do give a picture of a huge segment (possibly one-fifth) of the male working population as a great casual pool, in which the less enthusiastic, the less strong, the less lucky might have a fine margin between occupational mobility and unemployment.

To adjust a casual labouring force of this kind to the demands of seasonal work is strictly a theoretical exercise. The difficulties the Department faced were not just those of supply and demand, but also distance and experience. The Wellington office reported slack times in April 1893, but 'the bush felling season, which is now close at hand, will have the effect of relieving the unskilled labour market to a large extent'.⁴² The same hope was repeated during the next two months:

Numerous contracts have been let during the month for bush-felling, and, judging by the large number

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 296-303.

41. Reeves, *State Experiments*, I, pp. 31-32.

42. *Journal*, April 1893, p. 26.

of tenders invited through the medium of the country newspapers, we anticipate that the majority of men suitable for the work, now out of employment, will speedily be absorbed.⁴³

In August, however, it was reported in the Journal that although there were still considerable numbers of unemployed the country Agents said there was a scarcity of capable bushmen.⁴⁴

Sometimes world markets had an effect on the labour market and increased the difficulties of the Department. In May 1893 around Auckland, unemployed were going to the gumfields 'where they were speedily absorbed'; by December they were leaving the gumfields as the prices paid for gum had fallen to a point that hardly enabled the diggers to live. The prices rose once more in January 1894, but had fallen again by March, so that 'men are abandoning the fields and making their way into town' where they increased the number of inactive men.⁴⁵ Auckland by then was full of unemployed gumdiggers, hands who had just finished harvesting, and those off the beats - Auckland being the port of call for the 'cheap fare' steamers arriving from Australia.⁴⁶

Around January each year there was fairly full employment. Agents did not even bother to 'book' men at the offices, but simply gave them information as to where hands were required.⁴⁷ Of course, even at the height of the busy season the vagaries of weather could upset the calculations of the Bureau.

43. Journal, May 1893, p. 31; June 1893, p. 47.

44. Journal, August 1893, p. 19; September 1893, p. 2.

45. Journal, May 1893, p. 30; December 1893, p. 1; January 1894, p. 2; March 1894, p. 1.

46. Journal, April 1894, p. 5.

47. AJHR, 1893, H-10, pp. 14-16.

1893-94 was a wet season in Canterbury, the grain harvest was poor, and unemployment figures remained high. A dry season did not always help: in 1894-95 the grass-seed harvest was spoilt at Gisborne in this way, with a lack of work resulting.⁴⁸ And Christmas with its holidays and festivities, brought men (and families) to town for a brief period, although most soon left for the country again.⁴⁹

After January the position soon worsened. Towards the end of the month, if we take 1895 as an example, the shearing contracts finished: there was soon unemployment in the Gisborne, Hawkes Bay and Manawatu areas because of this, and many men left these places for Wellington. Generally at this time summer bushfelling contracts were completed, and no new contracts would be called for a time. Killing resumed at freezing works in January and coal-mining at the beginning of March; in Russell, on the other hand, this was the time of year to close the fish factories. The situation at the end of February was still reasonably good: harvesting in the South Island was now 'in full swing', though the falling-off in prices in 1895 meant that at Timaru, for instance, fewer harvesters were employed. In the Wairarapa, moreover, work on the stations had become slack and hands were being discharged. There was work available in the hop fields at Nelson; and men were sought in Eketahuna for autumn fencing contracts.⁵⁰

By May the winter had set in alongside unemployment. At best the Agents would report that most local men were employed (as at Woodville), at worst

48. *AJHR*, 1894, H-6, p. 1; *Journal*, March 1894, p. 2; January 1895, p. 1.

49. *Journal*, January 1894, p. 2; January 1895, p. 3.

50. *Journal*, January 1895, pp. 1, 2, 4, 6; February 1895, pp. 109, 110, 112; March 1895, pp. 219, 220, 221; April 1895, pp. 331, 332.

that there were local unemployed as well as men from other towns travelling in the vicinity (as at Wanganui and Patea).⁵¹ Local men could often be placed now in private employment, with several small but continual local jobs. For outsiders only bushfelling or Government works would (or might) be available. In the big cities there were relief-works - roadmaking, or constructing public amenities - provided by the civic authorities.

In October employment opportunities arrived with the spring grass. For Gisborne, 'shearing is now in full swing', and in Hawkes Bay, Manawatu and Wairarapa there were fewer men on the roads and little 'local' unemployment. By November the Auckland Agent was able to report 'Fewer applications for employment than for some months past', while in Gisborne some men declined to take up offers of Government roadmaking. South of Nelson there was still distress until the harvest started; the cycle is complete with the February report from Rangiora: 'All men in the district are busy at harvesting'.⁵²

In this careful manner did the Department build up its knowledge of supply and demand, of the general difficulties engendered by seasonal work. It built up such information not only so that it might try and adjust placement of men to the vacancies available, but to fulfil that point of Ballance's initial programme: to find out what unemployment really consisted of;⁵³ or, in other words, what caused unemployment. Tregear now knew that there was more than simple redeployment involved. He knew also that there was a gap in the winter when the cure-all, bushfelling, did not absorb the surplus of

51. Journal, May 1895, p. 438.

52. Journal, October 1895, p. 978; November 1895, p. 1081; February 1896, p. 108.

53. PD, 1894, 71, p. 68.

labour, either because there was less bushfelling in a district - as in parts of the Wairarapa area where settlement in the 'eighties had been followed by consolidation and the decline of seasonal work in the 'nineties;⁵⁴ or because too many of the unemployed were unskilled in bushfelling - a job that required not only fitness, but expertise and experience. One of the ways to bridge the gap was to get private employers, in both town and country, to take on extra hands, or at least to keep full staffs.

Unfortunately, private employers looked on the Bureau for a long time with considerable disfavour. In Auckland employers believed at first they would get only inferior workers through the Bureau; consequently it was decided to publish in the main newspapers lists of men seeking employment so employers could see that suitable men were available. The Christchurch Agent thought the lack of patronage from private employers might have been due to a deficiency of advertising by the Bureau in comparison with the publicity of commercial agents. 'Yet I fear there is a strong political undercurrent at the bottom of it.'⁵⁵ Tregear thought so too. He complained in 1894 that employers were not giving 'generous support' to the Department. A year later the change was stated more directly.

I received many complaints from working men during the year as to the manner in which they have been received when seeking work by landholders and there has been no lack of accusations from all parts of the country as to hands being discharged unnecessarily in order to embarrass the department I am afraid that the expression, "Go and get work from the Government you put in," has been only too frequently used⁵⁶

54. S.H. Franklin, 'The Village and the Bush', Pacific Viewpoint, I (September 1960), pp. 160-80.

55. AJHR, 1893, H-10, pp. 14, 21; Journal, April 1895, p. 331.

56. AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 3; 1895, H-6, p. 2. In 1896 Seddon claimed in a speech at Hastings that station owners were trying to embarrass the Government by employing Maori instead of European shearers; see, NZH, 23 May 1896.

When private employers did not assist - or could not assist, for these were depression years and they had problems of their own - the Department was forced to find men places on the co-operative works.

The Labour Department was directly connected with the co-operative system in matters of labour supply; and indirectly through mutual interest with the Lands and Public Works Departments in forestalling unemployed agitation. Criticism of the co-operative system was increasingly linked with criticism of the Labour Department; for example, R.C. Bruce said in the House 'that in after-years this Labour Bureau and co-operative system would be looked back upon as an excrescence incidental to a period of great industrial excitement and upheaval'. Tregear typified such criticism as 'Rash and misleading statements'; and he pointed out in his 1896 'Report' that 'no actual administrative power [over the co-operative system] lies with the Labour Department'.⁵⁷ However, the Bureau soon became the only means through which a man wanting to be employed on Government works could be engaged; only those applications made at the Bureau were regarded as genuine.⁵⁸ And when 'grumbling' on the co-operative works became extremely bad, Labour Agents were permitted to visit the works and try to smooth matters over.⁵⁹ The Department had, as it were, a vested interest.

The co-operative works deserve to be described in some detail, not least because (since private employment was scarce) the majority of unemployed assisted by the Department in the 1890s were sent to Government works constructed

57. PD, 1892, 78, p. 366; AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 1; 1896, H-6, p. viii.

58. PD, 1896, 92, p. 392 (W.W. Collins); AJHR, 1900, H-11, p. i; 1901, H-11, p. i; 1902, H-11, p. ii.

59. AJHR, 1896, H-6, p. viii.

PLATE IV.

Co-operative Labouring: Railway Construction.

The gang is working on the North Island Main

Trunk, sometime after 1900.

(Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.)



under this labouring system. The following table shows the numbers placed in private and in Government employment through the decade.⁶⁰

	Private Employment	Government Employment
1891-92	1730	863
1892-93	2518	1356
1893-94	1019	2322
1894-95	894	2136
1895-96	708	2163
1896-97	652	1066
1897-98	544	1491
1898-99	638	1477

The genesis of the co-operative system was apparently fairly fortuitous. Soon after Seddon became Minister for Public Works in 1891, some tenders for construction of an extension to the Ngakawau, West Coast, railway line were accepted, but three of the contracts were subsequently not taken up. Normally, Seddon would have called for fresh tenders. However, when he arrived at Westport he found 'a large number of men who had flocked there from different parts of the colony, expecting to get employment on the construction of this railway'. New tenders would have caused delay and hardship. Seddon decided to cut the delay, withhold advertisements for fresh tenders, and inaugurate for public works a system he adapted from what he had seen on the goldfields.⁶¹

He 'asked the men to divide themselves into parties of about fifty each, and to select from each party certain trustees, the trustees to take the work

60. AJHR, 1909, H-11, p. iv. The figures for 1891-92 are for ten months.

61. AJHR, 1893, D-5A, p. 2; Burdon, King Dick, p. 93.

from the Government in the ordinary way, but the work itself to be done by the whole of the men, each one having equal interest with his fellows; the price to be given to be fixed by the Engineer in charge of the work'. In this manner not only were delays to be avoided, but the contractor's profit was cut out; the men received - theoretically, at any rate - the same level of wages, while the contractor's share remained with the Treasury.⁶²

To Seddon this experiment in co-operation was not simply an interim measure. From the start he insisted that it was 'a system which, in the near future, must, I think, obtain throughout' and 'it will long be recognised as the proper system on which our public works should be constructed'. Further, he thought the system should be integrated with land-settlement schemes. 'It is necessary that a remedy should be devised for the mistakes of the past, and that remedy is the construction of works on the co-operative system, and the simultaneous throwing-open of lands for settlement in the vicinity of the works.' This was the birth of the 'alternate system'.⁶³

It was the unalterable belief of many of the critics of the co-operative system that the wages were either excessive, or a great deal more than anywhere else. The initial reaction of the New Zealand Herald in 1891 is typical.

The inevitable result will be that Mr Seddon will draw crowds of men from their work at 4s or 5s to where he is paying 9s. [per working day] from the public funds.⁶⁴

This at least was a more definite sort of attack than H.S. Fish made in

62. AJHR, 1893, D-5A, pp. 2-3.

63. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

64. NZH, 29 May 1891.

Parliament. That hon. member called the co-operative system a 'wretched policy' and 'foresaw' that through it New Zealand workers would suffer 'great misery and distress'.⁶⁵ But the Herald was still saying in 1898 that the co-operative workers were overpaid (which was - comparatively - untrue) and that the 'best' workmen and labourers disliked the system (which was pure rhetoric).⁶⁶

Earnings could be high, with luck as to terrain and with hard work. A weak party might earn only a pittance. Not long after the Herald complained about Mr Seddon's '9s from the public funds' it reported a party returning to Wellington from Pahiatua, 'being unable to endure the hardships of camp life'; and six weeks after that on 20 July, the Herald carried an item in which a man who had been at Makuri was reported as saying that he would rather be dead than undergoing the hardships of a winter camp. One gang, working seven weeks, drew fivepence per day 'after paying for tucker'.⁶⁷ It was not all milk and honey.

