

MICHAEL DINEEN O'KEEFFE: PRESIDENT OF THE THAMES
MINERS' UNION

Philip Hart

Te Aroha Mining District Working Papers

No. 154

Revised on March 16, 2017

Historical Research Unit
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences
The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton, New Zealand

ISSN: 2463-6266

© 2016 Philip Hart

Contact: prhart1940@gmail.com



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

MICHAEL DINEEN O'KEEFFE: PRESIDENT OF THE THAMES MINERS' UNION

Abstract: *An Irishman, O'Keeffe remained very 'Irish' throughout his long life as a miner. Arriving in New Zealand in 1879, he moved to Te Aroha in 1881 and became one of the more prominent miners at Waiorongomai. Partly because of his wit and vibrant personality he was prominent in the community, and assisted efforts to aid mining and the district more generally. Financially he struggled, for instance being unable to develop a farm at Gordon and becoming bankrupt; whilst the latter was relatively common, he was most unusual in paying his creditors in full, an illustration of his high ethical standards.*

In the 1890s he mined at Thames and, despite his clearly limited education, studied at the Thames School of Mines to become a certificated mine manager. After being increasingly involved in the Thames Miners' Union he became its president, and by forcefully standing up for the rights of his members became very prominent for his outspoken views and very popular with most of the members (though the more conservative members were upset by some of his behaviour). Controversially, he wanted the union involved in politics, and particularly controversial was his criticism of an arbitration court judge whose award went against the union. He struggled to satisfy the demands of the Waihi branch, which would later break away. During all this time he was prominent in the wider community.

After ceasing to be involved in the union, he mined at Coromandel, Kuaotunu, Karangahake, and Marlborough, managing some mines, but struggling to make much money at any of these places. His financial situation required him to continue mining almost until his death at age 79. After being one of the most well known men in Hauraki, his final years were spent in obscurity.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Michael Dineen O'Keeffe's¹ full name was Michael William Dineen O'Keeffe.² During the 1880s he wrote his name as Michael W. Dineen

¹ For his photograph, see *New Zealand Graphic*, 23 June 1900, p. 1180.

² Supreme Court, Bankruptcy Register 1887-1892, p. 278, BBAE 5639/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1902*, p. 61.

O’Keeffe, and by the 1890s the W. was usually omitted.³ His multiplicity of first names led to his being once referred to as ‘Alphabet O’Keeffe’.⁴ Accurate spelling was not one of his strengths, and often others wrote his surname as ‘O’Keefe’; for consistency, it is given as O’Keeffe throughout this paper. Prominent in many ways, especially for his quirky ways of expressing himself, he was one of the most notable ‘characters’ on several goldfields.

BEFORE WAIORONGOMAI

O’Keeffe was born in 1852 either at Mitcheltown or Blackrock, County Cork, Ireland.⁵ His father, John, was a farmer, and his mother was Margaret, née Dineen.⁶ According to his account, ‘he was brought up to foundry work in the city of Cork’, where he learnt an unspecified trade related to that industry.⁷ Afterwards he worked for ‘three years in Liverpool. In 1879 he came to Auckland by the ship “Earl Granville,” and worked for some time in Northern Wairoa’.⁸ It left Plymouth on 29 November 1879, and arrived at Auckland on 4 March 1880. An assisted immigrant, he was recorded as Michael O’Keefe, born in Cork, which was correct, aged 25, an incorrect age, and an agricultural labourer,⁹ which was possible, and may have been his occupation in Northern Wairoa. In 1897, he stated that he had been a coal miner for some time;¹⁰ if he did mine for coal when first in New Zealand, it was not in Northern Wairoa, for the meagre

³ For example, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880-1881, no. 1691, BBAV 11533/1g; Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1883, no. 2043, BBAV 11533/1l, ANZ-A; letter from M.D. O’Keeffe, *Thames Advertiser*, 6 September 1898, p. 1.

⁴ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 3 November 1883, p. 16.

⁵ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 473; Marriage Certificate of Michael O’Keefe, 31 October 1884, 1884/1749; Death Certificate of Michael Dineen O’Keeffe, 14 May 1931, 1931/3999, BDM.

⁶ Marriage Certificate of Michael O’Keefe, 31 October 1884, 1884/1749, BDM.

⁷ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 473; *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 3.

⁸ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 473.

⁹ Passenger list of ‘Earl Granville’, arrived in Auckland on 4 March 1880, Microfilm 287460, folio 17, Mormon Archives; Assisted Immigrants to Auckland, Social Security, SS Im., 15/373, Immigration, IM 5/4/33, no. 399, ANZ-W.

¹⁰ M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Secretary, Board of Examiners, 12 January 1897, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/239, ANZ-W.

coal deposits there were never developed.¹¹ In May 1901 he stated that he had been a miner for 21 years and in October wrote that it had been 22 years,¹² meaning that he had mined for either coal or gold before Te Aroha was proclaimed in November 1880. In January 1897 he stated that he had spent 26 years mining coal and both alluvial and quartz gold,¹³ which would date the start of his mining career as 1871, when he was 19 years old. Any involvement in alluvial mining before 1897 was of extremely brief duration, for there were no alluvial fields in the North Island and he did not work in the South Island until the twentieth century.

On 9 December 1880, after pleading guilty in the Thames court to an offense under the Shipping and Seamen Act 1877, he was required to pay damage of 10s.¹⁴ His offense was breaking a table on the 'Rotomahana', which plied between Thames and Auckland, by dancing on it. The prosecuting policeman 'said he was a splendid dancer, and suggested that he should give the Court a specimen of his performance in the Terpsichorean Art', a frivolous suggestion not taken up by the magistrate;¹⁵ clearly his behaviour was viewed with more amusement than concern. A Thames gossip writer quoted O'Keeffe as claiming that he could 'dance forty variations to one tune' and 'had been performing for the benefit of passengers'.¹⁶

O'Keeffe claimed to be present at the opening of the Te Aroha goldfield,¹⁷ but the earliest miner's right recorded in the surviving butt books was dated 6 January 1881.¹⁸ His involvement in this rush was minimal: on the same day that he took out this right, he purchased another

¹¹ John Stallworthy, *Early Northern Wairoa* (Dargaville, 1916), pp. 140-141.

¹² *Thames Star*, 10 May 1901, p. 2; M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Minister of Mines, 19 October 1901, Mines Department, MD 1, 06/458, ANZ-W.

¹³ M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Secretary, Board of Examiners, 12 January 1897, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/239, ANZ-W.

¹⁴ Thames Magistrate's Court, Criminal Record Book 1879-1881, entry for 9 December 1880, BACL 13736/15b, ANZ-A.

¹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 10 December 1880, p. 2.

¹⁶ 'Thames Jottings', *Observer*, 8 January 1881, p. 162.

¹⁷ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 473.

¹⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Miners' Rights Butt Book 1880-1881, no. 1691, BBAV 11533/1g, ANZ-A.

man's interests in one claim, and three months later bought a small interest in another.¹⁹

MINING AT WAIORONGOMAI

In December 1881, he acquired his first interests in the new Waiorongomai goldfield, holding one and a half of the initial 15 shares in the May Queen; he sold all these by June 1883 for £30.²⁰ In May 1882 he bought 200 scrip shares in the Hero Company.²¹ One month later, he purchased a quarter of one share in the Coquette for £10, which three months later became 250 scrip shares in the Coquette Company,²² an unprofitable investment unless he was able to unload his shares. He was the sole owner of another claim, named the Star of Erin, probably because of his Irish parentage, but abandoned it after 15 days; his letter to the warden indicated that he, like many miners, was imperfectly literate:

Sir,
I the below Sined do Hearby Give notice of abondement of the
Star of Erin Clame
I have the Honor Sir of being truly
MWDO'Keeffe²³

He worked for an Auckland investor, John Abbott,²⁴ in an unspecified claim in the latter part of the year, successfully suing him for wages

¹⁹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 155, 202, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁰ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 28, BBAV 11500/9a; Transfers and Assignments 1882, nos. 46, 47, BBAV 11581/1a; Certified Instruments 1883, nos. 217, 249, BBAV 11581/4a, ANZ-A.

²¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 1 June 1882, p. 800.

²² Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 8, BBAV 11500/9a; Transfers and Assignments 1882, no. 588, BBAV 11581/2a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 16 November 1882, p. 1733.

²³ M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Warden, 9 September 1882, attached to Notice of Marking Out Claims, Te Aroha Warden's Court, Notices of Marking Out Claims 1882, no. 157, BBAV 11557/2a, ANZ-A.

²⁴ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 194, 423.

totalling £15 15s in September.²⁵ In November, he bought one share in the Virginia City for £15, five months later transferring it to another unsuccessful company, the Waiorongomai Gold Mining and Quartz Crushing Company, receiving 608 scrip shares.²⁶

In June 1883, with fellow miner John O'Shea, also born in County Cork,²⁷ O'Keeffe registered two claims: the Fiery Cross and the Star of the South.²⁸ Previously known as the Union Jack and Thistle, the change of names may have been for nationalistic reasons.²⁹ Immediately after they were taken up, the *Te Aroha News* reported that prospecting was 'going on energetically. The known reputation of the owners as miners is sufficient guarantee that the ground will be well prospected'.³⁰ By October, they were registered as licensed holdings with two additional partners in both, Abbott and Nicholas Cleary,³¹ a former Te Aroha policeman.³² Protection was applied for early in that month;³³ neither was to be a successful mine. His only other investment during that year was to buy three shares in the Young Caledonian for £10; he sold one and three quarters for £50 before the remainder were transferred to the liquidator of the partnership in April 1884.³⁴ He had worked for wages for 23 days in August and also provided a

²⁵ Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Civil Record Book 1881-1884, 38/1882, BCDG 11221/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁶ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 118, BBAV 11500/9a; Certified Instruments 1883, no. 41, BBAV 11581/3a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 31 May 1883, p. 722.

²⁷ Waihi Hospital, Register of Patients 1914-1919, folio 23, entry for 22 November 1916, ZABW 4935/1c, ANZ-A; Death Certificate of John O'Shea, 17 May 1942, 1942/19789, BDM.

²⁸ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 288, 289, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 2.

³⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 30 June 1883, p. 2.

³¹ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folios 82, 83, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

³² See *Thames Advertiser*, 30 March 1875, p. 3, Te Aroha Correspondent, 3 February 1882, p. 3, 8 November 1882, p. 2.

³³ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1883-1900, 169, 170/1883, BBAV 11505/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁴ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 132, BBAV 11500/9a; Certified Instruments 1883, nos. 480, 623, 681, BBAV 11581/4a, ANZ-A.

wheelbarrow, a total cost to the partnership of £11 3s; in the final settlement of accounts two calls of £2 each on one share were deducted.³⁵ By August 1883 he was concentrating on the Auckland, on the May Queen spur. The local newspaper, referring to him as ‘the well known prospector’, wrote that he had ‘commenced a drive on a nice looking reef about 2 feet wide’, with good signs being detected;³⁶ as so often, these supposedly encouraging indications were misleading.

In 1883, O’Keeffe was in trouble for the common failure to take out a miner’s right. These were current for 12 months, but after obtaining one on 6 January 1881 the next was not obtained until 21 August the following year, and the third was dated 3 October 1883.³⁷ Before the latter date, the mining inspector sued him for ‘being engaged & employed in Mining operations & not being a holder of a Miner’s Right’, for which offence he was fined 1s and costs.³⁸

At the banquet held by miners to celebrate the first cleaning up of the battery in December, O’Keeffe proposed the toast to their host and hostess ‘in eulogistic terms’;³⁹ his role indicated that he was becoming a prominent member of the community. In July 1884, he seconded Peter Ferguson’s⁴⁰ motion at a public meeting that the council be asked to construct roads and tramways for claims below its tramway, and was elected to the committee charged with putting these resolutions into effect.⁴¹ However, less than a month later, at another meeting he opposed Ferguson’s desire that the council make the road to his battery because it would be a private road that others could not use; his motion to lodge an objection was carried unanimously.⁴² Later in the year he signed the petition to the warden seeking the leasing of the tramway.⁴³ In February the following year, he

³⁵ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Notices of Abandonments of Registered Claims, 12/1884, BBAV 11572/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 18 August 1883, p. 2.

³⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1880-1881, no. 1691, BBAV 11533/1g; Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1882, no. 2232, BBAV 11533/1j; Miners’ Rights Butt Book 1883, no. 2043, BBAV 11533/1l, ANZ-A.

³⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Complaint Book 1880-1898, 36/1883, BBAV 11547/1a, ANZ-A.

³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1883, p. 3.

⁴⁰ See paper on Peter Ferguson and his New Era.

⁴¹ *Te Aroha News*, 12 July 1884, p. 7.

⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 2 August 1884, p. 2.

⁴³ *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1884, p. 7.

successfully moved that the meeting ‘urgently request’ the council ‘to use every effort to assist capital in constructing roads for the conveyance of machinery and in developing the resources of the goldfield’. Another successful motion was that Denis Murphy, a county councillor,⁴⁴ ask detailed questions to uncover whether the council had given, or was still giving, the Battery Company special favours when constructing and operating the tramway. He also seconded the motion that the meeting should reconvene at Te Aroha.⁴⁵ Later the same month, he seconded a motion at the latter meeting asking the government to investigate the costs of constructing and running the tramway, and was elected to the committee to list the issues to be examined.⁴⁶ Five months later, with Bernard Montague, a contractor,⁴⁷ he arranged an entertainment for Ferguson to celebrate the government providing assistance for constructing a tramway to his battery.⁴⁸ Two months later, after a fellow miner, James Munro,⁴⁹ was outbid in an attempt to buy the Vulcan, he raised unpublished concerns about the way it was auctioned, but was informed that his suspicions were incorrect.⁵⁰

During 1885, both O’Shea and O’Keeffe tributed in the Wellington, the latter’s party driving on a ‘leader in the upper workings adjourning the County tramway’.⁵¹ In August they obtained the ‘very excellent result of 10oz 5dwt retorted gold’ from one hundredweight of ore.⁵² The only other return reported was in October 1886, when they obtained 4oz 4dwt of retorted gold from two truckloads.⁵³ O’Keeffe was shift boss for his tributing party for three years, O’Shea managing the mine until leaving the district in 1886.⁵⁴ O’Shea had been one of the five original owners of the

⁴⁴ See paper on his life.

⁴⁵ *Waikato Times*, 5 February 1885, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 7 February 1885, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Waikato Times*, 24 February 1885, p. 2.

⁴⁷ See paper on his life.

⁴⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 25 July 1885, p. 3.

⁴⁹ See paper on John Squirrell.

⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 19 September 1885, p. 2, including ‘Reply to Correspondents’.

⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 7 February 1885, p. 2, 21 March 1885, p. 2.

⁵² *Te Aroha News*, 15 August 1885, p. 2.

⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 16 October 1886, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Declaration by J.T. O’Shea (manager, Wellington mine, Waiorongomai), 2 March 1892, Mines Department, MD 1, 92/687, ANZ-W; recollections of John O’Shea, *Te Aroha News*, 28 November 1940, p. 5.

