

THE STRIKE AT WAIORONGOMAI IN 1884

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Abstract: *After the initial crushing produced lower returns than expected, the decision of mine owners to reduce costs by cutting wages provoked a strike to retain the former rates of pay. A particular cause of the sense of injustice was the unexpected manner in which this decision was announced. The owners' justification of having no alternative was accepted by some but challenged by others, with some newspapers supporting the miners. A widely predicted outcome, that the best miners would leave the field, would be fulfilled. The strike gradually faded, leaving some strikers facing retribution, although the miner who chaired the meeting that voted to strike was not one of those.*

Wages were also cut in the battery and on the tramway, provoking a strike on the latter. Although the employers won, the strike and the resultant loss of good workers meant another lowering of the reputation of the field.

START OF THE STRIKE

STRIKE OF THE MINERS

Attempted Reduction of Wages

Very considerable excitement was occasioned at the townships of Te Aroha and Waiorongomai on Saturday evening, when it became known that the directors of the leading mines on the field had decided to reduce the wages of the workmen from nine shillings to eight shillings per day. Most of the mine managers had been made acquainted with the proposal during their visit to Auckland during the Christmas holidays, and they came up quite prepared to explain the intention of the directors. When the news got about here, the miners speedily collected in little knots, and it was soon apparent that there was a strong healthy public opinion against the change in the rate of wage. Work should have started at most of the mines on Monday, but with one exception not a pick was put in the ground in these mines in which it had been announced wages had been reduced. At that time the only mines of consequence in which the rate of pay was not changed were the Waiorongomai and Phoenix. In the Eureka, the manager himself [James Richard Shaw Wilson]¹ guaranteed his men the shilling a day out of his own pocket if they would go to work, and most of them complied with his request. At about 10 o'clock on Monday morning the miners, to the number of 200, assembled near the battery, and order having been obtained Mr Thomas Gavin,

¹ See paper on the Eureka mine.

manager of the New Find,² officially announced the decision of the directors. He said that the step had been induced by the fact that most of the mines were not paying. As a part recompense, however, for the reduction, huts would be erected for the men, and if they desired it their provisions would be taken up the tramway at 1s per cwt. He severely criticised the action of one of the mine managers [Wilson?] in going away from the meeting and taking his men with him. In conclusion he asked them to remember that a number of men would be thrown out of work if the mines were stopped, and requested them to consider whether they would accept the reduction or not and communicate with the managers. The mine managers then withdrew, and Mr [Hamilton] Verity³ having been voted to the chair, he asked all who were disinclined to accept the reduction to step to the right. There was a simultaneous movement of all present in the direction mentioned, and the result was hailed with loud cheers. Several having spoken in favour of fighting against the reduction, a deputation was appointed to communicate the result to the mine managers. The latter having learned that the men steadfastly refused to agree to the interference with the rate of wage, they, through Mr Gavin, telegraphed to Auckland. The reply was that the directors would not alter their decision. When this was made known to the men they gave three cheers and determined not to work in the mines at the reduced pay. Since then no work has been done, and a good many of the men have already packed up their swags and left the district.⁴

This *Te Aroha News* report was the most detailed one to be published about the start of the strike on Saturday, 5 January 1884. It did not mention that the truckers, who pushed ore trucks out of the mines, would have their wages reduced to seven shillings a day.⁵ Another account of this meeting noted that ‘the proceedings were orderly’.⁶

WORKERS’ COMPLAINTS

What caused particular complaint was that on Christmas Eve, when miners received their last pay for the year, the companies kept back one

² See paper on his life.

³ See below.

⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 January 1884, p. 24.

⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 January 1884, p. 3.

week's wages and told them to have a fortnight's holiday.⁷ Many then left for Auckland, where they spent their money freely.⁸

The men complain that they were led into a trap, and that they ought to have received notice at Christmas that wages would be reduced. The directors of the companies must have seen the implication they would be under, and the equivocal position they would be placed in by passing a resolution to reduce wages under such a combination of circumstances unfavourable and unfair to their working men.⁹

Another reason for feeling they had been misled was that, at the banquet celebrating the first crushing, James McCosh Clark of the Battery Company¹⁰ had supported protection because it meant higher wages,¹¹ but then cut the pay.¹² In mid-January complaints were 'rife in some quarters that wages due up to Christmas time and tradesmen's accounts for mining requisites' remained unpaid. This was 'most unfair to the men, and calculated to increase rather than diminish the present difficulty'.¹³ Only after some delay was the arrears paid, 'as the law if invoked would have compelled payment'.¹⁴ It was believed that, had the companies announced the cuts before Christmas, 'comparatively little demur would have been made'.¹⁵ A Te Aroha resident argued that, if it had not been possible before Christmas to inform the miners, 'then the men should have been allowed to resume work at the previous rate of wage, with a notice that after a certain date it would be lowered'. Had that happened, it was 'very probable that the reduction would have been quietly submitted to, and there would have been no stoppage'.¹⁶

⁷ *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 January 1884, p. 24.

⁸ Michael Landers, 'A Trip to Te Aroha and Ohinemuri Districts', *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1884, p. 13.

⁹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 19 January 1884, p. 24.

¹⁰ See paper on this company.

¹¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 15 December 1883, p. 7.

¹² *Labour*, 31 January 1884, p. 5.