Probably news of the highest earnings spread more quickly than news of the lowest. One of these fancy earnings was a rate of £1 18s 3d per day in 1893 on the Makohine section of the North Island Main Trunk railway - and this for a labourer. What had happened was that the work had not been 'trimmed' properly, and payment had been held back, inflating one return. Average earnings per day for the section were 8s 11d, and the smallest wage for a day was a mere 2s 7d. The previous August and September the men on

65. PD, 1892, 77, p. 363.

66. NZH, 3 August 1898.

67. NZH, 4 June 1891; 20 July 1891.

that same section had had some rare luck. A higher price than usual had been allowed for some work because it had been let in very wet weather. 'Before the work was finished, however, the weather improved, and the men earned high rates towards the last'. Very few contracts averaged out at nine shillings per day per man.⁶⁸

Not only the critics of the co-operative system, but many labourers as well swallowed the tale of high wages. When the Greymouth Labour Agent in 1893 asked for names for a ballasting contract, he listed 359, 'which, it is needless to say, is a surprising number'. It turned out that 'exaggerated accounts of the profits of co-operative labour' had got around, and many miners and others with employment had registered. The Agent took salutary action and 'struck out the names of those who were procrastinating work already in hand'.⁶⁹ The member of Parliament for Waitotara said he knew many men had left 'excellent employment' in his electorate to get on the co-operative system. The best story, even if it is a little farfetched, was told in the House by T. Fergus. Co-operative works had begun at Hunterville. A man with employment there had left his job, travelled to Wellington to register with the Labour Bureau - just so that he could be sent back to Hunterville as a co-operative worker.⁷⁰

Once on the co-operative works, labourers were less happy with their lot. They grumbled considerably about rates of pay, especially if the going became difficult or wet weather hindered operations, or if men in a gang were not pulling their weight and thus held back others and diminished average

68. AJHR, 1893, D-5C, pp. 3-4.

69. AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 19.

70. PD, 1892, 78, p. 366 (Bruce); 77, p. 372 (Fergus).

PLATE V.

A Group of Co-operative Workmen, Taranaki,

c. 1905.

(McAllister Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library,
Wellington.)



earnings. Perhaps in their uncomfortable camps, leading a pretty joyless existence, it was surprising that there was not more trouble. Somehow the Government managed to sidestep Committees of Investigation and Royal Commissions on the co-operative works, so the abuses of the system, opaquely refracted through the reports of overseers and officials generally, are not easily discoverable. Nevertheless, some examples reflecting typical conditions and attitudes can be provided. As befitted small and (however temporarily) corporate groups, the workmen had an acute estimation of their rights and dues. The Southland Chief Surveyor reported that men insisted on payment for even the smallest amount of extra work. 'Only a month or two ago, a party, who were moving from one contract they had just completed to another at no great distance, wanted payment for shifting their wheelbarrows and planks to a new job.'⁷¹

Another Chief Surveyor, J. Strauchon of Taranaki, thought the co-operative worker improvident.

If he makes low wages, he gets into debt; if fair wages, he may pay his way; if high wages, he lives up to it. Storekeepers tell me the monthly accounts are largely swelled with such items as tinned-milk, jams, sauces, tinned-fish, &c⁷²

(Storekeepers, it should be noted, were on to a good thing financially, allowing credit to the needy workmen when they began their contracts. Some workers threatened to repudiate their orders on wages; and the Weekly News was complaining as late as 1909 of debts left by co-operative workmen.)⁷³
Luxuries doubtless helped morale when conditions were bad. Strauchon

71. AJHR, 1896, C-1, p. 95.

72. Ibid., p. 90.

73. Ibid., p. 95; Auckland Weekly News, 25 February 1909, p. 36.

mentioned elsewhere in his report the workers at Ngairé Swamp: 'the men being wet every day and covered with mud. Many have suffered from rheumatism, and others who wounded their feet or legs have had to abandon the work until healed, the swamp water preventing a cut or bruise from healing'.⁷⁴

The Labour Agents probably did not know that swamp water was so unhealthy. They did know that co-operative works gave a crucial employment opportunity when they would have difficulty in supplying any other work. There is almost a sigh of relief in the Agent's words when he reports: 'Fifty men have been sent to Government works during the month. This, combined with local relief works, has eased the market considerably'.⁷⁵ Even public works, however, could come to an unforeseen standstill. There was so much rain around Auckland in July 1895, at a time when unemployment was very bad, that all roadmaking ceased. On the other hand, the weather occasionally provided employment: at Eketahuna in May 1895 rain halted road construction, but the wet spell had caused slips on roads and railways and the men were employed clearing debris away.⁷⁶

Co-operative works often stopped without the interference of poor weather. 'A number of men unemployed', said the Hokitika Agent, 'and the finish of the railway works will probably increase them.'⁷⁷ When Seddon introduced his system of co-operative construction he had foreseen the advantages for Treasury:

74. AJHR, 1896, C-1, p. 90.

75. Journal, July 1895, p. 646.

76. Journal, May 1895, p. 439; July 1895, p. 641; August 1897, p. 671.

77. Journal, May 1895, p. 440.

Government has the expenditure thoroughly under control. Should any circumstances arise rendering it desirable to curtail expenditure, it is simply necessary to reduce the number of men, the agreements with the men providing that the Government is at liberty to order the work to be discontinued at any time without payment of compensation.⁷⁸

Usually men were not simply laid off while at work; but if money was not available, once a particular contract was completed - and the contracts were often small and brief - another was not offered.

Co-operative workers found such a termination of work annoying: 'for men who once get a start on co-operative works think that, as soon as one contract is completed, another should be let to them, and they seem never to look out for other work'.⁷⁹ No doubt the Hokitika Agent mentioned above found the cessation of work annoying as well, for ideally it was expected that as harvesting finished co-operative work began, and there would be less slack in the labour market. This did take place at times. In January 1895 there were 1162 men on co-operative road construction under the Lands Department; this became 1409 in February, 1605 in June, and 1852 in September, falling away then to 1328 in January 1896.⁸⁰ In the same period there was little change in the number employed by the Public Works Department on railways; in fact, the lowest total was for July. Yet even in roadmaking there was not sufficient expansion of work to take all the surplus labour; and this was because expenditure (which also had to be adjusted geographically to political considerations) was always limited, and sometimes quite erratic.

78. AJHR, 1893, D-5A, pp. 3-4.

79. AJHR, 1896, C-1, p. 95.

80. Journal, January 1895 to January 1896 (months as in text above), pp. 116, 223-24, 647, 783, 113.

Seddon claimed in Parliament that it was the duty of the State to provide work for the unemployed. 'But it is not done', complained a member. 'Put in my proviso', replied Seddon: 'as long as we have reproductive works to do.'⁸¹ The Government never deviated from that principle: co-operative construction was limited to soundly-based projects of present or future value to the colony, and no works were initiated simply to provide wages (or 'relief') for the unemployed. In later years, when there was more money to spend, on railways especially, co-operative work became virtually permanent employment for those who wanted it. During a time of economic stringency, not to say stinginess, it remained intermittent, casual hire like much else.

When (or if) New Zealanders agreed that unemployment existed and that its existence was not desirable, and if they accepted Seddon's 'proviso' about public expenditure, then land and settlement seemed to provide an answer to the unemployment problem. 'Getting people onto the land' was a catchcry of many people, from single-taxers to socialists. In his annual 'Reports' the head of the Labour Department agreed.

There is no action of such moment, no issue so important, no legislation so necessary, as that dealing with the question whether the citizens of New Zealand are to be employed or unemployed in the near future we may evade the most pressing of threatened evils by ... settling the land⁸²

Such settlement (for which Tregear thought land should be bought from the Maoris or reclaimed from bush or swamp) could be matched with the co-operative works, as Seddon had envisaged the 'alternative' system in 1891. If

81. PD, 1897, 97, p. 115.

82. AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 5.

bushfellers and road and railway workers were settled on land near their place of employment, they, first, would have an occupation to fall back upon when contracts were curtailed (and therefore not drift back to the cities), and, secondly, could develop their farms with a certain if minute supply of capital.⁸³

In the long run Tregear believed settlement on land was only a 'temporary palliative' and that the ultimate 'problem' of employment was the growth of landless and wage-earners faster than those who were landed and who paid wages.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, to reduce in the meantime the unemployment figures (which his task as a public servant was, rather than to propagate his socialist theories) men had to be got on to the land. Privately he even thought that free railway travel would go a long way towards promoting this - labour would be absorbed in the sponge of the countryside.⁸⁵ Publicly he supported the efforts of the Government to provide small farms on various tenures, Village, Homestead, Improved Farm, and Special settlements.

Yet even when these tenures came into operation, and especially the Improved Farm and Special settlements which from 1894 were broken in by men 'alternately' working in co-operative contracts, intractable elements did not prove very amenable to the settling process. Strauchon reported for Taranaki that the alternative system was working. However,

In many cases we find that men apply for improved farm settlement lands merely to ensure a better

83. AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 7; 1896, H-6, p. viii.

84. AJHR, 1894, H-6, pp. 4-5; Journal, May 1894, pp. 38-39.

85. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 22 April 1896.

chance of getting [co-operative] work. Such men will abandon the land when they are compelled to reside on it; but about a year has to elapse in each case before we can find out whether the man will make a fair settler or not.⁸⁶

Such subversive, ungrateful action. Tregear had little patience with those he was trying to help if they did not act in a respectable manner. He doubtless thought ill of (if he knew of) these Improved Farm settlers who were 'trying to get away with something', just as he disapproved of the rogues who had misused the free railway passes, or the labourers who had kept the letter but not the spirit of the Truck Act by ordering goods from their employers and then withholding payment.⁸⁷ He shared with Reeves an infinite regret over the 'black sheep' of the labouring fraternity who gave other workers a bad name.⁸⁸ How could you make workmen respectable, law-abiding, thrifty, serious-minded? How could you make them enter into the spirit of the bureaucratic crusade for justice and employment?

Tregear's ideals of labouring appear best in a passage written in 1909, containing matters pertaining to the gumfields but equally obviously valid for labourers generally.

The military training of the Austrians [Dalmatians from the Austro-Hungarian empire] enables them to organise their power in a co-operative way, which, while it should open the eyes of the colonists to their own laxity and feeble-mindedness in this respect, renders the strangers almost invincible when opposed to the scattered diggers of the British race. The camps of tents in which the Austrians live, neatly set up and with sanitary precautions; their arrangements for supplies for working in ranks and gangs, clearing the gum out

86. AJHR, 1896, C-1, p. 90.

87. AJHR, 1896, H-6, p. iv.

88. Reeves, State Experiments, II, p. 219; AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 6.

thoroughly as they move; the system for forwarding and selling the gum through agents of their own race; their legal advice from astute lawyers paid out of co-operative levies, &c., and with finances used for introducing fresh labour from Dalmatia; all these things, to those who have seen them, bring irresistible conviction that the wandering gumdigger who competes against them as a single person working just as he pleases buys his "freedom" at the cost of his living.⁸⁹

This is the kind of orderliness and respectability that the Department was to try and create on its major experiment in Labour control, the State Farm.

89. AJHR, 1909, H-11, p. xv. This may be compared with his description of 1893; E. Tregear, 'Labour in New Zealand', New Zealand Official Year-Book (Wellington, 1893), p. 221.

PLATE VI.

James Mackay, Chief Clerk of the Labour
Department 1891-1907. The photograph
was probably taken around the latter date.

(Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.)



IV FIRST EXERCISES IN CONTROL : THE STATE FARM.

The parentage of the State Farm is not open to dispute: it was the child of Reeves and Tregear, with James Mackay as a diligent nanny. The genesis of the idea is open to question. A New Zealander, W.H. Clarke, spent some dozen years pestering various ministers of the Crown with a comprehensive plan for solving unemployment, halting pauperisation, keeping the young and the old occupied, all while making a profit. Clarke had even worked out a balance sheet for his 'co-operative farm scheme'; and today, if one allows that Clarke was a little optimistic about the enthusiasm with which he expected people to work on his farms, the scheme reads logically and convincingly. There were, however, so many schemes for solving unemployment in those days it is not surprising that Clarke made little headway.¹

Eventually he saw Ballance in December 1891. Ballance acknowledged the good points of the scheme. He asked that Clarke's manuscript be printed as recommended by the Petitions Committee, which had examined it the previous August. Soon after, in February 1892, the New Zealand Herald reported that Ballance intended setting up 'industrial farms'. Clarke seems to suggest

1. W.H. Clarke, A Co-operative Farm Scheme (Wellington, 1894), p. 34 and passim. Among the more curious solutions of unemployment proposed was that of a currency reformer, who said that all men out of work should be engaged by the Government Printer to print bank-notes - and produce wealth. For another man there was no solution. He said that unemployment was related to the 'duration of spots on the sun'. AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 7.

that it was his idea, or a perversion of it, that was taken up by the Government: 'At last they call it by its right name - State farms'.²

The first official notice given of a possible state farm, nevertheless, comes some time before Clarke met Ballance: Reeves spoke of state farms, vagrancy and penal settlements before the House in October 1891.³ Possibly Reeves had previously heard of Clarke's ideas. Certainly he knew of overseas examples of state farms, for he had written to Sir Harry Atkinson in April 1891:

I write this note because I want to send you something The magazine which I send contains an article on German 'Labour Colonies' which has interested me immensely and which I can't help thinking will interest you.⁴

Or Reeves may have mixed both sets of ideas. It could well be, on the other hand, that Reeves and Tregear together hatched an original plan, with the Village Settlements as the most obvious New Zealand precedent.