Wellington,⁵⁵ and the two men were friends as well as mining mates; in 1884, O'Shea was a witness at O'Keeffe's marriage.⁵⁶

In September 1885, O'Keeffe wrote the following letter to the Minister of Mines:

Could you conveniently furnish the following information
 How to prospect for Silver and to distinguish the same from
 other minerals
 It have been proved by Mr Le Mont that silver exists in those
 reefs but so far we are ignarent how to prospect for it.⁵⁷

Two textbooks were recommended to him.⁵⁸ As whatever prospecting he did to find silver was not recorded, it must have been unsuccessful. Possibly from late 1885 onwards he was underground boss in the Colonist, a position he held for two (unspecified) years.⁵⁹

As mining faded, he attempted to be a roading contractor, in partnership with Bernard Montague. In February 1886, their tenders to make two sledge tracks adjoining Buck Rock, forming and metalling Kilgour Street in Waiorongomai, and a bridge and approaches on the road from Waiorongomai to Shaftesbuty were all declined.⁶⁰ One month later, their tender to the Ohinemuri County Council to form the Waitekauri road was also declined.⁶¹ O'Keeffe made no further attempts to win roading contracts.

In April 1888 his tender of £1 12s 6d per foot to drive the Canadian level of the New Find mine was accepted.⁶² Two months later, his party obtained a contract to drive 100 feet on the 450-foot level of the New Find and to crosscut through the reef to its western wall.⁶³ Two months later,

⁵⁵ Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 28, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A.

⁵⁶ Marriage Certificate of Michael O'Keefe, 31 October 1884, 1884/1749, BDM.

⁵⁷ M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Minister of Mines, 3 September 1885, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/1095, ANZ-W.

⁵⁸ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to M.W.D. O'Keeffe, 14 September 1885, Mines Department, MD 1, 85/1095, ANZ-W.

⁵⁹ Declaration of D.G. MacDonnell, 17 May 1892, Mines Department, MD 1, 92/687, ANZ-W.

⁶⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1886, p. 7.

⁶¹ Ohinemuri County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 20 March 1886, p. 7.

⁶² *Te Aroha News*, 4 April 1888, p. 2.

⁶³ *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1888, p. 2.

another tender to drive a further 100 feet in this level was declined, as was one to drive the same distance on the Hero reef.⁶⁴ In that December he unsuccessfully sought a contract to drive in the Champion, at Tui.⁶⁵ In September 1889, he ceased working as a wages man in an unstated mine, but in December with some mates was tributing in the Colonist.⁶⁶

O’Keeffe had two notable accidents in the 1880s. In January 1884 he cut his leg above the knee with an axe, which required several stitches.⁶⁷ More dramatically, in May 1889 he cut ‘the inside portion of his knee with a tomahawk’ when working in a claim high in the ranges and far from a track:

It appears that he was engaged cutting a route in a very awkward place, and the instrument being dull glanced off and inflicted the wound. The leg bled profusely at the time, but Mr [Patrick] Moriarty,⁶⁸ his mate, who luckily had a needle and thread in his coat, stitched up the cut and bandaged it with a handkerchief. After a little rest Mr O’Keeffe started for home, and after about three hours managed to reach the township.... Mr O’Keeffe when walking home had a very hard time of it, the country over which he had to travel being very rough.⁶⁹

Such an experience would have strengthened his desire to have an effective accident relief fund. Three months before cutting his leg, at a meeting of Waiorongomai members of this moribund fund he successfully moved that it be revived and that the new committee submit rules and regulations to another meeting.⁷⁰ At the latter he asked whether a resolution to give former trustees ‘some slight present as a recognition for past services’, passed at the previous meeting, could be rescinded. Told by the chairman, John Somerville,⁷¹ that such an action, although unusual,

⁶⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 18 August 1888, p. 2.

⁶⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1888, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 11 December 1889, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 19 January 1884, p. 2.

⁶⁸ See *Te Aroha News*, 14 September 1914, p. 2, letter from John Williams, 18 September 1914, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Waiorongomai Correspondent, *Te Aroha News*, 22 May 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1889, p. 2.

⁷¹ See *Te Aroha News*, 13 October 1888, p. 2, Waiorongomai Correspondent, 8 March 1889, p. 2.

was permissible, O’Keeffe moved that this be done. After Thomas Gavin⁷² stated that that prior notice must be given, ‘Mr O’Keeffe made some reference to doing things with a high hand’. After his motion was carried, controversy was provoked by legal points raised by Gavin; Somerville walked out, and ‘eventually Mr O’Keeffe was persuaded to accept the responsible position’ of chairman. When the business was concluded, he proposed ‘a hearty vote of thanks’ to Somerville ‘for his kindness in presiding over their meetings’.⁷³ In May, at another meeting, he demanded that the old committee transfer the funds to their successors.⁷⁴

PRIVATE LIFE

O’Keeffe’s private life was publicised for the amusement of readers of the Auckland *Observer* during 1883. In early July, the *Te Aroha Observer* Man recorded that ‘Mick O’K’ was one of the bachelors ‘taking the girls by storm’.⁷⁵ In the last issue for that month, a long report was published:

Over-polite was laughably illustrated at Waiorongomai during the last panorama, at O’K’s expense. Ha! Ha! Ha! I must laugh at him now when I think of it. I must first tell you Mick is a notorious lady-killer, so, of course, to have a dance after the panorama was right into his hands. His unmentionables being a little the worse for wear, he had to apply to [George Hubert] Applegate [a Waiorongomai storekeeper]⁷⁶ for a pair, number 7 size, but could only be supplied with number 6, which Mick found almost skin-tight. In going into the dancing-room with Mag on his arm, he bowed rather too too, and – oh! Tell it not in Gath, and publish it not in the gates of Askelon – R.I.P. went the lower extremities of his No. 6! To retire and diligently apply needle and thread was his only alternative. Again he appeared, as he thought,

All properly adjusted,
But in picking up a handkerchief the darned stitches bursted,
And when the missing link appeared, great Caesar!
how he cursed it,

⁷² See paper on his life.

⁷³ *Te Aroha News*, 27 February 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 4 May 1889, p. 2.

⁷⁵ ‘Te Aroha’, *Observer*, 7 July 1883, p. 248.

⁷⁶ See *Waikato Times*, 29 May 1883, p. 2; *Te Aroha News*, 23 June 1883, p. 2, 3 November 1883, p. 3.

And left the Hall and Margaret, disheartened and disgusted.⁷⁷

Mag, otherwise Margaret, was the daughter of Patrick O'Leary, a farmer of Queenstown, Ireland, and Honora, née Twomey. A domestic servant at Waiorongomai since 1882, being aged 26 she was four years younger than O'Keefe.⁷⁸ She was not discouraged by the embarrassing ripping of her beau's underpants at this dance, for at the beginning of September the Waiorongomai *Observer* Man noted that 'Mick came from the hill to enjoy a good waltz, and spooned all the time with Margaret'.⁷⁹ By the end of that month, 'Margaret and Mike have got the tables and chairs for the little house, and are about to go into partnership'.⁸⁰ At the start of November, he was recorded as one of the three local males who were 'going to meet the cook on the convincing ground at Christmas, whose acceptance of the (matri)money will not let all be premature'.⁸¹ O'Keefe must have grumbled about his wedding plans being thus publicised, for a month later the Waiorongomai correspondent responded with another comment: 'Mick, you softy, you might have known that a woman cannot keep a secret. That is how it leaked out about your building the dove-cot. But beware of the butcher!',⁸² presumably a warning of a rival suitor. Was he 'C.', referred to twice in late November: 'It was cruel of Maggie to hurt C.'s feelings', and 'Mick doesn't cut much wood when C. is in the yard'.⁸³

As the *Observer* for 1884 has not survived, any further gossip about O'Keefe's love life has been lost to history. In his entry in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, O'Keefe not only got the Christian name of his father-in-law wrong but gave the date of the marriage as 1886;⁸⁴ it was 2 November 1884, in St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland. He was aged 31 according to the notice

⁷⁷ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 28 July 1883, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Notices of Intentions of Marry 1884, folio 938, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/29, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Michael O'Keefe, 31 October 1884, 1884/1749, BDM; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 474.

⁷⁹ 'Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 1 September 1883, p. 12.

⁸⁰ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 29 September 1883, p. 8.

⁸¹ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 3 November 1883, p. 16.

⁸² 'Waiorongomai', *Observer*, 1 December 1883, p. 12.

⁸³ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 24 November 1883, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 474.

of his intention to marry but 32 according to the marriage certificate, and his bride was 27.⁸⁵

No children were to be born to their union (a great shame, as O’Keeffe would have been a marvelously jolly father).

OBTAINING A HOME

When first at Te Aroha, O’Keeffe lived in the British Hotel, in July 1882 describing himself as one of its ‘oldest boarders’.⁸⁶ In November that year he was granted a business site at Te Aroha, upon which he erected a house for £15, upon which he spent another £5 having it lined.⁸⁷ After paying two annual rentals, he forfeited the section in March 1885 for failing to pay the third.⁸⁸ By then he was living at Waiorongomai, having shifted his house there without the permission of his landlords, the Lipsey family, who in October 1884 sought £20 in damages. George Lipsey⁸⁹ stated that, when learning that O’Keeffe intended to remove it, he sent ‘a written notice not to do. After receiving that notice defendant removed the building’. O’Keeffe responded that he thought he had the right to remove it.

Both Mr Lipsey and the Mining Inspector told me not to move it. I consulted Mr Miller (solicitor) on the matter; he advised me not to remove it. I did not take his advice. (Laughter.)

In reply to Mr Miller, defendant stated it was quite true he told the Mining Inspector, “If he could not remove it he would make it so small that he (Mining Inspector) could smoke it in his pipe.” (Great laughter.)

Judgment was reserved for one month, the magistrate, Harry Kenrick,⁹⁰ commenting that although O’Keeffe had ‘no right whatever to remove the building’, he was unsure what amount of ‘reversionary interest’

⁸⁵ Notices of Intentions to Marry 1884, folio 938, Births Deaths and Marriages, BDM 20/29, ANZ-W; Marriage Certificate of Michael O’Keefe, 31 October 1884, 1884/1749, BDM.

⁸⁶ Supreme Court, Gillies J, Judge’s Notebooks, Criminal, 1882-1885, Hearing of 5 October 1882, p. 29, BBAE A340/256, ANZ-A.

⁸⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1880-1882, folio 225, BBAV 11505/3a, ANZ-A; Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1884, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Rent Register 1881-1899, folio 331, BBAV 11501/1a, ANZ-A.

⁸⁹ See paper on his life.

⁹⁰ See paper on his life.

the plaintiffs could claim on the building at the end of the 21-year lease.⁹¹ In giving judgment one month later, after warning O’Keeffe that he was liable to be sued for the full present value of the building removed, Kenrick imposed nominal damages of £1 plus costs because of ‘the class of the building in question, and its probable value at the end of 21 years’.⁹²

As he did not pay the fine, one month later the Lipsey family sought a judgment summons for £4.⁹³ O’Keeffe admitted being liable, and under questioning made the following excuses:

Had not paid it, and could not afford to; had no money. Could afford to get married about a month ago. Was in work and got 9s a day.... 9s a day was not sufficient to keep his house. Could just manage to exist on 9s a day, only himself and wife to keep. Could support a gold watch and chain. Got a little furniture lately, but it was Mrs O’Keeffe who paid for it with her own money. Gave the house he removed from Lipsey’s Block, Te Aroha, to the lady he afterwards married in part satisfaction for some money he owed her, and which he had borrowed from her before they were married. Might have said to some person he would rather “take it out” [‘serve a prison term’]⁹⁴ than ever pay the amount. Did not really see how he could afford to pay it at all.

Kenrick was impervious to this plea of poverty, quite reasonably, as his wife may have been working, and many miners supported a family on the same income and labourers did on a lower one. O’Keeffe was required to pay £4 7s by weekly instalments of 10s, or in default be imprisoned for 14 days.⁹⁵ The money was paid, and when next he wanted to remove a building he first sought permission.⁹⁶

O’Keeffe had been granted a business site on Allotment 64 Block 111 at Waiorongomai in September 1883.⁹⁷ The previous month he had applied for another business site there, Allotment 55 Block 1V, on behalf of

⁹¹ Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 18 October 1884, p. 2.

⁹² Warden’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 15 November 1884, p. 2.

⁹³ Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Civil Record Book 1881-1884, 210/1884, BCDG 11221/1a; Civil Record Book 1884-1889, 210/1884, BCDG 11221/1b, ANZ-A.

⁹⁴ Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 1175.

⁹⁵ Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 6 December 1884, p. 7.

⁹⁶ High School Board, *Thames Advertiser*, 13 March 1886, p. 3.

⁹⁷ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Business Site License Butt Book 1882-1884, folio 33, BBAV 11548/1e, ANZ-A.

‘Margrate Oleary’; it was granted.⁹⁸ Two months before their marriage, he transferred to his future bride his Waiorongomai business site and the buildings on it he had erected or moved from Te Aroha. A notional charge of £50 for this transaction represented part of the sum he had borrowed from her.⁹⁹ They forfeited their sections after leaving the district and ceasing to pay rent.¹⁰⁰

INVOLVED IN A SCUFFLE

Throughout his life, O’Keeffe drew attention to himself, usually by quirky behaviour or a dramatic way of making a point, but occasionally unintentionally. An example of the latter occurred in July 1882, when John Leydon, an auctioneer,¹⁰¹ was remanded to appear in Thames on a charge of ‘feloniously wounding one Michael O’Keeffe by stabbing him with a knife’.¹⁰² When the case was heard, O’Keeffe stated that he ‘did not wish to press the case against Leydon’, but was told that it was now in the hands of the police.¹⁰³ A policeman, Nicholas Cleary, described how, upon hearing ‘a row’ in the British Hotel, he entered to find O’Keeffe bleeding from a wound and the publican, Patrick Quinlan,¹⁰⁴ holding Leydon, whom members of the crowd were attempting to beat. Although Leydon had been drinking, he did not seem to be drunk, and O’Keeffe appeared to be sober. Dr Charles Huxtable deposed that, in the centre of O’Keeffe’s back,

about an inch and a-half or two inches from the backbone, he found a longitudinal stabbing cut, 1 inch long. The skin around it

⁹⁸ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Business Site and Residence Site Applications 1883, 102/655, BBAV 11289/10a, ANZ-A.

⁹⁹ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Transfer dated 2 September 1884, Certified Instruments 1884, BBAV 11581/5a, ANZ-A; Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 6 December 1884, p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Complaint Book 1880-1898, 49/1891, BBAV 11547/1a; Complaints 1900, 2/1900, BBAV 11572/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰¹ See *Thames Advertiser*, 19 November 1878, p. 3, 28 November 1879, p. 2, 11 December 1880, p. 2, 5 April 1882, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 8 April 1927, p. 12.

¹⁰² Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Criminal Record Book 1881-1896, 15/1882, BCDG 11220/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁰³ *Thames Star*, 20 July 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ See paper on his life.

was swollen. On the left side, nearly opposite to the first wound, there was a similar cut about 2 inches from the backbone, which was in the same condition. They did not apparently penetrate deeper than the ribs, and did not injure the lungs; consequently, surgically, they were not dangerous.

