

Merging politics with economics: Non-industrial and political work stoppage statistics in New Zealand during the long 1970s

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Abstract

During the 1970s, the number of ‘non-industrial’ (including ‘political’) work stoppages dramatically increased in New Zealand. In that decade, hundreds of thousands of workers participated in such stoppages, making up 30 per cent of the total number of workers involved in all recorded stoppage activity, and 15 per cent of the total number of days not worked due to all recorded stoppages. Hitherto, these stoppages have largely been overlooked in previous statistical analyses of the period, thus, giving the impression that the extent of workplace conflict was considerably lower than it actually was. Further, many, if not most, of the significant and controversial strikes of the period could be considered non-industrial. Because the vast majority of these stoppages were struggles over wages and working conditions, yet directed against the government, the traditional division between economics and politics in trade union activity is difficult to sustain for the 1970s.

Key words: *strikes, political strikes, work stoppage statistics, incomes policies*

Introduction

Today, it may seem trifling to evaluate the accuracy of work stoppage statistics, given that, by any measure, New Zealand is currently experiencing an extraordinary long-term lull in strike activity. Yet, it is not inconsequential to do so for the period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s – the ‘long 1970s’ – when New Zealand experienced widespread strike activity. A fairly unique characteristic of this upsurge, relative to other periods of New Zealand history, was that a substantial minority of stoppages were considered ‘non-industrial’ (including ‘political’) in nature. The Department of Labour (DOL) initially defined “non-industrial stoppages” as those that made no demand on the employer (DOL, 1979a: 2).

While the DOL excluded such stoppages from its official stoppage statistics until 1980, it kept a separate record of them. Yet, most analyses of the period have neglected these separate statistics (for instance, see Deeks & Boxall, 1989; Brosnan, Smith & Walsh, 1990). This article employs this data to help furnish a more historically accurate picture of the extent of workplace conflict – as measured by recorded work stoppages – during the long 1970s. Indeed, excluding non-industrial stoppages, many of which were significant and contentious national or regional disputes, has led to a substantial underestimation of strike activity. An extraordinary 46 per cent of the workforce took part in stoppages during 1979, largely due to the general strike of that year. This figure of nearly half the workforce participating in stoppages represents a vastly higher percentage than what was thought to be the previous peak for that measure in New Zealand history: 19 per cent in 1976 (although if non-industrial

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stoppages are included for 1976, that figure climbs to 25 per cent). Accordingly, many commentators – including myself – have mistakenly claimed that workplace dissidence in terms of workers involved peaked during the mid-1970s (see for example Boraman, 2007; Bramble & Heal, 1997; Roper, 2011; Trotter, 2007).

Commentators from varied perspectives have argued that trade union activity was economic in the long 1970s, and, thus, largely unconcerned with political issues beyond the workplace (Awatere, 1984; Deeks, 1977; Jesson, 1981). Hence, this article also examines the extent of ‘political’ strikes during the long 1970s. As Hay (1978) observes, political strikes are often considered to be synonymous with non-industrial stoppages. Initially, the DOL concurred – it defined political stoppages as those that made no demand on the employer (DOL, 1976). Yet, later it re-defined such stoppages as those that not only placed no demand on employers, but also “did not relate to the workers’ conditions of employment” (DOL, 1981b: 2). Consequently, political strikes were an “expression of dissatisfaction with particular aspects of the broader society in which workers live” (DOL, 1981b: 3). In other words, they were strikes in support of social and political causes that were unrelated to wages and working conditions.

This article proceeds by, firstly, examining the broader issue of the accuracy of official stoppage statistics during the long 1970s, especially in regards to the under-reporting of strikes. It, then, analyses the data on non-industrial stoppages, and briefly considers the major disputes that can be categorised as non-industrial. Then, it assesses how many of these non-industrial stoppages could be deemed strictly political to help evaluate whether unions were economic. The focus of this article is the statistical analysis. Apart from some brief analysis in the conclusion, it does not offer explanations as to why so many non-industrial disputes took place, and why they eventually declined (including the effectiveness of attempts to outlaw them), and the heated political debate that occurred about political stoppages during the period (for some discussion, see Deeks, 1977; Boston, 1984).

Stoppage statistics and under-reporting

It is extraordinarily difficult to capture statistically the frequency and extent of work stoppages. There is substantial global discussion on the accuracy of official stoppage statistics (see for example Gall, 1999; Lyddon, 2007; Shalev, 1978). Most scholars argue that such statistics tend to underestimate the extent and intensity of stoppages. Lyddon (2007), for instance, notes that brief localised strikes, and small unofficial stoppages, are often unrecorded. Every day or informal forms of collective work refusal are also difficult, or almost impossible, to measure.

Several scholars have made similar claims in New Zealand (Deeks & Boxall, 1989: 246; Harbridge, 1987; Roper, 2011). The major case study of the accuracy of stoppage statistics found that, in 1984, the DOL underestimated the number of workers involved in the Federation of Labour’s (FOL) right to bargain campaign by 42 per cent and the number of days not worked by 47 per cent (Harbridge, 1987). That campaign was an unsuccessful attempt to break the National government’s two-year long wage-freeze. Ironically, the DOL would have deemed those strikes as non-industrial if they had occurred before 1980 and, thus, would have omitted them from their main statistical series.

However, as far as is known, no general overview of the accuracy of New Zealand stoppage statistics has been written. This section endeavours to do so for the long 1970s, drawing upon

internal discussions held within the DOL, the body then responsible for collecting stoppage statistics, in regards to their own concerns about the under-reporting of disputes. Indeed, the DOL acknowledged a general tendency towards under-reporting (DOL, 1976; DOL, 1981a; DOL, 1982).