¹³ *New Zealand Herald*, 17 January 1884, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Labour*, 31 January 1884, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 31 January 1884, p. 2.

¹⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 11 January 1884, p. 2.

¹⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 January 1884, p. 10.

THE DIRECTORS' POSITION

The stated reason for the reduction was economic necessity, Gavin telling the miners' meeting that it was 'on account of most of the mines not yet being payable'.¹⁷ On 7 January, when a joint meeting of directors rejected the miners' demand that the rate of 9s per day be continued, one reason was 'that living is not more expensive at Waiorongomai than elsewhere'.¹⁸ When a strikers' meeting was told 'the directors had declined to reconsider their decision, the men cheered, and again affirmed their determination not to work under 9s per day'.¹⁹

One Te Aroha resident absolved the directors of blame for anything other than lack of advance notice, for their 'honourable' motives were 'a pure and simple intention of lessening the expenses of working' and without 'the slightest idea of taking any undue advantage of the men'.²⁰ A more typical view was 'Nemo', a columnist in the *Thames Star*, who repeated an 'ugly rumour' that the owners had said that, unless the miners went back to work on reduced wages, they would stop all work and close the battery for 12 months. 'Nemo' could 'hardly believe that such a suicidal policy would be attempted by any sane man, as there are other parties who are "just as powerful" interested in the continuous working of the now known paying claims', meaning mining officials.²¹

HAMILTON VERITY, STRIKE LEADER

Hamilton Verity, the miner who had chaired the meeting that resolved to strike, had not previously been antagonistic to capitalists. In December 1883, he chaired a miners' banquet at Waiorongomai to celebrate the first month's cleaning up at the battery. 'In an admirable address', he 'impressed upon all the advantages to be derived from the union of capital [and] labour, and not to have feelings of envy towards those who have so liberally responded to our need of capital to develop the mines because the venture is likely to turn out a profitable one for them'.²² Why he was chosen to chair

¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 January 1884, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 January 1884, p. 2.

¹⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 9 January 1884, p. 3.

²⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 January 1884, p. 10.

²¹ 'Nemo', 'At the Corner', *Thames Star*, 12 January 1881, p. 2.

²² *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1883, p. 3.

the miners' meeting may have been his popularity. In 1883 and 1884, he captained the Te Aroha football team, and in October 1884 captained the Waiorongomai team against Te Aroha.²³ During the strike, he played in the Te Aroha cricket team against Waiorongomai, and later in 1884 played for the Hill (meaning Quartzville, where he lived) against the Flat (meaning Waiorongomai).²⁴ His social life was hinted at in gossip recorded in the *Observer*. He was recorded as flirting with a daughter of John Bernard Kilian, a local storekeeper and hotelkeeper.²⁵ At a dance in November 1882, 'H V monopolized the fair Miss K'.²⁶ Later, included in a series of jests about a make-believe horse race, was 'Hamilton V. after Kilian Cup'.²⁷ Six months later, a Waiorongomai correspondent asked, 'What is the attraction of K's pub for H? Surely he has not forgotten the old love so soon?'²⁸ Whichever love he was pursuing, he did so in vain, for no marriage ensued. He also featured in other now-obscure gossip. In November 1882, 'some of H V's friends seem inclined to cavill with him on his decided preference for the cultivation of the poppy'.²⁹ In mid-1883, a Waiorongomai correspondent wrote, 'Shame on you, Jack O S, to jilt poor H V after as long as he lived the hermit',³⁰ an apparent reference to his sharing accommodation with a fellow-miner, John O'Shea.³¹ And what can now be made of 'What's the price of wool Verity?'³²

Any influence Verity had on the strike probably was a moderating one. He was not recorded as directing it after chairing the first meeting, although he may have done so; no other men were mentioned as playing a leading role. No further meetings were recorded apart from one to hear the directors' response, for apparently the miners had hoped their refusal to work would be sufficient for them to win. Verity continued to mine at Waiorongomai for over a year after the strike, living at Quartzville during

²³ *Thames Star*, 29 August 1883, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 24 September 1883, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 26 April 1884, p. 2, 11 October 1884, p. 2.

²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 7, 29 November 1884, p. 2.

²⁵ See paper on the Kilian family.

²⁶ *Observer*, 4 November 1882, p. 121.

²⁷ *Observer*, 3 March 1883, p. 394.

²⁸ 'Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 22 September 1883, p. 12.

²⁹ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 25 November 1882, p. 170.

³⁰ 'Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 30 June 1883, p. 229.

³¹ See *Te Aroha News*, 28 November 1940, p. 5.

³² 'Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 6 October 1883, p. 16.

1884,³³ not joining those who left the field because they refused to accept the new rate.