His ribs had stopped the knife.¹⁰⁵ O’Keeffe stated that early that evening Leydon, an amateur phrenologist,¹⁰⁶ had ‘read his bumps, and made a big boil on him (laughter)’.¹⁰⁷ According to a more likely version of his evidence, Leydon ‘made a big boy of him’.¹⁰⁸

Left the hotel and returned shortly after about 12 o’clock. Saw accused in the passage apparently coming out of a room; he had his coat and boots off. Mr [Henry Ernest] Whitaker¹⁰⁹ and another gentleman came in at the front door and Leydon walked against him. They began to growl at one another. Mr Whitaker stood off as if to shape.

After Quinlan separated them, Leydon ‘complained of bad treatment during the night’, to which O’Keeffe responded that ‘he deserved all he got’. Asked by Quinlan to go into the room where Leydon had gone and remove his clothes, O’Keeffe found Leydon sitting down; turning to a table with some clothes on it, he asked: ‘Are those your clothes, Leydon?’

Leydon rose up, and raised his right hand which contained an open knife, blade upward, over his head, and made a step towards witness, saying, “Don’t lay a hand on them.” Witness then bent down, and made a rush at him, and got under his left arm. He had not then made any attempt to strike at witness with a knife. While in that position felt a stab in the back. Witness caught hold of him and threw him down. Fell on top of him, and his hand being above witness’s back, received another stab. He was stabbing away at him while on the ground. Witness sung out the wretch had him stabbed. Several persons came to his relief.

¹⁰⁵ Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 July 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ For example, *Thames Advertiser*, advertisement, 31 December 1875, p. 2, 25 March 1876, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Thames Star*, 20 July 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 July 1882, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ See paper on Harry and Charles: Henry Ernest Whitaker and Charles Stanislaus Stafford.

O'Keeffe admitted having 'taken liquor but was not the worse for it'. He was certain that the stabs were not accidental, for 'when on the ground Leydon kept stabbing at him, while he punched Leydon'.¹¹⁰ Earlier that evening, 'Leydon was disputing with him and others about grammar, but there was no actual quarrel'. In reply to Leydon's counsel, he stated that 'there was nothing malicious between Leydon and him'. The only reason he could give for the stabbing was 'that he had told him he deserved the bad treatment', for 'the affray took place about a minute after he had spoken to Leydon about the treatment he had received'.¹¹¹

Quinlan deposed that he had refused Leydon a bed for the night because the hotel was full, and after Leydon scuffled with a miner tried to make him leave. After the clash with Whitaker, he decided 'not to allow Leydon to remain in the house, and accordingly asked O'Keeffe to go into the room for his clothes'. Hearing the 'row', he 'cautioned O'Keeffe about such conduct at that time of the night, who replied that he couldn't help it; Leydon had a knife and was stabbing him'. Quinlan concluded that 'as far as he knew Leydon and O'Keeffe were on the best of terms'. After Leydon's counsel did not raise a defence, he was committed for trial in the Supreme Court.¹¹²

As the judge in this trial recorded, O'Keeffe deposed that he returned to the hotel after midnight and

came in by private door into passage. Saw two chaps about to go to bed – I went to shew them their beds at back of house – came into passage again – saw prisr in shirt & trousers hat coat & I think boots off. Whitaker came in – some others there – Quinlan about but don't know if he was in passage – prisr was complaining of being badly treated. I sd he deserved to be badly treated – he walked a few paces along passage toward front door from me. Whitaker came in front door – appeared to be picking quarrel with him – appeared W. was preparing to strike him. I sd to them not to row. Quinlan came into passage & talked about sending pair away out of house – Quinlan told me to go into a room & fetch Leydons clothes - I did so shortly after – a minute after – Prisr went into room before I did – there were 3 men in bed there the parlour – Prisr was sitting down when I went in – opposite side of room. I spoke to him in bed – I turned to table in room – there were clothes on table – I laid my hands on them – I

¹¹⁰ *Thames Star*, 20 July 1882, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 July 1882, pp. 2-3.

¹¹² *Thames Star*, 21 July 1882, p. 2.

sd to prisr are those yours – he jumped up from where sitting & raised his right hand over his head – made a step towards me – he hd a knife in his hand, open, a pocket knife large sized, he sd don't lay a hand on them – I turned round & closed on him reached towards him – I attempted to strike him with my left hand & did so. I then about same time recd stab in back – I had stooped under his left arm as I struck at him. We struggled together – I recd two stabs in back – I shoved him agt the wall of the chiffonier. We came to ground together uppermost – it was as we were falling I got second stab in back. I was striking him – he was half sitting agt wall stabbing at me with knife – I recd light scratches on hand – Quinlan came in & a crowd more. Q told me not to be making a row at that time of night – I told him prisr stabbed me – Q & others pulled me away.¹¹³

He admitted he 'was not exactly sober', having had five drinks. Under cross-examination, after stating that he had known Leydon before the incident but 'never had nothing to say to him', he provided a few more details:

When he got up was first time I saw knife – Within one step when I rushed him – the step I made brot us together – I struck him in face – After the blow I caught him in my arms – that threw his arms round my back – struggled trying to throw him down – felt second blow as sliding to ground – whole thing couple of minutes – I don't think the stabs were accidental – possible that second blow might be accidental but I don't like to believe it was – I think he called out for police after when my clothes being taken off.

He had struck Leydon as a 'better chance of defending myself', and considered Leydon 'deserved what he got' because of 'rowing other chaps'. After being stabbed, he was in bed for two or three days because of 'bad pain in side'.¹¹⁴

A labourer and a miner boarding in the hotel gave their accounts, the latter saying Leydon had earlier pulled a knife from his pocket and said that the first person 'that lays hands on me Ill put it through his bloody heart'. When the two men were separated, he 'heard OK say O Crites boys

¹¹³ Supreme Court, Gillies J, Judge's Notebook, Criminal, 1882-1885, hearing of 5 October 1882, pp. 29-30, BBAE A304/256, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁴ Supreme Court, Gillies J, Judge's Notebook, Criminal, 1882-1885, Hearing of 5 October 1882, p. 30, BBAE A304/256, ANZ-A.

hes knifed me'.¹¹⁵ In his earlier testimony, he had quoted O'Keeffe as calling out 'Leydon is splitting me with the knife'. He also considered that, as the door was open, O'Keeffe 'could easily have passed out, instead of rushing at Leydon'.¹¹⁶ Quinlan stated that he had refused Leydon a bed as the hotel was full. When he entered the room after hearing the fight, O'Keeffe had Leydon against the wall, with himself uppermost. He had asked O'Keeffe to remove Leydon's clothes because he thought they were 'on good terms'.¹¹⁷

The charges heard in the Supreme Court included 'assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm'. The defence was that 'the slightness of the wounds and the excitement that prevailed' indicated that there was no malicious intent, and emphasised Leydon's 'generally peaceable and good character'; after a short deliberation, he was found not guilty.¹¹⁸

INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

O'Keeffe was a prominent member of the community through his enthusiastic involvement in local activities. Referring to an entertainment at Quartzville in September 1883, where he may have been living during the week whilst mining nearby, a Te Aroha correspondent made the only surviving account of his capabilities as a singer:

We had a little vocalisation on the hill last Monday. The singing wasn't up to much with the exception of Mr O.K. who gave "The night that poor Larry was stretched, och one!" yelled by as melodeous as the sound made by sharpening a saw, the vibration, created by it, smashing two cups and put a split in the bottom of the old fryingpan. The defunct Larry must have fancied the morning of the Resurrection had come. Mick, you might be as good a whistler as ever cocked a lip, but if that is singing, ye gods and little fishes! I hope it will never be my misfortune to hear you cry.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Supreme Court, Gillies J, Judge's Notebook, Criminal, 1882-1885, Hearing of 5 October 1882, pp. 31-32, BBAE A304/256, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁶ Police Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 July 1882, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Supreme Court, Gillies J, Judge's Notebook, Criminal, 1882-1885, Hearing of 5 October 1882, p. 32, BBAE A304/256, ANZ-A.

¹¹⁸ Supreme Court, *Auckland Weekly News*, 7 October 1882, p. 20.

¹¹⁹ 'Te Aroha', *Observer*, 22 September 1883, p. 16.

O'Keeffe was never recorded as contributing to another entertainment, but, as indicated in the gossip about his flirtation with Margaret, he was fond of dancing. In October 1885, he was on the committee that organised a Miners' Ball at Waiorongomai,¹²⁰ and three years later attended a Fancy Dress Carnival there dressed as 'Miner just off shift',¹²¹ which did not require much creativity. The only time that he was recorded as assisting people in need was in the same year, when 'chiefly through the efforts of him and Hugh McLiver, a mine manager,¹²² 'the handsome sum of £35' was raised for a destitute widow.¹²³ There is no reason to doubt that he assisted others as well. In 1884 he participated in the short-lived Waiorongomai Debating Society.¹²⁴

O'Keeffe had a minor role in sports, in December 1883 collecting subscriptions for the Boxing Day Sports and coming second in the 400 yards hurdle race.¹²⁵ Not till 1889 was he again recorded as participating in sport, when he played for the Quartzville football team against Waiorongomai.¹²⁶ His playing for it suggests that for at least part of this year he was living at Quartzville during the week. He was not noted as playing well, but was the first to make 'complimentary speeches' at the subsequent meal.¹²⁷

As well as attempting to assist the mining industry, as noted, he was actively involved in matters of broader concern. The first record of this was in August 1884, when he attended Denis Murphy's speech¹²⁸ at Quartzville seeking election to the council,¹²⁹ another indication that he was living there then. Four months later, he proposed the names, including his own, for a committee to protect the interests of Waiorongomai and to oppose Te Aroha moves to form a borough.¹³⁰ Six months later, he nominated James Munro for the licensing committee.¹³¹ As Munro was a temperance (but not

¹²⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 10 October 1885, p. 7.

¹²¹ *Te Aroha News*, 22 September 1888, p. 2.

¹²² See papers on the New Find mine and on Henry Hopper Adams.

¹²³ *Te Aroha News*, 29 August 1888, p. 2.

¹²⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 21 June 1884, p. 2.

¹²⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 15 December 1883, p. 2; 29 December 1883, p. 2.

¹²⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 28 August 1889, p. 2.

¹²⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 4 September 1889, p. 2.

¹²⁸ See paper on his life.

¹²⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 23 August 1884, p. 2.

¹³⁰ *Waikato Times*, 6 December 1884, p. 2.

¹³¹ *Te Aroha News*, 14 February 1885, p. 2.

prohibition) candidate,¹³² O’Keeffe’s support may reflect either his own views on the drink question or indicate their friendship. Munro, a fellow miner,¹³³ shared his views about the running of the tramway, council assistance to the goldfield, and forming a borough.¹³⁴ In November 1885, O’Keeffe was a member of a delegation to the Minister of Lands that complained about the high rents charged for Waiorongomai sections and about the high school board’s failure to return any benefits to settlers.¹³⁵ The following year, he was a scrutineer at the election for the school committee,¹³⁶ and two months later was one of the four ‘principal speakers’ at a Waiorongomai meeting considering the best form of local self-government.¹³⁷ By then he was in favour of Te Aroha, Waiorongomai, and Quartzville becoming a borough.¹³⁸ At another meeting he proposed a resolution supporting the council levying a special rate to pay for works in the Te Aroha Riding.¹³⁹ In 1889, ‘to test the meeting’ he proposed the resolution to form a borough, and subsequently, with Munro, canvassed for signatures to a petition supporting one.¹⁴⁰

O’Keeffe’s wider interests reflected his Catholic faith and Irish background. In 1883, he wrote to an Auckland newspaper asking it to answer two questions ‘to decide a wager’. The first was ‘in what year was Pope Pius IX dethroned from being King of Italy?’, which the newspaper correctly took to mean when he lost his temporal power, and the second asked whether Garibaldi was ever ‘head of the army in Italy’.¹⁴¹ The reason for the questions indicated that he was not averse to gambling, in a small way. In November 1889, he welcomed Sir Thomas Edmonde, Member of

¹³² *Thames Advertiser*, 25 February 1885, p. 3.

¹³³ For example, Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888, folios 144, 183, 285, 304, 305, 328, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 8 December 1883, p. 3.

¹³⁴ *Waikato Times*, 6 December 1884, p. 2, Te Aroha Correspondent, 5 February 1885, p. 2, 24 February 1885, p. 2, 16 July 1889, p. 3.

¹³⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 14 November 1885, p. 7.

¹³⁶ *Te Aroha News*, 1 May 1886, p. 2.

¹³⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 3 July 1886, p. 2.

¹³⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 10 July 1886, p. 2.

¹³⁹ *Te Aroha News*, 24 July 1886, p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 17 July 1889, p. 2, 20 July 1889, p. 2; for signatories, see 23 October 1889, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ ‘To Correspondents’, *Auckland Weekly News*, 27 October 1883, p. 25.

Parliament for South Dublin and a Home Rule advocate, to Te Aroha, and was on the platform at his meeting. At its conclusion, he moved that a committee collect subscriptions for the relief of evicted Irish tenants, but did not become a member of it.¹⁴²

As noted, O’Keeffe was not a technically competent writer of the English language. The *Te Aroha News* published a ‘characteristically Hibernian epistle’ it received from him in 1883 in its original form, for the amusement of its readers, but ‘without any feeling of malice’:

SIR in reading your last issue I think your report of the Consert & Ball given in aid of the Roman Cathilec Church Building fund hasent done Justice to those good Leadys & Honorable Gintlemen who took active Part in so Charitable institution. It is scarcely suffisient thanks mearly to mintion that Miss so & so sung, & Mr so & so sung, but every pearson, that took Part should be mintioned and the part they took. Now for instance there was Mrs. Lawless who is always ready to leand a healinging Hand has been neaver mentioned, neither has Miss Cleark who is a sorce of Joy to this place sense we wer firs blessed by that yount leadys preasence. I don’t know who to bleam or is’m falt whether Correspondent or Ed. But as a whole the report of Program is only a boil over thare is also Miss Warren who Contented her selfe to humbly set down all night and play for the Ball & Mr Feeney who Could be onley Compared to an old Armeiy viteron never qualed till the small hours brought the whole to a close. Signed Figfuludal (alis Michael W.D. O’K.)¹⁴³

The significance of ‘Figfuludal’ is unknown (it is not Gaelic), though it must have meant something to his contemporaries; was it from a song? It may be assumed that he continued to participate in the life of his church. With that level of literacy, it was surprising that, when he revisited Te Aroha in 1914, it was revealed that during the 1880s he had been the newspaper’s travelling correspondent throughout the district.¹⁴⁴ The only time a newspaper article was attributed to him was in 1899, when the *Thames Advertiser* published a long and well-written report of his travelling from Thames to Kuaotunu.¹⁴⁵ This was not the only example of a miner

¹⁴² *Te Aroha News*, 13 November 1889, pp. 2, 7.

