

**White-  
collar  
Radical**

*Dedicated to my fellow members of the  
New Zealand Public Service Association – past, present and future*

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# White- collar Radical

Dan Long  
and the rise of the  
white-collar  
unions

**Mark Derby**

craig potton publishing

# Contents

Introduction	6
CHAPTER 1 Cross Creek	9
CHAPTER 2 Conchy Camp	35
CHAPTER 3 Decorous Eunuchs	66
CHAPTER 4 A Thrawn Person	101
CHAPTER 5 White-collar Worker	135
CHAPTER 6 Leapfrogging in the Wages Field	174
CHAPTER 7 Peaceniks and Vietniks	215
CHAPTER 8 Red Tie Funeral	257
Acknowledgements	288
Index	290

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## Introduction

In a windowless viewing room in the Television Archive in Lower Hutt, I replayed a tiny reel of film through the editing machine over and over. The clip ran for just over a minute – soundless footage shot in the heightened, unlikelike colours that I recalled from holiday photographs in my childhood.

It showed a large crowd standing outside a church on a sunny autumn morning. The camera zoomed in on some of the individuals. I could identify the National Party politician Keith Holyoake looking relaxed and avuncular, and the grim and craggy-faced Federation of Labour leader Jim Knox. There were many younger men I didn't recognise, with shoulder-length hair and wide ties that placed the scene in the 1970s. There were smartly dressed women and rows of schoolchildren – boys in grey uniforms and girls in maroon ones. It was an odd, solemn, disparate gathering.

A coffin appeared from the church door, carried by a group of grieving men. Among them I could make out the myopic unionist Pat Kelly. There were mounds of red roses on the coffin, and several gowned priests followed it to a shiny black hearse waiting on the street. The reel ended before the car drove away.

Tracing this sliver of film had taken me several months of searching, and at first sight I was disappointed by how little it revealed of the man whose life story I had been commissioned to write. Historical research,

even into the recent past, delivers many of these anticlimaxes and very few 'Eureka' moments. Yet even this short sequence, I realised, could give me a few insights I would not otherwise have known about the place Dan Long had held in the New Zealand of 40 years ago.

I knew that this fragmentary record had been shot for screening on the TV news that very night. This meant that it showed the funeral of a public figure, and one whose death was significant to an unusual range of people, from notorious labour radicals like Kelly to Holyoake, a popular and conservative recent prime minister. It was a Catholic funeral, yet attended by scores of non-believers. It had taken place at a liminal point in the country's political history – almost on the cusp between the 40-year era of social democracy that began with the first Labour government, and the following 40 years when much of the machinery of social security, including the role of employee organisations in workplace management, was systematically dismantled.

Dan Long's sudden death at the height of his powers as the country's most respected public sector unionist was perhaps the last such occasion to make the nightly news broadcast. Unionism was thereafter steadily sidelined from the political stage. So in writing this biography I found myself tracing a career and personal philosophy that have become practically invisible – the life of an unapologetic social democrat, professionally dedicated to advancing economic equality and liberal ideals through the agency of the nation's largest employee organisation, the Public Service Association. The PSA still retains that rank, although in other respects it is a vastly different organisation from the one Dan managed at the time of his death. It is a central contention of this book that Dan's contribution to the PSA during the 1960s and 70s has continuing relevance to public-sector unionism, and to wider social and economic questions, in the present day.

I have been advantaged by writing this book while working in the public service, and so I was able to observe the modern-day PSA from a member's perspective. In the PSA's centenary year, it has been a refreshing and heartening experience to review its past in the course of researching one of its most able, influential and complex figures.

What follows is a portrait of a man whom I never knew personally, although our lives overlapped by 20 years and for most of that time we lived in adjoining suburbs. Instead I have assembled my information from many hours of interviews with Dan's friends and professional acquaintances,

as well as from written and visual sources such as the fragment of news film held at the Television Archive.

It is important to note that although this biography was commissioned and paid for by the Dan Long Memorial Trust, and written with the co-operation of Dan's immediate family, neither party had the power to enforce changes to the text beyond correcting errors of fact. Its analysis, opinions and conclusions are my own.

*Mark Derby  
November 2012*

CHAPTER 1

## Cross Creek

The whump and hiss of a slowly departing steam locomotive was the sound that, for several decades, orchestrated the lives of Dan Long's family. His early years were spent in a succession of Railways Department houses, their floors periodically trembling under the heavy rhythm of passing trains, a sound and sensation as familiar to him as the wind.

Tim Long, his father, began working on the railway in 1914 at the age of 23. Starting perhaps as a goods yard labourer, he later became a shunter, learning the skill of slipping between wagons to unshackle their weighty couplings, and developing the expertise required to reassemble and direct a string of carriages and wagons according to their weight, contents and destination. He remained with the railways until his retirement, sustaining his family through depression and war by working for New Zealand's largest employer, one that supplemented his lowly income with subsidised housing, cut-price travel, enviable job security and exceptional workforce camaraderie.

The last of these benefits may have been the most appealing to the unmarried Tim Long when his career began in the sooty, clanging railyards of West Coast port towns, coupling wagons heaped with coal mined from the mountains nearby and directing them towards cities of which, at that time, he knew nothing at all. His childhood had been spent beneath the gentler, enfolding hills of the Dunhallow district of County Cork in Ireland's rural southwest. In this quiet, depopulated corner of the country,

villages were small and dispersed and years were measured in hiring fairs and market days.

Tim Long's own village of Scrahan was too small even for those modest festivals. His townland (as farming settlements were termed in Ireland) comprised about 500 acres of hedge-lined fields supporting half a dozen households. The Long family walked the few miles to the market town of Knocknagree when they had produce or stock to buy and sell, or for the purposes of entertainment. English was their common tongue since the Irish language had largely disappeared in this region and only the oldest residents of Scrahan still spoke it.