They noted several reasons why this occurred. Employers were not under any statutory duty to report stoppages (and thus when employers failed to report stoppages, DOL Offices were relied on to “collect information” about such disputes). Additionally, employers often did not report restrictive practices at work, such as go-slows, work-to-rules, and various bans. The DOL noted these were difficult to measure (DOL, 1982).

Moreover, stoppages in the public sector were generally excluded (DOL, 1982). Stoppages involving state sector unions that were not registered under the Industrial Relations Act, such as the Public Service Association (PSA), were omitted until the passage of the State Sector Act in 1988. Additionally, disputes involving several private sector unions who were unregistered under the Industrial Relations Act were also presumably discounted. These unregistered unions had a combined membership of 200,000 in 1982 (Boston, 1984). However, several unions that covered the state sector were registered under the Industrial Relations Act, such as various railway unions and the New Zealand Workers’ Union (DOL, 1976). While registered unions carried out the majority of strikes in the 1970s and 1980s, white-collar workers and unions experienced a degree of ‘radicalisation’ during those decades, and hence took far more strike action than they had previously (see for example Derby, 2013; Roth & Hammond, 1981: 164; Roth, 1990).

However, in comparison with Britain, New Zealand stoppage statistics were more accurate in one facet: they included strikes that lasted less than a day. During the 1970s, many New Zealand stoppages were of such duration, as Roth (1977: 7) noted: “In 1975...out of 426 recorded stoppages, 157 – more than a third – lasted less than one day, which means that in Britain they wouldn’t even have been counted as strikes”.

Nevertheless, these brief stoppages themselves were subject to considerable under-reporting. Indeed, the DOL noted that employers frequently did not report unauthorised stoppages, which often lasted less than a day (DOL, 1982). For example, the Meat Industry Employers’ Association provided remarkable data that about 2,500 stoppages of brief duration (often only lasting an hour or two) occurred across the meat industry during 1970-72 for a Commission of Inquiry into the meat industry. These stoppages involved nearly 470,000 workers. Yet, they were unrecorded in the DOL’s official tally (DOL, 1976). Even if the Association’s figures were inflated, they are still highly significant. Indeed, they far exceeded the official national totals for all industries of about 1,000 stoppages that involved around 300,000 workers during 1970-72 (both figures include non-industrial stoppages; see table 1 below). Additionally, stoppages of less than four hours duration, which commonly occurred on large, highly unionised worksites, were unrecorded in some large industrial districts such as Auckland due to an informal departmental convention (DOL, 1973; 1974).

What is more, unlike the bulk of other high-income countries, employers were relied upon as the primary source of data (Perry & Wilson, 2004). While “employers are perhaps typically in a better position to measure absences” (Perry & Wilson, 2004: 8), sometimes they may

have an interest in downplaying the size and, thus, effectiveness of a dispute, or not reporting them altogether; indeed, trade unions often disputed the figures provided by employers as severe underestimates, as will be detailed below (see also Harris, 1997). Subsequently, many countries request or require trade unions to also provide data.

Lastly – the main subject of this article – the DOL omitted stoppages that it deemed ‘non-industrial’ until 1980. As Silver (2003: 189) and Walsh (1983) contend, excluding political and wider non-industrial strikes could lead to a substantial under-estimation of the level of conflict. Walsh (1983) argues that:

Though most protest actions on a large scale (for example, national strikes) may ostensibly seem politically motivated, in most cases there will be underlying causes fundamentally concerned with terms and conditions of work. A national protest stoppage over, say, a wage freeze is primarily concerned with the pay of individual strikers and its appearance as a political strike will arise out of the direction of the protest towards the instigators of the measure, namely the government (p.22).

The DOL had earlier voiced remarkably similar concerns to Walsh. For instance, it remarked that many ‘non-industrial’ disputes in which “no demand is made on the employer” were protests against government actions and policies (DOL, 1979a: 2). It also noted:

Although non-industrial stoppages have occurred outside the control of the enterprise, which is still directly affected by the stoppage, the motivation for many non-industrial strikes stems primarily from the work situation...For the Trade Union Movement non-industrial stoppages are looked upon as expressions for better welfare and working conditions (DOL, 1979a: 3).

Hence, in order to “gain a better perspective of stoppage activity”, non-industrial stoppages needed to be taken into account (DOL, 1979a: 3). This resulted in the DOL eventually including non-industrial stoppages in its official count from 1980 onwards. This also could explain why the DOL amassed separate statistics on non-industrial stoppages from 1960 to 1982 (they still noted the occurrence of such stoppages in 1981 and 1982, but included these in later official statistical series – in other words, the statistics for 1981-2 were backdated until 1980). Two annual publications – the *Industrial Statistics Handbooks* and especially the *Industrial Stoppages Reports* – published the discrete data about non-industrial stoppages.

As far as is known, only Roth (1970) has utilised the above mentioned little-known reports to highlight the data about non-industrial stoppages. Yet he did not aggregate such data with that for industrial stoppages in his main statistical tables of stoppages. He also only scrutinised data for non-industrial stoppages for the period 1960-1976, and, thus, neglected the more tumultuous years of the late 1970s and the early 1980s.

Data analysis

Before the 1970s, political stoppages over social issues rarely occurred in New Zealand, and seemingly assumed little significance. Many were ephemeral protests against various wars and fascism by 'militant' unions, such as the Miners', Watersiders' and Seamen's Unions (Richardson, 1995; Roth, 1978). Yet, from about the late 1960s, with a general upturn in strike activity following the Arbitration Court's infamous nil wage order of 1968, stoppages deemed 'non-industrial' by the DOL became far more prevalent and substantial.