¹⁴³ *Te Aroha News*, 15 December 1883, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Te Aroha News*, 4 February 1914, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ M.D. O’Keeffe, ‘Overland from Thames to Kuaotunu’, *Thames Advertiser*, 9 March 1899, p. 4.

with an insecure grasp of spelling having an edited version of his writings published: an *Auckland Star* journalist transformed the memoirs of Billy Nicholl¹⁴⁶ from their ungrammatical, mis-spelt and almost illegible original.¹⁴⁷

A MEMBER OF THE GORDON SETTLEMENT

When mining faded in 1885, O’Keeffe was one of the miners who formed the Gordon Special Settlement, upstream from Waiorongomai. He was active in the preliminary meetings,¹⁴⁸ at the second moving a vote of thanks to Sir George Grey and others who had established the settlement against the opposition of the ‘land shark’ Thomas Russell,¹⁴⁹ who claimed to have purchased this land from its Maori owners. He ‘referred in eulogistic terms to those whose votes carried the day in the House when Mr Thos. Russell was ousted, and said it should be one of the first endeavours of the Gordon special settlers to raise a monument to those noble men’.¹⁵⁰ One month later, when a member of a delegation of settlers to the Minister of Lands, John Ballance, he stated that the association sought ‘a timber reserve of say 250 acres set apart for the benefit of the settlers, and also a village settlement of say 5 acres in the centre’, which was agreed to.¹⁵¹ In the September 1886 allocation of land he received 150 acres.¹⁵² When the Crown Lands Board’s ranger inspected the settlement six months later he discovered that O’Keeffe was the only one to have improved his land, to the modest extent of two acres.¹⁵³ In March 1887, the secretary of the settlers’ association, Malcolm Robertson,¹⁵⁴ informed the Commissioner of Crown

¹⁴⁶ See paper on his life.

¹⁴⁷ Compare W.S.C. Nicholl, ‘Autobiography’, n.d. [1927], MS 1713, Alexander Turnbull Library, with *Auckland Star*, 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 September 1928, 6, 13, 20, 27 October 1928, Magazine Sections, pp. 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 10 October 1885, p. 7, 31 October 1885, p. 2.

¹⁴⁹ See Russell Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A colonial business community and its fall* (Auckland, 1973), pp. 177-189.

¹⁵⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 31 October 1885, p. 2.

¹⁵¹ *Te Aroha News*, 14 November 1885, p. 7.

¹⁵² *Waikato Times*, 7 September 1886, p. 2.

¹⁵³ *Te Aroha News*, 5 March 1887, p. 3.

¹⁵⁴ See *Te Aroha News*, 22 March 1884, p. 2, 18 April 1885, p. 2, 5 March 1887, p. 3, 6 August 1887, p. 3, 13 April 1895, p. 2, 8 March 1898, p. 2.

Lands in Auckland that O’Keeffe had defaulted through being unable to pay the first instalment of the cost of surveying his land.¹⁵⁵ The following day, O’Keeffe explained his position:

Sir I beg to state that I am at presant unable to pay the whole of my ten per cent Call in sec No 15 Block V11 from the fact that I have worked on my alotment sence it was aloted to me in the 4th September last fencing tillin and draining etc & have also spent a Hundred Pounds or ther about buying Cattle Horse & implements.

I am now prepared to pay down half the amount if you to would be good enough to give me three months time for the balance.¹⁵⁶

As Robertson explained that O’Keeffe had already paid £9 14s 9d for the survey and had ‘made some considerable improvements’ his proposal was accepted.¹⁵⁷

When the July council meeting considered a request to complete the road to the settlement, Charles Gould, a farmer,¹⁵⁸ criticized the settlers:

These people were very rough on “land sharks,” though when they’ve got half a chance they become land sharks themselves. His impression was that the settlers took up the land only for what they could make out of it.... The road was not wanted by the settlers except to improve the value of their land, in order that they might sell it. They were making no effort to improve the land. One man had put in five acres of oats and an acre of potatoes, and as he had got nothing off them he cleared out’.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Malcolm Robertson to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 16 March 1887, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁶ M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 17 March 1887, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁷ Malcolm Robertson to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 17 March 1887; Under-Secretary, Lands Department, to Malcolm Robertson, 29 March 1887; M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Commissioner of Crown Lands, Auckland, 6 April 1887, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁵⁸ See paper on his life.

¹⁵⁹ Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 9 May 1887, p. 2.

Another settler, Bernard Montague, briefly his partner as a contractor in the previous year,¹⁶⁰ responded that this version of O’Keeffe’s return was ‘totally incorrect’, and that O’Keeffe ‘intended putting in a much larger area this season’.¹⁶¹ In January 1888, his friend Munro told the *Te Aroha News* that O’Keeffe, ‘the pioneer of the settlement’, had ‘broken up eight acres, two acres of which are fenced and in crop’.¹⁶²

In March 1889 the Crown Lands Board told O’Keeffe that, having failed to be ‘continuously in residential occupation’, his section was liable to forfeiture along with any improvements, and required him to show cause why this should not be done.¹⁶³ O’Keeffe explained that the reason was ‘quite patent to all first hand times low wages and scarcity of work second. No market for produce third’. Having made the improvements required, ‘I hoap to be residind on my land before the end of this year’. Should his section be forfeited, he asked for a refund of his improvements, rents, and survey costs, for he was ‘a poorer man than I had been before I got such land’.¹⁶⁴ The ranger informed the board that his ‘only approach to cultivation was about five acres of land ploughed, and that overgrown with fern’, and O’Keeffe later admitted doing no further work after March 1889.¹⁶⁵ By November he was listed as a defaulter. As his land had a capital value of £150, his annual rental was £15; although he had officially taken it up on 13 April 1887, having paid rent only from 1 July that year until 30 June 1888 he owed £22 10s.¹⁶⁶ Three months later, five days before being sued for the £30 owing, he asked for ‘a little more time for rent on my alotment as I expect to be able to make arengement with some body to take

¹⁶⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 13 February 1886, p. 7, Ohinemuri County Council, 20 March 1886, p. 7.

¹⁶¹ Piako County Council, *Waikato Times*, 2 August 1887, p. 2; Piako County Council, *Te Aroha News*, 6 August 1887, p. 3.

¹⁶² Letter from James Munro, *Te Aroha News*, 14 January 1888, p. 2.

¹⁶³ A.P. Etheridge to M.W.D. O’Keeffe, 4 March 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁴ M.W.D. O’Keeffe to ‘Chairman and Gentlemen’, Crown Lands Board, Auckland, 12 March 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁵ Memorandum by Ranger, 19 March 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A; Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 5 February 1890, p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ Memorandum on Defaulters, 25 November 1889, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

over my land and pay the rent on it'.¹⁶⁷ This was declined, and as did not appear in court judgment went against him.¹⁶⁸ When his land was forfeited in July, although he had 'done nothing in the way of Cultivation' his improvements were valued at £11 10s.¹⁶⁹

FINANCIAL POSITION

As noted, when moving his house from Te Aroha to Waiorongomai and when attempting to develop his Gordon section, he had claimed that poverty prevented him paying his debts. As an indication of his modest standard of living, his wife wore a cream sateen dress with cardinal trimmings to a ball in 1885, inexpensive clothing compared with some of the other dresses and adornments on display.¹⁷⁰ At the end of 1889, in addition to being sued for not paying rent on his Gordon farm, two shopkeepers sued over small debts. On 26 November, Duncan Edward Clerk¹⁷¹ successfully sued for £4 2s 5d.¹⁷² Two weeks later, he had to respond to a judgment summons for £6 11s taken out by William Samuel Collins.¹⁷³ His explanation of why he had failed to pay revealed the state of his finances:

About two months ago he offered to pay £1 per month, but could not do that now, as he had not been working for wages since September 4th. On September 7th he paid Mr Collins £3, out of a cheque for £4 he received for wages, which then left a balance of £4 10s 10d due; but expenses had been piled on, bringing up the amount now claimed to £7 2s 6d. He was now working along with mates as a tributer in the Colonist mine. Since September 4th he

¹⁶⁷ M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Thomas Humphries, 22 February 1890, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 1 March 1890, p. 2; Thomas Humphries to M.W.D. O'Keeffe, 4 March 1890, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum re arrears and legal proceedings, July 1890, Lands and Survey Department, BAAZ 1108/103a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 10 October 1885, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ See *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 16 May 1888, p. 2, Piako County Council, 12 June 1889, p. 2.

¹⁷² Te Aroha Magistrate's Court, Civil Record Book 1889-1896, 112/1889, BCDG 11221/1c, ANZ-A.

¹⁷³ See *Te Aroha News*, 22 September 1888, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 27 December 1915, p. 9.

had earned and received about £13. He had some land, but said that was more a source of loss than profit to him. He was willing to pay the £4 10s 10d, but he protested against paying the very heavy expenses he had been drawn into through no fault of his own.¹⁷⁴

He agreed to pay £1 each month, commencing on 10 January 1890,¹⁷⁵ but on 17 January 1890 both shopkeepers took out warrants of distress to enforce payment. Clerk sought £5 7s 11d, of which £3 0s 6d was paid at the hearing.¹⁷⁶ As the remainder was not paid, two weeks later the bailiff sold two of his dairy cows ‘in full milk’ for £5.¹⁷⁷ Collins sought £7 19s 6d, but after the bailiff went to seize some of O’Keeffe’s possessions the warrant was returned marked ‘Nulla Bona’, meaning there was nothing of value to be sold.¹⁷⁸ On 4 February, the magistrate considered a judgment summons taken out by Collins for this amount plus additional court costs, meaning he now had to pay £8 11s 6d. After Collins’ solicitor stated that, as no money had been paid, O’Keeffe should show why he should not be imprisoned for contempt of the court’s decision, he explained his financial position:

He had not obeyed the order made on November 12th, because he had not had the means to do so. He owed various other creditors small sums, ranging from £1 to £6, and sold some cattle to justify these small debts. The whole of the cattle sold realised about £10 17s 6d. Two milch cows had been seized by the Bailiff and sold for £5, he valued the cows at £10. He had himself sold one head of cattle to H[enry William] Baskiville,¹⁷⁹ of Waiorongomai, for £2 17s 6d; and two others to D[avid] Foughey,¹⁸⁰ of Shaftesbury, for £3 or £3 10s, he was not sure which. He had no horse, or other means of paying the debt.

¹⁷⁴ Magistrate’s Court, *Te Aroha News*, 11 December 1889, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Civil Record Book 1889-1896, Judgment Summons heard on 10 December 1889, BCDG 11221/1c, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁶ Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Home Warrant Book 1883-1928, 112/1890, BBAV 11498/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 25 January 1890, p. 2, 1 February 1890, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ Te Aroha Magistrate’s Court, Home Warrant Book 1883-1928, 101/1890, BBAV 11498/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁷⁹ See *Te Aroha News*, 9 June 1883, p. 3; *Thames Advertiser*, 6 September 1887, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 12 February 1903, Monthly Summary, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ See paper on John Squirrell.

His Worship addressing the defendant said: A few months ago you stated on your oath to me, when you came and offered yourself as security for Owen Gayer¹⁸¹ to the extent of £50, that you were worth considerably over £50 in goods and chattels, irrespective of your land; what have you done with the cattle you then had?

Defendant: There are seven of my cattle on "the run" [at Gordon] yet; at present market values they are worth about 30s each. I had some fencing materials and implements, a harrow, spade and shovels, tools, etc. I have done no farming for the last eleven months.

His Worship: Where are the £50 worth of chattels you swore to me you possessed about four months ago.

The horse I had then I sold to John Kelly¹⁸² for £2 5s.

His Worship: You said when you came to me to go security for Owen Gayer, that you had over £100 worth of chattels, cattle, horses, implements, etc.

Defendant: I don't think I said that.

His Worship: But it is here recorded in the books of the Court. Apparently you would have me to understand, if any of you men offer to go bail and make a statement as to what you are worth, in the way of realisable property, I must discount it by about 90 per cent.

Judgment: Ordered to pay the amount in which he has made default, and the balance, on or before 13 February, inst., he having the means, or in default one month's imprisonment in Mount Eden gaol.

His Worship addressing defendant said: I am astonished at a man coming here a short time ago like you did, when you offered yourself as bail for Owen Gayer, and stating you were, to use your own words, "Worth £50, aye £100," in chattels if required, and now coming into this Court and swearing you have not the means to pay this small debt. ¹⁸³

The court records referred to have not survived. The local newspaper recorded that the two sureties for Gayer were required to provide £25 each and to satisfy the magistrate that 'they were possessed of sufficient goods in

¹⁸¹ See *Te Aroha News*, advertisement, 9 February 1889, p. 2, Police Court, 5 October 1889, p. 2.

¹⁸² Not traced.

¹⁸³ *Te Aroha Magistrate's Court*, Civil Record Book 1889-1896, Judgment Summons heard on 4 February 1890, BCDG 11221/1c, ANZ-A; Magistrate's Court, *Te Aroha News*, 5 February 1890, p. 2.

their own right which could be levied on it such a course were found necessary'.¹⁸⁴

O'Keeffe did not pay, instead filing as a bankrupt. He was adjudged bankrupt on 15 February, two days after he had to pay the debt to Collins or be imprisoned and 12 days before he was ordered to pay the rent outstanding on his Gordon land.¹⁸⁵ At his creditors' meeting, attended by five storekeepers, 11 unsecured creditors put in claims totalling £57 18s: all were storekeepers apart from a publican, a builder, a miner, and the government, which was owed £8 11s for rent. His only asset was his land at Gordon, and the available assets were nil. 'After some general questions had been asked and replied to', Duncan Clerk produced the newspaper report of the case brought against him by Collins, emphasizing the magistrate's strictures on his claiming to have realisable property worth over £100, leading to the following tussle:

Mr Clerk to Bankrupt: Will you tell us where the goods and chattels are (over and above the land you own), you referred to when before the R.M.; have you still got the implements, tools, etc, referred to?

Bankrupt: No.

Mr Clerk: Where have those goods you valued then at £100 gone to?

Bankrupt: You can do the same as the Warden, and discount what I said by ninety per cent.

Mr Clerk: Please make a note of Mr O'Keeffe's reply in the Minutes Mr Chairman.

Bankrupt: I have no cattle on "the run" now, or anything else. I sold the cattle I had on "the run" about two weeks ago.

Mr Clerk: Since you were ordered to pay by the Court.

Bankrupt: Yes....

Mr Roberts: Who does the corner section next your house belong to?

Bankrupt: To Hugh McLiver. I agreed to buy it from him, but failed to pay for it.

In reply to Mr Roberts: It was I fenced it, and planted the potato crop on it.

By Mr Clerk: The house I live in belongs to my wife....

By Mr Clerk: I sold the cattle I had on the run to Tom Casey about a fortnight ago. He paid me £7 for them.

¹⁸⁴ Police Court, *Te Aroha News*, 5 October 1889, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Supreme Court, Bankruptcy Register 1887-1892, p. 278, BBAE 5639/1a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 22 February 1890, p. 2, 1 March 1890, p. 2.

