

# MEMORIES OF JOHN RIGG

*An Appreciation of Tom L. Mills*



JOHN RIGG, C.M.G.

Although John Rigg had been prominent in printing circles, it was his work as chairman of the Wellington Trades and Labour Council's Anti-Boy Labour Committee that brought him into prominence in wider Labour circles. I was secretary of that committee, and therefore know what our chairman did as organiser and leader of deputations to master printers, who, on the whole, were fair and reasonable, with the result that instead of printeries being swamped with boys, a reasonable proportion of apprentices was secured. John Rigg was, in fact, the father of the apprentice-rate to journeymen in the printing and allied trades in New Zealand.

## In the Upper House

When he was called to the Upper House, he ceased to work at his trade, being a believer in the principle of unionism, one job per man. As a legislator, he got the same wage that he got at case—three pounds per week, I urged him to use his opportunity of seven years with much leisure time to study for the law, and in its practice specialise in Maori Land Court cases. But he slacked on that enterprise. It was a lost opportunity, for he had undoubted gifts. Fortunately, Mr. Seddon gave him a second term of seven years. When that term was nearing its end, John—by this time a very able Chairman of Committees of the Council—was at cross-purposes with the Leader of the Liberal-Labour Party; and he said to me: "What am I going to do about a reappointment, Tom?" "That's easy, Jack," I replied. "Richard John is really fond of you, and you have always been his white-haired boy. All you have to do is to make the *amende* to the Premier." Jack protested, and I replied bluntly that it was only his Scottish pride that stood in the way, adding: "All you have to do to-morrow morning (Parliament was in session), is to look across the lobby as Mr. Seddon walks down on the other side and say 'Good-morning,' and I'll bet he will meet you more than half-way." It was actually just as easy as that, and in due time, John Rigg got his third term.

JOHN RIGG is dead. The news comes to me here in Feilding, and what memories it brings. For I knew him better than well, and there are now few of us left to tell the almost-forgotten tales of the New Unionism movement that first brought him before the public. John served his term as an apprentice to type-setting in the Government Printing Office, where I also held cases some years later. I also worked with him as his vis-à-vis in the job printing works of Lyon and Blair (now Whitcombe and Tombs), on Lambton Quay.

When John Ballance became Premier, he asked the four Trades Councils of the colony to nominate members to represent Labour in the Upper House. Lists of names of suitable men were sent in, and John Rigg got the Wellington appointment. Another printer, Will Jennings got the Auckland seat. Mr. Jenkinson, a boilermaker, and Mr. Bolt, a storeman, got the Christchurch and Dunedin seats. Those were the first "Labour Lords" of New Zealand.

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fare is provided. Mince pies are pretty good in the right place, but not as a sole diet. I cannot say that I have heard any serial that I should say was positively harmful, though I have heard parts of a good many that I myself disliked. It is the lack of any literary or artistic merit, and the high pitch of excitement from episode to episode that is to be deplored. No one can doubt that in the end love, courage, honour and virtue will triumph. After 150 or more episodes, the villain will get his nose rubbed in the mud and the right man will marry the right girl. You do not listen to see a skilful plot unfold or a series of character studies built up. You listen for the immediate thrill of an immediate sensation. In brief, serials may take Dad's mind off office worries (though to be honest, I don't know any fathers who bother to listen). They may brighten Mum's long sessions with the mending basket; they may give little Jim and Mary something to look forward to be-

fore they go to bed: but it is nonsense to pretend that the fare is either satisfying, stimulating, or instructive. And if parents to-day quail at the rod, what is wrong with a turn of the knob?

IMPROBABLE and exciting situations are not the special monopoly of thrillers. The ambition of the writer of short radio plays must be to spring as many unexpected situations as possible. You are jolted around corners and swung up and down with all the rush and excitement of a mental switchback. Take, for instance, the comedy thriller from 2YA the other Sunday night: *A Passion for Emeralds*. There were three unexpected turns planned to give listeners an exciting mental lurch: the prince turned villain, the heroine changed from a dead body into a live police agent, the foreign potentate dropped his French-cum-German-cum-Italian accent for a charming Irish brogue. Surely a majority of listeners have now outgrown these puerilities?



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