The number of such stoppages peaked in the mid-1970s, specifically in 1974, when 70 such stoppages or 15.6 per cent of the total number of stoppages took place. By the late 1970s, the frequency of non-industrial stoppages fell away (see figure 1 and also table 1 below). Overall the number of non-industrial stoppages as a percentage of all stoppages was 5.8 per cent for the 1970s, and slightly less (4.8 per cent) for the period 1960-82. While this represented only a small fraction of all stoppages, the annual total number of non-industrial stoppages in the mid-1970s was greater than the sequential annual total number of all stoppages from 1992 until the present day – in other words, since 1992 recorded disputes have totalled less than 70 each year.

If measures other than the number of stoppages are analysed, non-industrial stoppages assume greater importance. This is particularly the case for participation in non-industrial disputes, which accounted for 29.8 per cent of the total number of workers involved in all stoppages in the 1970s. Of the total number of days not worked in the 1970s due to all stoppages, 15 per cent were a result of non-industrial stoppages, and 13.8 per cent for the period 1960-82 (see table 1 below).

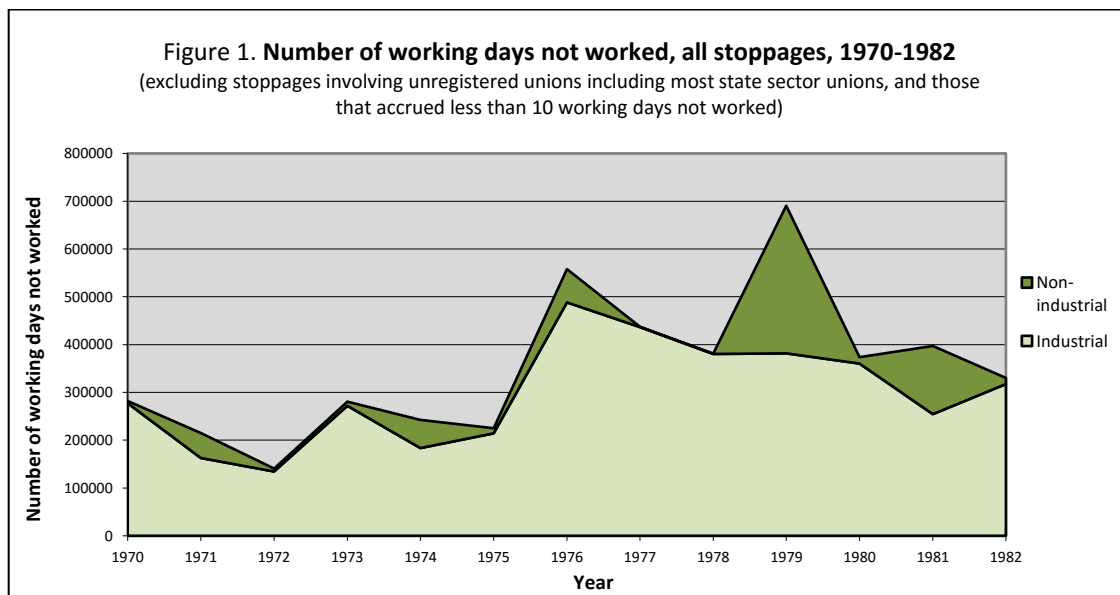
As most non-industrial stoppages were short-lived protest stoppages against government policies and practices, they had more effect on the total number of workers involved in disputes rather than working days not worked (see figures 1 and 2 below). For example, in 1971, non-industrial disputes averaged 1.37 days not worked per worker involved, compared to 1.89 for industrial stoppages (*Industrial Stoppages 1971*, 1972: 20). In 1975, their average duration was 1.26 compared to 4.27 for industrial stoppages (*Industrial Stoppages 1975 Part Two*, 1976: 45). Even in 1979, there were more days not worked due to strikes other than the general strike of that year.

Table 1. **Non-Industrial Stoppages 1960–82** (excluding stoppages involving unregistered unions including most state sector unions, and those that accrued less than 10 working days not worked)