By Mr Clerk: [Thomas] Casey¹⁸⁶ is my mate. I paid the £7 I received from Casey to [solicitor] Sir Wm. Wasteneys to put me through the [bankruptcy] Court. The harrow, etc, are still up at the [Gordon] Settlement somewhere, I don't know where they are now.

In reply to Mr Clerk, the Bankrupt said he also had a bullock some time ago, but sold it to Mr McNicol for 10s. The reason he sold it so cheap was that it had been running on [the McNicol brothers' estate at] Wairakau for a long time, and Mr McNicol claimed for the grazing of it. Mr McNicol had paid him the 10s.

Mr Roberts in reply to Mr Clerk said he spoke to Mr McNicol a few days ago about this bullock, and Mr McNicol then told him he had neither paid for nor bought the bullock at all.

Mr Clerk here again reminded the Bankrupt of what the R.M. had so recently said to him in Court.

Bankrupt: The Warden made as false and deliberate a statement in Court as ever a man made, or else he made a great mistake.

By Mr Clerk: ... The £2 due to Thos. Casey is for money I borrowed from him. I borrowed it from him long before I sold him my cattle. He did not deduct it when paying me for the cattle, but paid me the £7 in full.

(The creditors present remarked upon the very liberal way Mr Casey had of doing business).

Bankrupt in reply to Mr Clerk: Martin Murphy's claim is partly for money I borrowed from him, and the balance for drink.

(Martin Murphy was a Waiorongomai publican.)¹⁸⁷ After 'some further unimportant questions had been put', it was agreed to send the official assignee a copy of the minutes of this meeting and of the newspaper account of the magistrate's comments. They drew attention to O'Keeffe's statement that 'he had within the preceding fortnight sold seven head of cattle to his own mate for £7', an amount they wanted to obtain; they also wanted to enquire into the sale of the bullock. Their concluding resolution stated that they were so 'dissatisfied with the position of affairs' that they wished O'Keeffe to be publicly examined on oath.¹⁸⁸

His straightened financial circumstances suggest that his wife was not working in her former occupation as a servant, although she probably

¹⁸⁶ See *Te Aroha Warden's Court, Register of Te Aroha Claims 1880-1888*, folios 28, 132, BBAV 11567/1a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 November 1883, p. 1704; *Te Aroha News*, 4 December 1888, p. 2.

¹⁸⁷ See *Waikato Times*, 12 June 1888, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 11 May 1891, p. 2, 10 July 1897, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 29 March 1898, p. 2, 3 June 1910, p. 2, 30 June 1932, p. 5.

¹⁸⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 1 March 1890, p. 2.

milked the cows while he was either mining or trying to farm. There was no public examination under oath, as requested, for reasons that cannot be traced because of the destruction of his bankruptcy file. In late 1891 his creditors received 1s 3 1/2d in the £ as a first and final dividend.¹⁸⁹ After a balance sheet was filed in December, in the following month his bankruptcy was closed.¹⁹⁰

Unlike most bankruptcies, this closure did not end the story. As O’Keeffe wrote in his biography in the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, after he had been ‘unfortunate and became bankrupt’, he ‘carried his swag to the Thames, and some time afterwards, having been successful in mining, called a meeting of his creditors and paid everyone twenty shillings in the pound’.¹⁹¹ After the second and final dividend of 18s 8 1/2d was paid in early 1894, a journal that reported people’s creditworthiness added ‘NB’ to the announcement that he had met his debts in full.¹⁹² The *Auckland Star* headlined its report of this unusual act ‘An Honest Bankrupt: He Pays His Debts in Full’, and described it as ‘a case of exceptional honesty’.¹⁹³ A small Thames newspaper mainly devoted to advertising, the *Thames Sentinel and Miners’ Journal*, reprinted this paragraph because it believed his action was probably the first such case in that town and hoped, over-optimistically, that others might follow his example. It was also impressed by his action being made possible not through sudden good fortune but ‘from the proceeds of hard work and careful saving’.¹⁹⁴ In 1901, the *Observer* wrote an account that may have been based on information provided by O’Keeffe:

Years ago, Michael made a rise at Waiorongomai which enabled him to invest in a farm in the neighbourhood. At that time, farming was at such a low ebb that the venture proved an utter loss, and the result was bankruptcy. O’Keeffe shouldered his blanket, and trudged to the Thames, but ere many months had elapsed a second lucky find gave him a bank balance of £1300. Without delay, he came to Auckland, and, placing a cheque in the Official Assignee’s hands, he requested that gentleman to call his creditors together and pay them in full. Mr Lawson objected. O’Keeffe had got his discharge, and, in the eyes of the law, owed

¹⁸⁹ *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette*, 19 November 1891, p. 349.

¹⁹⁰ Supreme Court, Bankruptcy Register 1887-1892, p. 278, BBAE 5639/1a, ANZ-A.

¹⁹¹ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 473.

¹⁹² *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette*, 15 February 1894, p. 70.

¹⁹³ *Auckland Star*, 4 January 1894, p. 5.

¹⁹⁴ *Thames Sentinel and Miners’ Journal*, 1 February 1894, p. 2.

no man anything, and if philanthropy was his purpose, he would act more sensibly by distributing his little pile in bank notes at the South British corner [where mining investments were made]. But the sturdy miner was obdurate. The creditors were called together, and were paid in full, and Mr O’Keeffe felt he could look any man in the country in the face. There are a few wealthy individuals in this community, whose property travelled round to the rear of the Bankruptcy Court and met them when they emerged from it, who would find a high lesson in honour and morality in this episode.¹⁹⁵

MINING AT THAMES IN THE 1890s

Apart from this reference to a lucky find in an unnamed mine, and a declaration in April 1892 by a mine manager that O’Keeffe had worked under him as a shift boss ‘for a long time’ in the Thames area,¹⁹⁶ little was published about his mining there in the early 1890s. In May 1892 he was fined 2s for the common offence of having two cows at large in a public street.¹⁹⁷ In May 1894, he was on the committee of the Thames Prospecting Association but resigned from the association for unknown reasons four months later.¹⁹⁸ At that time he was living at Collarbone,¹⁹⁹ amongst the mines; the following year the borough council agreed to his request ‘that the approach from his residence to the Hazelbank shaft – about a chain and a half – should be made fit for foot and dray traffic’.²⁰⁰ Shortly afterwards he bought a residence site on Caledonian Hill for £20 which he retained until the end of 1910.²⁰¹ In 1902 he was living in the Moanataiari Creek area.²⁰² His house on Moanataiari Hill was valued at £36 in 1905, being then 25 years old and in ‘medium’ condition.²⁰³

¹⁹⁵ *Observer*, 15 June 1901, p. 6.

¹⁹⁶ Declaration of John Williams, 14 April 1892, Mines Department, MD 1, 92/687, ANZ-W.

¹⁹⁷ Thames Magistrate’s Court, Criminal Record Book 1889-1893, 88/1892, BACL 13736/2a, ANZ-A.

¹⁹⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1894, p. 2, 3 September 1894, p. 3.

¹⁹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 August 1894, p. 3.

²⁰⁰ Borough Council, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 April 1895, p. 3.

²⁰¹ Thames Warden’s Court, Register of Licenses 1893-1896, folio 10, BACL 14422/1a; Transfers and Mortgages 1894-1895, no. 54879, BACL 13964/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁰² *Thames Electoral Roll, 1902*, p. 61.

²⁰³ Thames Borough Valuation Roll, 1 April 1905, folio 28, Valuation Department, BBBC A150/450, ANZ-A.

In January 1895, he was sued for £7 7s 6d, being unpaid wages presumably over to a miner.²⁰⁴ Six months later, he applied for what he called the Disowned;²⁰⁵ formerly the profitable Prince Imperial, because it was not being manned by the Victoria Company he claimed it should be forfeited to him. ‘The case excited considerable interest, and the Court was crowded during its hearing’; instead of granting his application, the warden fined the company £4 for a ‘technical breach of the regulations’.²⁰⁶ Two months later, he again tried to obtain possession, but after the hearing was adjourned withdrew his application,²⁰⁷ presumably despairing of winning.

In June 1896, a meeting of ‘experienced miners’ considered government proposals to require mine managers to hold a certificate of competence. When the chairman, John Carnie,²⁰⁸ stated that under the new regulations the ‘practical miners’ found themselves being managed by young men ‘fresh from the School of Mines’ and without experience, O’Keeffe interjected:

I protest against those remarks. Several of the young men from the School of Mines are quite practical.

The Chairman: When I have finished, Mr O’Keeffe, you can say what you wish to.

When a motion was proposed that all practical miners with 15 years’ experience could apply for a certificate,

Mr O’Keeffe said he was in perfect sympathy with the motion, and also with the remarks of many of the speakers. He thought the rights of the experienced men should be recognised, but he could not agree with the Chairman in his remarks as to the rawness in practical knowledge of those at the School of Mines, and he could assure Mr Carnie that if he spent an hour or two there he would find that there were those in the room to whom he

²⁰⁴ Thames Magistrate’s Court, *Plaint Book 1890-1895*, entry for 10 January 1895, BACL 13737/2a, ANZ-A.

²⁰⁵ Thames Warden’s Court, *Register of Applications for Licensed Holdings and Special Claims 1887-1896*, folio 122, BACL 14376/1a, ANZ-A.

²⁰⁶ Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 21 June 1895, p. 2, 22 June 1895, p. 3.

²⁰⁷ Warden’s Court, *Thames Advertiser*, 16 August 1895, p. 3; *New Zealand Herald*, 6 September 1895, p. 6.

²⁰⁸ See *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1896*, pp. 2, 8; *Auckland Star*, 28 August 1896, p. 4; *Thames Advertiser*, 22 March 1897, p. 3.

could give no points. He could not see why, because men were scholars, they could have no practical ability, and speaking directly for the students of the School he could say they wished to see the merits of experienced men recognised, and they would assist them in getting certificates.²⁰⁹

As implied, O’Keeffe was studying at the School of Mines. In October 1892, he had obtained a Second Class Service Certificate after three mine managers declared that he had been an underground boss in the Colonist at Waiorongomai for two years, a shift boss in the Wellington there for three years, and for a ‘long time’ a shift boss in an unnamed Thames mine.²¹⁰ During 1896, he attended classes, but obtained only 28 marks, the lowest of the seven candidates; the next-lowest mark was 46.²¹¹ In January 1897, he asked to be examined for a First Class Mine Manager’s Certificate because he was applying to manage the Union of Waihi Company’s mine.²¹² Henry Hopper Adams’²¹³ reference stated that O’Keeffe, who had worked under him for four years, was a first class man capable of supervising underground operations.²¹⁴ During 1897, he attended about half the mining, drawing, and surveying classes. For the first two quarters of 1898, he continued with the drawing classes, attended half the geology classes, less than half the mineralogy classes, and only four of the 45 assaying classes in the first quarter (he soon abandoned this course).²¹⁵ He received the eighth-highest marks of the 25 successful students.²¹⁶ In examinations on mining, ventilation and explosives, pumping and winding, land and mining surveying, and map drawing, he obtained either one of the lowest scores or the lowest one. His worst result, in surveying, was 13; all the others were

²⁰⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 June 1896, p. 3.

²¹⁰ Declarations by J.T. O’Shea, 2 March 1892, J. Williams, 14 April 1892, D.G. MacDonnell, 17 May 1892; Memorandum of 5 October 1892, Mines Department, MD 1, 92/687, ANZ-W.

²¹¹ *New Zealand Gazette*, 11 February 1897, p. 454.

²¹² M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Secretary, Board of Examiners, 12 January 1897, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/239, ANZ-W.

²¹³ See paper on his life.

²¹⁴ Declaration by H.H. Adams, 13 January 1897, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/239, ANZ-W.

²¹⁵ Thames School of Mines, Register of Attendance, 1897 and 1898, folios 139, 140, 143, 151-153, 162-164, 169, 172, 175, 176, 182-184, School of Mines Archives, Thames.

²¹⁶ *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 March 1898, p. 357.

50 or above, his highest mark, of 85, being in mining.²¹⁷ His studies enabled him to qualify as a mine manager by examination in addition to his long service.²¹⁸ In 1901, he told the Arbitration Court that he ‘knew mining in all departments. He thought it would take an intelligent man three years to become a practised miner. He had been mining [for] 31 years and was satisfied he had not learned it all yet’.²¹⁹

Despite his earlier plans, he did not move to Waihi to manage a mine there. The next time his mining activities were reported in the press was in January 1898, when he was granted permission to dredge and sluice Karaka Creek for tailings.²²⁰ From September that year until the following March he tributed in part of the Kuranui-Caledonian Company’s mine, working the day shift.²²¹ In November 1898, ‘on behalf and in the presence of the whole of the men’, he presented the company’s blacksmith with a present to mark his departure, stating that ‘it afforded him great pleasure to be chosen by his mates and co-workmen’ for this task.²²² He was tributing again in this mine in June 1899, when his party, along with six others, had their picked stone stolen from a safe in the change-house; his eleven and a half pounds was the result of several weeks’ work.²²³ Although he lived ‘within about a chain of the office’, he did not hear ‘anything going on’ before retiring to bed after 11 o’clock.²²⁴ As the company denied any liability,²²⁵ three tributers sued for the value of their ore, claiming that it had not been adequately safeguarded. Giving evidence on their behalf, O’Keeffe recalled having ‘several conversations’ with the mine manager about placing stone in a chest in the office, as required by their agreements with the company. He believed ‘the stone was not put in a safe place, and that it would be possible for two or three persons to enter the building and take the stone

²¹⁷ *New Zealand Gazette*, 3 February 1898, p. 193.

²¹⁸ *Observer*, 17 August 1901, p. 8; M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Minister of Mines, 19 October 1901, Mines Department, MD 1, 06/458, ANZ-W.

²¹⁹ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1901, p. 3.

²²⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 January 1898, p. 3.

²²¹ Kuranui Caledonian Gold Mining Co. Ltd., Tributers’ Book 1898-1913, p. 20, School of Mines Archives, Thames; *Thames Star*, 17 June 1899, p. 2.

²²² *Thames Star*, 21 November 1899, p. 2.

²²³ *Thames Star*, 16 June 1899, p. 2; *Thames Advertiser*, 19 June 1899, p. 1; *Auckland Weekly News*, 23 June 1899, p. 37; ‘Thames Notes’, *Observer*, 24 June 1899, p. 20.

²²⁴ *Thames Star*, 17 June 1899, p. 2.

²²⁵ *Auckland Weekly News*, 4 August 1899, p. 20.

away'. He 'even went so far as to explain how he could do so himself by placing a plug of dynamite into the keyhole of the chest and so blow it open'. The value of the lost ore was 'about £320, but he could not say exactly from memory'. He would not have kept any money or valuables there, as he 'might almost as well have left it outside. From a burglar's point of view he should think so. (Laughter). The building was no protection'.²²⁶ The warden's judgment for the plaintiffs was 'received with universal feelings of satisfaction'.²²⁷ Not being a party to the action, O'Keeffe's loss was not made good.