THE WARDEN'S VIEWS

Harry Kenrick, the warden,³⁴ sought to play a moderating role, as at a meeting held on 9 January:

A meeting of miners and others interested in the field, convened by the Warden, was held on Wednesday afternoon, in the paddock at the rear of the Court-house, Te Aroha. There were about 150 persons present. Mr Kenrick in commencing gave expression to his regret at the occurrence of the difference between the miners and their employers. It was unfortunate for this field, for the mine-owners and the miners themselves. It might be that his reason for speaking to them might be misconstrued elsewhere, but he considered it his duty in the interest of this goldfield to speak to them on this matter without expressing an opinion on the rights or wrongs of this dispute. He then went on to point out that the directors stated that after the late crushing they found that in most of the mines, if they did not reduce the expenditure they would have to close the mines, and they commenced the retrenchment on the miners' wages. He strongly urged them, however unpalatable it might be, to pause before they decided not to accept the 8s per diem. It was quite the average rate of wages ruling for the district and they should mind that they only worked 7 1/2 hours per day and four hours on Saturdays, so that the wage was not such a bad one. At any rate they had to consider their wives, and their families. If they decided to leave, only very few of them could obtain employment at the Thames, the capacity of which place for absorbing labour they well knew was limited. Some might get work on the swamps or in the farms, but an amount of travelling would need to have been done and some time wasted. Some of them would doubtless say "they would rather work elsewhere for a less wage than for these men at 8s, after the way they had treated them" on the principle of bite your nose to spite your face. The question for them to consider was: could they not better their condition by going elsewhere? He advised them to go to work, and if they saw anything better they could take their own time and leave. He reminded them that one advantage possessed by the Aroha over the Thames and adjoining goldfields was that it was a new district, and in the event of any new

³³ *Waikato Electoral Roll, 1884*, p. 22; *Te Aroha News*, 20 September 1884, p. 2, 29 November 1884, p. 2; *Thames Directory for 1886* (Thames, 1886), p. 171.

³⁴ See paper on his life.

discoveries all working men had the same chance of putting in their pegs and participating therein. At the Thames, they were all aware, that no new discoveries could be made that would benefit the miners to any extent. Fresh discoveries might benefit the companies or capitalists, but not the labour. Mr Kenrick then went on to say that he had represented to the directors that skilled and unskilled labour should not be paid at the same rate, but they had thought otherwise. Referring to the impression that had got abroad that he could compel the companies to man their ground or forfeit it, he pointed out that if the companies satisfied him that they had used all reasonable means to obtain men at a fair rate of pay he would grant them protection. He criticised the action of the companies in not giving the men notice of their intention to decrease the wages; the companies had placed the men in a corner and forced them to accept or decline at once. Had the men received a fortnight's notice, he felt sure that after they had talked it over amongst themselves they would have quietly gone to work at the 8s per day. In conclusion, he said it was a bitter pill to swallow, and they had to consider whether they should swallow it or go to another doctor. Several questions having been asked of the Warden, he withdrew. At the end of the address he was warmly applauded, but the advice to accept the reduction was received with solemn silence.³⁵

And ignored.

NEWSPAPER OPINION

Kenrick's disapproval of the directors' actions was common. A *Thames Advertiser* editorial, after unsympathetically examining the grumbles of the unemployed in the South Island, considered developments at Te Aroha:

The information from Te Aroha regarding the attempt to reduce the wages of the miners there comes in the nature of a complete surprise when the condition of things is considered. To begin with, it is not saying too much to aver that a portion of the very best class of Thames miners constitute the men who have been engaged at Te Aroha up to the present; men well worth a higher wage under even ordinary circumstances than the usual run of men engaged in mining, but in Te Aroha the circumstances are by no means ordinary, as the cost of living and supplies generally is greater than at the Thames, and the men are required to work in situations far from being as comfortable or attractive as those occupied by the majority of Thames men, who can retire to the

³⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

bosom of their families when their eight-hour shift is done. The Te Aroha men have to surrender nearly all the comforts of a home in order to be near their work, and on every ground are entitled to look for an increased rate of pay to that given in an old settled goldfield. The owners of the Te Aroha mines have been very badly advised by somebody in this matter, and the sooner they cheerfully submit to an adherence to the old rate of wage the better it will be for their own interests in every respect. The men are altogether right in refusing the terms proposed, and they need anticipate little difficulty in obtaining employment at the Thames should the directors of the Aroha mines be so stupid as to persist in their present supposed policy of making the wage of their men depend in a measure upon the grade of the stone produced, for this we take to be the meaning of the whole thing - the stone is low grade, therefore pay low wages. It is a great pity indeed, just at the beginning of the new year when the men engaged in the development of a practically new goldfield ought to be stimulated by their employers to put forth their best exertions in order to make the operations to be engaged in yield returns quite up to the expectations formed, that a damper should be put upon the whole field which, even after the cause is removed, will leave its ill effects in the retarded progress of the district. If ever there was a place in which the very best understanding and sympathy between capital and labour was necessary for its successful development, that place is Te Aroha; and whoever has advised the step just taken, so fraught with danger to the continued existence of that sympathy, has made a serious error, and one which will be seen in its effects long after the immediate cause of the present dead-lock has been removed. We take for granted, without the slightest hesitation, that the proposal to reduce the wages of the miners at Te Aroha will be dropped, there is no help for it - such must be the case; but it is a matter of extreme regret that such a cause of difference should ever have been raised between the directors and their men, when it is recollected what a splendid feeling has hitherto existed between them. Some evil effects are certain to follow the present strained relations between employers and employed, but those evils will best be reduced to a minimum by a frank admission being promptly made that the whole thing has arisen from an error or a mistake on the part of the mine owners and the prompt setting to work of the men to make up for the valuable time lost, which it is of extreme importance should be utilised to the fullest extent if Te Aroha is this year to take that rank as a gold producer which its capabilities, if wisely and spiritedly developed, entitle it to assume.³⁶

³⁶ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 8 January 1884, p. 2.