Why is this important? Because if the state farm was an 'indigenous' idea, it may have originally been planned without much thought of the possibilities (or should we say, potentialities) of labour control; it may have been an alleviation measure, rather than a consciously 'decasualising' plan aiming to produce tamed and eminently respectable labourers. Tregear later wrote:

2. Clarke, p. 34.

3. PD, 1891, 73, pp. 430-34.

4. W.P. Reeves to Sir H. Atkinson, 20 April 1891, The Richmond-Atkinson Papers, ed. G.H. Scolefield (Two volumes, Wellington, 1960), II, p. 582. Compare, Sinclair, History of NZ, p. 165.

It was intended as a place to which surplus labour could be sent when there was no opening in the general labour-market, and where men who knew nothing of bush life might learn the use of axe and spade, becoming thus more fit to undertake rural occupations.⁵

Initially Tregear discounted the idea of a penal colony. The essence of the scheme, as he envisaged it in 1892 was 'the relief of pressure upon the deserving poor'. It was still in 1896 'a reservoir or storage-place where labour can be temporarily placed till other channels are opened'; or, as W.H. Montgomery put it, a 'drafting place' for surplus labour, where men unaccustomed to farmwork were taught how to use implements. The latter idea was at least equivalent to if not inspired by Clarke's belief that state farms should be a cheap (and profitable) form of technical and agricultural education; and was designed to dispose of one major and valid criticism that always met any cry of 'settle the land': 'as a general rule, it is the unemployed of towns who are, of all men, least fitted to achieve success on the land, even under the most favourable circumstances'.⁶

The farm, nevertheless, became more than a transit and training station, although it was that as well. Tregear talked in 1894 of the future permanency of the farm personnel once the 'idle and incapable' had been identified and removed. The 'incapable', in the form of old men, were sent to the farm when the Department could not get them employment elsewhere.⁷ The Cyclopedia of New Zealand put it this way:

Here we see the old colonist of sixty to eighty

5. AJHR, 1899, H-11, p. iv.

6. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 3; 1896, H-6, p. vii; PD, 1896, 94, p. 261 (Montgomery); 1887, 57, p. 447 (D.H. Macarthur).

7. AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. x.

years of age, who has given the best of his life to pioneer work. He is too proud to ask for charitable aid, saying, "Although I am old, still I can do a little, and if I do not get a large wage, still it is enough for my few wants."

It was, in conception and description, rather pathetic. The average age of those employed on the farm was $56\frac{1}{2}$ years early in 1897, 49 years towards the end of 1898. At the latter date there were seven men there over sixty years of age, four of them sixty-one and three in their seventies.⁸

There was difficulty at first in procuring a property for establishing a state farm. There is a hint that the Lands Department was not helpful, probably because the land was not only to be managed but also owned by the Labour Department. Early in 1892 Tregear was asking the Native Affairs Department for five portions of land, located throughout the country. The specifications were 1000 to 1500 acres, good soil, country not too broken, with part of the land to be suitable for a small township or village. It turned out that there was little land available from the Maoris, Europeans having already purchased or leased a considerable amount north of Wellington where Tregear wished to make a start with the first of the farms.⁹ Eventually land was purchased about a mile-and-a-half from the Levin Railway Station, a block of 800 acres, nearly all of which was heavily timbered.¹⁰

The Department's Chief Clerk, Mackay, very early made the farm his own

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8. Cyclopedia of NZ, I, p. 1110; AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. x; 1898, I-11, p. 36.
9. AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 5; Lloyd, Newest England, p. 202; E. Tregear to W.T. Morpeth, 17 March 1892; Maori Affairs Department official minute written by A.H. Mackay, 21 March 1892, Maori Affairs, Series 1 (Yearly series), 1892/441, National Archives. I am indebted to Mr G.V. Butterworth for this latter reference.
10. Cyclopedia of NZ, I, p. 1109; Lloyd, Newest England, p. 202.

special concern. He took the first party of men to the site in 1894, and three years later it was described as 'largely under Mr Mackay's control'. Tregear wrote that, 'Mackay, good old fellow, made a pet-child of Levin farm and was always running me bows-under for expenses on it'. The long-distance control was criticised, and Tregear had to make a point of reporting 'Little difficulty has been found ... in governing the operation from headquarters.'¹¹

Despite the distance from Wellington, there was a considerable degree of labour control on the State Farm. The following description is from the Cyclopedia, which probably gleaned a great deal of its information from Tregear, Mackay, or Thomas Walker, the manager, or all three.

Each worker on going to work at the farm has to sign that he is willing to abide by the rules and regulations, a printed copy of which is furnished to him. Drunkenness and insubordination are punished by instant dismissal. The manager has the right at all reasonable times to enter any of the cottages on the farm to see that the sanitary laws are being complied with.¹²

It is sobering to take out of context and apply here an earlier comment in the same account, that the manager's house 'is so situated as to command a view of the whole part of the farm'.¹³

Where there was not control, there was considerable moral persuasion. The residents were permitted to elect their own committee to run the school

11. Cyclopedia of NZ, I pp. 146, 1111; 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 17 January 1897; PD, 1895, 91, pp. 168 ff.; AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 3.

12. Cyclopedia of NZ, I p. 1111.

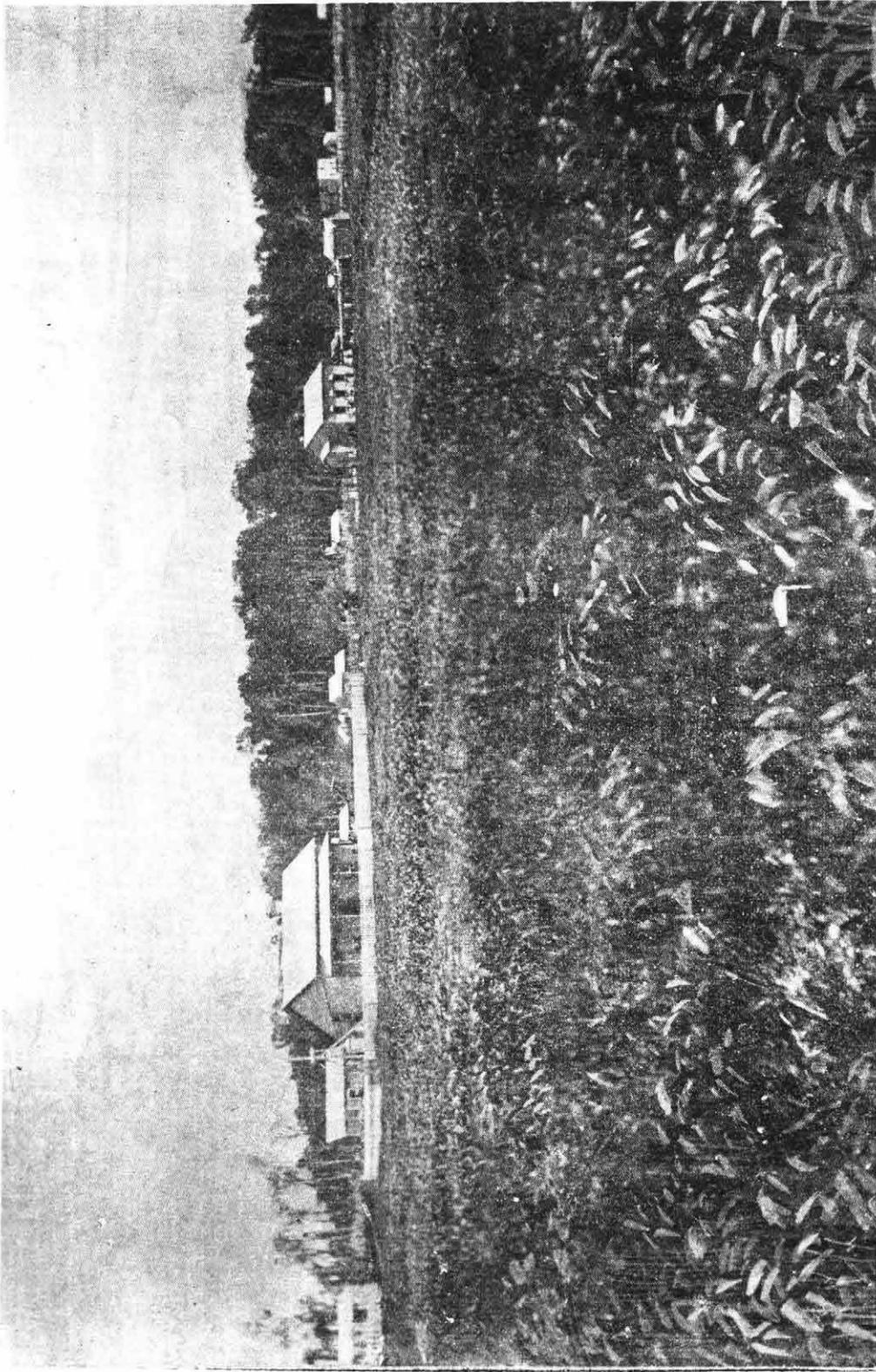
13. *Ibid.*, I, p. 1109.

PLATE VII.

The Settlement at the Levin State Farm, c. 1897.

The photograph appears to have been retouched in
the foreground.

(Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.)



on the farm, and to arrange socials and lectures: the manager was ex officio always the chairman. And if the hands of the labourers were allowed no idleness, their souls likewise must have had scant rest. Regular services were held in the schoolroom by Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic clergymen, and the Salvation Army held meetings as well.¹⁴

Tregear once carelessly claimed that 'hundreds of men' had benefitted on the farm.¹⁵ The number was considerably less, a very small number indeed when we reflect on the extent of unemployment and distress during the 1890s. Up to September 1898, 129 men had 'passed through' the farm, and a number of these had wives and children dependent upon them. Mackay believed that 'the whole number have to a certain extent benefitted by their stay there'. He gave examples of the careers of these men; it is worth quoting a few of these examples, not simply to show the difficulties of existence in the early Liberal period, but to see what type of working-man the Department hoped to produce from the farm.

S.D. - This man has been a soldier in the Imperial Army, was able-bodied, but totally ignorant of any country work. Stated had left his wife in Dunedin. Put him to work on farm at bushfelling, brought wife and family from Dunedin. Wife had been earning a few shillings there by laundry work, practically destitute. They were on the farm about two years. Saved a little money. The man was discharged to make room for others, and went to work on the North Island Main Trunk Railway. Family got into work in Ohingaiti district, and are now doing very well.

B.Y. - Brought from Christchurch; living on the charity of his family. Is now in Levin, earning a fair living.

14. Ibid., I, p. 1111.

15. AJHR, 1899, H-11, p. iv.

M.F. -- has been on farm for some time, and is now working as ploughman and team-driver. Was in very straitened circumstances when he went there, has pulled himself round, has got his daughters into work in the district, and is now doing fairly well; and when his time comes to go will, no doubt, be able to hustle round, and make a comfortable home for himself.¹⁶

Apparently Mackay shared with Tregear a pessimistic view of the shiftlessness of the labouring class and the general depravity of man. He finishes his list of those who found redemption through the State Farm with the sad, cautionary tale of 'M.N.' M.N. was not only destitute but his wife had taken to drink. Having come to the farm, however, 'The wife pulled herself together, and gradually the family recovered their former respectability'. If the family 'had not been taken at the time they were,' insisted Mackay, the woman would have become more addicted to liquor, and 'the children would have run wild, and probably got into the grasp of the law'.¹⁷

Since the ideals, and generally the practices, of Government thrift and retrenchment remained very much alive in the early Liberal period, and even after prosperity returned, it was simple to attack the State Farm on the grounds of expense. Tregear recognised this, advising as early as 1892 in his first 'Report' that there would be 'endeavour to make the undertaking as remunerative as possible to the state without losing sight of its primary object'.¹⁸ Timber and produce were sold from the farm; but this was no answer to the item which continued to be on view in the annual estimates - Expenses for State Farms: £2500 for 1895-96; £1500 for 1896-97.¹⁹ W.F.

16. AJHR, 1898, I-11, pp. 35-36.

17. Ibid., p. 36.

18. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 3.

19. AJHR, 1895, B-7, p. 48; 1896, B-7, p. 48.

Massey often directed his energy to this very problem, although he disliked State Farms for other reasons than expense.²⁰ As late as 1898 the principal argument the New Zealand Herald could use against the farm was its cost.²¹ The attack could, nevertheless, become ridiculous. It was claimed meteorological instruments had been set up on the Farm at enormous cost to the taxpayer in both money and working time. Instruments there certainly were, but they had been put on the Farm by the Meteorological Department as one of their many recording stations throughout the country: 'The cost to the farm was the value of a few feet of 3 x 2 timber as stays' and a couple of minutes observation-time each morning.²² Only some socialists, who saw the State Farm in rather ideal terms, did not begrudge the money spent on it; and E.J. LeGrove of Wellington even deplored that 'the apathy of the people led to the Government starving the Levin State Farm'.²³

Besides its expense being noted and criticised in Parliament and elsewhere, the State Farm came to public notice in a more lighthearted manner.