He continued to tribute in this mine, his party selling 9oz 16dwt of melted gold to the Bank of New Zealand in September and 13oz 16dwt in November.²²⁸ In 1900 his party sold a total of 56 oz 9dwt between 14 July and 19 October.²²⁹ In May and June the following year he sold a total of 16oz 15dwt.²³⁰ He mined there for the remainder of the year, taking a tribute for another 12 months from December,²³¹ but no further sales of gold were recorded by the local bank.

In September 1901 he would describe the conditions he had experienced in Thames mines, stressing 'the prevalence of gas in the mines on the flat. In some places the mines were very hot. Where he was now working a tribute it was not less than 100 degrees Fahr'.²³²

FIRST INVOLVEMENT WITH THE UNION

O'Keeffe's first recorded involvement in the Thames Miners' Union was in March 1893, when in the annual Union Demonstration he came first in

²²⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 22 September 1899, p. 4.

²²⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 October 1899, editorial, p. 2, p. 4.

²²⁸ Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Purchase Register 1899-1932, entries for 12 September 1899, 14 November 1899, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

²²⁹ Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Purchase Register 1899-1932, entries for 14 July 1900, 25 August 1900, 8 September 1900, 19 October 1900, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

²³⁰ Bank of New Zealand, Thames Branch, Gold Purchase Register 1899-1932, entries for 31 May 1901, 29 June 1901, Bank of New Zealand Archives, Wellington.

²³¹ *Thames Star*, 14 September 1901, p. 4; Kuranui Caledonian Gold Mining Co. Ltd., Tributers' Book 1898-1913 [no pagination], School of Mines Archives, Thames.

²³² Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1901, p. 3.

the miners' race for men aged from 40 to 50.²³³ One year later, he was on the committee of the Thames Prospecting Association, which had the backing of the union.²³⁴ In that year he stood for election to the committee of the union, obtaining the sixth highest vote of the 12 men elected: 237, compared with the highest of 264.²³⁵ As the union's records have not survived, his role on its committee cannot now be determined, but he actively participated in its quarterly members' meetings and in general miners' meetings, such as one in June 1896 held to discuss restrictive regulations about appointing mine managers. He successfully moved an amendment about the membership of a committee to organise a petition and contact the Minister of Mines, and his subsequent motion that the petition be sent to Coromandel and to the Auckland Chamber of Mines for more signatures was carried.²³⁶ In late 1896 he tried to obtain compensation from the Waihi Silverton Company for the widow of a man killed in its mine, and when it refused to pay urged that compensation be made an issue in the parliamentary elections. The union's president, William Henry Potts,²³⁷ opposed its becoming involved in politics, instead preferring that members should take up the issue as individuals.²³⁸ At the quarterly meeting of May 1897 O'Keeffe supported enlarging the Miners' Hall, preferring to do all the work at once 'as the cost proportionately would be less than by making the additions little by little'. He 'hoped the Committee would feel bound by experts' advice – that there should be no definite instructions from the meeting, but that the work should be carried out in the cheapest and best way'. When there was some opposition to granting £10 to the Coromandel School of Mines,

Mr O'Keeffe considered it essentially the duty of the Union to help their young men. Coromandel was a strong branch, and of great assistance financially to the Union, and the voting of a paltry £10 was a mere fleabite compared with the advantages which would accrue thereby. He would like to see the amount made double.

²³³ *Thames Advertiser*, 7 March 1894, p. 3.

²³⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1894, p. 2.

²³⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 16 July 1894, p. 3, 15 August 1894, p. 3.

²³⁶ *Thames Advertiser*, 29 June 1896, p. 3.

²³⁷ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 865.

²³⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 November 1896, p. 3.

The grant was carried, by ten votes to nine,²³⁹ the small attendance indicating the lack of involvement of members. At the annual meeting in August, his sole recorded contribution was, in his words, ‘to test the feeling of the meeting’ by proposing a small increase in the salary of the Waihi steward, as the latter had requested. There was no seconder, and the vote to retain the existing salary was unanimous, indicating either that he voted with the others or abstained.²⁴⁰ In June 1898, at a public meeting to discuss the state of the Thames goldfield and to find ways of providing work for unemployed miners, his participation was limited to seconding the resolution, moved by Henry James Greenslade,²⁴¹ who would be elected mayor in December,²⁴² that tributes should be let in ‘manifestly undermanned’ claims that lacked capital. He was recorded as making the very briefest of speeches: ‘He said they were not there to beg pity from anyone, but to bring pressure on the Government (Applause)’.²⁴³ One month later, he seconded the move by the Waihi branch for more control over its affairs and finances; when this was defeated, he ‘at once gave notice of motion that he would move at the next quarterly meeting that the rules submitted by the delegate from Waihi be re-considered and amended’. No other participation was recorded.²⁴⁴

PRESIDENT OF THE UNION

Potts had been re-elected unopposed in the 1897, when O’Keeffe did not stand for any position.²⁴⁵ In August 1898, O’Keeffe stood against three other candidates, one of them being Thomas Burrett, another former president.²⁴⁶ The other two men ‘from the outset ... were singled out as the contestants on whom the issue depended’.²⁴⁷ In the ballot O’Keeffe received

²³⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 May 1897, p. 3.

²⁴⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 2 August 1897, p. 3.

²⁴¹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 784, 863, 1021-1022.

²⁴² *Thames Advertiser*, 1 December 1898, p. 3.

²⁴³ *Thames Star*, 14 June 1898, p. 2.

²⁴⁴ *Thames Star*, 1 August 1898, p. 4.

²⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 19 July 1897, p. 2, 10 August 1897, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ See *Thames Advertiser*, 28 November 1893, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 25 September 1897, p. 2, 30 January 1899, p. 3, 15 April 1919, p. 2.

²⁴⁷ *Thames Star*, 15 August 1898, p. 1.

247 votes, Potts 232, and Burrett 173.²⁴⁸ The *Thames Advertiser*, in an editorial reprinted in the evening newspaper, described the contest as ‘keen, close, and friendly’, with the result indicating a desire for new blood. O’Keeffe was a ‘very creditable choice’, being ‘a working miner of considerable local experience, a man of marked integrity’, and ‘progressive enough to have set to work and succeeded, even at an advanced age, in learning sufficient to improve his qualifications’. Although his ‘valuable apprenticeship’ on the executive committee meant that he was ‘by no means a novice’, he might not ‘have the polish that some exacting critics would demand’.²⁴⁹

O’Keeffe took up his new post with enthusiasm. Two weeks after being elected, he wrote a long letter to a Paeroa newspaper supporting making a railway to Waihi, berating the lack of government action, and arguing that it was ‘high time the people of Ohinemuri took the bull by the horns and insisted that this work be taken in hand and pushed through with all dispatch’. One justification for its construction was that employment was ‘very scarce all over the goldfields’ and there was ‘little prospect of a revival in mining during the coming two years’. In a year’s time, the railway line to Thames would be completed and those working on it would be unemployed, making ‘the present outlook from a workman’s or a wage earner’s point of view ... a very dreary one’. Several new mines at Waihi would soon have to stop work until their pumps and battery machinery arrived, and the cost of transporting these without a railway was almost prohibitive. As firewood was ‘getting too far away and too expensive’, cheaper fuel must be brought in. He anticipated that the free-milling ore in the Waihi Company’s mine would soon be exhausted and that ‘below base water mark the ore will get more complexed and refractory, so that the cyanide will not treat it successfully’ and another process requiring cheap fuel would be needed. Combination led by the Ohinemuri County Council would to force the government to act:

Let them invite a Conference to meet at Paeroa of delegates representing the Te Aroha Borough Council, Thames Borough Council, Thames County Council, and Thames Miners’ Union, and I assure you that you will have then in hand a lever that will move King Richard [Seddon] if he were even a ton in weight. You

²⁴⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 August 1898, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 15 August 1898, p. 2, reprinted in *Thames Star*, 15 August 1898, p. 1.

can rest assured of the hearty support and co-operation of the Thames Miners' Union, as well as the support of a liberal and progressive Thames Press, - in fact the support of every person, great or small, at the Thames.

Now was the time to act, for if the railway was 'not in hand and approaching completion' by the election 14 months hence 'we could politely tell our representatives in Parliament that we beg to dispense with their services, and that we should look round for some better men, never mind whether those representatives are Ministers or common M.H.Rs', a reference to Alfred Jerome Cadman, Member for Ohinemuri and Minister of Mines. He hoped 'that which to-day is only a whisper may be turned into a regular howl, and let that howl be heard from Cape Colville to Waiorongomai', forcing the government to fund the railway's construction before the end of the year. 'If not, it may mean hanging up the whole industry of the district for another three years'.²⁵⁰ Despite his advocacy, construction did not commence until 1900.²⁵¹

One month later he wrote to both Thames newspapers to raise as 'a matter of vital local importance' the need for a public crushing battery 'where tributers and others could get their few loads of quartz treated efficiently and cheaply'. The only public battery was inconveniently sited in the northern end of the field, increasing carting costs considerably, 'a serious consideration' for a tributer 'trying to make ends meet'. (As O'Keeffe had been working in that part of the goldfield, his call was based on his own experience.) After describing the inadequacies of several batteries, he urged Thames residents to do what they had done previously, namely 'depend on their own resources, put their heads together, and let the Mayor call a public meeting to appoint a Board of Directors, and buy either the Golden Crown or the Cambria battery; put it into a thorough state of repair, and work it on the co-operative principle'. The cost could be 'easily raised by forming a co-operative company' in which every businessman and all 700 local miners would invest. In conclusion, he argued that the mining industry was far more important than obtaining a new wharf and a railway station at Grahamstown. 'If mining does not improve here, Mr [John

²⁵⁰ Letter from M.D. O'Keeffe, *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 September 1898, p. 2.

²⁵¹ H. Armour, 'Early Goods Transport', in *Waihi Borough Council Diamond Jubilee 1902-1962*, ed. N.S. Climie (Paeroa, 1962), p. 83.

William] Poulgrain [a law clerk]²⁵² can have the Tararu wharf to himself, and Mr [John] Grigg [a music teacher and amateur astronomer]²⁵³ can have the railway station as a supplementary observatory'.²⁵⁴

In his first speech as president to the October quarterly meeting of the union, O'Keeffe commenced by expressing his 'sincere thanks' for being elected:

Any error which I may make during my term of office will be an error in judgment rather than a lack of will to serve your Union and serve myself. Making an error of judgment would be almost impossible when I consider the *personnel* of the Committee and officers which you elected to counsel and assist me.

Having visited Karangahake and Waihi, he considered there was 'splendid material in both these places to make important branches of the Union'. More attention should be paid to these out-districts; a railway to Waihi would enable miners in the various districts to have 'a chance of becoming better acquainted'. Although mining had declined at these two places, he believed the prospects at Thames were brighter and hoped that they had 'passed the period of acute depression'. He was confident that tributers would find gold, but, again probably reflecting his own experiences, made 'serious complaint of the meagre conditions' under which companies let tributes. These were 'the worst that had ever been offered at the Thames', only one company offering terms a tributer would be justified in accepting. He thanked its manager 'for the honest, straight-forward, and manly manner in which he met a deputation' from the union and agreed to their requests, and praised another 'for the splendid manner in which he received me and also acceded to my request' over hours of work. After contrasting the terms offered to tributers by companies with the latter's attempts to extract concessions from the government over the tenure of

²⁵² See *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1893*, p. 49; 1897, p. 56; *Thames Star*, 4 September 1935, p. 10; Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 September 1935, p. 4; *Auckland Star*, 4 October 1935, p. 9.

²⁵³ See *Thames Advertiser*, 20 March 1885, p. 3, 16 December 1887, p. 2, letter from John Grigg, 6 November 1896, p. 3, 11 January 1898, p. 3, 22 December 1898, p. 4; *Thames Electoral Rolls, 1897*, p. 26; 1899, p. 38.

²⁵⁴ Letter from M.D. O'Keeffe, *Thames Star*, 25 October 1898, p. 3, *Thames Advertiser*, 26 October 1898, p. 4.

their properties, he concluded by again thanking members for electing him.²⁵⁵

Both Thames newspapers considered that O’Keeffe ‘hit the right nail on the head’ by pointing out that, whilst holders of ground were ‘crying out against the Government’s conditions of tenure’, they were ‘endeavouring to impose far worse conditions on the tributers’. In all the matters raised he ‘showed a keen grasp of the Union’s affairs’, and was ‘to be congratulated on his courage in taking the bull by the horns and tackling the complicated question of the constitution of the out-districts’.²⁵⁶

In late November, O’Keeffe went to Karangahake to resolve a dispute in the Crown mine ‘which at one time threatened to cause a good deal of friction’. Miners had been informed that from 1 December they would be required to provide their own candles, ‘and the men very properly looked upon this as a reduction in wages’, a Karangahake correspondent noted. After O’Keeffe met the general manager, Frederick Daw,²⁵⁷ it was reported that an agreement had been reached:

It was arranged that Mr Daw should give the men an increase in wages equivalent to an amount that would pay for a stipulated number of candles used by them, and if it can be proved to his (Mr Daw’s) satisfaction that this increase in wages is not sufficient to pay for the candles actually used, and in no case shall there be any deduction made from the usual rate of wages paid for some time past. This mutually satisfactory arrangement has given the utmost pleasure, and on every hand Mr O’Keeffe is complemented upon the success of his mission.²⁵⁸

However, a month later, when a Paeroa correspondent interviewed Daw about ‘the recent alleged difficulty re candles’, Daw denied making any arrangement, having merely explained the agreement reached with the wages men whereby he had raised the wages by 2d a day and would raise it even further once he had ‘ascertained the legitimate consumption of candles’. Asked if he knew the origin of the report of the discussion with O’Keeffe, Daw said he did not, but had heard ‘it was done for political purposes’, there being ‘some one at the bottom of the trouble who wishes to

²⁵⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 October 1898, p. 2.

²⁵⁶ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 1 November 1898, p. 2; editorial, *Thames Star*, 1 November 1898, p. 4.

²⁵⁷ See paper on the New Zealand Exploration Company and Aroha Gold Mines Ltd.

²⁵⁸ Karangahake Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 3 December 1898, p. 3.

obtain the miners' votes at the coming election'.²⁵⁹ In response, O'Keeffe wrote that, although it was true that before he arrived Daw had offered an increase of 2d to meet the cost of candles, the miners had refused to accept this as being sufficient, 'and it was with some difficulty' that he had convinced them to accept it. He repeated from memory his conversation with Daw, in which he had said that the amount offered was insufficient because it would only purchase one and a half candles. He recommended the system used in all the mines he had worked in, whereby the shift boss issued the candles, but claimed Daw had responded 'that there were men now at Karangahake who would steal the eye out of my head'. O'Keeffe then asked him to supply candles, and 'where it can be shown that no unreasonable waste of candles took place, then deduct nothing from the men's wages', and they agreed to implement this system once Daw discovered how much the candles would cost and had raised the wages accordingly.