The Longs are remembered locally as 'decent, honest people', who owned their own substantial slate-roofed farmhouse and outbuildings.<sup>1</sup> They may have grown an acre of oats for porridge and another of wheat for bread, but the herd of half a dozen milking cows upheld the family income and was primarily a female preserve. The women of the household did the milking and poured the buckets into wide pans, where the cream rose in its own time until it could be separated by skimming. Three or four women would then converge in one house to collectively churn it into butter, which was packed by hand into small wooden barrels and sent by rail to the great butter market in Cork city. Butter-making was a ritualistic activity, wreathed in archaic customs that survived alongside Christian precepts among these deeply religious people. Churning day, remembered one resident:

was a most delicate time to enter a house lest one be suspected of mischief-making or invoking evil spirits to whisk away the butter. Those were the days when 'piseogs' were rampant and superstition stalked the land. The only way to vindicate oneself and purge any possible guilt was to take a hand in butter-making. The minimum to be made by the intruder was the size of his or her head in butter.<sup>2</sup>

Of the five other families in Scrahan, one was headed by a widow named Hickey. Her second daughter, Catherine Mary, known to her family as Kattie, was three years younger than Tim Long and became close to him. Most rural Irish families in this period 'reared their children to emigrate', and when Tim chose to escape a future as a farm labourer by migrating the unimaginable distance to New Zealand, he farewelled Kattie with the

promise that he would return for her.<sup>3</sup> Letters the couple exchanged in the years before World War One are still held by their grandchildren. In one of these, written in 1913 from the West Coast coalmining settlement of Seddonville, Tim Long proposed to his sweetheart, and she accepted him.

When she next saw her fiancé, he was in the uniform of the British Army. Although he was employed in a reserved occupation that exempted him from conscription, Tim Long, together with a large number of his New Zealand workmates on the railway, signed up at the outbreak of World War One, choosing to serve in the British Army rather than that of his adopted country.<sup>4</sup> He was a reticent man who left few traces of his life, and his reasons for going to war are not known, but they may have been those of a fellow Irishman, Thomas Kettle, who, shortly before his death on the Somme, wrote that he and his countrymen:

Died not for the flag, nor King, nor Emperor,  
But for a dream, born in a herdsman's shed,  
And for the secret Scripture of the poor.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond doubt, serving in the Middle East and elsewhere, the former farm labourer and railway shunter proved an able and conscientious soldier. He was promoted to sergeant and shortly before his discharge in 1918 received an officer's commission. As a second lieutenant, Long then returned to the fields of west Cork and he and Catherine married there in the year after the war. The bride was conveyed to the local church in a small, open horse-drawn carriage called a sidecar, and the groom arrived mounted on a fine saddle horse. They are said to have made such a handsome couple that the wedding was remembered in the district almost a century later.<sup>6</sup>

Catherine evidently had other admirers in Scrahan, and one of them wrote her an epithalamium in ponderous but evidently heartfelt verses, of which the following are only a sample:

A soldier and an Irish boy,  
Who, like another Mike O'Leary,  
Gained rank and fame for courage high,  
Is husband now of Catherine Mary.

So let her go, a happy bride,  
And live in city, town or prairie;

The man she loves is at her side  
And he is proud of Catherine Mary.

And, when she leaves her native land  
And parts from friends she loves so dearly,  
His love, his words, his heart and hand  
Will comfort bring to Catherine Mary.<sup>7</sup>

Like the entire populace of the district, the Long and Hickey families were staunchly Catholic, and a village wedding meant a solemn ceremony followed by a boisterous celebration, an excuse to forget the turmoil recently engulfing the continent. It is not likely that the people of Scrahan resented the return of one of their young men in the uniform of the ancient oppressor. County Cork, although traditionally a rebel stronghold, had given strong support to the British military effort, especially after 1915 when the war came shockingly close to these secluded country people. In that year the passenger liner *Lusitania* was sunk off their coast by a German U-boat and 1200 bodies drifted towards the Head of Kinsale. However, the long European conflict had compounded divisions within the republican movement, and as the newly-wedded Longs left by ship for New Zealand their homeland descended into a savage civil war, with the old city of Cork one of its ugliest fronts.

British irregular forces, known from their uniforms as Black and Tans, fired on priests and other unarmed citizens in the city and murdered its republican mayor, Thomas McCurtain. IRA guerillas retaliated by petrol-bombing the British barracks and the following night the Black and Tans, in a drunken rampage, torched much of the town centre. One remorseful participant wrote that 'Many who have witnessed similar scenes in France and Flanders say that nothing they had experienced was comparable to the punishment meted out in Cork.'<sup>8</sup> Near Scrahan village itself, a lorry-load of Black and Tans drove past a group of boys playing a game of Gaelic football. As boys will, they raised their curved hurley sticks and pointed them like rifles at these strangers, making appropriate noises with their mouths. The Tans responded with machine-gun fire and left several children dead or dying.<sup>9</sup>

Like millions of Irish before them, the Longs left their country to seek what it could not provide, and refuge from sectarian violence may have been as

pressing a requirement as economic security. They, and later their children, held the moderately nationalist sympathies that were almost universal in the community in which they were raised, but there is no indication that they ever accepted violence as a means to attain political ends.

As a returned serviceman Tim Long was able to resume his former job as a shunter and the young couple set up home in the welcoming, vigorous town of Westport, where almost one in four residents were Irish Catholics like themselves. Westport was an important regional terminus in the giant enterprise of a state-owned railway system at the peak of its expansion. In this period the Railways Department employed 16,000 people and no fewer than 11,000 of these were members of the quaintly named but powerful and well-regarded Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants. Formed in the 1880s, the ASRS was the country's oldest and largest railway workers' union, with a reputation for moderation and integrity. Its size and strategic heft enabled it to remain outside the system of compulsory arbitration imposed on smaller unions and it negotiated instead directly with its sole employer, the government, securing its members an enviable slate of working conditions. The union had not found it necessary to call a strike since 1890 and loyally deferred all wage demands for the duration of World War One.

In 1920, however, a government headed by the energetically anti-union Bill Massey refused to grant an anticipated annual wage increase and the war-weary railways staff exploded with indignation. The labour movement's national newspaper wrote that:

the present feeling throughout the [railway] service is one of supreme discontent and extreme measures are openly suggested to get something more from the Government...<sup>10</sup>

Gauging the mood of its members, the traditionally conservative union called out its entire North Island membership, with the South Islanders – shunter Long active among them – standing by to give support if necessary. It timed the action well. The handsome and decadent young Prince of Wales was in the process of a stately national tour and the strike stranded him in Rotorua. The irascible aristocrat was already irritated by his reception there, writing to his mistress, the long-suffering (and married) Freda Ward, that:

I had to go through long and tedious Maori ceremonies at both the native villages & had to submit to being made to look the most hopeless B.F [bloody fool] dolled up in mats & other things while inane Maories danced & made weird noises at me!!<sup>11</sup>

The prospect of requiring this reluctant guest to spend even longer in such conditions must have helped convince the government of the railwaymen's case, especially as the public was strongly behind the strikers. Massey reportedly 'motored through miles of mud' to Wellington to negotiate with the union's executive, and quickly granted every one of their demands.<sup>12</sup> The heir-apparent then resumed his royal progress, although he was obliged to miss a deer-shooting expedition 'which had been arranged for him as a brief respite from the continuous strain of official receptions'.<sup>13</sup>

Tim Long cannot have failed to be impressed by this well-leveraged industrial action. The pay increase that followed was especially welcome since the Longs' first child, a boy named after his father but known always by his middle name of Joseph, was just months old when the strike took place. Joseph was joined after two years by another boy, Daniel Patrick Francis, and three years later by a third, Bartholomew Christopher, who again, and understandably, was known by his middle name.