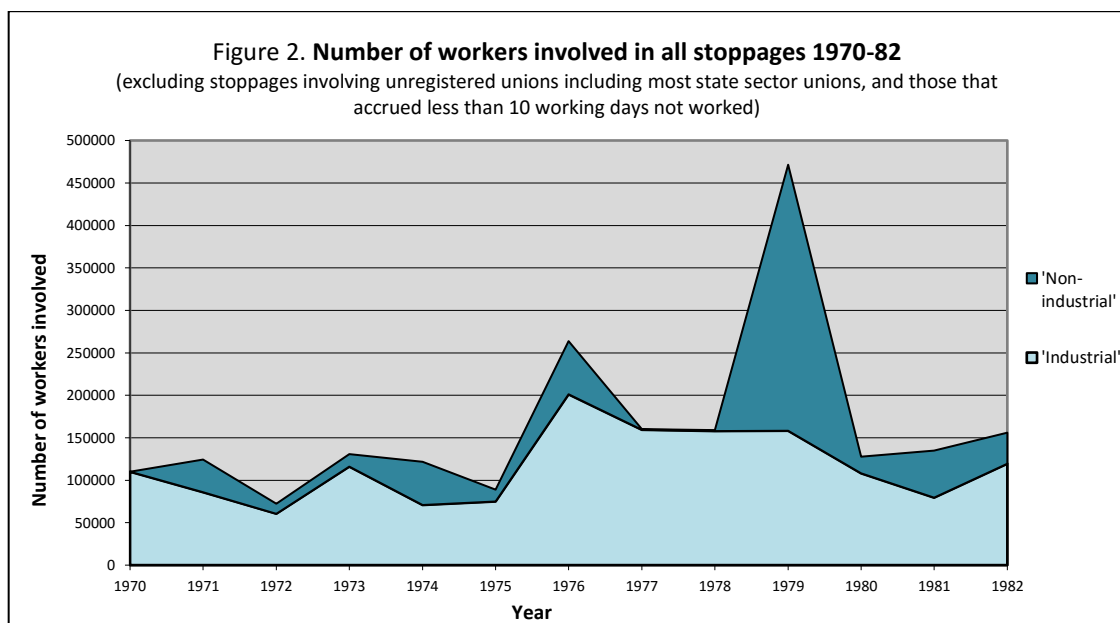
Year	Number of stoppages			Number of working days not worked			Number of workers involved		
	All stoppages	Non-industrial stoppages	Per cent Non-industrial	All stoppages	Non-industrial	Per cent Non-Industrial	All stoppages	Non-industrial	Per cent Non-industrial
1960	60	-	-	35683	-	-	14305	-	-
1961	71	-	-	38185	-	-	16626	-	-
1962	97	1	1.0	93243	86	0.1	39921	N/A	N/A
1963	60	-	-	54490	-	-	14911	-	-
1964	97	4	4.1	68043	1209	1.8	34779	N/A	N/A
1965	110	5	4.5	22743	929	4.1	15267	N/A	N/A
1966	147	2	1.4	103120	4025	3.9	33132	N/A	N/A
1967	89	-	-	139490	-	-	28490	-	-
1968	153	-	-	130267	-	-	37458	-	-
1969	173	4	2.3	141453	2778	2.0	44041	N/A	N/A
1970	330	7	2.1	282239	4891	1.7	110096	N/A	N/A
1971	323	10	3.1	215266	52703	24.5	124371	38362	30.8
1972	307	41	13.4	140755	6250	4.3	72386	11957	16.5
1973	418	24	5.7	280390	8684	3.1	130809	14944	11.4
1974	450	70	15.6	242579	58891	24.3	121490	50586	41.6
1975	478	50	10.5	224923	10291	4.6	88902	14082	15.8
1976	543	56	10.3	557595	69154	12.4	263855	62770	23.8
1977	564	2	0.4	437123	315	0.1	160020	613	0.4
1978	413	2	0.5	380797	192	0.1	158955	1052	0.7
1979	530	7	1.3	690523	308627	44.7	471450	313255	66.5
1980	362	10	2.8	373496	13427	3.6	127651	19556	15.3
1981	293	4	1.4	388086	142740	36	135006	56457	41.8
1982	333	5	1.5	330028	12659	3.8	155987	36397	23.3

Sources: *Industrial Stoppages* Annual reports 1972 (DOL, 1974) and 1975-82 (DOL, n.d.a; 1979a, b; 1981a, b, 1982; 1983). *Handbook of Industrial Stoppage Statistics*, July 1975 (DOL, n.d.c), and *Industrial Stoppages* 1971 (1972: 20).

Note: the 1971 figures for non-industrial stoppages are taken from DOL, 1972: 20; DOL, 1974: 11. DOL, 1979b, Appendix Two: 2 and *Handbook of Industrial Stoppage Statistics July 1975* (DOL, n.d.c: 23) noted different data for 1971 (namely only one stoppage which accrued 295 days not worked). The earlier figures appear to be more accurate as they included several large-scale stoppages against the Stabilisation of Remuneration Act, the decision of the Remuneration Authority to reduce negotiated pay rises in 27 industries, and the Shipping and Seamen Amendment Bill. *Industrial stoppages* 1971, 1972: 21. It is unknown why these significant stoppages were later excluded.



Source: as for Table 1 above



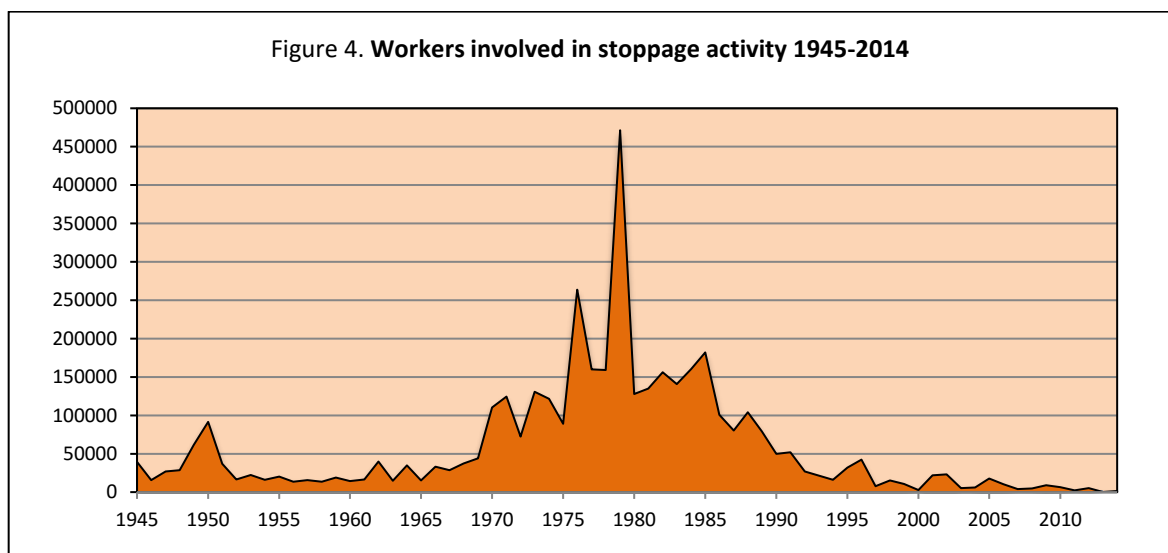
Source: as for Table 1 above.

Perhaps the most noteworthy statistic is the jump in the percentage of the workforce involved in stoppages when participation in non-industrial stoppages is included (see figure 3 and table 2 below). As mentioned above, the largest increase was in 1979.



Sources: as for table 1 above.

