This is, of course, only one reading. Marxists will be inclined to give greater weight to structures. Those influenced by the New Right's emphasis upon the centrality of the individual will rather see Cox as a no-hoper responsible for his own failings. Romantics will have him escaping some terrible dark secret involving Jefferies. Personally I find Fairburn's explanation convincing although I would have liked a little more investigation on why he never married, nor attempted to secure a leasehold. Other ideologies also acted upon him, especially the 'ruralism' which came from his own particular English background and impelled him towards life in the rural sector when he was clearly much better equipped to become a clerk, or perhaps an inspector, in the burgeoning Liberal bureaucracy. Even so I think Fairburn has got Cox about right.

The problem remains of representativeness. Fairburn steers around this difficulty although he does concede that structures were more important than he had earlier thought. One can detect a definite sidestep to the left in an historian noted for his critique of the soft pink colour of New Zealand historical writing. Although Cox was a rather unusual itinerant agricultural labourer my own research on John McKenzie's land settlement programme suggests that this kind of failure was probably rather more common than the powerful myth of widespread upwards social mobility in the rural sector suggests.

When I reviewed *The Ideal Society* I remarked that such path-breaking books only come along once in a blue moon. Fairburn has written something just as important in the space of a mere six harvest moons. To Fairburn's credit he cleverly avoids writing a long, self-conscious footnote to *The Ideal Society*, yet his new work complements and supplements the earlier work in all sorts of fascinating ways. The Cox diary does not 'prove' the 'atomization' thesis, but it does tell us much about the 'losers' who have been largely neglected in our historiography. Once again Fairburn has thrown down the gauntlet to New Zealand historians who are still locked into the comfortable Reevesian paradigm of relentless progress, improvement and widespread individual success. The expert telling of this sad tale brings both New Right and Old Left interpretations of our past into serious question.

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Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham 1880s-1920s. By Erik Olssen. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1995. x + 297pp. NZ price: $39.95. ISBN 1-86940-106-9.

IN THIS NEW BOOK Professor Olssen returns to a period, a place, a people and debates he knows well and has previously explored in exciting and innovative ways. Now the place is less the focus of the study than the site for the construction of an argument about relationships between, mainly, men, their work, politics and society. The methodologies that Olssen uses to uncover and analyse these relationships are wide ranging but a new one requires us to think of words and concepts 'not simply as words and concepts . . . but as multivalent symbols, clues to life as well as (proposed) fulcrums for reform'. He invites, therefore, not only a deconstruction of the texts created by the past but of the text presented here. The title of the book itself suggests the layers of meaning and practice that Olssen, the historian, has employed in creating his texts — hard, honest toil, skill and

craftsmanship, innovation and experiment, interaction with the community and political engagement.

Olssen has previously argued that the years from the 1880s to the 1920s are a hinge between our pre-industrial European communities and industrial towns. His analysis of work, politics and society in Caversham supports this view. A suburb of Dunedin with about 6000 residents, Caversham was dominated by its skilled men, masters and employees, working in, apart from the Hillside railway workshops, small, often domestic, units, with a closely guarded control over labour processes. The organization of skilled work, Olssen argues, structured politics and class relations, which, in their turn, reflected back on to the work floor. The organization of the work and the work processes were also structured by and helped underwrite the ideals of skilled men — egalitarianism, mutualism (although there is some tension between goals of independence and mutualism), security and fairness. These ideals in turn shaped the role of New Zealand as the social laboratory of the world.

The introduction of the book lays out its theoretical underpinnings. Olssen has, more than is usual with New Zealand historians, read and been influenced by the work of class and labour theorists, and has now become acquainted with feminist and post-modern theory. He does not align himself with any particular theory, insisting that the New Zealand case must be allowed to speak for itself and adopts an eclectic approach which applies particular theoretical insights when they can be helpful in elucidating a problem or analysing data. This theoretical introduction is a useful guide to the development of the argument throughout the book.

After a chapter in which the geography, economic and demographic history of Caversham are anatomized, four chapters investigate the work of the skilled in Caversham — the male handicraft workers, skilled women workers, carpenters and the metal tradesmen. Leaving aside the women for the moment, this is what Olssen is best at. He has a detailed and intimate knowledge of the workplace, labour processes, shop-floor politics, the men and their aspirations. His discussion of these trades is unsurpassed in our historiography in explaining labour practices and change.