Occasionally ... the clerks would receive telegraphic instructions from their "Chief" Mackay, while he was on a visit to the South Island, to meet the steamer on its arrival ... and arrange for the transfer of cattle from the wharf to the railway station. Probably it was not expected that the clerks would see fit to undertake the duty themselves; they felt interested, however, and being young and resourceful, could not resist the temptation to perform the task.

20. PD, 1896, 92, p. 76; 94, p. 260; 1897, 100, p. 525.

21. NZH, 3 August 1898.

22. Cyclopedia of NZ, I, p. 1109.

23. Evening Star, 31 July 1897 (Address by E.J. Le Grove before the Wellington Trades and Labour Council).

A number of bulls overcame the clerks' resourcefulness and escaped in various directions through the streets of Wellington, causing quite a stir until, with the help of some watersiders, they were rounded up several hours later.²⁴

What Tregear thought of that episode is not recorded. Expense, however, did worry him. He visited the State Farm in November 1896, finding it so much improved that 'it is quite unsuitable now for a labour depot. You can't put 40 or 50 men on a dairy farm and keep them to useful work. It is only a constant sinking of money on permanent improvements and a windmill for the Quixotes of the Opposition'. In another letter to Reeves he complained, 'it has almost swallowed up our little vote in expenses'.²⁵

Tregear was then touchy about the Farm not least because Parliamentary criticism of it had come to a head in 1896. As soon as the House went into Committee of Supply the Farm came under attack. The secretary had written in his 'Report' for that year, 'Those persons who try their utmost to depreciate or mock [the State Farm] should refrain from criticism until they have paid a personal visit'.²⁶ R. Thompson had done so (for the third consecutive year) and said, 'The sooner the farm was taken from under the control of the Labour Department and placed under the management of some practical man or body the better'. Although 'he had always been a supporter of the State Farm,' J.A. Kelly was even more damning: 'he said of the late minister of Labour, and those with him in connection with this State Farm

24. Rowley, Industrial Situation, p. 10.

25. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 22 November 1896; 17 January 1897.

26. AJHR, 1896, H-6, p. vii.

[i.e., the Department], that it was conceived in ignorance and carried on in incapacity'. The attack, fierce enough, ran down under a welter of gratuitous advice. When it was suggested that the Farm be turned to dairying, one member, in reference to the transient labour, insisted that cows were sensitive and that if milkers were changed the cows would refuse to give milk.²⁷

Tregear now wanted to be rid of the Farm. He needed a place for labour, not cows.²⁸ With the constant expense and continual criticism the State Farm had become, as a member had said in the House, an incubus.²⁹ The Farm, Tregear reported in 1897,

has ceased to fulfil its function as a reservoir for surplus labour. It has arrived at a condition of cultivation when no variety of rough employment can be supplied to which an untrained or unexpert labourer can be set to work under co-operative contract.³⁰

'We are going to part with the State Farm', he told Reeves. 'The Govt [sic] are to give me in return two blocks of unimproved land, one at Makuri and one on the East Road at Stratford.' Three weeks later there was still doubt as to the second property; and finally only one section was earmarked as a State Farm, 'some 3000 acres at Taihape' of heavy forest. The experiment of a Labour Department owning land was not repeated: 'The land itself has not been transferred to the Labour Department, but remains Crown Lands'.³¹

The Department had to put up with the incubus a while longer. It had

27. PD, 1896, 94, pp. 245 (Thompson), 252 (Kelly), 259 (J. McLachlan).

28. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 8 December 1896.

29. PD, 1896, 94, p. 246 (McLachlan).

30. AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. viii.

31. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 17 January 1897; 7 February 1897; AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. viii.

now become an expensive species of rest home. In 1899 there were still twenty men employed there. The old men, unable to find work elsewhere, were 'engaged at the lighter portions of orchard and farm-work', while the abler removed the unsightly stumps in the paddocks and strung fences tidily across the property - as befitted a dairy farm.³² On 1 April 1900 the Farm was handed over to the Department of Agriculture.³³

The State Farm, for all its difficulties and disappointments, had shown not only how men could be trained in the ruder yet specialised aspects of pioneering, but also had shown Tregear how workers could be made respectable, hard-working, reliable. The example of control on the State Farm was now being extended by Tregear to consideration of control of the more persistent 'black sheep' of the casual work force - the swaggers and 'loafers'.

32. AJHR, 1899, H-11, p. v.

33. NZ Department of Labour, p. 8.

V FROM ALLEVIATION TO COERCION

Fossicker, fencer, rouseabout, and rabbitier he'd been,
From Riversdale to Naseby every hamlet he had seen;

so wrote 'Hamilton Thompson' of the swagger 'Ned Dunne'.¹ Swaggers were an Australasian phenomenon that developed for a number of economic and social reasons. The gold-digger in the 'fifties (Australia) and 'sixties (New Zealand) often gathered his blanket and pan, struck camp, and walked to find a pot of gold at the end of another rainbow in the next district, or next province, or next colony; and he was the spiritual or actual predecessor of the swagger. When the miner struck his pay-lode (or failed to do so for too long) he wandered into the city, and drifted around the streets; then he was the spiritual or actual predecessor of the 'loafer'. The swagger came with the development of roads, which gave him a necessary highway in rough country.² He came with the rise of pastoralism and the growth of cereal harvests, when employers required a larger pool of labour than could be employed permanently on a farm, and at mustering and at harvest they drew on the services of the swagger: 'it is due to the fluctuating character of the work they sometimes offer that the formation of a class of wandering labourers is due'.³

1. 'Hamilton Thompson', 'Ned Dunne', in New Zealand Farm and Station Verse, ed. A.E. Woodhouse (Christchurch, 1950), p. 73.

2. W. Vance, High Endeavour (Timaru, 1965), p. 66.

3. AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 2.

There were as many variables in the making of the swagger as there were swaggers. The swagger was a former gold-miner, or a failed artisan, or a wife-deserter. Edward Wakefield, a nephew of the coloniser, decided they ranged from luckless younger sons of aristocratic parents, broken down guardsmen, and ex-cavalry officers, to the 'very dregs of colonial democracy'. Some, with hopes of a prosperous life, covered their lack of achievement by mixing in the country roads with other men who had disappointments - drifters together. J. Bradshaw, like Wakefield in parliament in the 'eighties, believed these men often had good intentions of settling down, but never did; or as Lawson put it:

"New leaf, new land", my motto was - I did my very best.
'Twas want of work that threw me back - an' liquor did the rest.⁴

In many ways the swagger was just a casual labourer; or, alternatively, many casual labourers (except the permanent village handyman) were swaggers - they walked the roads (and in winter the city streets), turned a hand to any work that was going, and moved on once more. What made the casual labourer a swagger? The question is largely, what made the observer discard at times the occupational description - casual labourer, unemployed - for one that implied considerable moral and economic judgement - swagger or 'loafer'? The answer is in the existence of a 'hard core' of swaggers, and in the manifestation of extreme swagger habits.⁵ The progression of thought is

4. Edward Wakefield, New Zealand After Fifty Years (London, [1889]), p. 155; Henry Lawson, 'The Windy Hills o' Wellington', in Shanties by the Way, p. 125; J. Bradshaw, New Zealand As It Is (London, 1883), p. 99.

5. And 'loafer' habits. Although there is not a complete correspondence between the swagger in the countryside for the summer months and the 'loafer' in the city during the winter, many men were both. Each shared the vices of improvidence, shiftlessness and so forth. When I use 'swagger' the 'loafer' is in mind as well. Notwithstanding this, the qualification must be made that some swaggers never moved into the city; some 'loafers', especially skilled unemployed, did not go into the country.

PLATE VIII.

A Swagger, c. 1900.

(Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.)



exemplified in a letter written by C.W. Richmond, the former judge and Native Minister, in 1894:

The lowest of our working classes ... spend the enormous wages they receive whilst work is plentiful at shearing time and harvest, in a few days at the public houses. Their wives and families are left unprovided for, and they themselves have to appeal for state aid as "the unemployed". Having left themselves without a penny they travel the country as "swaggers" and "sun-downers" - claiming everywhere at the stations food and free quarters.

As swaggers tramped across country they needed to be fed and given a place to sleep at night. They were confident of food and shelter from the stations because of the unwritten law amongst runholders that every swagger should be provided with an evening meal, sleeping accommodation for a night and breakfast'. If the bed was poor the food was generally good, and both were usually offered even if the owner did not require labour at that time. The other particular exemplification of swagger life was the swaggers' habit of 'knocking down' their wages; that is, spending, often in a hotel bar, several days or weeks accumulated earnings in a prolonged spree.⁷

Among the groups tramping the roads were at least a few criminals; ruthless, even violent men. When a tramp assaulted someone, all swaggers, all wandering labourers, would suffer accusation by association. There could also be something very unsettling about an unshaven, ill-clad stranger shuffling around a small village in the late afternoon. And amongst the swaggers were some two hundred hawkers, often Asiatics and going under the label 'Assyrians',

6. C.W. Richmond to Alice Blake, 29 March 1894, Richmond-Atkinson Papers, II, p. 598.

7. Vance, High Endeavour, p. 68; J. Bradshaw, New Zealand of To-day (London, 1888), pp. 180-82.

whose race, exotic habits and commercial enterprise were suspect if not frightening.⁸

'Only a few were bad men', John A. Lee decided; but swaggers were not always given the benefit of the doubt. 'Many of them are very good fellows', wrote Wakefield, 'honest and manly, and generous to a fault; but with few exceptions they are rough, and some of them are great blackguards'. They were outcasts and 'Bohemians'; worse still, in Wakefield's eyes, they kept class animosity bubbling. He thought they were a waste, a menace, and that it was time they were diminished. Bradshaw divided them into two categories. The first group were hard-working but a representative of the second category was characterised as

"blowing", undesirable, sponging alike on the runholder, the farmer and the hotel-keeper - an individual who won't work unless he is obliged, and sometimes not even then; a disgrace to his kind, and fit only to be classed with the "casuals" of an English workhouse.⁹

A suspicion existed that if the swagger were not simply improvident, spending his earnings rapidly and disreputably, he was probably living off the charity of kindly folk to the extent that he did not work at all. A few swaggers notoriously did not work, preferring to live by their wits:

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8. For an instance of violence, see H.C.M. Norris, Settlers in Depression (Auckland, 1964), p. 226; John A. Lee recalls swagging with a murderer: J.A. Lee, Shining with the Shiner (Auckland, 1950), pp. 11-12. An example of the use of 'Assyrian', or similar description, for the hawkers is in, E.E. Vaile, Pioneering the Pumice (Christchurch, 1939), p. 48; see also, P.S. O'Connor, 'Keeping New Zealand White, 1908-1920', New Zealand Journal of History, II (1968), p. 64 n 91; AJHR, 1896, H-6, p. vii and n; PD, 1894, 86, p. 447 (A.K. Newman).
9. Lee, Shining with the Shiner, p. 12; Bradshaw, NZ As It Is, pp. 26-27; Wakefield, NZ After Fifty Years, pp. 155-58.

Edmond ('The Shiner') Slattery was the most well-known of these.¹⁰ E. Way Elkington, who tramped around the turn of the century, said it was common knowledge that ten out of a dozen swaggers 'would be grossly insulted were they offered work'.¹¹ W.P. Reeves, soon to be Minister of Labour, displayed his dislike for the swagger in verse in 1889:

He'd asked for a "feed" from many a boss,
And if, through stress of human badness,
The answer was profane or cross,
Aye smiled with philosophic sadness,
Nor ever let refusal pain,
But, model for a carpet-bagger,
No malice bore, and - asked again,
A disappointed swagger.

In the last verse Reeves has his swagger experience the supreme disappointment: he gets a job.¹²

We have no way of telling how many swaggers and 'loafers' there were at any time. Probably in the early 1890s, and especially in 1894 and 1895 (which the monthly reports of the Journal would suggest were the worst), there were many thousands on the road both by choice and by necessity. 'In those days the gap between vagabondage and respectability was not immense, a bad season, a foreclosed mortgage.'¹³ As late as 1895 Tregear reported that the floating labour population was being augmented by settlers and others previously 'permanent labourers'. In 1894 there were even some women carrying a swag.¹⁴ One Hawkes Bay station kept a record of meals provided, and the tally was 900

10. Lee, Shining with the Shiner, *passim*; R. J. Jones, 'Slattery, Edmond', An Encyclopedia of New Zealand, III, pp. 264-65.