On the following day, this newspaper was 'very sorry indeed' that the directors would not back down, arguing that only 'the least valuable' miners would take the lower wage. 'The better workmen will probably drift away', reducing the 'already too limited' numbers needed to adequately man the ground, resulting in the abandonment of some claims. It hoped that terms would be reached to end the dispute, for a large exodus of labour would ruin the new field, at least for the present.³⁷ Although the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Auckland Star*, the *Thames Star*, and the *Waikato Times* did not express any editorial opinions, the *Te Aroha News* had very strong views:

The strike of the miners employed in our goldfield is a circumstance which may be fraught with the most serious consequences to this district. We had hoped when the tramway was completed, and the battery had started crushing, that we had left all our troubles behind us, and that we were to glide serenely along the uninterrupted current of prosperity. But this is not to be. No sooner have the people interested in the development of the field by Herculean efforts surmounted the most serious of the initial difficulties, than our struggles are jeopardised by a struggle between capital and labour. In referring to this unfortunate *contretemps*, we will begin by unhesitatingly stating that we sympathise to some extent with the men. The scale of wage - 9s per diem is little enough, when it is remembered that ordinary labourers are at present in receipt of 8s per day. Surely the discomforts for a Waiorongomai miner's life - separated from home and kindred, and living in a rough and primitive fashion, sufficiently far away from civilisation to deprive him of most of its benefits - should entitle him to at least one shilling per diem more than the ordinary labourer. And this is quite apart from the consideration that mining is a skilled calling, and entitled to payment as such and also that the cost of living here is considerably higher than on other goldfields on the Cape Colville Peninsula. An old Thames miner, whose word we place implicit reliance in, assures us that he could live at Grahamstown for just half what it costs him to subsist up the hill. Those who have instigated this most unwise step have displayed considerable cunning in choosing a fitting period for striking the blow at the miners; they knew that the Christmas festivities would have made a serious inroad on their little savings, and no doubt believed that they would be forced to accept the reduction without a murmur. But these clever gentlemen have made a grave miscalculation and we misinterpret the feeling of the miners greatly if they do not hold out as long as the mine owners. There is plenty of work in the district and sooner than be beaten the

³⁷ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 January 1884, p. 2.

men would go swamping or platelaying. The excuse given for the reduction is that some of the mines are not paying. Now this is a most unfair argument for capital to raise in a contention with labour, and for this reason: When a commercial venture is paying the owners would never think of inviting the employees to participate in the profits, and, *au contraire*, they should not think of asking them to bear a share of the loss. On other grounds the excuse is a hollow one. The New Find mine is paying; why should the wages of its employees be reduced? The directors, to be consistent, should increase the wages of the men employed in that mine. To our minds the most contemptible thing in this unfortunate affair is the manner in which the reduction was made. Even those who may consider the decrease necessary will be compelled to admit that it was "a right thing done in a wrong way." The men were permitted to go to Auckland and elsewhere for their holidays without a word being said concerning the nice little surprise that had been prepared for them on their return. They came back, many of them light in pocket, and they were forced on the spur of the moment to take the money offered or shake the dust of Aroha from their feet. We are inclined to think, with Mr Kenrick, that had the companies given a week or a fortnight's notice of their intention, that most of the men, though feeling themselves hardly used would have decided to continue at work. And now just one word of warning to the mine owners. Should the strike continue, it will be found impossible to re-man the hill with experienced workmen. Most of the ground is strong, irregularly, stratified "shooting" ground, and to break it to advantage the highest technical knowledge is required. The result of the employment of unqualified men will be an increase in the "mining requisites" bills that will more than counterbalance the saving of the shilling per day in the men's wages. The whole matter bears indications that the directors have been badly advised, and we trust that they will speedily reconsider their decision and meet the miners in a fair and generous manner.

The editorial concluded by approvingly quoting the *Thames Advertiser's* criticism of the owners.³⁸

SYMPATHISERS

A visitor from Auckland also sympathized with the miners. 'Goodness knows, nine shillings a day is little enough for a man working on such hard and wet ground, and using dynamite, the deleterious fumes of which are

³⁸ Editorial, *Te Aroha News*, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

slow death to some men'.³⁹ Richard Wiseman included the following verses in his 'Te Aroha Touches', sung at Thames on 28 January at the Oddfellows' Anniversary celebration (the first stanza referred to the scandal over the first crushing):⁴⁰

So that unscrupulous schemers thrive by other people's ruin;
Whole districts are now languishing thro' such nefarious doing;
Manipulating of the scrip, and the cold water squeezing;
And to reduce the miner's wage the chance some now are seizing.

Their motto, "Weakest to the wall," a week's wage kept as binding
That they'd ensure the men's return, and now new terms are finding.
But, men, be firm - reject these terms! - boldly resist their offers!
Or pinch yourselves and families, so they enrich their coffers.⁴¹

Thomas Lawless, licensee of the Waiorongomai Hotel,⁴² and an owner of nine claims,⁴³ gave practical assistance, as explained by a friend of 'Nemo':

A boniface on the field had generously come to the front with an offer of one month's "grub" free gratis for nothing, "on trust" for better times. The hardy miner won't forget that - especially if pints are added. Such *Lawless* conduct on his part will be resented by the directors, put the *Scotty* [ill-tempered]⁴⁴ managers in a White heat, and even agitate the almost imperturbable calm of the worthy McDonnell.⁴⁵

³⁹ M[ichael] Landers, 'A Trip to Te Aroha and Ohinemuri Districts', *Freeman's Journal*, 28 March 1884, p. 13.