This growing family cannot have been easy to support on a shunter's wage, in the cramped and spartan cottage that accompanied it, but Long had few prospects for advancement. His employer had ceased to be the expansive and benevolent institution of earlier years. A second strike in 1924 was swiftly crushed when locomotive drivers, members of a separate union, failed to support it. By the late 1920s freight volume and passenger numbers were both showing early signs of a terminal decline from competition with motor vehicles, while the railway was simultaneously debilitated by the onset of a worldwide economic depression. For Tim Long as well, his most active years were behind him. He was aged almost 40, and the physical demands of a shunter's duties, on round-the-clock shifts and in all weathers, had begun to take their toll. Eventually he took a transfer that must have involved long discussions with his wife and a careful balancing of pros and cons. In 1929 the family moved from Westport, the shipping and rail hub of the West Coast, to one of the oddest and most isolated corners of the national rail network.

A decaying stretch of asphalt, with its tennis court markings long obliterated and waist-high broom encroaching from the sidelines, is today the first and incongruous sign of the long-abandoned railway settlement of Cross Creek. It lies at the end of a foot track, a half-hour walk through manuka and rangiora scrub following the busy mountain stream that gives the locality its name. The track then rises onto a grass embankment with a tiny and immaculate cream-painted wooden station building, carefully restored in its original position at the heart of Cross Creek, whose three miles of triple-railed track were once the wonder and admiration of the entire railway world.

In the 1920s more than 200 people lived in this sombre, windswept, south Wairarapa valley in the shadow of the Rimutaka range. All but one, the community's sole-charge teacher, were employed by or otherwise depended on the railway, which in turn relied on their skill and exertion to ease its rolling stock up and over the range's daunting eastern flank. The terrain required a track rising at a gradient of one in 15, twice as steep as the most precipitous modern railway line and demanding far more traction than conventional engines could provide. The solution, considered daring and dubious even when introduced in 1878, was a special centre rail slightly raised above the outer pair, gripped by an extra set of wheels mounted horizontally under the locomotive carriage like the blade of a rotary lawnmower.

This improbable yet effective system had been developed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century by an English railway contractor named Fell, and was named after him. John Fell built the first of his mountain railways across the Mt Cenis Pass in the Italian Alps, where it ran for just four years until superseded by a tunnel. The locomotives were then shipped to Brazil, where they hauled trains up the steep escarpment inland of Rio de Janeiro. Here the line was plagued with problems and was superseded after a decade. The New Zealand version drew on the experience of both its predecessors to form an integral element of the nation's arterial rail routes, linking the rich farming country of the Wairarapa with the city of Wellington to the south. Against all expectations, the world's third and last Fell railway remained in continuous heavy use for 77 years.

Arriving in Cross Creek in 1929, the Long family found a substantial but exposed and isolated settlement strung out along the railway line and dominated by its shunting yard, station and maintenance sheds. The sole





Cross Creek's maintenance workshops lie on the far side of the creek itself and the curving railway line in this c. 1935 photo. The Longs' cottage stood on the near side of the railway line to the left of the workshops. PHOTO – COURTESY BARRY O'DONNELL

two-storied building was the single men's boarding house, known as The Alley, which bore a reputation for outbreaks of riotous behaviour. The school and teacher's house stood at the southern end of the elongated community, beneath steep hills that shrouded it in shade for much of the day. The Longs' cottage, no. 69, was at the opposite end, necessitating a schoolbag-banging walk of three-quarters of a mile along a path beside the railway, then across a swing bridge over the creek, for the two sons already of school age.

Fronting directly onto the railway line, 69 Cross Creek was a basic, government-issue railway cottage of six small, square rooms. The cast-iron kitchen range, designed and built in one of the Railway Department's own workshops, could be fuelled by either wood or coal and also provided most of the heating, making it a crucial, ever-burning nucleus during the valley's dreary winters. The wash house had its own small fire for heating water beneath the copper tub. Electricity would not reach the settlement for another 10 years and on summer nights the mellow radiance of kerosene or spirit lamps spilled from open doorways. The stationmaster was a figure of great authority, also acting as postmaster since the railway station doubled as the post office and sold stamps and money orders along with



This relaxed crew of railway workers stands directly outside the Longs' cottage, and may include Tim Long himself. PHOTO – COURTESY BARRY O'DONNELL

tickets. There was no shop, so every other purchase had to be ordered from Featherston, seven miles away. In the evenings residents would gather at the station to meet the train bringing the day's newspapers, and return home to devour the latest *Evening Post*.

This inconvenient community was regarded as a hardship post within the national rail network. A fireman working there a few years after Tim Long wrote feelingly of its disadvantages:

It was absolute cruelty having to climb out of a nice warm bed and make your way up to the engine shed in the middle of the night, struggling against the gale blowing down the valley. I often used to lay for a while and listen to the wind howling around the end of the Alley and think to myself, what a terrible way to make a living.<sup>14</sup>

However, the move from Westport provided one evident compensation for Tim Long. It came with a promotion from shunter to guard, meaning that hard, physical effort on the outside of carriages was replaced by signalling departures, clipping tickets and sorting freight in his own austere van at the rear of the train. He was now provided with a uniform, dark blue with red cuffs and cap, and carried ticket nippers as his badge of office. Aspects of a guard's job still carried some physical risk. Since there were

no gangways between carriages, guards had to leap across the couplings from one to the next. The unique demands of the Rimutaka run meant that the Fell guard vans were equipped with two sets of brakes, and the guards were given special training in their use.