11. E. Way Elkington, Adrift in New Zealand (London, 1906), p. 120.

12. W.P. Reeves, 'The Disappointed Swagger', in Farm and Station Verse, pp. 22-3.

13. Lee, Shining with the Shiner, pp. 10-11.

14. AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 1; Norris, Settlers in Depression, p. 226.

swaggers fed in six months in 1894; doubtless some men received more than one meal. Charles Tripp, a stationholder in the MacKenzie Country, was estimated to provide for 600 swaggers a year. Elkington recalled being at a station when thirty swaggers were fed and lodged in a single night. In the Census of 1891, 1250 men described themselves as 'Gentlemen of independent means', and 894 failed to state any occupation.¹⁵ It is tempting to think that a considerable number in both categories were swaggers with (respectively) a sense of humour or of guilt, but such speculation does not bring us materially closer to estimating numbers.

We must also take into account the Australian influx which was high in 1893 and 1894. 'As a rule', it was reported in 1893, 'they have been good, strong, sturdy men, many of them being returned New Zealanders' But the following year depression in Australia apparently drove to New Zealand less desirable specimens.

The only feature of the Australian influx which I consider wholly harmful [wrote Tregear] is that, consequent on the immigration of so large a number of worthy men there has followed a small fringe of the "sundowner" or loafer element.

In the Journal the Wellington report solemnly listed their disabilities: 'unused to, and ... physically unfit for, manual labour; being without means, strength, or ability, they are very undesirable immigrants'.¹⁶ M. McCaskill, investigating Australian settlement in New Zealand, did emphasise the point

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15. Norris, Settlers in Depression, p. 226; Vance, High Endeavour, p. 68; Elkington, Adrift in NZ, p. 121; Census, 1891, pp. 299, 301.
16. Journal, March 1893, p. 15; April 1893, H-10, p. 27; AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 4; Journal, February 1894, p. 2. For fiction that is also descriptive, see H. Lawson, 'Coming Across', in While the Billy Boils (Sydney, 1896), pp. 245-63.

that the greatest proportion of Australians settled either in the large towns or in the mining camps and backcountry areas. 'These - the big city and the 'outback' - are indeed the characteristically Australian environments.'¹⁷

It is probable that when the Department put into effect its unemployment measures Tregear had not 'mentally isolated' the swagger and 'loafer' as he later did, mostly because he had considerable faith in the efficacy of redeployment measures and believed that the greater part of the unemployed iceberg could be melted rapidly and permanently. The system of free railway passes in 1891-93 suggests he was over-optimistic about the incidence of rogues. At any rate, the recalcitrant wanderer is treated fairly gently in his 1892 'Report'. In his discussion of the possibilities and scope of state farms in that report, he mentions the penal labour colonies of Europe but decided, 'New Zealand has at present no distinct criminal or pauper class, and therefore no such institutions need consideration'.¹⁸ As we shall see below, his attitude changed considerably. Why?

First, the Department was being heavily criticised for its expense when everyone - as the argument ran - knew that it was all for loafers, to whom the Department was allegedly giving all manner of handouts paid for by the taxpayer.¹⁹ Tregear personally did not appreciate criticism, either of his scholarship (he was upset by the poor reception given his book, The Aryan Maori) or of his administration ('Tom Taylor I do not like', he told Reeves,

17. M. McCaskill, 'The Australian Element in the Population of New Zealand', unpublished typescript of paper presented to A.N.Z.A.A.S. Congress, Sydney, 1962, p. 12.

18. AJHR, 1892, H-14, p. 2.

19. For example, NZH, 3 August 1898.

'he always says spiteful things about the Labour Department').²⁰ Besides, criticism on valid points - and Tregear had admitted that some of his 'loafing fraternity' had literally taken the Department for a ride in its early days²¹ - might lead to successful and convincing attacks on the Department's work in other fields, factory and shop legislation especially.

Secondly, Tregear gradually learned more as his secretaryship continued of how disreputable, clever and uncooperative workmen could be, and this outraged his sense of decency and orderliness.²²

Thirdly, Tregear believed that a little charity went a long way, and that if food and blankets were provided free, either on the stations or in the towns, pauperisation would result - the process whereby a man was supposed to lose the inclination to work if he did not have to. The Departmental motto was: 'Without work, nothing'.²³ This attitude was not peculiar to Tregear but was shared by 'responsible' citizens; it was a belief, in fact, that appears in print in New Zealand as early as 1867²⁴ and continues through the depression of the 'thirties.

It is well to recall that Tregear in this period received a vast amount of information and literature from overseas on labour conditions, and the overseas opinion was that relief led to pauperisation; and although this was

20. NZBC Tape; 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 5 December 1902.

21. Fair Play, loc. cit.

22. See above, pp. 33, 60.

23. AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 4; compare, Lloyd, Newest England, p. 247.

24. Sutch, Poverty and Progress, p. 85.

a confirming rather than an initiating influence on Tregear, it doubtless had considerable weight. Some of the reprinted articles in the Journal deal with the subject. In the very first issue of the Journal there is a report of an independent enquiry by 'interested clergy' in London into unemployment. Two of their recommendations were that a register should be kept of the previous employment of those relieved; and that relief funds and doles should not be resorted to. In July 1893 this item appeared:

Mr Arnold White estimates £6,000,000 is every year given by the public to London charities.... He maintains that the distribution of this money sustains a population of professional hypocrites and cadgers which he is of the opinion ought to be exterminated.²⁵

An article by White was published in December that same year. In his conclusion White suggested that what the unemployed ought to do

is to lead celibate lives, take the pledge, keep a civil tongue in their heads, avoid strong language, suffer in silence, and display virtues that we do not practise ourselves.

One wonders whether Tregear pondered how that reflected his own attitudes.

Perhaps Mr P. Okeden of Queensland ought to have read it too. The Journal reports him as saying:

It is a fact that loafing habits and dependence on Government charity, combined with indulgence in drink and tobacco, habits of uncleanliness, and complete lack of thrift or foresight, are among the characteristics of a large proportion of those who pose conspicuously among the unemployed and are most loudmouthed in saying what society should do for them.²⁶

There are similar articles and attitudes scattered throughout the Journals of the next few years.

25. Journal, March 1893, p. 22; July 1893, p. 64.

26. Journal, December 1893, p. 91; March 1894, p. 60.

It all tended, therefore, to confirm Tregear's belief that charity resulted in pauperisation, and that New Zealand must at all costs avoid the creation of a class that overseas commentators described with considerable pessimism. As a consequence of this belief he deplored local body efforts to provide sustenance. The point may be illustrated with reference to Christchurch (which, lacking bushfelling and roadmaking - Canterbury's road system was virtually complete - was inundated by shearers, harvesters and swaggers generally in the wet season), and Wellington. In the South Island in 1894 the harvest had been unsuccessful, worsening the employment situation; the provincial historian notes that the year was for Canterbury in many ways the worst of the long depression, and there was demoralisation in the business community.²⁷

In April the Christchurch Labour Agent reported that a committee of leading citizens had been set up to investigate unemployment, and to ask local bodies 'to do something to relieve the distress'. T.E. Taylor, a harsh critic of the Department, was in the forefront of the movement, pressing for a Government subsidy on local body relief.²⁸ Tregear wished the Christchurch citizens every success.

But we trust that there will be no element of charity in the scheme; once import that into dealing with able-bodied unemployed difficulty and, to our mind the whole thing will end in a failure.

There was agitation in Wellington at the same time; and groups of citizens there also organised small relief projects. Tregear had to protect the interests of the Department. The Government, as he put it, had been doing

27. Scotter, Canterbury, III, p. 64.

28. Journal, April 1894, p. 4; Scotter, Canterbury, III, p. 64.

all they could, with justice to the colony, to help the men who were out of work, but people in Wellington and Christchurch were expecting 'impossibilities'.²⁹

His worst fears had been realised next month. In Wellington men had been arriving from the outlying districts, 'attracted ... by the news which has gone round the country that free beds and free meals are being provided for all and sundry'. Swaggers were reported on the move towards Wellington for 'the good things' from as far away as Patea. And the Christchurch Agent said that a large number of single men had been attracted there 'by the latest charitable inventions'.³⁰ When in July the following year the Christchurch Agent reported that relief-works were drawing still more men into a city with considerable unemployment already, the Wellington office made a general appeal: 'It will be wise on the part of those [local bodies] who have the management of those [relief] works if they insist on some proof being given that the men applying are bona fide residents of the city'. The Christchurch Agent had reported before the works were started that there had been about 100 unemployed; now, incredibly, there were 494 on relief-works.³¹

As bad as the 'charity' in this situation, as bad as the incipient pauperisation, was the gathering of men into the cities to make the number of unemployed seem vastly higher than the Labour Department estimated, and the opportunity with such large groups for disaffection to be publicised and

29. Journal, April 1894, p. 5; May 1894, p. 9.

30. Journal, June 1894, pp. 2-3.

31. Journal, July 1895, p. 645; August 1895, pp. 756, 758. Later on the authorities in the cities took more care over the provision of relief-works: AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. xvi.

turned against the Government and the Department. Meetings and deputations were customary format. 'We are of the opinion', said the Christchurch Agent, 'that a good many men who are most prominent in getting up these meetings are very careful not to accept any work that may be offered' And in Wellington:

There has been a great deal of agitation among a certain class of men during the last few weeks, much more, probably, than there was any occasion for. Several meetings were held by men reported out of employment. One of these we attended ... we should say that out of the estimated two hundred present there were at least a hundred who work on the wharves and about the shipping. It being a slack day at their work, they of course attended the meeting.³²

Pressure on the Department to 'do something' therefore became acute. Tregear had to make a response. He also had evidence before him which suggested that some kind of pauperisation had taken place.

Beginning around June 1894, the Labour Agents began to report the presence of swaggers instead of simply as they had done in the past referring to unemployed men. Certainly, previous reports had mentioned people unwilling to work and people unable to tackle the rougher sorts of employment; and the previous September the Masterton Agent complained of a group of men 'who say they want work, and yet when it is offered them they make all sorts of objections, and finally decide not to take it'. But reports of 'loafers' now become regular. One Agent in June 1894 reports a distinct change: 'there is now a class of men on the road very different from the bona fide man in search of work'.³³

32. Journal, May 1894, p. 8; August 1894, p. 3.

33. Journal, September 1893, p. 4; June 1894, p. 2.

Such reports more or less coincide with the beginnings of large-scale local body relief in both islands. Did the prospect of relief-works bring the swaggers out of hiding? Surely they had been evident earlier. What is more likely is that faced with local body activities that would conflict with the Department's no-charity principle, that would gather together and highlight the unemployment statistics, bring the Department into discredit, and hasten the pauperisation process, Tregear determined to isolate and identify the 'loafer' elements and their more despicable characteristics. He virtually gave warning of this when he wrote in his 1894 'Report':

The public will have to learn to discriminate between men really anxious to work and men who only call out for work; too many of the "hard cases" rejected by the Labour Department being among the latter class.³⁴

His Agents responded well.

In August 1894 the Pahiatua Agent reported a class of men passing through the town who said they were looking for work, 'the truth of which statement he very greatly doubts'. Next month the Napier Agent decided that the single men who had applied to his Bureau for assistance 'were not the right sort to assist, they having been drinking about the town'. The tales from Woodville were quite horrific: some of the swaggers, 'after getting a night's lodging and food, refuse to chop a bit of firewood to repay some of the cost, in fact, some will go without the food rather than do a little work for it'; and the following month: swaggers begged 'a shilling to get food, saying they are starving, and after getting it spend it in drink'.³⁵ Except during the peak periods of employment, when shearing and harvesting absorbed

34. AJHR, 1894, H-6, p. 4.

35. Journal, August 1894, p. 2; September 1894, pp. 1-2; October 1894, p. 2.

most surplus labour, Agents thenceforth regularly reported the presence of swaggers in Hawkes Bay, in the Manawatu-Wanganui district, in the Wairarapa, in Canterbury province generally, and to a lesser extent in Taranaki and the Bay of Plenty.

It is necessary to emphasise here what can easily be overlooked, that in the majority of localities the Labour Agents were policemen. Such a circumstance gave a tone of law-enforcement to the Department's efforts to solve unemployment. The no-nonsense attitude of many of the annual reports from local Agents, the suggestions for control and punishment of recalcitrant labourers and swaggers, are from the same officials who as constables arrested men on charges of vagrancy and worse. The Hastings Agent reported in 1897 that there were a large number of tramps in the neighbourhood with 'idle and annoying habits', and 'at every opportunity they thieve'.

I hope the day is not far off when this class of idlers will be compelled to keep off the roads. Work of some sort should surely be provided, which, if they did not accept, they should be sent to goal and compelled to work.³⁶

One result of this use of police as agents was suggested by a writer in the Westminster Review, who claimed that the Labour Department was 'rarely defeated by the undeserving. Confronted by the officials in blue, who know his antecedents, and can show him his whole past history neatly docketed, the "moocher", the true loafer, here at last meets his match'.³⁷ A.W. Hogg, an M.P., also recognised the implications of using police as Labour Agents.

36. AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. xxi.

37. E. Reeves, 'The Present Position of Adult Male Labour in New Zealand', from the Westminster Review, reprinted in the Journal, February 1896, pp. 158-73, and see especially p. 167.

They should not act in such a capacity in the country districts, he thought, 'for working-men felt humiliated when they had to go to the police station and beg for work'.³⁸ Probably more important than the moocher meeting his match or an alleged humiliation of the worker was the effect those thoughts, official asides like that by the Hastings Agent, had upon Tregear. The ideas expressed in his 'Reports' on the necessity for stern control were echoed, reinforced surely, by many of his local Agents. Both Tregear and the Agents were viewing the swagger as a vagrant - and vagrancy was a criminal offence. Moreover, society accepted that criminals were required to behave under compulsion.

The first sign of Tregear's wish for compulsion is in his 'Report' for 1893:

The dependent classes should be divided into three distinct orders - viz., the helpful poor, who need only guidance and direction to enable the work and the worker to be brought together; the helpless poor, who are to be regarded as subjects for benevolent aid; and the criminally-lazy poor, who should be compelled to work.

In an article, 'Labour in New Zealand', published in the 1893 Year-Book, Tregear speaks of a more gentle process, 'weaning' men from a nomadic life; no compulsion is threatened, but there is the hint that the days of the peripatetic labourer are numbered.³⁹ By 1895 something akin to quiet fury appears in Tregear's 'Report', where he details the elements that were plaguing him:

the loafers, the drunkards, the spielers, the hangers-on of wives, the sickly, and the incapable.

38. PD, 1896, 94, p. 247.

39. AJHR, 1893, H-10, p. 2; E. Tregear, 'Labour in New Zealand', p. 220.

All these are ready to attend 'unemployed' meetings, and sign petitions that work may be provided, but they are not unemployed in the sense of being men desirous of obtaining work and ready to take it.⁴⁰

Nothing was being done about these men. Certainly, there was the Police Offences Act of 1884 ready to be used. It proscribed not only the man 'found by night having his face blackened ... or otherwise disguised with a felonious intent' but also anyone who 'does not give a good account of his means of support' to the satisfaction of a magistrate.⁴¹ Yet there were only about four hundred charges annually under this Act, not all resulting in convictions.⁴²

Suffering from 'men not so industrious with their hands as with their tongues',⁴³ Tregear found an answer in penal farms, the solution he had originally rejected. He now had before him the example of the State Farm. There were also the promptings of overseas examples; and like the discussions of pauperisation, information on and advocacy of penal farms appear in many issues of the Journal in this period. In April 1894 a New South Wales report was summarised.

It is estimated that in Sydney there are from four to five hundred confirmed loafers, and the report suggests that 100 acres or more of fairly good land be set apart as an industrial farm ... and that these idlers be sent to it and compelled to earn their keep.⁴⁴

40. AJHR, 1895, H-6, p. 6.

41. Statutes of NZ, 1884, pp. 72-73.

42. Statistics of the Colony of New Zealand, 1891-93 (for 1893), p. 368 (370 males taken into custody, 91 discharged); 1895, p. 374 (378 males taken into custody, 80 discharged). There was a noticeable drop in the figures on the return of prosperity: Statistics, 1896, p. 273 (295 males taken into custody, 76 discharged).

43. AJHR, 1896, H-6, p. i.

44. Journal, April 1894, p. 89.

In June 1894 there was a detailed comparative article on the labour colonies of Holland and Germany; in November, an article by John Burns, an English Member of Parliament, who spoke harshly of the 'loafer' and the desirability of controlling him; in August 1895, another comparative report entitled 'Labour Colonies'.⁴⁵

Tregear made his strongest recommendation for compulsion in his 1896 'Report', when he advocated penal farms.

I am more and more impressed with the necessity that exists of establishing farms which shall be used as places of restriction for the incurably vagrant atoms of population. The State Farm does not and should not fulfil this purpose What is required is a place of detention and discipline. There exists in every town a certain number of men whose position vibrates between that of the loafer and the criminal; these should be altogether removed from cities. The spieler, the bookmaker, the habitual drunkard, the loafer on his wife's earnings, the man who has no honest occupation, he whose condition of 'unemployed' has become chronic and insoluble, all these persons are evil examples and possible dangers.⁴⁶

What was significant about the statement was not simply that compulsion and coercion appear in it. Many people would have agreed with James Allen in Parliament when he said: 'I am bound to say I should like to see ... some scheme by which they [the unemployed] should be compelled to work if they will not work'.⁴⁷ The significance was that a Government department set up a short while before to alleviate unemployment was now, to simplify its task and reduce criticism, advocating that it should be responsible (and the implication is there) for sponsoring or organising penal farms on which the recalcitrant elements should be made to work.

45. Journal, June 1894, pp. 31-42; November 1894, pp. 39-53; August 1895, pp. 798-817.

46. AJHR, 1896, H-6, p. vii.

47. PD, 1897, 98, p. 159.

VI EPILOGUE AND PROLOGUE.

A number of influences militated against Tregear's recommendation of penal farms being taken further. It was the 1896 session that saw the culmination of the attack on the State Farm at Levin. In these circumstances it was hardly likely that Seddon would countenance more state farms, of whatever variety, under the control of the Labour Department when even one had been such a focus of criticism for both the friends and the foes of the Government.¹ The Levin farm stayed in the news, and in the Parliamentary limelight. Somewhat inevitably the whole idea was investigated officially; it did not rate a Royal Commission, but a Joint Committee drawn from both Legislative Council and House sat in 1898. The Committee was to examine 'the desirableness of establishing state farms and industrial settlements as a means of alleviating the evils arising from irregularity of employment'. Early in its report the Committee dealt with penal farms.

In collecting evidence on the subject the Committee did not deem it necessary to extend their inquiry into the working of Continental labour colonies. It is well known that these colonies are chiefly peopled by enfeebled persons, discharged prisoners and suspected tramps; and, although we have representatives of these classes in this colony, they are not with us the pressing danger that they are in the congested populations of Europe. Fortunately, with us their number is small, and if state farms are established in our midst it will not be for

1. For the debate, see above pp. 70-71. For Seddon's later discouraging attitude to state farms, and his retrospective view of the Levin example, PD, 1903, 125, p. 217.

the purpose of dealing effectively with them, but rather with a view to arresting the growth amongst us of such an undesirable element.²

Mackay gave evidence before the Committee, but only to do with the Levin Farm.³ Tregear did not give evidence. Any chance there had been of establishing labour colonies was effectively ended by the Joint Committee's dismissal of the idea. It is important, though, to notice that there had been some lessening of both unemployment and of swaggers between Tregear's call for penal farms and the Committee's report. Tregear himself was quite certain in 1897 that there had been an improvement in the 'general prosperity'. He referred relatively mildly to the 'drifting population, that at its best, can find only a precarious livelihood, and at its worst is an expense and drawback to the colony'.⁴ In raw figures, only 1718 men were assisted to employment by the Department, 1153 less than the previous year, and the least assisted by the Department since its formation.⁵

The Labour Agents reported far fewer swaggers than usual in 1897, though the improvement was not so marked in the South Island until the following year when the Midland Railway forged ahead and absorbed labour from most of the area. There was desultory debate in Parliament about the improvement in employment. C. Wilson claimed:

2. AJHR, 1898, I-11, p. 2.

3. Ibid., p. 2.

4. AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. ii.

5. Ibid., p. x. It must be remembered, however, that 'men assisted' does not correspond to 'men unemployed'. We have only examples, not complete figures, for men registered as unemployed but not assisted. For instance at the Wellington office in 1896-97, 1441 men registered as requiring assistance, and 812 of these were helped by the Department to work. Nevertheless, the drop in 'men assisted' does indicate a lessening of unemployment, even if the proportions are not entirely reliable.

Those who are accustomed to look through the country newspapers must have noticed that the presence of swaggers on the roads was hardly ever alluded to. Members from the country districts will bear me out when I say that the number of itinerary or peripatetic labourers is less than it has ever been previously.

Mr Hogg went further: 'In the country districts a swagger is scarcely to be found'.⁶ It was not all rosy, as a visitor, Ben Tillett, wrote to Reeves:

The existence of a large 'swagger' and 'mining' class, living in celibacy - who are a source of danger - where lacking the powerful discipline of family life. Drunkenness [sic] must follow. The surplus labour of the cities also a menace⁷

There was some further reduction of the wandering unemployed when Old Age Pensions came into operation.⁸

But apart from the Joint Committee's disapproval and the lessening of the number of unemployed, a change in Tregear's own attitudes towards compulsion are visible after 1897. The change can be related to Tregear's health and work. Tregear suffered more often from illness as his tenure of the secretaryship lengthened, and this must have dampened his enthusiasm and limited his activity. He was ill late in 1891, being unable to attend the meetings of the Philosophical Society of Wellington, of which he was president at that time, and in which he took a great interest. Overwork brought him neuralgia, and he suffered each winter from pleurisy.⁹ In 1898 he was afflicted with inflamed eyes and was unable to work in the evenings; two

6. PD, 1897, 98, pp. 42 (Wilson), 67 (Hogg).

7. 'Letters from Men of Mark', B. Tillett to W.P. Reeves, 30 June 1898. (Punctuation as in original).

8. AJHR, 1899, H-11, p. ii.

9. Transactions and Proceedings of the New Zealand Institute, 1891, XXIV (1892), pp. 693-700; NZBC Tape.

years later he added a 'bad back' (which he coupled with influenza). In 1901 his neuralgia was so bad that his pen-hand was 'crippled'; and in 1904 he more or less broke under the pressure of work.

I have been running down hill in health for a year or two, becoming as listless that it was only by exercise of will that I kept up a strain on the collar. You know how, as soon as work ceases to be a pleasure, it "takes it out" of one, and just three weeks before session ended I went under - mad with sciatica.¹⁰

There is evidence to suggest that the pleasure had gone out of Tregear's work much earlier and, added to his involvement with the increasing amount of administration as the Department grew, he may have let slip some of his prime interests. Frank Waldegrave, Reeves's former private secretary, wrote to Reeves in 1901 that Tregear was 'still battling away for the rights of man, but he is less enthusiastic I fancy than of yore', and he had noticed this as early as 1896.¹¹ Reeves's departure may have left Tregear with less inspiration. 'Poor Tregear', Tillett told Reeves, 'is lost without you'.¹² Late in 1896 Tregear wrote thus to Reeves:

I am not old enough to be your father in years, but I am immensely older, infinitely older than you because I have passed a certain point when I know that ambitions and youthful dreams will never be fulfilled. This is real age, when the conviction comes that the height is still unclimbed.¹³

It is likely, then, that illness and responsibility, isolation and age,

10. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 30 June 1898; 11 January 1900; 7 May 1901; 23 January 1905.

11. Ibid., F. Waldegrave to W.P. Reeves, 25 May 1901; 24 August 1896.

12. Ibid., B. Tillett to W.P. Reeves, 10 August 1897.

13. Ibid., E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 7 October 1896.

together had important consequences in Tregear's attitude towards his work. The outbursts against the swagger and the loafers became rarer, and there is no action contemplated against them - at least not by the Department, which was the crucial point in 1896. True, there were fewer swaggers and the numbers of unemployed had greatly decreased, but they were still there. Yet Tregear, who had always tended to underestimate the numbers of unemployed,¹⁴ became blasé, almost careless in his attitude towards them. When H.D. Lloyd visited New Zealand he had made a request:

He asked me to get him a photo of a group of "unemployed" - well I regret for his sake and am glad for my own that I cannot get such a group. Except for the occasional straggler we have no "unemployed"¹⁵

Possibly Tregear did not care so much anymore. There was less criticism of the Department over unemployment as prosperity returned, but in any case Tregear may well have built a kind of mental barrier against such criticism. There is an important passage in the first letter he wrote to Reeves after the latter had taken up the Agent-Generalship in London.

You will be surprised to hear that "the permanent settlement of the unemployed difficulty" has not yet been accomplished. There were several meetings both here and in Kch, deputations to Mr Seddon and other ministers, but little came of them The premier promised that land for suburban settlement should be acquired as soon as possible; that men should be put on public works as numerously as possible &c but nothing new.¹⁶

The use of quotation marks around "the permanent ..." makes the phrase 'You

14. AJHR, 1897, H-6, p. i, n; Fair Play, loc. cit.

15. 'Letters from Men of Mark', E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 16 February 1900. In the winter, however, Lloyd found plenty of unemployment: Lloyd, Newest England, p. 251.

16. *Ibid.*, E. Tregear to W.P. Reeves, 22 April 1896.

will be surprised' quite rhetorical; and 'but nothing new' has a tired ring about it. Could it be that Tregear, at the time he was advocating penal farms as a violent remedy for the dreaded deputations, was already building a protective, sardonic shell, inside which his sensitive personality could retire if he had to face the fact that human nature would upset the orderly world he was creating?