If stoppages deemed non-industrial are included in a graph illustrating a longer historical sweep of 1945 to 2014, the late 1970s peak in numbers involved is stark (see figure 4 below). 1970, being the actual pinnacle in terms of numbers involved in stoppages, gels with the memories of prominent trade unionists – for example, Dean Parker remembered that “Bill Andersen always talked about ‘79 as being the high point of the union movement” (as cited in Bodman, 2013: 34).



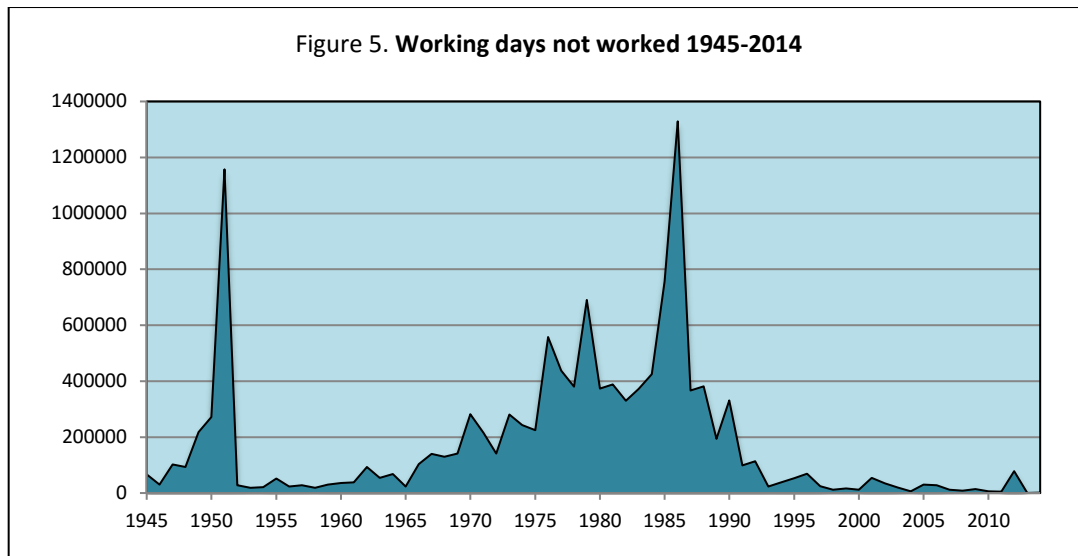
Sources: As for table 2 above; Deeks & Boxall, 1989: 248-49; *New Zealand Yearbooks*; and various quarterly and annual work stoppage reports of Statistics New Zealand and the Department of Labour.

Table 2. Percentage of the workforce involved in all stoppages and working days lost per 1000 employees 1960-82 (excludes stoppages involving unregistered unions including most state sector unions, and those that accrued less than 10 days not worked)

Year	Percentage of wage and salary earners involved in stoppages		Working days not worked due to stoppages per 1000 employees	
	Percentage involved in industrial stoppages	Percentage involved in industrial and non-industrial stoppages	Working days not worked due to industrial stoppages per 1000 employees	Working days not worked due to industrial and non-industrial stoppages per 1000 employees
1971	9.13	13.2	172.79	228.4
1972	6.34	7.59	141.02	147.6
1973	11.75	13.27	275.62	284.43
1974	6.96	11.92	180.25	238.03
1975	7.26	8.62	208.18	218.16
1976	19.3	25.32	468.71	535.07
1977	15.26	15.31	418.04	418.34
1978	15.18	15.28	365.9	366.08
1979	15.5	46.2	374.22	676.65
1980	10.59	12.5	352.66	365.81
1981	7.7	13.06	237.42	375.54
1982	11.57	15.09	307.05	319.3

Sources: Calculated from DOL, *Industrial Stoppages Reports*, 1972 and 1975-82; DOL, *Handbook of Industrial Stoppage Statistics*, July 1975; *Industrial Stoppages 1971, 1972*: 20, and Department of Statistics, 1985: 9.

However, to judge the overall statistical peak in workplace dissidence, consideration ought to be given to measures other than workers involved. If days not worked, including non-industrial stoppages, are scrutinised for the same historical span (1945 to 2014), the high-point for that measure remains the mid-1980s. This was primarily due to widespread and major industrial confrontations that attempted to regain wages lost during the 1982-4 wage freeze, and to halt or minimise the effects of restructuring. The 1970s still witnessed a notable number of days not worked, nevertheless; for instance, the year 1979 experienced the third highest yearly total of days not worked after 1986 and 1951 respectively (see figure 5 below).



Sources: as for Figure 4.

In terms of the total number of strikes, including non-industrial stoppages, the historic pinnacle remains 1977, although that peak is less clear-cut than the other measures. The years 1976 and 1979 experienced very similar aggregates to that of 1977. Overall, the entire mid-1970s (when the highest number of non-industrial stoppages occurred, as noted above) and the late 1970s witnessed a relatively high number of disputes (see table 1 above).

Subsequently, an integrative measure of strike activity is needed to ascertain the overall peak in stoppage activity in New Zealand history. If one roughly triangulates the peaks in the number of strikes, number of workers involved, and working days not worked since official statistics have been collected in 1906, the historic apex of *recorded* stoppage activity was the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. Given this triangulation is imprecise, however, further research is needed. Perhaps the ‘strike shapes’ methodology of authors, such as Shorter and Tilly, (1971) and Franzosi (1989) could be employed to calculate in a more exact and holistic fashion strike peaks and troughs over time. That method shows, in three-dimensional shapes, the annual size (the number of workers involved per strike), duration (working days not worked per worker involved) and frequency (the number of strikes per thousand wage- and salary-workers) of strikes.

