

## Eulogy: Gay Simpkin

RAY MARKEY\*

Gay Simpkin was one of those rare people who bridged the worlds of activism and the academy. She was a passionate and effective feminist and union activist, as well as a highly successful, incisive, and reflective scholar in labour studies. Each sphere also benefited from the other – her academic work was informed by the practical experience of her activism, which in turn benefited from her sharp analytical ability and application of broad comparative, historical and theoretical perspectives to practice. In these ways she was an inspiration across both spheres.

I came to know Gay well in 2005, soon after I arrived from Australia to take up a position at Auckland University of Technology as Professor of Employment Relations. She was then an organiser with the Post Primary Teachers' Association. We soon teamed up in forming the Auckland Labour History Group of which she became secretary. Gay was a very well organised and effective secretary of the Auckland Labour History Group, which benefited greatly from her fine attention to detail, process and record keeping - it was basically her efforts that kept us ticking over. Under her stewardship we organised a number of well-attended labour history events that many people attending her tribute will remember.

Gay also became a valued contributor to the New Zealand Work and Labour Market Institute (now Work Research Institute) when I formed it at AUT and she retired from the PPTA. She became a Project Officer with the Institute, and she had main responsibility for two significant projects. The first was conducting case studies of a small number of New Zealand schools for a comparative study of employee participation and quality of the work environment in New Zealand and Denmark. Based on this research, we subsequently wrote an article together with a Danish colleague, Herman Knudsen, in the British based journal, the *Industrial Relations Journal* (I give a reference below, and I'll also send a soft copy by email upon request). In this study we were able to demonstrate that if you give workers a say in decision making in their workplaces, they will rate their work environment much more positively. Gay also led a major Institute project on Union Effectiveness in New Zealand Schools on behalf of the Institute, sponsored by the PPTA.

In my work with Gay I benefited greatly at a personal level from her support, loyalty and wise counsel. My partner, Fran Laneyrie, also loved her warm spirit. The Institute benefited from her research skills, her cool reflection and logic, her intelligence, her common sense, and again, her fine attention to detail in which she never allowed the big picture to be lost. In the Labour History Group and the Institute her colleagues valued her collegiality, commitment, and wry humour. And because of all of Gay's efforts, she made a significant contribution generally to the discipline of labour studies, historically and in contemporary employment relations.

After I returned to Australia in late 2011, I saw Gay less frequently. But on periodic return visits to Auckland I always looked forward to joining her over a meal and glass of wine at Vivace's. Gay's style was quiet, but she was highly effective as a scholar and activist because of her integrity and intellectual depth. Gay will be sorely missed by activists and scholars alike.

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\* Prof Ray Markey, Centre for Workforce Futures, Macquarie University, Ray.markey@mq.edu.au