As each southbound train arrived at the foot of the imposing rampart of the Rimutakas, it was obliged to wait for half an hour or more while its locomotive was uncoupled and a stocky little Fell engine inserted at about every fifth carriage or freight wagon, depending on the train's overall length and weight. The guard's van with its emergency brake was added at the rear and the hybrid creature, spouting gouts of steam and showers of crimson sparks at intervals, made a run at the slope with all throttles wide open.

Pulling away from the easy gradient of the station, the fireman on each Fell engine in turn rotated a handle to engage the raised centre rail, gripping it with the additional driving wheels that supplied the purchase to haul their latest load up the mountain.

Euphemistically known as the Incline, the section of railway that veered uphill from Cross Creek station wound like a goat track through a series of tight bends, crossing the creek itself along a high earth embankment and passing through three asphyxiating tunnels before reaching the Summit, a tiny outpost a thousand feet above sea level, subject to heavy snow and ferocious gales in winter. The journey was made at little more than walking pace but took 40 gruelling minutes, with the drivers nursing uneasy livestock and impatient passengers along a scrub-covered valley that was repeatedly burnt off by flying sparks. Towards the top the most exposed section of line, ruefully named Siberia, was enclosed by high wooden fences as protection against gales that might otherwise blast a fully-loaded train off the track and into the steep shingle gully below it.

On reaching the Summit, the Fell engines were disengaged and the train resumed its southward progress under conventional propulsion. Meanwhile the Cross Creek crews marshalled a waiting northbound train for a descent that was faster but no less demanding than the uphill trip. The engines were required to edge down backwards in case the water level in their boilers dropped so low that they risked exploding. Every brake the engines possessed, often including the guard's drag brake at the rear, was employed to withstand the pull of gravity, and for added friction sand was sprinkled on the centre rail. A single descent could wear out

a new set of 32-pound cast-iron brake blocks, leaving shards of molten metal along the track and keeping fitters busy in the workshop replacing blocks for the next trip.

Parallel rows of concrete-lined pits are today the only physical traces of the echoing workshops where this constant maintenance was carried out. The last of Cross Creek's dwellings and its schoolhouse have also long since disappeared. Only the recollections of former residents survive to confirm that, despite all its privations, Cross Creek was a pleasant place to live and raise children. The social hall, the human hub of the community, housed a fine library and was in constant use for dances, euchre and table tennis tournaments, and school celebrations. The nearby stream and scrubby hills offered opportunities to fish for eel and trout, and to hunt rabbits, pigs and wild goats. Even the physical hardships could be turned to some advantage. It was said that no Cross Creek resident ever bought a hat since so many passengers lost headgear during the arduous passage up the Incline, to be recovered later by gangers working on the line and distributed around the community. Wives were expected to rise from their beds at any hour to provide breakfast and a packed lunch for men working a night shift, but ways were found to make their life easier. 'We had a simple system of signals to let our wives know what was happening. A certain whistle would tell them we had time to drop in home for a cup of tea.'<sup>15</sup>

Catherine Long took a zealous pride in her housekeeping and was a much-admired cook, even when her husband's pay was cut and his rent increased during the worst years of the Depression. Some of her recipes have survived and afford a glimpse of Depression-era cuisine:

*Brown pudding*

Cream 1 tablespoon dripping with 2 tablespoons sugar

Add 1½ cups flour

1 tablespoon jam

1 teaspoon soda in half a cup of milk

Mix all together, put into greased basin, steam 2 ½ hours and serve with sauce<sup>16</sup>

Her three sons were expected to chop kindling, gather firewood and pick up lumps of coal from beside the railway line during their walks to



The Long children in Sunday best – Dan (left), Chris and Joe – soon after their arrival in Cross Creek.  
LONG FAMILY COLLECTION

school. As they grew older, each boy developed specific skills that were also turned to account. Joe was the most useful at carpentry and gardening. Dan helped his mother in the house and was the best cook, while Chris spent his free time hunting in the hills and also tinkered with electrical equipment, eventually assembling radios and other appliances.

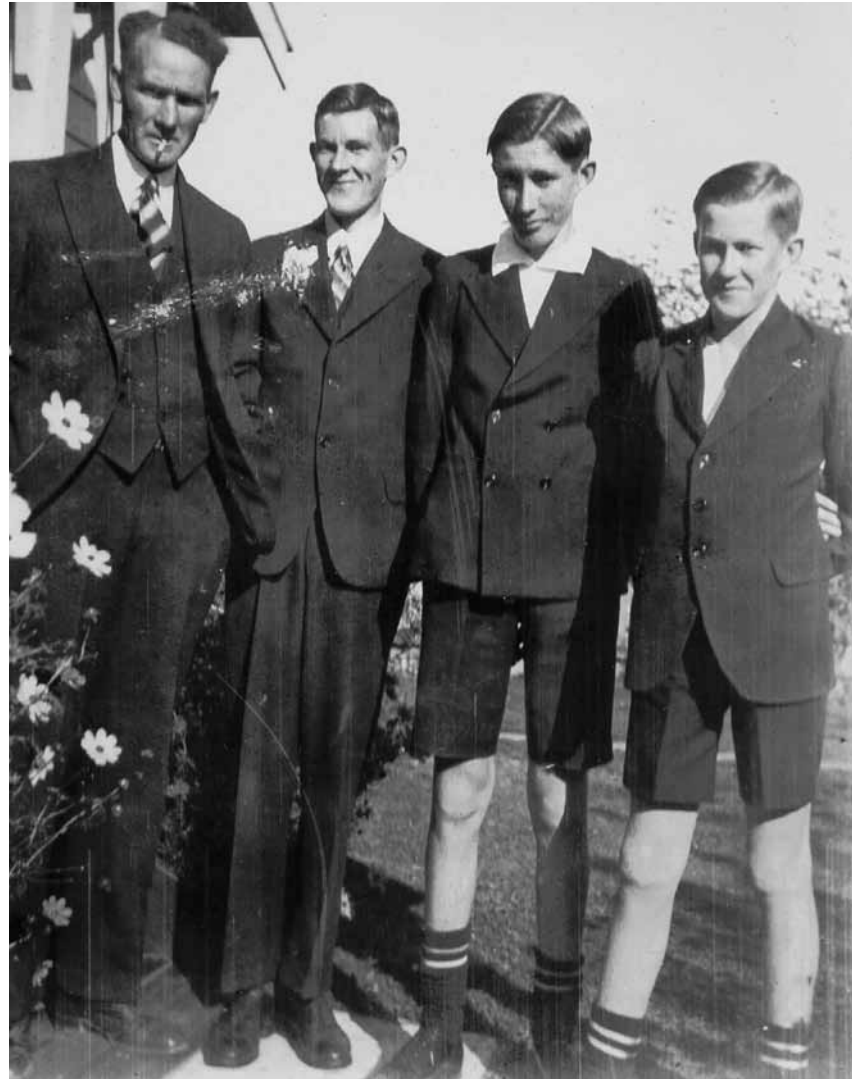
All three boys grew devoted to their strong-willed, scrupulous and pious mother, while their father became a remote and sometimes embarrassing figure, known for his bouts of public drunkenness. Like many another Irish-born railwayman, Tim Long enjoyed a drink. As early as 1920, when his first child was only months old, he had been convicted of after-hours drinking in Westport, and the size of the fine suggests this was not his first such offence.<sup>17</sup> Cross Creek had no pub but may have offered even greater opportunities for off-licensed revelry. Beer in two-gallon wicker-covered jars was delivered on the Saturday 'beer train' from Featherston, while cheerful punters returning to the city from a day at the local Tauherenikau racecourse were known to stagger up the Incline alongside the train and hand up opened bottles to the engine crews. The exceptional demands