Such a notion is not too fanciful when we look at his 1898 'Report', composed about two years after his letter to Reeves quoted above. It must be confessed, he wrote,

that some of those for whom work has been found have made little effort to help themselves. This class of men has not been created either by the co-operative works or the Labour Department; they formerly stood about helpless at street-corners; they are not really idle men, but they lack energy, and are economically helpless.¹⁷

This is virtually an admission that some men cannot be compelled to work, and yet are not deliberately taunting the Labour Department by vagrancy or whatever - though the phrase 'economically helpless' is (as the Herald was quick to point out) rather obscure.¹⁸

Tregear's rosy 'Reports' on the state of employment after 1900 help to cast that glow on the latter years of Seddon's rule that the historian can hardly help being warmly touched by. He said that the unemployed of 1891 were by 1901 either in steady employment in towns or were prosperous country settlers; 'there is scarcely a name on the books of the Department which could be found there ten years ago'. The following year he decided: 'Those

17. AJHR, 1898, H-6, p. i.

18. NZH, 3 August 1898.

who are enumerated in our schedule as having been assisted ... have little or no relation to the class of unemployed of fourteen years ago'. The recalcitrant he had recognised now as a constant factor in human society, and any coercion involved he gave to other authorities:

There is in New Zealand, as elsewhere (and as there always has been where men gathered in communities), a number of persons who do not work - the sick, the maimed, the inebriate, the lazy - but these are subjects for the charitable aid societies or the Commissioner of Police rather than for the Labour Department.¹⁹

There was, apparently, a new dispensation for the wandering labourer.

'It is pleasing to find', he wrote in 1908, 'that the shearer nowadays is reported by most employers to be superior to the shearer of a few years ago.' The way Tregear 'mentally decasualised' the situation casts a similar light.

Some employers have been successful, by showing fair and generous treatment to their shearers, in getting the same men year after year to perform their work and the result has proved mutually satisfactory.²⁰

Even if Ned Slattery and John A. Lee were now able to walk thirty miles together²¹ without the overhanging threat of compulsory work on a Labour Department penal colony, control of the labouring force continued in other directions. Statutes dealing with conditions of employment in factories, shops, and offices, with the safety of scaffolding and machinery, with the provision of workers' accommodation and the probity of servants registry offices - all these laws were introduced, or amended and extended. The

19. AJHR, 1903, H-11, p. ii.

20. AJHR, 1908, H-11, p. xii.

21. Lee, Shining with the Shiner, p. 11.

Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act (which Tregear valued because it allowed the Arbitration Court 'compulsory powers, and thus tends to prevent a multitude of petty bickerings and small disputes to grow into open rupture'²²) was several times amended so that it more easily disposed of possible strikes and more perfectly promoted industrial orderliness. The number of Departmental Inspectors continued to increase, and so did their powers. They investigated in detail the areas specified in the statutes - factories, shops, offices, scaffolding, machinery, Court of Arbitration Awards, and so on.²³ Furthermore, in assisting men to employment over the years the Department had gradually but greatly 'decasualised' the casual labourer in a cumulative manner. Tregear claimed that the employment procured by the Department

has sometimes prevented a feeling of utter despair taking possession of a defeated labourer, and has enabled him not only to get a few weeks' or a few months' work at a critical time, but in many cases has allowed him the means to leave an overcrowded town and proceed to a country district, where one job has succeeded another until he has found a place in rural society that he can fill with advantage to himself and to his neighbours.²⁴

Not all proceeded to or stayed in the country districts. From 1902 onwards a large number of casual labourers went to the chief centres as navvies in the construction of tramway systems.²⁵ Those that stayed in the country areas often ended up as freezing-workers, as slaughtermen in abattoirs, and as dairy-factory workers. Although there was (as there is today) a

22. AJHR, 1896, H-6, p. vi.

23. For more detail on this, see above, pp. 7-14.

24. AJHR, 1898, H-6, p. i.

25. AJHR, 1903, H-11, p. i.

seasonal aspect to this work,²⁶ to some extent these men were harnessed, controlled by factory regulations, continual employment, and the integrative forces of unionism engendered by the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. Indeed, the settling process of this period, the Labour Department measures and the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act must be seen as the background to the formation of a Wellington rural workers union in 1914 (including farm and station hands, dairy factory workers, 'flaxies' and freezing-workers), even if it is admitted that industrial strife was the occasion of this organisation.²⁷

It is difficult to guess whether Tregear would have found such a development as the rural workers union altogether admirable, or whether he would have been unhappy about his 'rogues' banding together in the countryside. Even though the later years of his secretaryship were marked by his increasing interest in socialism,²⁸ he was still able to waggle an admonitory official finger at the tramps who had so vexed him years before. In his final 'Report', 1910, he wrote:

I hope to submit to you during the present year a new scheme for the providing of "employment" cards to men assisted by the Department. We have already adopted a registration-card system ... but I would like to extend the system so as to provide each man with a card ... showing his name, age, calling, name of last employer, and also providing columns (somewhat

26. See, for instance, AJHR, 1908, I-9, p. 43; 1912, H-18, p. 436.

27. A. McLeod and E. Hunter, Wellington Farm and Station Hands (other than Shearers) Creamery, Butter and Cheese Factory Employers Industrial Union of Workers ... (Wellington, 1915), passim.

28. See, for instance, H. Roth, 'Secretary Tregear writes a letter', Here and Now, III, number 4 (February, 1953), pp. 14-15.

on the lines of a seaman's certificate-of-discharge book) in which an employer, by the use of letters could indicate the character and conduct of a man whilst in his employ.²⁹

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Clio is not simply a political muse; neither is she exclusively or even largely an administrative muse. Clio is pre-eminently a pervasive muse; and the historian must, if he is to truly acknowledge his mentor, climb back out of his investigatory tunnels and view the mountain as a whole. It is, certainly, worth studying the nature of our bureaucracy, and its genesis, for its own sake, and by specific reference to the Labour Department in the 1890s this thesis has made a contribution to such a study. Nevertheless, there should be a wider context in which this research can be placed, and in which context administrative history, expanded by the influence of Clio, may be used for illumination.

To begin any illumination, to strike the first spark is a perilous, almost presumptuous undertaking when so much initial research on administrative history remains to be done. Yet, even more absurdly, there is little 'wider context' to illuminate. We know a great deal about various aspects of the years 1890-1914 - radical legislation, cabinets, elections, worker dissatisfaction and the rise of socialism, imperialism - but we lack a modern synthesis. If we use the concept of the 'Liberal period' (and many New

29. AJHR, 1910, H-11, p. v.

Zealand historians implicitly or explicitly do), we are bound to admit that our historical characterisation of it has scarcely advanced since André Siegfried's time.³⁰

Of course, it is possible to argue that the concept is unnecessary and that a synthesis might be misleading for a period that saw much controversy and strife. While one must admit that recent research on sectarian and racial tensions is extremely valuable for our further knowledge of the period, one should ask whether an attempt to do without a new synthesis is realistic. Is there not historical interest in the essence of a society that revelled in a humdrum existence, exulted in vulgarity, and perhaps preferred strife to be channelled into extra-Parliamentary institutions (such as the temperance movement) where tensions could be expressed with less danger to the consensus?

From the standpoint of the administrative historian, the word 'consensus' is a major label in any description of the Liberal period. In fact, two hypotheses can be worked alongside one another: the historian of Government administration in the Liberal period may attempt a characterisation of the period, because he finds in his research that what played a major part in creating the 'Liberal consensus', what especially characterised the period, was the growth of (and the consequences of) a 'new bureaucracy'. At this point it is reasonable to fill out such a claim by detailing the hypotheses.

Government administration in New Zealand in the period 1890-1914 underwent, as has been suggested above, both a qualitative and quantitative change. The quantitative change consisted of a considerable increase in the number of bureaucrats, at both the local and central levels; of an expansion of

30. Siegfried, Democracy in NZ, passim.

the number of laws that were to be administered; and of an expansion in the number of Government Departments. The qualitative change derives in large part from the quantitative change: the expansion of departments, laws and personnel was such as to produce a new intensity as well as a new frequency in Liberal bureaucracy.

There were other factors working for qualitative, for essential change. Bureaucracy built up before 1890, or assumed from the Provincial governments and subsequently rationalised, was a mixture of central and local control - hospitals and Charitable Aid were administered in this manner, with elected local committees working alongside authorities appointed from Wellington. The new departments of the Liberal period, especially those major examples of Labour, Health, and Agriculture, may often have appointed local people to agencies and part-time inspectorates, but the elected committees were absent, and ultimate control lay in the head offices at Wellington.

Further, the men appointed to high positions in these head offices by their attitudes and activities furthered qualitative change. The late nineteenth century seems to have produced a high-tide of Anglo-Saxon social conscience, from Henry George to the Salvation Army. Social philosophies (or, as such ideas were often then termed, 'political economy') found an echo in the depressed colony of New Zealand, and mouthpieces in men such as W.P. Reeves, T.E. Taylor, George Hogben, Percy Smith, and Edward Tregear. They were men with programmes (even if their vision was somewhat limited), with precise ideas of social reform. Their precision of thought was matched by fussy practicality. Those who went into the civil service instead of entering politics, like Tregear, brought a perfectionism to their plans of reform that gave rise to legislative detail and bureaucratic efficiency, that tended to direct society for its own 'good', and that ultimately

tended to control society.

The real 'Liberal revolution' was an administrative one, carried through by men like Edward Tregear. What was the response of society?

It matters a great deal that the rise of the Liberal bureaucracy should have been paralleled by the rise of the Liberal prosperity. Part of the relationship is causal : bureaucrats played a considerable role in the diffusion (rather than the creation) of prosperity. Government officials tended the monies under the Government Advances to Settlers Act, upheld wages and related conditions under various labour legislation, and helped increase efficiency and solvency in farming, in business, and in manufacturing. Moreover, the bureaucrat was not simply interpreting the fiat of Parliament. A great deal of Liberal legislation was initiated, or reformulated, in Departmental offices - in response to a mosaic of reactions and pressures exerted on local agents and reported to Wellington.

This brings another step in the sequence. We have a department which expands to detail and supervise more fully; and its expansion brings an increasing number of people into contact with the legislative detail. The expanded department finds that inequalities of wealth become more obvious, and injustices more identifiable as a greater number of groups and individuals come within its ambit; and the groups and individuals react more sharply and frequently as administrative supervision or control becomes more intimate. Bureaucracy at this 'stage' needs no Edward Tregear to build it up, detail upon detail, for each citizen has a vested and irreversible interest in the workings of bureaucracy, in the efficiency of administration, and a belief that bureaucracy should not work to his disadvantage.

The polarities that we noted at the beginning of this thesis as existing for the bureaucrat, that bureaucracy should be used for alleviation and for coercion, have by the end of the Liberal period been accepted by the 'ordinary citizen'. Edward Tregear wanted to alleviate the lot of the unfortunates of society, and he found he had to exercise control (even advocate coercion) of recalcitrant elements who threatened his well-intentioned programmes. By 1914 the 'ordinary citizen' wanted bureaucracy to 'alleviate' his own conditions (so that he could benefit fully from the visible prosperity) and 'coerce' his neighbour.

Why did the 'ordinary citizen' see bureaucracy not only as a cow to be milked (an apposite phrase for the times), but also as a bludgeon to be wielded? The answer may be provided by a closer examination of the 'Liberal prosperity', or, more specifically, the standard of living in New Zealand before the Great War.

There is plenty of statistical evidence for the 'Liberal prosperity'. Except for a recession in 1908-1909 (which produced a salutary rationalisation in manufacturing and business circles), tables for exports, imports, dairy and pastoral production show regular and often spectacular increases. To measure a widespread rise in the standard of living is more difficult: there were few bankruptcies, and the level of small deposits in the Post Office Savings Bank rose steadily, but these are ambiguous indices.

Less precise but more convincing is some of the evidence offered to the 1912 Royal Commission on the Cost of Living. G.L. Peacocke, a land agent and formerly editor of the New Zealand Farmer provided a general summary, even if in so doing he moved from the sublime to the ridiculous.