⁴⁰ See paper on this crushing.

⁴¹ Richard Wiseman, 'Te Aroha Touches', performed on 28 January 1884, printed in *Thames Star*, 30 July 1927, p. 6 [wrongly recorded as Robert Wiseman].

⁴² See paper on his life.

⁴³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 2, 13, 29, 39, 53, 54, 150, 152, 155, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

⁴⁴ Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 1038.

⁴⁵ 'Nemo', 'At the Corner', *Thames Star*, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

The allusions were to Roderick McDonald Scott,⁴⁶ Francis Angus White,⁴⁷ and Dennis Gilmore MacDonnell,⁴⁸ legal managers of the principal mines.

Two miners gave newspapers their assessment of the causes and consequences of cutting wages. ‘Miner’ of *Te Aroha* thanked the *Thames Advertiser* for its editorial, which ‘afforded general satisfaction to everyone here’, especially as the *Te Aroha News* appeared ‘to be the mouthpiece of a clique who have endeavoured from the first to work everything for their own sole advantage’. (Although this might have been the case when previously owned by Harry Whitaker,⁴⁹ he must have missed the point of its editorial.) He argued that, ‘finding the pressure too heavy on the mines’, the directors had decided to cut wages rather than try to reduce excessive battery charges. The clique was trying to ‘retain the enormous battery profits, at the expense of the miner’. He insisted the mines were payable, for many miners were ‘very willing to take them on tribute at from 15 to 20%’.⁵⁰ ‘A Miner’, in the *Te Aroha News* of 26 January, claimed the directors, mostly Aucklanders, had caused share values to fall and worsened the scarcity of skilled miners. Before the strike, managers ‘were taking on every good man they could get, and were hoping to get a good many more after the holidays’. The directors’ action ‘not only prevented others from coming but has driven most of the best men off the field’. Less skilled miners created higher costs, including ‘the loss of blasting materials, which is very heavy’. He insisted the companies were not short of money, ‘having considerable funds in hand’. If directors chose to ‘throw away’ their capital

by giving so many thousands of scrip for the privilege of paying an exorbitant price for crushing their quartz, it is unjust to try and make their employees pay for it. I think there will always have to be more wages given here than at the Thames and other places where the men can be at home with their families every night, for here the miners are so far away in the hills that the men can only go home once or twice a-week, consequently having

⁴⁶ See *Observer*, 3 October 1903, p. 5, 17 June 1905, p. 17.

⁴⁷ See *Waikato Times*, 22 July 1893, p. 2; *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 December 1895, p. 9, 26 August 1898, p. 36, 7 September 1900, p. 14, 14 September 1900, p. 34.

⁴⁸ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 7, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁹ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

⁵⁰ Letter from ‘Miner’, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 January 1884, p. 3.

to keep two houses open. Had the reduction been delayed for a year there might have been a better class of workman settled here, and would, perhaps, rather have taken the reduction than move their families; but as it is, many of the best men are gone, and there are not enough left to work the mines, so the wages will have to be raised to get men.⁵¹

A NON-SYMPATHISER

The Te Aroha correspondent of the *New Zealand Herald* had a very different opinion:

Beyond not having received notice, I do not think the miners here are being at all hardly used in being offered 8s for, beside this, they are to have comfortable houses built for them on the claims, and also their provisions taken up the hill on the tramway at a very cheap rate. Nor is there any comparison between the work here and on the Thames. Here there is none of the foul air and close atmosphere that the miners there have to contend against. The advantages in this respect, and they are not of little moment either, are all in favour of Te Aroha claims. It has been suggested that a very feasible way out of the present difficulty might be arrived at by adopting, wherever practicable (and this might be in almost all cases), the contract system. Then the men would be paid just according to what they did, and perhaps if this system can be carried out, as I am assured it can, it might be worth while giving it a trial. No system of payment, however, will ever be satisfactory to either employers or employed which does not recognise the principle of paying a man according to his work. It has been the setting aside of this principle on the Te Aroha field which has in a great measure tended to bring about the present unsatisfactory state of affairs. It never has paid, and never will pay, to employ men as miners who are not miners, and especially is this the case where quartz is only of [low] grade quality, as it is here, and the sooner the directors interested recognise this fact, and also act up to it, the better it will be for our mines and the field.⁵²

Two days later, he claimed 'the general feeling' at Te Aroha 'amongst disinterested parties' was that 'although the men were treated somewhat unfairly in not having warning given them before the holidays that the wages were to be lowered', they were harming themselves 'in not

⁵¹ Letter from 'A Miner', *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 7.