of the work at Cross Creek meant that only capable men could remain employed there, but Tim Long evidently relied on the tolerance of his workmates to keep his job once his drinking became uncontrollable. His wife, although an occasional cigarette smoker, was an unrelenting teetotaler. Under her example each of her sons, as soon he reached the age at which he might be tempted to drink, 'took the pledge' to abstain from alcohol.

Their entrenched Catholic faith remained a unifying and sustaining force for the family. Although the occasional itinerant priest made the journey into Cross Creek to hear confessions and conduct Mass in parishioners' houses, the Longs' nearest church was a simple wood-framed structure near the Featherston railway station dedicated to St Teresa. Here, from about the age of seven, each of the Long sons in turn served as an altar boy, dressed in black soutane and snowy surplice, ringing a small bell at intervals and solemnly assisting in the ritual of the *Kyrie eleison*, the Latin responses and the sacred substances of communion. Catherine Long annually emptied her cupboards to ensure that the meal provided after Easter midnight Mass was an unforgettable feast.

As they did throughout the country, Catholics made up a distinct minority within this conservative farming community and formed a tight-knit and somewhat defensive component of it. Their children were teased by Protestant peers for religious practices such as the prohibition on eating meat on a Friday, while adult Catholics were often suspected of harbouring dangerous Fenian sympathies and of voting Labour *en masse* on the instructions of their priests. Those allegations were first raised during World War One, within a year of the Labour Party's formation, by the strategically bigoted Protestant Political Association. More recent research has shown that claims of a sinister electoral accord between the Catholic Church and the Labour Party were without substance, but their effect was strongly felt into the 1930s.<sup>18</sup>

A dedicated unionist like Tim Long had more compelling reasons for supporting Labour than its informal alliance with many, and by no means all, of the leaders of his church. Impassioned pamphlets by labour movement heroes such as Harry Holland had pride of place on the bookshelf of the family home, and the Long children were brought up on talk of union meetings and candidate selection committees. The election of the country's first Labour government, when Dan was aged 13, must



Still in short pants but nearly as tall as his father, Dan stands between his brothers on a formal occasion in about 1936. LONG FAMILY COLLECTION

have been one of the most memorable occasions that the household had experienced to that date.

By then Dan had already proved himself unusually academically capable. He and his brothers had enjoyed their primary education at the little Cross Creek School which, in a good year, boasted a roll that could barely field two rugby teams. The stream close by had been dammed to

form a swimming pool and Tim Long, with the help of his sons, played a leading part in laying the tennis court alongside the schoolhouse. The sole teacher, a Mr McClellan, was a kindly man who seldom resorted to inflicting punishment with his official leather strap. He encouraged Dan to move through the classes at his own pace, without regard for the stated curriculum. As a result his star pupil completed the primary syllabus two years early and educated himself through his own reading until, at 11, he was considered old enough to graduate to Featherston District High School.

By this small step alone Dan and his elder brother were embarking on a more advanced education than either of their parents had received, and more than most working class families then found possible. The Featherston school served the mainly rural population of south Wairarapa, and its post-primary department had been added just a decade earlier. Agriculture remained a compulsory subject for the boys, with 'home science' for the girls. With the occasional help of the principal, two teachers:

made valiant efforts to teach a multiplicity of subjects including mathematics, Latin and science to... post-primary pupils at the same time as they taught large classes of primary children in standards three to six.<sup>19</sup>

Cross Creek pupils faced the added handicap of a daily train journey to school, which meant they always arrived late and could not stay for after-school activities. Under these unfavourable conditions Dan comfortably passed School Certificate (then newly introduced to replace the former Public Service Entrance examination) in 1935, the year of Labour's historic election victory. The school's roll then exceeded 60 for the first time, qualifying it for a third teacher and presumably benefitting the senior pupils, since that period was the school's finest in terms of academic achievement. Two of Dan's peers at Featherston went on to gain doctorates, a remarkable record for such a tiny and unregarded institution. Dan himself aimed for a teaching career, an ambition aided by the school's practice of using its best-performing students as 'pupil teachers' who helped with the younger classes. His mother may have preferred a priest in the family, but both she and his two brothers were extremely proud of their future university graduate, already acknowledged as the brains of the family.<sup>20</sup>

Dan did not complete his secondary education at this modest district



A jug-eared junior standing second from right in the back row, Dan was nonetheless one of the most promising students in Featherston District High's 1935 class. LONG FAMILY COLLECTION

high school. At the end of 1936, seven years after arriving in Cross Creek, his family made the short but consequential move across the Rimutaka range to Upper Hutt, on the northernmost outskirts of Wellington City. Here, in this unfashionable and peripheral suburb, he would remain for the rest of his life, a notable stay-at-home within a restless society.

Among the reasons that prompted this change of address was Tim Long's drinking, which made him increasingly unfitted for the specialised and demanding duties at Cross Creek. In this period the station was adjusting to advances in rail technology that meant the cumbersome marshalling of carriages, locomotives and brake vans created an anachronistic bottleneck within the national network. A proposal for a rail tunnel through the Rimutaka range had been approved by the government as early as 1930 but the onset of the Depression caused this ambitious plan to be postponed indefinitely.

