

**United We Stand. Divided We Fall**  
**Commemoration of The Blackball '08 Strike. Easter 2008**

The Blackball miners' strike of 1908 triggered the formation of the trade union movement in New Zealand/Aotearoa. The strike gave energy to the formation of the first national unions and then to the first Trade Union Federation (the Red Feds). As the movement gathered steam, it became the period when militant socialism in NZ flexed its muscles.

The commemoration of Blackball '08 was held over Easter to celebrate this contribution to the working class history of NZ/Aotearoa and to remember the principles of solidarity, equality of opportunity and collective ownership that lay behind that contribution.

More than 200 people from the union and labour movement registered for the weekend, many of them with family links to the 08 strikers. The programme stretched over three days, starting with a re-union dinner on the Friday night provided by a small group of women from the Blackball Workingmen's Club and was followed by poems, speeches, songs from Choir, Choir Pants on Fire and the book launch of 'The Great '08' by historian, Brian Wood.

Saturday saw a celebration of working class culture with a parade through Blackball with floats from unions, schools and community groups, followed by a ceremony at the old mine entrance where the names of the strikers were read out and family members spoke.

In the evening more than 200 people attended a concert of union songs featuring the West Coast Wobblers, Spanner in the Works and Choir Choir Pants on Fire. The concert was followed by a community theatre production; Rain, Love and Coalsmoke, three plays written and directed by Paul Maunder which featured a national and local cast. These theatrical snapshots of key moments in Blackball history were woven together by commentary from a tangatawhenua chorus figure.

A seminar celebrating working class history was held on the Sunday in the Blackball Workingmen's Club, full to overflowing. Speakers included Eric Beardsley, Peter Clayworth, Mark Derby, Andrew Little, Melanie Nolan, Neville Bennett, Graham Coghlan, Peter Franks and Sue Bradford.

The weekend wound up with a rip-roaring dance at the Blackball community hall on the Sunday night. The last revellers were reported to have wound their way back to their beds at around 3am.

The commemoration of the '08 strike was both successful and revealing. For one weekend it celebrated the memory of socialist ideals and union activism. It generated unity and a healing of traditional divisions. It was a celebration and remembrance of what once was and of what, with consciousness, anger and solidarity, could be again.

*Come all of you good workers  
Good news to you I'll tell  
Of how the good old Union  
Has come in here to dwell*

*Which side are you on, which side are you on*

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