⁵² Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 12 January 1884, p. 6.

overlooking that little mistake, and going to work at the proffered eight shillings'. There was 'no doubt' the companies could not afford to pay more than what was 'the general rate' throughout Hauraki. 'They will have no difficulty either in obtaining men at that price, if those at present here do not care to accept it'.⁵³

THE STRIKE SLOWLY FAILS

On 9 January, a correspondent reported mining only in the very small number of mines yet to reduce wages. There was 'plenty of swamping work', meaning digging drains in the nearby swamps, 'and the majority of the miners would sooner tackle it than submit to the reduction'.⁵⁴ On the following day, another correspondent wrote that 'neither side' seemed inclined 'to give way in the least'. A few miners had left, and more were talking of leaving, but the majority remained, 'evidently hanging on under the impression that the companies will give way, which they don't seem inclined to do'.⁵⁵ One day later, another newspaper reported that the miners were 'thoroughly determined'. Out of nearly 200 men, only about eight were working, 'in mines whose owners have not intimated any intention' of lowering wages; the remainder were loitering around the townships. Because of the hardship of married men being 'obliged to support two homes in different districts', the directors had agreed to erect houses for miners near the claims and 'to convey the necessities of life over the tramway at a merely nominal cost, thus lessening the expense of living, and in some degree compensating for the vexatious reduction of pay'.⁵⁶ In practice, there were no reports of companies cutting the cost of transporting goods to those living on the hill,⁵⁷ and only the Premier, Colonist, and Arizona companies erected miners' huts at Quartzville.⁵⁸

⁵³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 12 January 1884, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 9 January 1884, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 11 January 1884, p. 2.

⁵⁷ See Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 27 September 1884, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 9, 10/1884, BBAV 11505/1a; E.K. Cooper to Warden, 23 June 1884, Mining Applications 1884, 23/766, BBAV 11289/10a, ANZ-A.

‘Good miners’ were leaving.⁵⁹ On 14 January, a correspondent wrote that over three days ‘a large number, probably 50’, of the strikers had left for ‘Thames and elsewhere. Little or no work whatever’ was going on, ‘except a contract or two’ employing ‘a few hands’.⁶⁰ Four days later he reported that ‘most’ of the strikers, ‘the best of them’, had left.⁶¹ Those who sought work on farms were welcomed by farmers, being ‘just in the nick of time’ to assist with harvesting.⁶² One correspondent noted the ‘deserted appearance’ of Waiorongomai. ‘On enquiry as to where were the men the reply was given that for the most part they had gone in most cases for good’.⁶³

With the steady departure of miners and some contracts being let, one correspondent, in a report published on 23 January, estimated that no more than 30 men were still unemployed, ‘and a number of these will find employment in connection with the new battery works’.⁶⁴ This was a reference to the much anticipated but never erected Excelsior battery at the foot of Butler’s Spur.⁶⁵ Several men were working in the New Find at the new rate, ‘and I have heard threats that steps will be taken by the “strikers” to prevent them working. Eight or nine contracts have been let in various mines recently, and all the contractors are paying their men nine shillings a day’.⁶⁶ Any threats against anyone blacklegging came to nothing. ‘Nemo’ was pleased that the ‘only one attempt to boycott’ miners resulted in ‘the sturdy digger’ refusing to stop work, ‘and the delegate who was sent to order the man out of his drive was requested to send his friends in two at a time, to receive an “explanation,” which was, however, not demanded’.⁶⁷

In late January, a correspondent complained that miners were ‘sauntering about doing nothing but grumbling and expressing their determination more strongly than ever not to accept the terms offered by

⁵⁹ *Thames Star*, 11 January 1884, p. 2, 12 January 1884, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 15 January 1884, p. 2.

⁶¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 19 January 1884, p. 2.

⁶² *Te Aroha News*, 23 February 1884, p. 2.

⁶³ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 19 January 1884, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 23 January 1884, p. 2.

⁶⁵ Harry Kenrick to Under-Secretary, Gold Fields, 19 April 1883, *AJHR*, H-5, p. 16; *Observer*, 7 July 1883, p. 248; *Waikato Times*, 13 November 1883, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 15 December 1883, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 23 January 1884, p. 2.

⁶⁷ ‘Nemo’, ‘At the Corner’, *Thames Star*, 2 February 1884, p. 2.

the directors. Many of them have left, and others are doing so every day'. While the contract system was the solution, he admitted this was 'impossible in some cases'. A compromise 'of some sort' was required that would give managers discretion 'to employ labour at a scale of wages to be fixed upon, and so bring things to a satisfactory conclusion'. Had only 'practical miners' been employed, it was 'very questionable whether the directors would have had any cause to complain of the amount of work done. It will certainly not pay on this field to employ any but the very best men'.⁶⁸ This suggestion of a scale of wages was not adopted.

One correspondent reported, on 22 January, that mining was 'exceedingly quiet', only a 'little' being done by contractors. It was believed the companies did not want 'to resume work until more satisfactory arrangements can be made with the Battery Company in reference to the treatment of tailings, for until all the gold can be obtained from the tailings it will not pay some of the companies to continue crushing as they have been'.⁶⁹ If this rumour was correct, miners' hopes of forcing companies to resume work on the old rate were futile. Two days later, mining was underway in the New Find, Arizona, Inverness, and Eureka.⁷⁰ On the following day, a correspondent reported that wages men had 'started in the Premier, and even the most hotheaded of the strikers do not see the advisability of holding our longer. I predict that in a week all will be at work'.⁷¹ Having ignored the strike in its issue of 19 January, in the next issue, published on 26 January, the *Te Aroha News* reported that 'the celebrated miners' strike' was 'at last showing signs of dissolution. Fully half the miners cleared out during the first ten days of the dispute', and of those left no more than 20 were out of work. 'A considerable number' were employed in contracts in the New Find, Colonist, and Alphabet, and other mines, and some were waiting for tenders to be accepted for the planned Excelsior battery. 'A good number of the strikers have quietly gone to work at eight shillings per diem, and now that their edge of the wedge has been got in, it does not require a Jeremiah to prophecy that eight shillings will soon become the ruling wage'.⁷² The *Thames Advertiser* agreed the strike appeared 'likely to become a thing of the past within a few days'. In addition

⁶⁸ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 26 January 1884, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 23 January 1884, p. 6.