Once the economy began to revive in the late 1930s, local expertise supplied an interim alternative to the antiquated Fell engine run that subjected passengers to grit in the eyes, near-suffocation in the tunnels and so much soiling of clothing that children wore their oldest clothes for the trip over the mountain and changed into city wear in the railway station restroom on their arrival in Wellington. In 1936, as Tim Long

prepared to leave 'the Creek', the first petrol-driven railcars were introduced to the run. Known as 'tin hares' and standing high enough to clear the raised centre rail, they had been designed and built in the Hutt Railway Workshops exclusively for this purpose. By eliminating lengthy shunting and the ponderous Fell engines, the tin hares bounded up the Incline at a lively 12 miles an hour, lopping an hour off the trip between Masterton and Wellington and freeing up staff such as veteran guard Tim Long to seek lighter duties. The work of a guard on the commuter line between Upper Hutt and Wellington was a pre-retirement sinecure by comparison with the tortuous trips up the Incline.

His latest and last Railways Department house was sited logically in Upper Hutt's Railway Avenue, directly across from the station where he worked. It came with a spacious property which the family developed into a series of large vegetable gardens and flowerbeds, and also accommodated a flock of hens and an elderly dog named Peter. The three rapidly growing boys took an energetic part in this outdoor activity alongside their schoolwork and, in Joe's case, a job in a local factory. All three were solidly built, practically inclined and physically active. At 16 Dan was of above average height with strong shoulders, weak eyes and a searching, urgent manner of movement and speech. The hours he spent over his books were relieved by playing tennis at the local club with the rest of his family. His father, despite intemperance and advancing years, remained a keen and competitive player.

The Longs' new home was well placed for another shared recreational pursuit. Trentham racecourse, one of the finest horse-racing venues in the southern hemisphere, was a short distance down the valley to the south and Tim and his sons were frequently found urging on their favourites at the side of the track. Trentham had been the Wellington region's main racecourse since the turn of the century, and acquired three giant, futuristic grandstands during the sport's great boom in the 1920s.

Like many Irishmen, Tim Long loved horses and was a good judge of their chances. Unlike his drinking, however, this indulgence was kept firmly under control and shared with the rest of the family. Even his abstemious wife joined in the weekly ritual of poring over the racing results (the Catholic weekly *Tablet* had a respected racing column), assessing form and picking winners for the weekend's starts. A few precious shillings may occasionally have been staked, but the Longs' gambling was almost

entirely hypothetical. They recorded their predictions, compared results later and accumulated points based on accuracy. It was a financially harmless, endlessly absorbing and fiercely competitive game of chance and skill, and one that Dan continued to play avidly throughout his life.

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A final outcome of the move to Upper Hutt was the opportunity for Dan to spend his last years of secondary schooling at one of the great Catholic schools in the country. St Patrick's College in Silverstream was then just five years old and already building a national reputation. It was an offshoot of a much older school of the same name in Wellington city, the first Catholic boys' secondary school in New Zealand. By 1931 its rising roll and lack of space had forced the construction of the second campus, and the two schools grew entirely independent of each other.

Arriving as one of 200 pupils for the start of the 1937 year, Dan would have found St Pat's sprawling and impersonal after the one- and two-teacher schools he was used to. His two years there were undistinguished. Although he comfortably coasted through the upper academic streams he took no prizes, went unmentioned in the college magazine and made no noticeable contribution to the school's renowned sporting tradition. Although his parents felt considerable pride in a son who took the train down the valley each day in the blue and white uniform of a St Patrick's senior, Dan's record gives the impression that he was at the school without being of it, and that he derived little of lasting significance from his time there.

The heavily clerical character of the instruction may not have appealed to him after the state secular education he was used to. St Patrick's employed almost no lay teachers and the ordained and celibate men who took the lessons also held church services every day, starting with morning Mass at 6.30. Latin was much more than a subject for study (and one at which Dan excelled). It was the language of Catholic worship, and at St Patrick's that might include:

simple or 'low' Mass, the sung Mass with or without incense, the Solemn High Mass with deacon, sub-deacon and an array of acolytes, cross-bearers, thurifer, servers and Master of Ceremonies. There were Simple and Solemn Requiem Masses, and even Benediction had its simple and solemn forms.<sup>21</sup>

So much chanting, genuflecting and crossing oneself is unlikely to have engaged a thoughtful young man who was impatient to embark on a profession.

In the 1930s St Patrick's was also a conservative and hermetic institution run to a system of rigid discipline based on corporal punishment. Most of the pupils were boarders from outside the local area, and their requirements and expectations dominated school life. Rugby, always referred to as 'football', was compulsory throughout the school and Dan played it with stolid determination but no apparent enthusiasm or talent. The other extracurricular activity most associated with the school was its cadet corps, featuring fierce rivalry between the infantry and artillery sections. Trentham Military Camp, the country's largest, lay a stone's throw away from the school grounds and St Patrick's formed close ties with the army. The camp's Sergeant-Major Taylor served as the school's drill instructor, bringing its corps to a high pitch of military precision. An issue of the school magazine from this period shows the college artillery section parading horse-drawn gun carriages on the bottom field, and the General Salute during the Anzac Day Mass was an occasion of 'solemn splendour'.<sup>22</sup>

In the school's first years this emphasis on weaponry and forming fours had a hearty and naïve quality, innocent of geopolitical implications. In 1934 St Patrick's hosted the crew of a visiting Italian naval vessel, the *Armendo Diaz*. A teacher wrote admiringly at the time of these, 'smiling and unintelligible sailors who sang their Fascist songs in full-throated Italian in recompense for our piping numbers'.<sup>23</sup> Within a few years, however, international developments ruled out further social visits from representatives of Mussolini's Italy.

The Governor-General, Lord Galway, made an official appearance at the school during Dan's first year there and the rector (or principal), Father Dowling, used the occasion to remind his students of the noble precedent set by their predecessors in the First World War. 'Our loyalty to the throne is not a mere sentiment. It has been proved in the past by the sacrifice of life made by Old Boys, and will again find future expression in action should occasion arise.'<sup>24</sup> By the following year a war in which New Zealand would take part was seen as inevitable, and the cadet corps' route marches, 'were accepted as a vital preparation for a conflict in which Old Boys were expected to bring pride to the school'.<sup>25</sup>

As with much else of importance to the life of the school, Dan did

not share in this 'glorious Patrician patriotism'.<sup>26</sup> His war veteran father may have been willing to see his son in uniform but his more influential mother was resolutely opposed to the wave of chauvinistic fervour sweeping over the country. Catherine Long was a constant reader despite her basic education, and since leaving Ireland at the end of the last war and the start of its own Troubles, she had steeped herself in the writings of Gandhi, Tolstoy and other apostles of non-violence. She accepted that her husband had fought in a righteous cause, yet it had been one that had promised, in vain, to end future worldwide conflicts. She was also affected by the many anti-triumphalist accounts of that war published from the 1920s, with their descriptions of slaughterhouse battlefields, asinine officers and incompetent and cynical political leadership on both sides.

