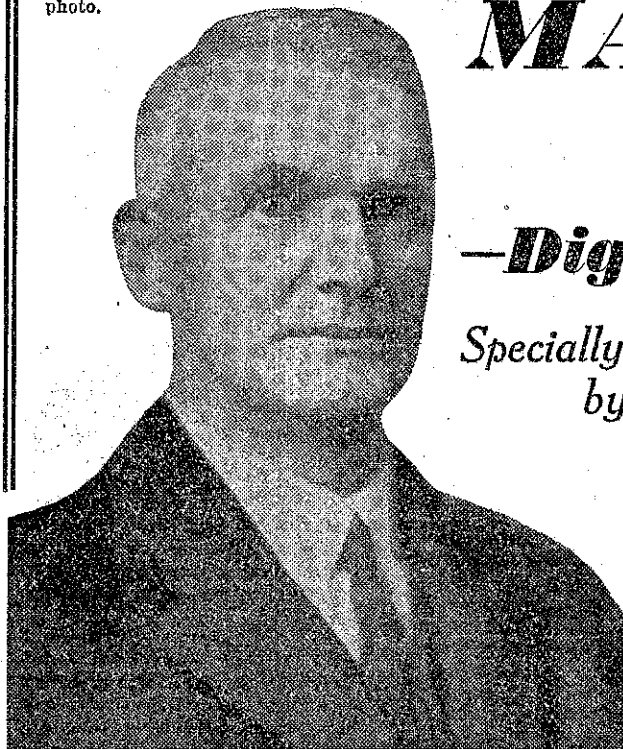


S. P. Andrew  
photo.



# MARK FAGAN

## —Dignitary of Labour

*Specially Written for the "Radio Record"*  
by CLYDE CARR, M.P.

**T**HE first genuine Labour man in the Legislative Council for many years, appointed by Sir Joseph Ward in 1930, the Hon. Mark Fagan is now, with the advent of a Labour Government, Minister without portfolio and the Leader of the Council. When he first took his seat in the Chamber he was regarded by a preponderantly Tory Council almost as an interloper, and looked upon askance, somewhat as the earlier Labour groups in the House of Representatives were practically ostracised by their colleagues of the Government and the official Opposition. They were not even welcomed to the billiard tables in the members' lobby. Since that day, the Labour men have established their supremacy at the game. Fagan himself is, by the way, an expert player. But it was his dignity, his manliness, his courtesy, his reasonableness and his outstanding ability that soon won respect and admiration from even his most bitter opponents, so that there is probably scarcely a man in "the other place" to-day but would at least grudgingly, if not cordially, admit that Fagan is the very man for the job.

His only handicap lies in his health, for, though he is such a fine, upstanding figure of a man, he carries in his lungs the seeds of trouble sown in his gold-mining days. Yet he never complains or betrays outwardly the signs of his "thorn in the flesh." His task to-day is a heavy one. Upon him rests the responsibility of piloting all the legislation through the Upper House. Other members of Cabinet are responsible for their own particular Bills, but he must familiarise himself with every measure, must be able to explain and justify it in face of a barrage of questions and criticism. If Sir Joseph had done nothing else to justify himself as Prime Minister in his declining years, his selection of Mark for our New Zealand "House of Lords" would have been of itself worth while. Since the recent elections, of course, he has been strongly reinforced by the appointment of a number of able Labour colleagues.

His success is the more remarkable in view of the fact that Fagan was, prior to his entry into Parliament, more of an industrialist than a politician. Many an industrialist is a left-winger industrially and a right-winger politically, if only because he has small faith in political action. This may have been in some degree true of our friend, and may explain the strong strain of political conservatism that characterises him to-day. Apart from that, one would not expect him at his time of life to resemble the young man in a hurry. Perhaps some small measure of his popularity is due to his extreme moderation. But he has great strength of character, and were he not

so kindly he might well be more feared than loved.

He was born in Tasmania and was mining as a young man in every State of Australia. Arriving in this country about 1900, he was gold mining at Reefton for many years. He became general secretary of the Inangahua Gold and Coal Miners' Union, and retained office for sixteen years. He was appointed workmen's inspector of the mines, and often appeared in the court in support of miners' rights, in the broader as well as the mere technical acceptance of the phrase. As an advocate he obtained many improvements in working conditions, including the weekly half-holiday for quartz miners. It is not surprising that he helped to promote the Miners' Phthisis Act of 1915. He served on the Hospital Board for ten years, being seven years its chairman. Other local bodies claimed his good offices, as well as sporting and philanthropic organisations. He has been president of the Inangahua Prospecting Association, secretary and treasurer of the St. John Ambulance Association, a member of the Repatriation Board throughout its existence, three years president of the trotting club and president of the cricket club.

The Hon. M. Fagan has been an executive member of the Miners' Federation and of the New Zealand Federation of Labour. He was a delegate to the famous "Unity Conference" of 1913. In 1925 he contested the Motueka seat in the Labour interest. Moving to Petone, he was campaign chairman for Mr. Walter Nash in 1929, when the seat was won for Labour. Mr. Fagan has long been a national executive member of the New Zealand Labour Party, and is highly esteemed and trusted not only in the councils of the party but in the councils of the nation.

Many stories of physical prowess are told of his earlier years. Bodily burdens were carried then as jauntily as the burdens of responsible office are carried now. In his quiet way he tells his story well of the turbulent days of the old mining camps. One story in particular has a far different flavour. Now that he often meets with the Governor-General in Council, he is reminded of an association with a former Governor of this country in a far less conventional way. Travelling on the same steamer with his Excellency, being then a young industrial union secretary, he visited the bathroom. Finding all in readiness, with scented soaps, bath-salts and yards of Turkish towel, much in evidence, he decided that the shipping company was certainly doing its passengers proud. In the midst of his ablutions, however, there was a great knocking at the door, with peremptory calls to appear without. This Mark was naturally indisposed to do. He was insufficiently clad, and he was enjoying his bath. Even when he learned that the preparations had been made for the Governor, whose aide-de-camp had been called away in the process, he made no undue haste. This was luxury. Thereby he gained prominent notice in Vice-Regal society, and long after the shine of the soap had departed his honest face beamed with a reflected glory. To-day it glows with his own inner light.

Next week's character sketch  
will be of Mr. W. J. Jordan,  
one of the Government  
Whips.