⁷⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 24 January 1884, p. 5.

⁷¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 25 January 1884, p. 2.

⁷² *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 2.

to the 50 or so who had taken up contracts, about 40 were harvesting on neighbouring farms, and about 20 had 'resignedly accepted' reduced wages in the *New Find* and *Colonist*. In some smaller claims miners were paid at the old rate, as were several contractors. There remained 'about 20 malcontents hanging around the townships' and preventing others 'willing to resume work from accepting the companies' terms'.⁷³

On 1 February, there were only 'about a dozen of obdurate miners who declare that they will not submit to the terms', but 'still hover about the field'.⁷⁴ One correspondent claimed 'all parties' felt 'great satisfaction' that the strike had ended.⁷⁵ Reluctantly, miners had accepted the new rate.⁷⁶ As some strikers still refused to give up, not until 28 February did one correspondent consider the strike could 'be said to have collapsed', as mining had resumed in all the principal claims.⁷⁷

AFTERMATH

On 16 February, the local newspaper wrote that, although the strike was 'virtually at an end', its effects would 'for some time to come be felt by all classes of the community. A slow, but gradual revival' was apparent, although work was slow to restart in the Premier because of the 'scarcity of suitable men'.⁷⁸ Prophecies that the most skilled miners would leave were fulfilled. Correspondents wrote, early in February, that as 'the best of the men' had left there was a demand 'for good miners. Many claims are undermanned, and cannot get the hands'.⁷⁹ So many returned to Thames that there was 'a glut in the labour market'.⁸⁰

OTHER WAGE CUTS, AND ONE OTHER STRIKE

⁷³ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 January 1884, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 February 1884, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 31 January 1881, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Industrial Gazette and Pastoral and Agricultural News*, 15 February 1883, p. 31.

⁷⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 28 February 1884, p. 3.

⁷⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 16 February 1884, p. 2; see also 2 February 1884, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 5 February 1884, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Weekly News*, 9 February 1884, p. 13.

⁸⁰ Thames Correspondent, *Freeman's Journal*, 1 February 1884, p. 5.

The directors of the Battery Company took the opportunity provided by their plant being shut down because of the strike to reduce the wages of amalgamators from £4 to £3 7s per week.⁸¹ No response of any kind was reported. Then, on 24 January, the tramway workers were told that their wages would be reduced from 9s to 8s per day, and told to respond on the following day.⁸² Once again, this ultimatum had been made without prior notice. They responded immediately:

NOTICE

THE WAIORONGOMAI TRAMWAY COMPANY having reduced the wages to 8s, the men have refused to work, and REQUEST all other men to KEEP AWAY till the strike is over.
William Marshall/Thos. Skillon⁸³

(Marshall has not been traced, but Skillon, a former soldier, would later be secretary of the Miners' Union at Huntly.)⁸⁴ Because their wages had not been cut at the same time as the miners' and they had been kept at work repairing the line rather than dismissed as had been ordered,⁸⁵ the tramway workers had been 'led to believe that their wages were not to be touched'. As their employers waited until some miners accepted the reduced rate before announcing the cut, the *Te Aroha News* considered that 'the unity in which lay their strength was lost, and they will have to accept the inevitable'.⁸⁶ The employers' response to the strike was to warn they were considering obtaining workers from Auckland, 'or failing that to let a contract for the delivery of quartz from the mine hoppers to the battery at so much a truck'.⁸⁷ Faced with these threats, although the notice was reprinted in all newspapers until 6 February, on 28 January traffic started

⁸¹ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 11 January 1884, p. 2, 25 January 1884, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 7.

⁸² Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 25 January 1884, p. 2.

⁸³ Notice, *Waikato Times*, 26 January 1884, p. 3; Notice, *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 7.

⁸⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 17 February 1891, p. 5, Huntly Correspondent, 21 May 1891, p. 6; *Auckland Star*, 19 October 1908, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Auckland Star*, 11 January 1884, p. 2.

⁸⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 26 January 1884, p. 2.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Waikato Times*, 26 January 1884, p. 2; Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 26 January 1884, p. 5.

once again.⁸⁸ According to the *Te Aroha News*, the strike ‘collapsed somewhat ignominiously. Some of the men have returned to work at 8s per diem, and the places of seven have been filled from other sources’.⁸⁹ Fourteen men were needed, but 16 had applied for work.⁹⁰ Although one newspaper stated they had returned on condition that the hours of work were shortened,⁹¹ no reduction was reported.