I then thanked Mr Daw for his courtesy to me, and told him that I would pledge the Union to this agreement for one month, until I would see how the thing worked, and naturally enough I parted with him with the impression that I had arrived at a satisfactory settlement, and I yet sincerely hope that it will prove satisfactory, as I do not care one little bit whether it is with me, or whether it is with his men, that Mr Daw made the agreement, so long as he does not deduct anything from the men's wages on account of candles. With reference to Mr Daw's remarks *re* seeking for votes at the coming general election, I beg to state that there is no member of the Union, as far as I am aware, who has as yet declared himself a candidate for the Ohinemuri district, and it is yet possible that I with the whole Union at my back, may be found supporting Mr Daw for that honorable position, if he thinks fit to offer himself as a candidate,²⁶⁰

another of his jokes. The *Waihi Chronicle*, in commenting on this dispute, asked why Daw, 'if his powers of discrimination are so keen as to be able to pick out amongst the miners working in the Crown mine certain persons who were using a large excess of chandles, how was it that he, with supreme control over these persons, did not dismiss them at once, instead of making the innocent suffer?' Although 'no doubt' some men wasted candles,

²⁵⁹ Paeroa Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 17 January 1899, p. 5.

²⁶⁰ Letter from M.D. O'Keeffe, *Thames Star*, 21 January 1899, p. 2, and *Thames Advertiser*, 23 January 1899, p. 4.

this was 'no reason why it should be made an excuse to rob every other man in the same mine'. He had also 'morally' defied O'Keefe by denying he had made an arrangement with him nor had any intention of doing so, thereby 'treating with contempt the motive power of the miners as a body'. And the 'political excuse' was 'worn out, and the bringing down of these pseudo arguments and cowardly subterfuges are only forming the rope whereby such motives are eventually strung by the neck till they are dead – dead – dead'.²⁶¹

During December 1898, O'Keefe was the spokesman for a union deputation to Cadman. The first issue raised was tributing, which had 'played an important part in the development of the mines, and in very many cases the tributers have not received the justice and fair play they deserved from companies and mine owners'. To prove his point, he cited examples of terms offered and complained that claims were 'far too large' and 'far too little development work' was done on them:

They are especially too much when one company or syndicate holds 200, 300, or 400 acres in the one claim. This, we think, is creating a system of landlordism, which, if it occurred in Ireland, would be sufficient to resurrect the dead remains of the forefathers of the Earl of Clanricarde, and like a banshee of old, would hover in spirit over the Minister of Mines in New Zealand, to bless and protect him.

After that reference to the problems of his homeland, he complained that the contracting system in Karangahake and Waihi 'would do credit to the most fossiliferous bargain that could possibly be made between Redruth and Castletown-Bearhaven', an allusion that would have made sense to his hearers. He explained how this operated in an electorate where the miners 'broke their necks' to elect Cadman:

The manager sits in his office and goes over the pay sheets for the last month and sees the amount earned by every party of contractors. In one case it may be £5 per month, in another £6 or £7. He thinks he can equalise this by bringing the two latter down to the former, and compromise matters by getting the three parties to earn £5 for the coming month, and this dodge has been so successful that the big mine at Waihi is now adopting it, and I have no hesitation in saying that before the expiration of two

²⁶¹ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 28 January 1899, p. 4.

years Karangahake and Waihi will be turned into a poorhouse of labour.

He quoted Seddon, recently in Thames, describing the workers' great advances under his government. 'That cannot be said of the working miners, who, if they have advanced at all, in my opinion, have advanced backwards'. Turning to land settlement, he produced a plan of 15,000 acres on the banks of the Piako River which he hoped would be handed over to a committee appointed by intending settlers, who would survey it and divide it by a lottery, as had happened at Gordon. 'I have the distinction of being the pioneer who led the way into that important settlement, and I have no hesitation in saying that, in my opinion, it is the most successful settlement in the North Island', which hardly matched his success at farming there. He then called for the immediate construction of railways to Waihi and Waitekauri to reduce the cost of goods for miners. When the delegation spent three hours with Cadman on the following morning 'the same ground was again gone carefully over, and the deputation have reason to be satisfied that good will result to the miners throughout the district'.²⁶²

Early in February 1899, in 'a long and interesting address' to Coromandel miners O'Keeffe stated that the union's committee was 'in an anxious state' about the 'unfortunate incidents' of specimen stealing there:

He hoped that every honest miner would put his foot down and assist the authorities in exposing and weeding out the thieves. He was well satisfied that the delinquents were not genuine miners, but were the offal which had been blown here by the boom, and all honest miners had suffered directly and indirectly in consequence.

He urged miners to assist the police 'for the good name of the district', exposing any man seen to be stealing. 'The detectives could not do the work. The miners must do it'. Such action would restore confidence, a statement that prompted 'loud applause'. He opposed miners being required to work until 10 p.m. on Saturday nights, and hoped this would be changed to 8 p.m, the norm elsewhere. After describing the 'iniquitous' system of contracting used in some Ohinemuri mines, which he hoped to see changed, he explained the new rules whereby union branches 'were able to constitute themselves into districts, appoint their own committees, and regulate their

²⁶² *Thames Advertiser*, 21 December 1898, p. 4.

own affairs'. 'A hearty vote of thanks' was moved by a miner 'who complimented Mr O'Keeffe on his outspoken address, the Chairman also expressing the same sentiments'.²⁶³ He investigated obtaining an office there, and in April was able to speak 'at some length' about this at the next quarterly meeting, which resolved to purchase a building.²⁶⁴

Two days after this speech was reported, a Kuaotunu correspondent informed the *Thames Advertiser* that, after spending a day there 'in visiting and making himself acquainted with various matters of public interest', O'Keeffe had what he (O'Keeffe) described as a 'sociable chat' with a large meeting of miners. 'Claiming his privilege as an Irishman to at all times be understood', he said he had come to discover whether the local branch would die from lack of support or could be reorganised:

There had never been a time so opportune as the present for unionism in New Zealand. The Conciliation Act now provided the means for settlement of grievances of the working man, or the disputes between the men and their masters. The speaker described this Act, and claimed that it was a grand thing for the working man.

As an argument in favor of unionism, only a registered union could be heard by the Conciliation Court, and he 'laid great stress upon the non-aggressive policy adopted' by the union. 'He was strongly of the opinion that more good was to be effected by quiet and reasonable diplomacy in case of friction than by a policy of aggressiveness, which invariably led to ill feeling'. Another reason for joining was that officials would deal with grievances, permitting the men 'to remain in the background themselves, an advantage of no small consideration'. After explaining the benevolent, accident, and relief provisions, he asked whether the branch, which had only two financial members, was to be reorganised. 'If not, he would reluctantly have to close it down altogether and take back the books with him'. At Opitonui, 'some apathy' had existed for months, but his arrival had prompted every miner to enrol. The apparent want of energy displayed by the Kuaotunu steward would be solved by giving 'some one else a show.' He concluded that as president 'he would always strive to move with the times and to do all that he could for unionism in the short time at his disposal'.

²⁶³ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 February 1899, p. 3.

²⁶⁴ *Thames Star*, 1 May 1899, p. 3.

On a show of hands, the branch was to be reorganised, about 20 men enrolling, James Courtney being unanimously elected as steward.²⁶⁵ Courtney was a former associate of O’Keeffe at Waiorongomai. In 1882, Courtney had purchased an interest in the Young Caledonian from him, and in 1889 had left Waiorongomai after becoming bankrupt through lack of work.²⁶⁶ After giving ‘some instructions and suggestions for their guidance in the working of the branch’, O’Keeffe stated that he had investigated the term of protection granted to the Kapai-Vermont Company. ‘Whilst in favor of giving everybody fair play, he considered that a term of twelve months’ protection was considerable’, and this was ‘an aggravated’ case. ‘His method in dealing with such matters was to endeavor by diplomatic or amicable arguments to remedy’ them, and he asked the meeting to authorise him to take up the issue with the warden. After this was done, the meeting passed the usual ‘hearty vote of thanks ... with acclamation’.²⁶⁷

Upon his return to Thames, O’Keeffe published an article in the morning newspaper entitled ‘Overland from Thames to Kuaotunu’. In this well-written article, no doubt edited by a journalist, he described himself as an ‘amateur horseman’ undertaking ‘a rough, tedious and tiresome journey’. He praised the ‘energetic’ Coromandel County Council for its good roads. At the first mining settlement he visited, Opitonui, he admired the battery being erected. The American engineer in charge ‘seemed to be a level-headed “Yank,” and apparently knows his work’. He ‘saw the battery at a disadvantage, it being Sunday, and nobody being about to give me any information, so that I had to depend entirely upon my own observations’. The only building of importance in the settlement was the ‘beautiful’ hotel erected by Gorge Loram,²⁶⁸ whose name was ‘sufficient to guarantee to the travelling public that they will be well catered for, it being Mr Loram’s boast that no one shall leave his house thirsty or hungry, whether they have money to pay or whether they have not’. After describing the ‘very unsatisfactory’ leasing terms imposed by the company on residents, he praised developments in the mine. ‘They have the finest outside show I have seen anywhere since the opening of the big reef at Waiorongomai, and there

²⁶⁵ Kuaotunu Correspondent, *Thames Advertiser*, 17 February 1899, p. 4.

²⁶⁶ Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 132, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *Te Aroha News*, 6 July 1889, p. 2, 10 July 1889, p. 2, 9 October 1889, p. 2.

²⁶⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 17 February 1899, p. 4.

²⁶⁸ See *Auckland Weekly News*, 22 January 1914, p. 68.

is a great similarity between the two ores, the only difference being that the gold at Opitonui is if anything finer than at Waiorongomai’.

He hired a horse named Jack from a man ‘who keeps no bad ones in his stables’ to ride to Kuaotunu:

[Jack] was the most self-willed animal I ever saw. He simply took matters into his own hands, and ran the whole show. When I thought “Jack” had a right to canter he would walk, and when I thought he should walk he cantered. His idea was that he was doing all the work, and that I was doing all the talking; and he was not taking any of this rubbish. We met the Kauri Company’s little engine tearing along the swamp, pulling about 20 one-ton trucks after it. “Jack” could not stand the sight of this thing. He thought it the height of presumption for a bit of a thing like that to puff and blow as if the whole swamp belonged to it, so “Jack” got clean disgusted and turned his back on the engine and did the quickest two miles of the whole journey. When he thought fit to pull up the white foam was dropping in buckets-full off him. Although “Jack” is not amphibious, he is quite as good a water horse as he is a land horse. When we came to the Owhara Creek he plunged right into it, and for a moment I thought that both of us were called upon to send in our papers. But when I recovered consciousness I found that he was swimming like a duck – that I had dropped the bridle out of my hand and was holding on to “Jack’s” mane. When we touched dry land I dismounted, took off my clothes, wrung them, and tied them with flax over the horse’s back to dry, doing the Highland Scotchman for the rest of the journey until I came in sight of Kuaotunu. There are a good number of gumdiggers and their camps along this portion of the road.... Two of these worthy Knights of the Spear, who looked as if they were shipmates of Captain Cook, stuck me up in the road and demanded to know if I was the blankety individual who hunted up the gum licenses? I believe I looked like a bit of a revenue collector, as I wore a small leather bag over my shoulder; no pants and boots and was without socks. Having answered all their questions satisfactorily in the negative, I was permitted to go my way.

Kuaotunu was favourably described, its school being ‘well filled with clean, well-clad, intelligent-looking children’. He inspected the mines, supported the request that the government should assist the sinking of the Mariposa shaft, and agreed with those who opposed granting the Kapai-Vermont Company further protection, for this had made about 60 miners unemployed.

Kuaotunu was first peopled by a colony from Waiorongomai. Some ten or twelve years ago, a gold famine set in at Waiorongomai, and one of those worthy pioneers struck out in search of new fields, and landed at Kuaotunu, and, like a flock of geese, all the others followed him. They all look hale and hearty, and the only change I could notice on them is that their hair has assumed a more permanent color.²⁶⁹

In March there was controversy over the Kuranui-Caledonian's tribute system, when a committee member who was also a tributer in this mine complained about the terms imposed.²⁷⁰ The *Thames Advertiser*, which had earlier pointed out the system's unfairness, again took up the issue, reporting that 'the vast majority' of miners were dissatisfied with the terms offered by some English-owned companies, notably this one. It gave details of the 'privation' created by the 'gross unfairness' of the sliding scale, under which a gross yield of £2 per week per man would mean each miner received, after paying expenses, 5s. There was 'nothing fair or reasonable about such a sliding scale', the 'slide' being 'solely in the direction of the company's coffers', making it 'monstrously one-sided.' It noted that O'Keeffe had supplied the minister with a copy of the conditions but had received no response.²⁷¹ Letters supported this article, one Kuranui Caledonian tributer considering it to be 'simply scandalous that the Miners' Union should for one week tolerate such unfair conditions, since they must in the end, if adopted throughout the goldfield, throttle the tribute system'.²⁷² O'Keeffe wrote to the press in case his members wondered at his silence,

more especially as I promised the Union and its members, when they elected me as their President, that if trouble should come to their Union and if they were forced into a fight while I was at their head, I should feel very much insulted if I was not permitted to be the first into that fight – but the fact is I do not wish for a fight, nor do those men who advise me, until all hope of peace has faded away.

²⁶⁹ M.W.D. O'Keeffe, 'Overland from Thames to Kuaotunu', *Thames Advertiser*, 9 March 1899, p. 4.

²⁷⁰ Letter from Richard Ross, *Thames Advertiser*, 14 March 1899, p. 3.

²⁷¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 15 March 1899, p. 4.

²⁷² *Thames Advertiser*, 16 March 1899, p. 3.

Whilst ‘in sympathy with every word’ of the newspaper and the views of those who had written about a system he had personally experienced, he asked for the committee to be given more time to settle the issue ‘amicably’. They had attempted to discuss the matter with the company’s supervisor, and he felt ‘sure this matter would be settled without any trouble’ once they had met him; should they fail, a mass meeting called by the mayor would be appropriate.²⁷³

Also in March, O’Keeffe asked to meet the committee arranging the visit of the Governor, Lord Ranfurly, as the union wanted to present him with an address of welcome; by meeting it, he hoped to avoid any ‘friction’ during the reception. One committee member considered that ‘it would be a surprise to the Governor’ to receive an unexpected address from the union, and another ‘would not like to run the risk of being “snubbed” by His Excellency’. The chairman, mayor Henry James Greenslade, was ‘also anxious to avert such a thing, but he would be the last to administer a snub to the Miners’ Union’. He denied having instigated it to present an address, but was ‘very pleased to see that the miners were not lacking in loyalty to the Queen’s representative. They should be encouraged in every possible way’, and he hoped that those committee members who had stated they would leave the platform if the address was presented would follow ‘wiser counsels’. It was agreed to hear O’Keeffe; what he said was not recorded,²⁷⁴ but his request was granted. At the reception, he, the vice-president, the secretary, and three members of the executive committee were introduced to Ranfurly, and before the decorated address was read out by the secretary and presented to him, O’Keeffe delivered a speech:

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Miners’ Union of the whole of this peninsula, have much pleasure in presenting you with an address of welcome on this, your first visit, to the Thames. We hope your short stay with us will be a pleasant and agreeable one, and when Your Excellency sees fit to take your departure from amongst us, we express the wish that you and yours will take away with you that peace of mind which is always conducive to good health and happiness. It would be only superfluous for me to talk to Your Excellency about the loyalty of the Miners’ Union and working men of New Zealand to the Crown, as they have already demonstrated this by their offer of men and arms to serve their Queen at the Soudan. May we

²⁷³ Letter from M.D. O’Keeffe, *Thames Advertiser*, 18 March 1899, p. 4.