As noted beforehand, the 1979 spike in the number of workers involved was primarily due to the general strike of that year. It was organised to protest against the government’s enforcement of the provisions of the Remuneration Act 1979 (see Roper, 1982; Walsh & McMaster, 1980a, b; Williams, 1984). The DOL estimated that 297,418 workers took part. Yet, it noted that it was “extremely difficult” to estimate those involved, given that the dispute involved a multitude of industries and workplaces – especially workplaces where employers did not report strikers. Instead, the DOL garnered information about the strike’s extent from media reports, employers and unions, and noted cautiously that the estimate “could be subject to a reasonable degree of error either upwards or downwards” (DOL, 1981a: 2-3).

Seeking such balance was exemplary; as the *Auckland Herald* (21 Sep. 1979) noted, employers tend to downplay the effect of strikes, while unions overplay them. While it will never be known for certain the accuracy of the DOL’s estimate, if state sector workers are taken into account – the Combined State Unions endorsed the FOL’s call for a general strike – then the tally would need to be boosted by tens of thousands, even though the turnout from

these unions was much lower and patchier than those from the FOL (see for example Roth, 1990). The State Services Commission estimated that 28 per cent of public servants (or 18,500 workers) participated in the general strike; the PSA contended that this figure was substantially higher (*PSA Journal*, Dec. 1979: 3; Sep. 1980: 4). Further, the FOL estimated a turnout of 75-80 per cent of its 457,000 members, rather than the 65 per cent estimated by the DOL (*PSA Journal*, Sep. 1980: 16).

Were the overall stoppage statistics inflated by a one-day and one-off symbolic general strike that was seemingly ineffective? Arguably, regulations issued under the Remuneration Act were only revoked after the Kinleith strike of 1980, a bitter dispute which lasted nearly three months (Roth & Hammond, 1981). Nevertheless, the general strike was a landmark event in New Zealand employment relations (see Walsh & McMaster, 1980b). It was the largest strike and the only genuinely national general strike in New Zealand history so far; it represented the first time that blue-collar and white-collar unions joined together in a national strike; and it possibly paved the way for the defeat of the Remuneration Act at Kinleith the next year.

Many, if not most, of the largest and pivotal industrial confrontations of the long 1970s were deemed non-industrial. They can be divided into two main types. The first and most numerous type mentioned in the *Industrial Stoppage Reports* were protests against government intervention to limit or reduce wage increases, either through legislation or direct intervention to cap or to partially or completely freeze wage increases – in other words, various incomes and wage restraint policies designed to combat the high inflation of the time (Deeks, 1977; Boston, 1984). Examples included the aforementioned general strike, but also national strikes in 1971 against the introduction of the Stabilisation of Remuneration Act, nationwide strikes against the wage freeze in 1976, the Kinleith strike (when it became a strike against the government), and the right to bargain campaign in 1982-4.

The secondly major type was protests against various branches of the state curbing the effectiveness of strike activity and union militancy through the use of injunctions, the use of the police to arrest picketers, or by introducing new legislation. As with strikes against incomes policies, many of these stoppages were nationwide and involved a cross-section of unions, thus accounting for their large size and controversy. These strikes were, however, seemingly ultimately concerned with wages and working conditions in the sense that they aimed to retain the effectiveness of stoppages' ability to maintain or improve wages and conditions. Examples included national strikes held against the Shipping and Seamen Amendment Bill in 1971, national strikes in protest against the imprisonment of Bill Andersen for ignoring a court injunction in 1974 over the Waiheke Island ferry dispute (which became a strike against the use of court injunctions to curtail industrial action), and two separate strikes over the arrests of picketers at Ravensdown in Dunedin and Auckland Airport in 1981 (see Roth & Hammond, 1981, for an overview of most of the above strikes).

To illustrate the importance and contentious nature of these disputes, when the 1974 anti-injunction strikes threatened briefly to become a nationwide, spontaneous general strike the Labour Government considered declaring a national emergency and possibly using the army (Bassett, 1976). The DOL estimated these strikes involved over 35,000 workers who ceased work for 40,000 days (DOL, *Industrial Stoppages Report 1974*, n.d.b: 13), while the *Auckland Star* (4 July 1974) estimated a much higher figure of 90,000 workers involved who did not work for the same number of days. The Commerce Amendment Act 1976 outlawed political strikes (they had earlier been made an offence via the National Government's Industrial Relations Bill 1972, but Labour's Industrial Relations Act 1973 deleted this offence

(Roth, 1977) in response to a week-long strike by port and maritime workers in Wellington that cancelled many ferry sailings during the school holidays. The stoppage was held to protest against the visit of a US nuclear vessel, the USS Truxtun. And in 1981, as a reaction to the solidarity strikes held to protest against the picketers arrested at Auckland Airport (involving, it was estimated, 41,193 workers who ceased work for 128,436 days (DOL, 1982), Tania Harris helped organise – with the support of others – an anti-strike ‘Kiwis care’ march in Auckland in which about 30,000 people participated, although estimates ranged from 10,000 to 50,000 (*NZ Herald*, 4 July 1981; *Dominion*, 4 July 1981).

Notwithstanding, several important disputes were arguably absent from the DOL’s tally of non-industrial stoppages. For example, under the DOL’s original definition, the nationwide strikes and load-out export bans undertaken to oppose the Arbitration Court’s nil wage order of 1968 could be categorised as non-industrial because they were directed against a court decision rather than employers. In 1977, two major strikes that could be categorised as non-industrial were omitted from the DOL’s calculation of a mere 613 workers who participated in non-industrial stoppages that year (DOL, 1979b: 3). Firstly, an estimated 25,000 retail workers ceased work to protest the proposed Shop Hours Trading Bill of 1977 (Hince, Taylor, Pearce & Biggs, 1990), a strike that was directed against the government rather than employers. The Retailers’ Federation condemned it as an illegal political protest under the Commerce Amendment Act 1976 (*Socialist Action*, 10 June 1977). However, the DOL may have considered this an industrial stoppage, as it was primarily concerned with working conditions (namely, extended working hours). Secondly, the Wellington Trades Council of the FOL organised a three-hour strike to protest against the government enlarging the powers of the Security Intelligence Service (SIS) in 1977. Estimates of protest participants ranged from 10,000 to 20,000, and it was reported that many industries, including factories, ferries, trains, hotels and shops, shut down during the rally (*Evening Post*, 14 and 15 Oct. 1977; *Dominion*, 15 Oct. 1977).