One newspaper reported ‘a species of mild terrorism’ was used to warn men not to return.⁹² It must have been extremely mild, for the men returned to work within about three days of striking. Two of the strike leaders whose names are known, Thomas Skillon and Alexander Jamieson,⁹³ cannot have been ‘terrorists’, for both were re-employed after it ended.⁹⁴

RETRIBUTION

On 9 February, ‘Miner’ asked the *Te Aroha News*: ‘Is it true that some of the mine managers have refused a man a job because he took a leading part in the strike? If it is so it is scandalous, and should be exposed’.⁹⁵ No answer was published, but later correspondence with the warden’s office revealed this rumour was true. On 14 April, one miner, Joseph Lynch,⁹⁶ applied for a residence site license on the Wellington claim so that he would obtain possession of the whare in which he was living. The managing director, Edward Kersey Cooper,⁹⁷ thereupon explained to Kenrick that, during the strike, ‘Lynch had a great deal to say and I as the Managing director of the Arizona Gold Mining Company told Lowe the manager to get rid of him, out of courtesy Lowe allowed Lynch to still occupy his bunk in the whare’. (The manager, Edwin Wass Lowe,⁹⁸ later founded the Thames

⁸⁸ *Waikato Times*, 29 January 1884, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 2 February 1884, p. 2.

⁹⁰ *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 February 1884, p. 13.

⁹¹ *Thames Star*, 30 January 1884, p. 2.

⁹² *Auckland Weekly News*, 2 February 1884, p. 13.

⁹³ See *Thames Star*, 28 July 1890, p. 4; *Thames Advertiser*, 1 January 1891, p. 2.

⁹⁴ *Waikato Times*, 19 July 1884, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 27 September 1884, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Letter from ‘Miner’, *Te Aroha News*, 9 February 1884, p. 7.

⁹⁶ His life has not been traced.

⁹⁷ See paper on his life.

⁹⁸ See *Thames Star*, 27 November 1883, p. 2; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 862.

Miners' Union.)⁹⁹ When told to leave, Lynch refused to hand over the keys so that Lowe could occupy it, but in July agreed to withdraw his application,¹⁰⁰ and was never heard of again on this goldfield.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

Some saw wider implications in this strike. *Labour*, a journal newly published by the Dunedin and Auckland Trade and Labour Councils, devoted part of its first issue, of 31 January, to it. As 'prospectors were poor', the public had to supply money for development and interests in the mines were transferred to 'speculators':¹⁰¹

Having the ear of the Government of the colony, being possessed of political influence, and the control of votes in the General Assembly, the speculators obtained a large grant of public money, to aid them in carrying out their private undertakings. Stripped of disguise, the matter stands thus. The prospectors found the gold, the public found the money to prove the mines; when the mines were proved shares in them were given to speculators to erect machinery; and the people from the North Cape to the Bluff were taxed to aid in making roads and tramways to improve and to develop private property. There was no sentiment in the transaction whatever. All the fustian that has been written about energy, patriotism, and enterprise, on this matter, is fustian and nothing more. Those who put up the machinery thought they had got a good thing; and if they had not put it up some other persons would.

It hoped miners who obtained employment elsewhere had 'more reputable employers', for their former ones knew the men, 'when returning from their holiday, would be short of money and would take what wages were offered them. The petty meanness of the transaction is very valuable

⁹⁹ See paper on this union.

¹⁰⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Application 32/766 for Residence Site, with attached letters of E.K. Cooper to Harry Kenrick, 23 June 1884 and E.K. Cooper to George Wilson, 25 July 1884, Mining Applications 1884, BBAV 11289/10a, ANZ-A; [Cooper's letters mislaid in the archives file but photocopies made by David Bettison in the 1970s are held in the archives of the University of Waikato Library].

¹⁰¹ *Labour*, 31 January 1884, p. 4.

to us as a guide, showing what those who have the direction of the mines would do if their power were equal to their greed'.¹⁰²

The journal asked miners to appoint a correspondent to keep it informed of their grievances. The Auckland Trades and Labour Council discussed the strike 'but pressure of other matters' prevented it 'coming to any definite conclusion'.¹⁰³ If it ever did reach one, it took no action. A correspondent was appointed, or appointed himself, and on 13 May reported the aftermath of the strike from the miners' point of view. Because of the wage cut,

most of the best men left the district, and their places were filled up by the inferior men engaged at the lower scale of wage. Soon the owners of mines discovered the quartz cost more to win under the new system than it did under the old. The greater number of men required, their want of experience – which causes them to exclude much of the best quartz in picking it over for crushing – and a grievance at present existing between miners and mine owners with regard to the Saturday half-holiday, have been for some time past ruining a payable field. Last week the climax occurred. Mine owners it appears have decided to pay no more wages, but to carry on the mines by contract work only. Consequently the men in most of the principal mines were discharged at a moment's notice, and a fortnight's pay kept in hand. This will, of course, have the intended effect of keeping the men hanging about until they consent to take contracts at losing rates.... A most perilous step has been taken by the mine owners, and one that may end in the ruin of the field. The miners have been most unjustly treated, and it only remains for them to clear out or taking losing contracts and strive along as best they can.¹⁰⁴

CONCLUSION

Mining resumed with the wages of miners, truckers, tramway workers, and amalgamators lowered to reduce costs. Contemporaries were unanimous that lowering wages meant lowering the skills, for the best miners departed. Those remaining were required to compete for contracts intended to benefit owners not miners. In reality, the main financial burdens were not wages alone but high tramway and battery charges. The

¹⁰² *Labour*, 31 January 1884, p. 5; portion cut out of original, but reprinted in *Thames Star*, 31 January 1884, p. 2.

¹⁰³ *Labour*, 31 January 1884, p. 5.

¹⁰⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *Labour*, 22 May 1884, p. 6.

strikes, forced upon the workers by their employers and coming so quickly after the allegations of share manipulations during the first month's controversial crushing, created further odium for the field without resolving any of its problems.