I certainly think that the general standard of living in this country ... has risen The higher existence wants books and pictures and good music, thinks more of health and cleanliness, and therefore wants better houses, and light to read by at night, instead of going to sleep soon after dark. The people are taught hygiene in the schools, and the religion of personal cleanliness, and therefore want bathrooms in their houses, and enough clothes to be able to change them before they "hum", as the boys express it.³¹

'People were no longer satisfied', suggested a married woman, 'with a smock and a hut and beans and bacon'. This woman believed 'a house without a bath was rightly regarded as a horror'.³² D.M. Lusk, a farmer from the King Country, admitted the reasonableness of cleanliness, but deplored the increasing practice of people wallowing in hot water.³³

George Court, a notable Auckland draper, agreed that customers (especially the 'working-classes') made 'application' for 'superior articles'. Did customers want more elegant clothes or better clothes? 'Fashion', declared Mr Court, 'is more studied than it used to be.'³⁴ As with clothes, food-buying was related as much to a 'standard' as to considerations of economy and quality. A.L. Hunt, manager of a large retail concern, noted the 'fastidiousness' of the people. He could not sell farmers' cured bacon at twopence per pound cheaper than factory bacon, 'due to the fact that the people almost insist on the bacon bearing the brand of a well-known factory'. It was the same for butter, and 'slightly undersized' potatoes were difficult to sell.³⁵

31. AJHR, 1912, H-18, pp. 295-96.

32. Ibid., p. 73.

33. Ibid., p. 233.

34. Ibid., p. 335.

35. Ibid., p. 422.

These examples could be multiplied. What is certain is that in a period of prosperity New Zealanders were aspiring to certain material norms of comfort. The process was helped by the expansion of hire-purchase buying, and the tramway systems in the cities that gave the suburban wage-earner cheap transport to the large department stores where he found 'a large choice of goods and cheap bargain-sales'.³⁶

There was a darker side to the general rise in the standard of living. A judge of the Arbitration Court made out a list of items which 'must find a place in a living wage', and in 1912 a carpenter put the weekly amounts alongside.³⁷

	£	s	d
Rent per week	15	6	
Fuel and Light	3	-	
Food for 5 persons	1	6	3
Clothes and boots	8	-	
Replacement furniture and utensils			6
Provision for unemployment	2	-	
Benefit Society and medicine	2	-	
Union Fees			6
Amusements and holidays	1	-	
Liquor	1	-	
Tobacco	1	-	
Provision for sickness and death			6
Domestic help, nurse, confinements			9

36. AJHR, 1905, H-11, p. iv.

37. AJHR, 1912, H-18, p. 371.

	£	s	d
Insurance	1	-	
Religion or charity		6	
Upkeep of tools	1	-	

That is, without savings as such, a total of £3 8s a week. Few workers, male or female, in shops or factories, received seventy shillings a week in wages; a man aged about forty-five generally received just over fifty shillings a week, a young man was often fortunate to earn forty.³⁸ However it is calculated, the disparity between the carpenter's figures and the average weekly wage meant a constant struggle for the citizen of Liberal New Zealand, not merely to exist, but to add in as well the new standards of the community - cinema shows, tinned food, furniture, clothes, bicycles, fashionable handbags, floor-coverings, hot water, and 'Royal Doulton, Royal Worcester ware, which today all classes are purchasing'.³⁹

Mr Micawber's famous monetary calculation of happiness seems not inapposite for the Liberal period:

Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.⁴⁰

The tension generated by the economic contradiction of material aspiration and actual wage levels was expressed in the general acceptance of the 'new

38. AJHR, 1912, H-11, Appendix, passim.

39. AJHR, 1912, H-18, p. 206; see also pp. 67, 73, 244, 337. It is instructive to peruse the printed advertisements of this period. I have looked at copies of the Auckland Weekly News between 1908 and 1913; the Weekly News carried a greater volume and range of advertising than the daily papers, and its lay-out for advertisements was often more generous in type-style and space.

40. C. Dickens, David Copperfield, New Oxford Illustrated edition (London, 1948), p. 175.

bureaucracy'. That is to say, individuals and groups judged the work of bureaucracy (and the legislation administered) by the effect that enforced regulations had upon their wages and costs. For a factory worker, for instance, labour legislation might shorten hours and increase wages; the factory worker approved of such alleviation of his lot, and commended the coercion of his employer by the bureaucrats. The factory directors, on the other hand, would then press for the 'coercion' (or regulation) of unsatisfactory and probably unprofitable work habits of some employees.

Since the Liberal community was small, and because its members were so interdependent, alleviation of conditions for one group would seem to deprive another group of their just rewards - rewards that enabled the material consensus to be kept in sight. Since legislation was now so detailed, any 'improvement' for one interest-group would appear to be a restriction on another. The majority of New Zealanders were so conscious of the struggle to obtain and retain material comforts that they were acutely aware of any measures that disadvantaged them: a spectacular instance of this in the Liberal period was the furore over the Shops and Offices Act of 1904, when the shopkeepers felt themselves penalised by half-holiday restrictions.⁴¹ Similarly, the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act was used in 1912-13 to coerce recalcitrant workers when their unrest threatened prosperity.

There are other less notorious instances for those who care to look. Moreover, it seems clear that this is a continuing feature of New Zealand's history. Should bakers wrap their bread? It would be too costly to wrap

41. Burdon, King Dick, pp. 274-82.

all bread and to retail the product at the same price, say the bakers. Those concerned to regulate if not eradicate contagious diseases would like the bread wrapped; no doubt many of the proponents of hygiene would find a cent surcharge for wrapping an intolerable imposition. Will the bakers be coerced? As this conclusion is being composed (1970) there is a nation-wide outcry against 'rising prices'. The bureaucrats are called upon to coerce wholesalers for the alleviation of customers; and there are newspaper complaints that intrinsically adequate as the regulations are to investigate price rises, there are not enough Inspectors to 'police' the dubious cases.

If the hypotheses set out above are viable, we must conclude not only that the Liberal period saw the creation of a consensus which was possibly more important than sectarian and ideological strife, but that that consensus possessed a particular dynamic. The essence of the Liberal period was not its 'state socialism', or its prosperity. Its essence was egalitarianism - of a type. Because the period before the Great War saw an admixture of reforming ideas and an insecure but attainable standard of living, equality also implied with it coercion of those elements that threatened the material norms. It was very much an 'aggressive egalitarianism'. In the creation of this 'aggressive egalitarianism' the Liberal bureaucracy was both an initiator, and an apparatus for cementing and adjusting the consensus. The legacy is with us today.

There is a further legacy of the 'administrative revolution', in the form of a reaction against a controlled (and self-controlling) society. New Zealanders have created a myth, and in a small measure have lived-out a myth, of rugged individualism. In indigenous literature this has taken the variation of an escape towards individualism and identity. Escape

from what? From wife, boss, bureaucrat; from a regulated life, a unionised, enfranchised, subsidised existence. In serious literature the examples range from John Mulgan's Man Alone (1939), to an extended incident in W.H. Pearson's Coal Flat (1964);⁴² and the popular success of Barry Crump's picaresque novels of the last decade make the point that the 'escape towards individualism' is no mere literary device. So not only do we have a social and economic tension in society that leads us to extend our bureaucracy for both alleviatory and coercive functions. We have also a cultural (in the widest sense) tension between our insistence on regulation and our pursuit of the remnants of freedom. It is not a matter of choice between regulation and a desire for freedom, but the fact of the coexistence of them both.

Significantly, New Zealanders have canonised Sam Cash,⁴³ the fictional successor of Ned Slattery, while Edward Tregear has become a 'forgotten man'.⁴⁴

42. J. Mulgan, Man Alone Second edition (Hamilton, 1949), passim; W.H. Pearson, Coal Flat (Auckland, 1964), pp. 371-87.

43. Sam Cash appears in, B. Crump, Hang on a Minute Mate (Wellington, 1961).

44. Title of NZBC Tape.

LIST OF SOURCES.

Arrangement.

- I. Manuscript Material.
- II. Official Publications. This section includes all official publications of the New Zealand Government, the Labour Department (except the Labour Department Journal), and the New South Wales Legislative Assembly.
- III. Contemporary Periodicals and Newspapers. Those published before 1914.
- IV. Other Published Contemporary Material. This section includes material published before 1914, and some verse and letters written before 1914 and published since.
- V. Secondary Published Material.
 - (a) Books.
 - (b) Articles.
- VI. Miscellaneous, Published and Unpublished. This includes unpublished typescripts, bibliographical items, modern fiction, and a tape recording.

I. Manuscript Material.

Letters from Men of Mark in New Zealand to W.P. Reeves, London.

Photocopy in Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, of original MSS held in the British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics.

Maori Affairs File, Series I (Yearly Series), 1892/441, held in National Archives, Wellington.

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1889	D-9	Return of men employed on Relief Works.
1890	H-5	Report of the 'Sweating Commission'.
1891	E-6	Annual Financial Statement.
1893	H-10A	Return of men provided with free passes by the Labour Department.
	D-5A	Statements on the Co-operative System of Public Works.
	D-5C	Return of men on the Co-operative Works and their earnings.
1895	B-7	Annual Expenditure.
1896	B-7	Annual Expenditure.
	C-1	Annual Reports of Lands Department.
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MAPS.

Key to Offices and Agencies in the North Island.

- | | | |
|------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Mangonui | 34. Hamilton | 68. Waverley |
| 2. Port Awanui | 35. Cambridge | 69. Waitotara |
| 3. Whangaroa | 36. Tauranga | 70. Wanganui |
| 4. Kaitaia | 37. Te Puke | 71. Hunterville |
| 5. Hokianga | 39. Kawhia | 72. Waipawa |
| 6. Russell | 40. Otorohanga | 73. Waipukurau |
| 7. Kawakawa | 41. Kihikihi | 74. Ormondville |
| 8. Hikurangi | 42. Rotorua | 75. Kimbolton |
| 9. Whangarei | 43. Whakatane | 76. Dannevirke |
| 10. Dargaville | 44. Opotiki | 77. Marton |
| 11. Aratapu | 45. Waipiro Bay | 78. Bulls |
| 12. Waipu | 46. Tolaga Bay | 79. Fielding |
| 13. Pahi | 47. Te Karaka | 80. Rongotea |
| 14. Helensville | 48. Gisborne | 81. Ashhurst |
| 15. Auckland | 49. Wairoa | 82. Woodville |
| 16. Onehunga | 50. Ongarue | 83. Pahiatua |
| 17. Otahuhu | 51. Taumarunui | 84. Porangahau |
| 18. Papakura | 52. Waitara | 85. Palmerston North |
| 19. Coromandel | 53. New Plymouth | 86. Foxton |
| 20. Whitianga | 54. Inglewood | 87. Shannon |
| 21. Waiuku | 55. Stratford | 88. Levin |
| 22. Pukekohe | 56. Opunake | 89. Eketahuna |
| 23. Mercer | 57. Manaia | 90. Otaki |
| 24. Thames | 58. Eltham | 91. Tinui |
| 25. Huntly | 59. Hawera | 92. Masterton |
| 26. Waikino | 60. Raetihi | 93. Carterton |
| 27. Paeroa | 61. Moawhango | 94. Greytown |
| 28. Karangahake | 62. Napier | 95. Featherston |
| 29. Waihi | 63. Clive | 96. Upper Hutt |
| 30. Te Aroha | 64. Hastings | 97. Martinborough |
| 31. Morrinsville | 65. Taihape | 98. Wellington |
| 32. Ngaruawahia | 66. Mangaweka | |
| 33. Raglan | 67. Patea | |

Source: NZ Department of Labour, following p. 32.

Key to Offices and Agencies in the South Island.

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Collingwood | 35. Ashburton | 69. Milton |
| 2. Takaka | 36. Okarito | 70. Balclutha |
| 3. Nelson | 37. Geraldine | 71. Kaitangata |
| 4. Havelock | 38. Fairlie | 72. Clinton |
| 5. Picton | 39. Temuka | 73. Gore |
| 6. Blenheim | 40. Pleasant Point | 74. Mataura |
| 7. Seddon | 41. Timaru | 75. Wyndham |
| 8. Denniston | 42. St Andrews | 76. Owaka |
| 9. Westport | 43. Waimate | 77. Winton |
| 10. Lyell | 44. Kurow | 78. Otautau |
| 11. Murchison | 45. Ngapara | 79. Riverton |
| 12. Reefton | 46. St Bathans | 80. Orepuki |
| 13. Kaikoura | 47. Oamaru | 81. Invercargill |
| 14. Brunner | 48. Naseby | 82. Bluff |
| 15. Greymouth | 49. Ophir | |
| 16. Kumara | 50. Cromwell | |
| 17. Hokitika | 51. Pembroke | |
| 18. Ross | 52. Arrowtown | |
| 19. Culverden | 53. Queenstown | |
| 20. Cheviot | 54. Clyde | |
| 21. Amberley | 55. Alexandra S. | |
| 22. Rangiora | 56. Middlemarch | |
| 23. Kaiapoi | 57. Hampden | |
| 24. Christchurch | 58. Palmerston S. | |
| 25. Lincoln | 59. Waikouaiti | |
| 26. Little River | 60. Dunedin | |
| 27. Akaroa | 61. Mosgiel | |
| 28. Leeston | 62. Outram | |
| 29. Oxford | 63. Lawrence | |
| 30. Sheffield | 64. Waitahuna | |
| 31. Coalgate | 65. Roxburgh | |
| 32. Southbridge | 66. Waikaia | |
| 33. Rakaiia | 67. Iamsden | |
| 34. Methven | 68. Tapanui | |