Political Stoppages

A clear-cut division between non-industrial and political stoppages is difficult to maintain, given that numerous strikes were held over wages and conditions but directed against the government. Yet, how many of these non-industrial strikes could be considered *strictly* ‘political’ under the DOL’s later definition of political strikes – that is, they not only made no demand on employers, but also were unrelated with wages and conditions of employment?

From examining the *Industrial Stoppages Reports*, the least frequent type of non-industrial stoppages, and those that involved the fewest workers and days not worked, were such political stoppages. Even strikes held over excessive temperatures in workplaces were more commonly recorded than strictly political stoppages. Like the vast majority of non-industrial disputes, these walkouts were concerned with wages or working conditions (in this case the latter), yet were classified as non-industrial because they did not place any demand on employers (DOL, *Industrial Stoppages Report 1973*, n.d.a: 9).

Firm data about the exact numbers and extent of political strikes is lacking. The most common type mentioned in the *Industrial Stoppages Reports* were protests against the visits of US and British nuclear armed and/or powered vessels into New Zealand ports. These also accounted for the largest recorded political stoppages (the aforementioned strike against the SIS bill in 1977 was probably larger than any anti-nuclear stoppage, but it was unrecorded). Other

political stoppages were held to show opposition to the Vietnam War and apartheid, but they were tiny and infrequent.

However, some data is available for the early to mid-1980s. After the DOL included non-industrial stoppages in its main series from 1980, it created a new category in its record on the causes of disputes: political disputes. This category gives some indication of the actual level of political stoppages as a percentage of all causes of disputes from 1980 to 1985 (see table 3). As table 3 shows, they generally accounted for less than two per cent of the total number of stoppages, workers involved and working days not worked. The small increase in the number of political stoppages in 1984 was largely due to strikes organised to protest against the introduction of voluntary unionism (although such a stoppage was non-industrial rather than strictly political under the DOL's definition) and the fatal bombing of Wellington Trades Hall.

Table 3. Political Stoppages (with percentage of all stoppages in brackets) 1980-85

Year	Number of political stoppages	Workers involved	Working days not worked
1980	1 (0.3%)	640 (0.5%)	790 (0.2%)
1981	2 (0.7%)	986 (0.7%)	1,282 (0.3%)
1982	2 (0.6%)	734 (0.5%)	497 (0.2%)
1983	2 (0.6%)	1,364 (1%)	589 (0.2%)
1984	8 (2.2%)	3,593 (2.2%)	2,164 (0.5%)
1985	4 (1%)	4,708 (2.6%)	8,601 (1.1%)

Source: Department of Statistics (1987): 14.

From this table, a direct comparison can be made during 1980 to 1982 between stoppages considered to be non-industrial under the old definition, and stoppages considered to be political under the tighter definition (see table 4).

Table 4. Non-industrial and Political Stoppages (with percentage of all stoppages in brackets) 1980-82

Year	Number of stoppages		Workers involved		Working days not worked	
	Non-industrial (excluding political)	Political	Non-industrial (excluding political)	Political	Non-industrial (excluding political)	Political
1980	9 (2.5%)	1 (0.3%)	18,916 (14.8%)	640 (0.5%)	12,637 (3.4%)	790 (0.2%)
1981	2 (0.7%)	2 (0.7%)	54,465 (40.3%)	986 (0.7%)	141,458 (36.5%)	1,282 (0.3%)
1982	3 (0.9%)	2 (0.6%)	35,663 (22.9%)	734 (0.5%)	12,162 (3.7%)	497 (0.2%)

Sources: Calculated from Department of Statistics, 1987: 14 and DOL, *Industrial Stoppage Reports* 1980-82 (DOL, 1981a, b; 1982; 1983)

Table 4 illustrates that, while overall non-industrial (including strictly political) stoppages were a tiny minority of stoppages, non-industrial (excluding strictly political) stoppages still made up a significant percentage of numbers of workers involved and working days not worked due to all stoppages in 1980-2. Indeed, in 1981, 36-40 per cent of all workers involved and working days not worked were due to such stoppages (mainly due to the aforementioned strikes held against the arrest of picketers in Dunedin and Auckland).

These statistics seem to validate the assertion that most disputes were economic, and thus by inference that most unions were economic. However, this neglects the wide scope of extra-parliamentary political activities undertaken by unions during the long 1970s that were unrecorded in the stoppage statistics because they were simply impossible to measure. These unrecorded activities, including several instances of union support for Maori causes largely in the form of bans on the development of Maori land, such as the Auckland Trades Council's green ban on Takaparawha/Bastion Point in 1977-8, the green ban placed by the Whangarei and Auckland Trades Councils on the Ngatihine block in Northland in 1977-8, and the ban placed by the Wellington Drivers' Union in 1976 on delivering construction materials for a proposed sewerage plant at Kaumanga Point near Porirua (and beside traditional fishing grounds). The green ban at Takaparawha/Bastion Point was effective in stopping development on that land and, thus, assisted considerably Ngati Whatua's seminal land occupation (Bodman, 2013). A green ban was also placed on a proposed gas pipeline through the Hakarimata Scenic Reserve near Ngaruawahia in 1977 (Industrial Relations Chronicle, 1977).