The most compelling of these Great War narratives, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, was written by a German army veteran. Its film version was banned in New Zealand on the curious grounds that the production was 'not entertainment' and therefore 'unsuitable for public exhibition'.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, this and similar works contributed to the rebuilding of a small, disparate but dedicated antiwar movement in which the Long family came to play a part. Just as she had imposed on her sons a prohibition on drinking alcohol, Catherine Long extracted from each of them a promise that they would never take part in warfare, and none of the three later wavered from this vow.

It is a tribute to the Long family that they retained the friendship of their neighbours and workmates despite openly holding to such widely unpopular antiwar views. Even many staunchly nationalist Irish migrants, whose homeland was then treading a path of cautious neutrality, were prepared to enlist in World War Two on the grounds that their primary loyalty was to their adopted country rather than to the British Crown.

The Longs' pacifist attitudes were barely more acceptable within the community of their Catholic faith. Even more than in the previous world war, New Zealand's Catholics tended to regard the storm clouds gathering over Europe as an opportunity to demonstrate national pride, and their leaders encouraged this stance as the route to full acceptance of Catholicism by wider society. Only a tiny minority of Catholics shared the Longs' pacifist interpretation of the Biblical commandment against taking human life, and their firm conviction that while peacemakers were truly blessed, militarists of any stamp could not be.

Tensions between the conflicting duties owed to church, state and conscience became acute towards the end of the decade, and many Catholics grappled within themselves to reconcile them. Their church claimed to offer a middle path between capitalism and communism, and a system of values that could avert political catastrophe, yet it seemed repeatedly to defer to militarism and tyranny. German Catholics assisted Hitler's rise to power. When Mussolini went to war in Abyssinia, the Pope gave his blessing. And when a group of insurgent generals led a military revolt against the elected government of Spain, with crucial tactical support from both Hitler and Mussolini, New Zealand Catholics were instructed to pray for these rebels and the success of their uprising.

The Spanish Civil War, more than any other single issue of the 1930s, posed moral problems for Catholics elsewhere. The most influential Catholic philosopher of the period, the Frenchman Jacques Maritain, refused to support General Franco, who had assumed leadership of the increasingly pitiless revolt. Yet the Catholic church in New Zealand was unanimous in its support for the generals and their clerical affiliates, and saw the civil war purely in terms of an attack on the pillars of the Spanish faith. For the many local Catholics of socialist leaning, it cannot have been easy to sustain such unequivocal support for an uprising that was targeting trade unionists and backed by fascists. Yet in most cases where Catholic principles came into conflict, the church's position prevailed. In 1938 Catholic members of the Upper Hutt branch of the Labour Party (perhaps including members of the Long family) took strong exception when a 'prominent member of the [Labour] party' spoke in support of the beleaguered Spanish Republic. These aggrieved branch members organised a public meeting in protest.<sup>28</sup>

Earlier that year the same party branch had been similarly offended by a lecture that they regarded as 'casting slurs on the church in Spain'.<sup>29</sup> In this case they were choosing to engage with a particularly accomplished protagonist. The lecture was given by a young economist and writer named Bill Sutch, who held a doctorate from New York's Columbia University and worked closely with the first Labour minister of finance, Walter Nash. A slim, dapper man of striking looks and great self-confidence, Sutch was a key figure in Wellington's political, cultural and intellectual life, active in opinion-forming organisations such as the Institute of International Affairs and the Left Book Club. He had helped establish the New Zealand

section of the League of Nations, a high-minded but ultimately ineffectual precursor to the UN that aimed to avoid warfare between nations through negotiation and economic pressure. By the time Sutch came to take his contentious public stand in support of Republican Spain, the League had been dissolved and its inability to forestall a second world war was apparent. The savagely internecine strife in Spain must have posed a grievous ethical paradox for an idealistic young Catholic whose humanitarian impulse was directed simultaneously through the channels of his religious faith and his pacifist convictions.

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Faced with such irreconcilable dilemmas at age 17, Dan appears to have taken refuge in the ancient consolations of his religion. Catholicism encouraged in its adherents a sense of a morality beyond the individual, and allegiance to a credo that was felt to transcend earthly realities. Dan saw out his last months of secondary education in an atmosphere of fervid and divided loyalties – to his church under siege in Spain, to his country, feverishly rearming itself to oppose the forces fighting alongside that same church, yet most of all to his mother’s simple, unquestioning certitude that her sons should stand aside from the rush to war and maintain a pacifist standpoint in the face of any eventuality.

At the end of 1938 he passed out of St Patrick’s with high marks but no accolades for either academic or sporting prowess. His family were indignant, feeling that he deserved to be made dux and had been denied this tribute simply because he was a dayboy rather than a boarder. Dan seemed not to share his family’s sense of injustice.<sup>30</sup> Although never in doubt about his own capabilities, he showed no interest in gaining token recognition of them and instead prepared to embark on further education in a better-ventilated intellectual environment.