The following two chapters discuss politics, arguing that the men moved from apathy to engagement through the agency of the long depression and the Maritime Strike, then, from incorporationist labour politics, through discontent with liberalism and changes in the work force and processes, to socialism. The detailed discussion of the formation and operations of political organizations in defence of the interests of skilled labour reminds us that the government of the 1890s was a Lib-Lab government and shows how, in Dunedin at least, the Labour partner had real power. The narrative argument here is convincing but in places the relationship that Olssen has posited between skilled men and politics frays a little at the edges. How, for instance, does Henry Shacklock, the exemplar of the egalitarian skilled master of the handicraft chapter, become the exemplar of the Dunedin Electoral League and the opponent of his old mates in labour by 1890?

The final chapter relates the organization of skilled labour to the social structure and community life of Caversham, arguing not for a deterministic but a symbiotic relationship, and exploring the origins and development of the ethos of the skilled.

To return to the question of women. Olssen has given a good deal of thought to where women fit into his analysis. He has a chapter on skilled working women, has used a number of sources left by women, explores union attitudes to women and the role of domesticity. He argues that the concept of 'work' and 'worker' excluded women unless they happened to be working for wages (and as most women did not do this, most were excluded). He also argues that nobody who used the phrase 'working class' thought of women as members of this class except through relationship to a father or husband; in contrast, the phrase 'working classes' might encompass, as one class, all women who sold

their labour. Women are seen as apolitical. We are told that 'Most women on The Flat probably ignored politics and unions. Some doubtless gave their husbands strong support, but most viewed strikes with fear and regarded the agitation as a type of boy's game. We *cannot know*.' [My italics]. These are strong statements in a case that 'we cannot know' and the claims will, I hope, enable us to see ways of suggesting how women might fit into analyses of work, politics and society. When Olssen suggests women are excluded from the concept of work and workers, we have to ask whose concept and explore more than the concepts of the census takers or the male unions (who, in arguing for the family wage, were not arguing that women, even married women, should not work). When he excludes women from an independent position in the working class we are challenged to ask more about the way that class was constructed, to shift our gaze away from the factory floor which, as Olssen himself argues, is not a total explanation. And the argument that women were 'apolitical' fails to take into account that from 1893 women made up over half of the voters in Caversham. Thomas Sidey, the most successful Caversham politician of his day, realized this — so should we. In discussing the 'belief that men were born equal' Olssen uses the word 'men advisedly because of its gendered ambiguity'. What does he mean? That we should read 'men' to include men and women? But surely in this context, almost more than any other, the work of feminist political theorists has shown that no ambiguity was intended or existed. While showing us much about the way skilled men thought about women, Olssen alerts us to the need to re-read the evidence not only for the exclusions but for the way they point to inclusions and alternative meanings.

Olssen sees the skilled workers of Caversham constructing a new world, defined by that other, old world. Certainly their rhetoric suggests a strong sense of purpose in this enterprise. However at least one ritual that is taken to suggest the transference from the old to the new is misread. Olssen speculates that the 'curious ritual of "flogging the dead horse", which occurred on many migrant vessels' may have represented a repudiation of the old world. This ritual, usually referred to as 'burying the dead horse' was carried out by sailors, not by migrants. They were in the custom of drawing an advance on their wages and spending this money while on shore. Thus they reckoned that for some time into the voyage they were working 'for a dead horse'. When they had worked off this debt, they 'buried' (threw overboard or burnt) the dead horse and looked forward to collecting their wages for the rest of the voyage. An even more interesting ritual for a labour historian.

As a window on Caversham, Olssen's book is full of interest; as an exploration of the linkages between skilled work, politics and society it is a return to old debates and a masterly summation of much of his research and writing in labour and political history.

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Nga Iwi o Tainui: The traditional history of the Tainui people/Nga koorero tuku iho a nga tuupuna. Compiled by Pei Te Hurinui Jones; edited and annotated by Bruce Biggs. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1995. 402pp. NZ price: $49.95. ISBN 1-86940-119-0.

'KUA WHAKATERE anoo te waka koorero o Tainui'. This canoe of communication of Tainui is buoyant again, conveying the 'living presence of our tuupuna . . . a living taaonga