Further, the statistics do not indicate the breadth of various other bans that unions placed on trade in order to support political causes. In 1972, the FOL banned servicing French ships and aircraft in New Zealand during the period when the French were testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific (FOL, 1973), and in 1974 banned trade with metropolitan France to protest against their nuclear testing in the Pacific (FOL, 1975). It also prohibited trade with Chile to show opposition to Pinochet's neoliberal military dictatorship (Trotter, 2007). Watersiders' and Seamen's Unions boycotted South African shipping and goods following a call by the International Federation of Free Trade Unions (*New Zealand Monthly Review*, 180 (Aug. 1976), p. 12.).

These varied actions indicate that many social movements and broad political currents of the long 1970s influenced, and were influential within, many trade unions. Yet, many political stands taken by unions were often confined to the level of FOL policy rather than practice. This is well-illustrated by the FOL's long-standing opposition, on the level of formal policy, to racial discrimination and apartheid in South Africa. Before the 1981 Springbok Tour, the FOL pledged its "total support to unions giving effect to this policy by withdrawal of services" to the Springbok rugby team (FOL, 1981). Yet, only two stoppages were recorded against that tour involving merely 986 workers, resulting in 1282 days not worked (DOL, 1982). This seems incongruent with the intense level of street protest against, and widespread public opposition to, that tour. The FOL and most unions were reluctant to mobilise union opposition to the tour because they perceived that the issue was divisive – they feared they would alienate the numerous rugby supporters amongst their members (Bodman, 2013).

Conclusions

While it is highly difficult to capture the extent of work stoppages statistically, as largely acknowledged by the DOL, significant under-reporting of stoppages occurred during the long 1970s. Incorporating the numerous non-industrial stoppages of that period into the statistical tally helps to rectify the historical record somewhat. As Hyman (1977: 171) observed "the increasing intervention of the state on the side of employers in industrial relations" in the 1970s meant that the traditional division between industrial and political activities became "largely meaningless." The vast majority of non-industrial stoppages were political *and* economic – they were directed against the state, but were mainly concerned with wages and working conditions. However, stoppages (or partial stoppages) that could be considered

strictly political – namely in support of political causes – were seemingly infrequent. Nevertheless, the breadth of causes supported by such political stoppages and bans – from nuclear free New Zealand to the environment and Maori land rights – was noteworthy. Some of these actions had significant impact, such as the green ban on Takaparawha/Bastion Point.

A few brief – and preliminary – points can be made about why these disputes occurred. Undoubtedly, they were caused by a complex combination of factors, especially the overall economic and political context. The long 1970s were characterised by the end of the post-WWII long economic boom due to various dynamics, including the oil shock of 1973-4. The state tended to assume that wage increases were the primary cause of the high inflation of the period (Deeks & Boxall, 1989). Consequently, successive governments attempted to curb strike activity, and introduced an extensive series of wage controls from the early 1970s. Indeed, Boston (1984) notes that New Zealand was subject to a higher degree of governmental wage restraints from the early 1970s to mid-1980s than any other country in the Organisation for Economic Development. He also points out that these incomes policies were imposed by successive governments rather than introduced through voluntary agreements between the government and unions, as they were in many other countries. Indeed, unlike many of its European counterparts, the peak union bodies – the FOL and Combined State Unions – opposed wage controls and often encouraged their affiliated unions to take action against them (Boston, 1984). It was this often bitter clash between the state and unions that helps explain to a large extent the high level of non-industrial stoppages

In contrast, unions denied that high inflation was largely caused by wage demands, and asserted they were mainly the product of businesses increasing prices in order to overcome their declining profitability in the context of a major and lengthy recession. Hence from this perspective, workers undertook what Silver (2003) calls a defensive strike wave in the 1970s – although this was not just in response to government attempts to limit wage increases and dampen strike activity, but also a response to the actions of employers. Van der Velden (2007) notes that major strike waves often occur in the transitional period from economic upswing to downswing, as most workers expect their standard of living to continue to rise.

At the same time as the Keynesian compromise broke down between unions, the state and employers, the broader political, cultural and social context was one of ferment from below, the long 1970s was New Zealand's 1960s, meaning it was a decade of widespread dissent (Boraman, 2016). Numerous mass grassroots political movements arose from the late 1960s, including the anti-war, anti-nuclear, anti-apartheid and environmental movements, and a major renewal in Maori protest and the feminist movement also occurred. While only a minority of the population participated in these protests, they did have extensive effect. For example, a degree of cross-fertilisation took place between these movements and unions (Locke, 2012; 2015). Simply put, the breadth of dissent in society contributed to the breadth of union action undertaken in the long 1970s.

During the long 1970s, the state's attempts to limit or prohibit the occurrence of non-industrial (and other) stoppages arguably led to increasing confrontations, at least until the late 1970s and early 1980s. Today, while non-industrial (including political) stoppages continue to be prohibited, such stoppages are seemingly virtually non-existent. This reflects many factors: the wholesale lurch away from governments employing what Deeks and Rasmussen (2002: 320) call the "power model" of setting wages to a "laissez-faire model" in 1984, accompanied with a decrease in direct state intervention in disputes. Yet, it also reflects two long-term trends: firstly, the general lull in strike and broader protest activity since about

the early 1990s (Boraman, 2016), and secondly – and more significantly – the sharp decline in workers’ bargaining power and associational (or organisational) power under globalisation and neoliberalism (Silver, 2003; Van der Velden, 2007). Far from being laissez-faire, Duménil and Lévy (2005) argue that this represents a “new discipline of labour” by capital and the state. It has not only contributed to a decline in stoppages, but also to a narrowing of the political and social priorities of the labour movement.

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