Like Sutch and many other working-class scholars of the period before government subsidy lowered the financial barriers to university education, Dan Long chose to study jointly at Wellington Teachers Training College and Victoria University. Training as a secondary teacher entitled him to a small salary that covered the fees for his foundation university courses in English, French and History. For two years he shuttled between classes at both institutions – Victoria’s cramped campus based around its handsome 19<sup>th</sup>-century brick lecture hall, and the ‘sprawling sub-standard scholastic

slum’ nearby, only recently re-opened after years of enforced retrenchment during the Depression.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to its squalid structure and minimal facilities, the teachers’ college was a vault of liberal opinion and enlightened technique, devoted to turning out proficient staff for schools operating in a euphoric, post-Depression era in which quality universal education was seen for the first time as a social right rather than a privilege. The gifted and iconoclastic teaching faculty included an English lecturer (and eventually principal) named Walter Scott. He was the first in New Zealand to teach critical analysis of newspapers, films, radio and other mass media, and rather than lecturing to his students, encouraged them to discuss and debate literary sources. Scott also directed the drama club’s productions, choosing contemporary and often highly controversial plays that made a lasting impact on both performers and audience. Here Dan quickly acquired a taste for entire new fields of knowledge, especially classical music. Brahms’ ‘Variations on a Theme by Haydn’ and other works were heard here for the first time, and loved and reheard ever since.<sup>32</sup>

As the unworldly Upper Hutt freshman moved on to apply his training in primary school classrooms around Wellington, his teaching record shows a pattern of increasing confidence and ability. The ‘extremely nervous, but thoughtful’ student teacher of an infant class in Kelburn progressed to one with ‘excellent control and purpose’ in front of Standard Ones in Lower Hutt.<sup>33</sup>

The university, while larger and more impersonal than training college, was similarly stimulating. Its state grant had been substantially increased by the incoming Labour government, yet its buildings and staff were fully stretched to cope with a rapidly rising number of students. One recently appointed lecturer was the historian John Beaglehole, whose classes proved some of the most influential on Dan, and whose ethic of public service he absorbed. In 1938 Beaglehole had proposed that the university should come to terms with its location at the seat of government by founding a school of political science that would also serve as a ‘staff college’ for public servants, providing an upper stratum of the bureaucracy with a liberal arts education while equipping them with advanced administrative expertise. At a time when few public servants had any university qualifications, Dr Beaglehole argued that some, at least, needed an education ‘that will be not merely technical but, in the intellectual sense, liberal and humane...



[the public servant] needs to be acquainted not merely with office-files and the peculiar mode of prose-composition they breed, but with literature'.<sup>34</sup>

The School of Public Administration accepted its first intake of students in Dan's second year at Victoria. As a young trainee teacher, he did not join them but took note of the concept that the upper reaches of the rapidly expanding public service might be attained through specialised university education rather than the traditional route of a lifetime's practical experience.

Professor Beaglehole was also prominent in the university's lively array of radical political activities. He chaired the Wellington branch of the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, New Zealand's main fundraising organisation for the Spanish Civil War, and he published a book of poems whose profits also went towards medical aid for the Spanish Republic. In his later history of Victoria University, Beaglehole describes this period of the university's life as 'those days of the United Front, the Left Book Club and the intellectual defence of Democracy'.<sup>35</sup> Students formed an antiwar movement in which 'all shades of opinion came together, from communist to Christian pacifist, in the attempt to argue out some common attitude'.<sup>36</sup> It was a noble attempt to resist the militarist tide, but it was doomed once the realisation dawned that the advance of fascist dictatorships carried the inescapable threat of another world war. In July 1939 the newly formed student newspaper *Salient* made its position explicit. 'The victory of Fascism means the end of all the Pacifist stands for. We had better choose the lesser evil.'<sup>37</sup>

Dan Long and a significant number of his fellow students, both at Victoria itself and at the teachers' college, came to a different conclusion. Their resistance to war, they determined, would remain absolute even in the face of the grimmest political realities. These deeply idealistic dissenters, thought Beaglehole, 'had been convinced, as a result of all the discussion of the preceding years, that duty lay in refusal to serve, and... deliberately chose the difficult path that led to the "defaulters" camp'.<sup>38</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- 1 J. O'Connell interview, Scrahan, Ireland, 26 May 2011
- 2 D. Moynihan, 'Times past around Knocknagree, and the art of butter-making', *Sliabh Luachra Journal* 1985, pp. 12–13
- 3 Personal communication, John O'Connell, 26 May 2011
- 4 M. Long interview, 7 May 2010
- 5 From 'To my daughter Betty, the gift of God', T. Kettle in Louis Untermeyer, ed., *Modern British Poetry*. Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920, p. 115
- 6 Personal communication, John O'Connell, 26 May 2011
- 7 'To Catherine Mary Long (On her leaving home for New Zealand, 6th Sept. 1919)', *The Bard of Knocknagree – 136 previously unpublished poems by Ned Buckley*, edited and published by Jerry O'Leary, October 2004. The Mike O'Leary referred to was another son of Cork, who gained a VC in World War One for an act of conspicuous gallantry.
- 8 Cited in W.H. Kautt, *The Anglo-Irish War 1916–1921*, Greenwood, 1999, p. 91
- 9 D. Moynihan, 'Knocknagree and its vicinity', *Seanchas Duthalla (Dunhallow Folklore)* 1978/79, p. 78
- 10 *Maoriland Worker*, 17 March 1920, p. 5
- 11 Edward, Prince of Wales to F.D. Ward, 28 April 1920, Rotorua, Turnbull Library collection. The 2010 film *The King's Speech* confirms that the prince had grown no less peevish and self-interested in the decade after this antipodean incident, by which time Mrs Ward had been replaced in his affections by the tenacious Wallis Simpson.
- 12 *Maoriland Worker*, 3 May 1920, p. 2
- 13 Cited in M. Slade, 'Industrial unionism in New Zealand 1916–1925', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1983, p. 66
- 14 Les Veale, cleaner and fireman 1939–42, Cross Creek information displays, Wellington Regional Council
- 15 Bill Olsen, railway worker, 1939–46, Cross Creek information displays, Wellington Regional Council
- 16 M. Long, undated, Long family collection
- 17 *Grey River Argus*, 4 September 1920, p. 6
- 18 See, for example, C. van der Krogt, 'A Catholic-Labour Alliance? The Catholic Press and the New Zealand Labour Party 1916–1939', *Australasian Catholic Record*, 78 (1), 2001
- 19 A.S. Kilsby, *Featherston [et al] 1863–1963 Schools*, Featherston School Centennial Committee, 1963, p. 20
- 20 N. Long interview, 19 June 2010
- 21 *St Patrick's College Silverstream 1931–1980*, Golden Jubilee Committee, Wellington, 1981, p. 59
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 69
- 23 *St Patrick's College, Silverstream 1931–1956*, Silver Jubilee Committee, Wellington 1956, p. 27
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 38
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 15
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 68
- 27 C. Watson and R. Shuker, *In the Public Good? Censorship in New Zealand*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1998, pp. 35–36
- 28 *Tablet*, 11 May 1938, p. 3
- 29 *Tablet*, 16 February 1938, p. 44
- 30 N. Long interview, 19 June 2010
- 31 P. Macaskill (ed.), *Ako Pai. A Special Issue to Celebrate the Centenary of Wellington*