²⁷⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 March 1899, p. 3.

wish Your Excellency a merry trip and a safe return to our Mother Country.²⁷⁵

In the view of the *Observer*, his wishing the Governor a safe return to England 'left it to be inferred that it was time he travelled'.²⁷⁶ For his part, Ranfurly, who had been born in Ireland, in thanking the unionists for their 'friendly introduction', commented that he was 'always glad to recognise an Irishman's voice (loud applause and laughter). I am always proud to see Irishmen at the top of the tree, and I presume the President of the Thames Miners' Association is in that position there. (Renewed applause.)'. He accepted their 'loyal address of welcome' with 'very great pleasure'.²⁷⁷

When James McGowan, the local Member of Parliament,²⁷⁸ spoke in the Miners' Union Hall in late April, he expressed his opposition to the new sliding scale for tributers, but 'could not undertake to have a clause inserted in the Mining Act limiting the percentage of tributes to 15 per cent, as that was a question the Government would not allow a private member to introduce'. He could not recall seeing a copy of the tribute rules that the union had sent to Cadman and which had been presented to the Goldfields Committee, of which he was a member. O'Keeffe, in a 'personal explanation', stated 'that either Mr Cadman had not spoken the truth or Mr McGowan had made an error'. McGowan responded that he 'failed to see where the untruth came in, but that he had made an error he was willing to admit'. After a vote of confidence in McGowan and the Liberal Government was moved, O'Keeffe proposed an amendment that, as McGowan was 'not personally acquainted with mining matters and has neglected the interests of the Thames miners', the meeting had no confidence in him as their representative in parliament:

Mr O'Keeffe spoke at some length in support of his amendment, but the meeting did not appear inclined to give him a patient hearing, and the Chairman had to call the meeting to order several times. Mr O'Keeffe was interrupted in his remarks so frequently that he had to submit to the inevitable and retire.

²⁷⁵ *Thames Star*, 29 March 1899, p. 2.

²⁷⁶ *Observer*, 8 April 1899, p. 3.

²⁷⁷ *Thames Star*, 29 March 1899, p. 2.

²⁷⁸ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 860; *Auckland Star*, 7 May 1912, p. 5; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 10 May 1912, p. 2; *Observer*, 11 May 1912, p. 4.

Only ‘a very few hands’ were raised in support of his amendment.²⁷⁹ When he was justifying his amendment by complaining about large areas being granted to companies, he was ‘interrupted by cries of “Sit down” and “What is your question,” etc’.²⁸⁰ At the end of this meeting, McGowan told O’Keeffe that he knew ‘nothing whatever’ about the changes made in manning levels.²⁸¹ O’Keeffe told the quarterly meeting of the union, held shortly afterwards, that in attending with another committee member he had the committee’s approval to give McGowan ‘a bit of their mind’ and to make it ‘abundantly clear that the Committee were dissatisfied with his action’. ‘He believed that drastic measures required drastic remedies, and as he always considered it wise to speak plainly and call a spade a spade, he had proposed a vote of no-confidence’.²⁸²

Also at this meeting, O’Keeffe was asked whether it was true that in some mines ‘a tribute could not be obtained until the tributer had paid a deposit re the winding of his dirt’. He confirmed that some tributers in one mine ‘had brought the matter under his notice, and he had inquired into it and talked with the men on the subject, with the results, he believed, that concessions had been made’. He referred to the new Mining Act as being ‘a very sore point’ with the union, ‘more particularly the labor conditions’, to which the committee ‘took great exception’ because they were against the best interests of both its members and the industry. ‘The clause that only one man need be employed to six acres had caused a very decided feeling of irritation, as it was considered that the provision in the previous Act of one man to three acres was sufficiently liberal’. They also opposed the potentially unlimited periods of protection that could be granted and a company or syndicate holding any number of 100-acre claims. ‘Say a company took up 400 acres; they need only man 100 acres and go on holding the remaining 300 acres for a period of 42 years without employing a single miner upon these 300 acres’.²⁸³

O’Keeffe also raised the question of the new sliding scale imposed on the tributers in the Kuranui-Caledonian, stating that ‘everything in reason had so far been done to bring about an amicable settlement of the difficulty, but up to the present without success’. Complaints had at first been ‘made

²⁷⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 26 April 1899, p. 3.

²⁸⁰ *Thames Star*, 26 April 1899, p. 2.

²⁸¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 May 1899, p. 3.

²⁸² *Thames Advertiser*, 1 May 1899, p. 2.

²⁸³ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 May 1899, p. 2.

to him privately regarding the unfairness of the system', and then in March almost all the tributers had formally asked the union to obtain better conditions. Correspondence with the general manager of the company, Stanley Sleverin Sorenson,²⁸⁴ was read out, the latter's response being both 'remarkable' and 'amusing' in the view of the *Thames Advertiser*, which Sorenson accused of stirring up the issue, insisting that, as the tributers were happy, the union should not become involved. He claimed the company had spent £3 in working expenses for every £1 obtained from the tributers, and that for this £1 the tributers had obtained £6 3s.

The reading of Mr Sorensen's letter ... created a good deal of amusement, more especially his apparent intense dissatisfaction with the local press for having backed up the efforts of the Miners' Union and espoused the cause of the tributers. His remark that the question had merely been taken up for electioneering purposes likewise provoked a laugh each time, since he punctuated the matter so forcibly, and alternative meaning glances of inquiry were cast by members at the President and Secretary, but each shook his head as much to say that he did not intend to be a candidate and had no desire to be classed as a "mob orator."

O'Keeffe explained that they were attempting to interview Cadman on the issue. Having obtained 'the best possible legal advice', which was 'distinctly favourable', it was likely that the sliding scale question would be put before either the Conciliation Board or the Appeal Court.²⁸⁵ Later that month, a special union meeting decided to take no further action.²⁸⁶

In June, in response to a claim in the Auckland press about a scarcity of labour for the Woodstock, at Karangahake, O'Keeffe wrote to the *Auckland Star* pointing out that, far from there being a shortage of labour anywhere in Hauraki, the supply was 'far in excess of the demand':

I will undertake to supply the Woodstock Company with fifty or more well-trained, practical and trustworthy miners in less time than one week, on one simple condition, namely, that the company will guarantee to pay them not less than the current rate of wages prevalent in the district, viz: 8s per day for ordinary

²⁸⁴ See *New Zealand Herald*, 5 July 1898, p. 5, 20 May 1897, p. 6; *Thames Star*, 4 April 1900, p. 4.

²⁸⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 1 May 1899, p. 3.

²⁸⁶ *Thames Star*, 23 May 1899, p. 2.

mining, and 9s or 10s for rock drill and shaft men. This is, I consider, a very fair offer.

The real facts were that the manager had 'gone in for a system of cheese-paring contracts, until the workmen cannot earn half the current rate of wages. Men have tried time after time for this last twelve months to earn a living at these contracts and could not make a do of it, only earning 3s or 4s per diem, and in some cases working long hours'. He hoped he had been wrongly informed that the manager had advertised in Australia for miners, for this 'deserves censure, not alone of the miners, but of every citizen of this district'.²⁸⁷ His letter provoked a jest in the *Observer*:

"Mick" O'Keeffe, the president of the Thames Miners' Union, has the credit of being a clever linguist. Bill Potts, ex-president of the Union, complimented Mick at the recent meeting of the Miners' Union on the "fine bit of Greek" that Michael let off in a little thing of his own in the *Auckland Star*, and said the Union should be proud of having such a grand scholar as their president. Mick was a bit flabbergasted until the article was pointed out to him, which proved to be one of those linotypical alphabetical mixtures.²⁸⁸

This mistake must have been fixed in a later edition, for it cannot be found now.²⁸⁹ His letter was treated more seriously by the Thames newspapers, which quoted it in full. The *Thames Star* noted that his facts were 'uncontradicted', and cited an Australian newspaper to prove that the company had advertised for 50 miners to accept contracts on terms that would make them 'white slaves'.²⁹⁰ The general manager's response was to claim that he was trying to obtain the most suitable miners to work the hard quartz.²⁹¹

At the annual general meeting at the end of July, O'Keeffe was able to report that the union was progressing 'very satisfactorily, both financially and in point of numbers'. There was a noticeable increase in membership outside Thames; Waihi, Karangahake, Golden Cross, and Kuaotunu had

²⁸⁷ Letter from M.D. O'Keeffe, *Auckland Star*, 13 June 1899, p. 2; reprinted in *Thames Star*, 14 June 1899, p. 2, and *Thames Advertiser*, 15 June 1899, p. 4.

²⁸⁸ *Observer*, 24 June 1899, p. 7.

²⁸⁹ Letter from M.D. O'Keeffe, *Auckland Star*, 13 June 1899, p. 2.

²⁹⁰ Editorial, *Thames Star*, 17 June 1899, p. 2.

²⁹¹ Letter from Frank Rich, *Thames Star*, 27 June 1899, p. 2.

collectively risen from 432 to about 940 members. Assets had risen by £565.²⁹² He announced that the committee wanted the union to assist the tributers in the Kuranui-Caledonian who had been unable to obtain compensation for their picked stone being stolen when in the company's care. 'Two solicitors had been asked their opinion as to the liability of the company. One had stated the tributers had not a good case against the company, while the other held out that they had. However, he wanted to see the case tested in Court, as it would be of interest to a large number of miners'. In response to a member who considered that, as a couple of the tributers were not members of the union, the latter should not be involved, he said the tributers 'should not have to suffer' because of this. It was agreed to take the company to court.²⁹³ Asked about men working on Sunday without extra pay, O'Keeffe responded that 'there had been no complaint by members', and it was agreed not to consider the issue until they complained.²⁹⁴

REPRESENTING THE UNION BEFORE THE CONCILIATION BOARD

The next major issue was an attempt by Sorenson to introduce a sliding scale of wages for the shift bosses of the Waihi-Silverton Company, of which he was superintendent. The principle behind the new scale was that they would be paid in proportion to the average monthly yield per ton of ore. It was feared that if this attempt was 'successful with the bosses, it may possibly be applied to the ordinary wages men, not only in the Waihi-Silverton but other mines'.²⁹⁵ The three shift bosses resigned rather than accept the new scale, which might reduce their wages to that of ordinary miners, contending that 'their earnings should not be influenced or regulated according to the quality of ore mined'.²⁹⁶ They had not intended to resign and had first placed their case in the hands of the union, but after being told by Sorenson 'that if they would not submit they could go – or words to that effect', they resigned, 'taking that intimation as tantamount

²⁹² *Thames Advertiser*, 31 July 1899, p. 3.

²⁹³ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 July 1899, editorial, p. 2, p. 3.

²⁹⁴ *Thames Star*, 31 July 1899, p. 4.

²⁹⁵ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 19 June 1899, p. 1.

²⁹⁶ Auckland Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 20 June 1899, p. 2.

to direct dismissal'.²⁹⁷ The *Waihi Chronicle* described the new arrangement as being 'little less than nigger-driving' and a 'human screw-driving system', for it would mean that, to keep up his average wage, the shift boss would have to force miners to work faster, causing more accidents.²⁹⁸ 'Old Thames' called on the union 'to put a stop to this thin end of the wedge being got in by appealing to the Conciliation Board, and, if necessary, the Arbitration Court'.²⁹⁹ The union's first move was to notify the company that it should pay the same rate of wages as the Waihi Company, for the Waihi-Silverton was paying less than other companies in the district. It expected the sliding scale to lead to a general reduction of wages. The *Waihi Chronicle* reported that the 'single hammer method' of mining was also being introduced into this mine, and suggested the superintendent should change its name to the 'Silverton Siberian Company'. 'The Conciliation Board will no doubt set matters aright. It certainly wants some strong force to keep the laws of equity and justice in their place, for there are so-called human beings who are only too willing to crush their fellow-creatures down to the level of a galley-slave'.³⁰⁰

The union decided to cite Sorenson to appear before the Conciliation Board, a move supported by the *Thames Star*, which saw the sliding scale as 'the palpably organised attempt on the part of a few high-salaried individuals to reduce the current rate of wages'. These men were 'pen and ink' managers and had never done any mining, hence their lack of sympathy with working miners: it was 'a striking fact that all the old and experienced mine managers' were 'perfectly satisfied with the rate of wages that has been in existence for so many years past' and 'strongly opposed to its curtailment'.³⁰¹ The *Waihi Chronicle* applauded the union for 'taking up, so enthusiastically', the cause of its members. The introduction of the sliding scale could lead to 'a fight between the Union and capital', since the former was demanding the reinstatement of the shift bosses and was 'carrying out the true principles of unionism, by seeing that those men suffer nothing, from a financial point of view'.³⁰² At an 'enthusiastic meeting

²⁹⁷ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 27 June 1899, p. 2.

²⁹⁸ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d. [19 June 1899?], reprinted in *Thames Star*, 20 June 1899, p. 2.

²⁹⁹ Letter from 'Old Thames', *Thames Star*, 21 June 1899, p. 2.

³⁰⁰ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 27 June 1899, p. 2.

³⁰¹ *Thames Star*, 29 June 1899, p. 4.

³⁰² *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 5 July 1899, p. 2 and *Thames Star*, 5 July 1899, p. 4.

of members' at Thames, O'Keeffe explained the sliding scale concept. As it 'was looked upon as the thin end of the wedge for eventually introducing the same system to the working miners', the committee proposed a rate of wages to be submitted to the Conciliation Board. 'He further remarked that in future the union intended to protest against any increase in the hours of labor', citing the miners in the Hauraki group of mines at Coromandel being required to work two hours longer on Saturday nights than elsewhere. The meeting unanimously resolved to refer the dispute to the board, and agreed that O'Keeffe, William Henry Carter,³⁰³ and Charles Joseph Molloy³⁰⁴ should represent the union.³⁰⁵ The *Waihi Chronicle* considered them to be 'made of the right stuff, and have true grit'.³⁰⁶

After a special committee meeting, the union sent an 'order of reference' to the board outlining the proposed rates of pay, the hours of work, the proportion of boys to men, and seeking reinstatement of the three shift bosses and preference for unionists.³⁰⁷ The board comprised two representatives of the employers and two of the workers, with an independent chairman, Archibald Henry Collins, either a Baptist or a Congregational minister.³⁰⁸

The Waihi branch, by 18 votes to 12 and with some abstentions, censured the union leaders for the scale of wages proposed, arguing that 'Thames should not attempt to dictate terms to Waihi' and wages should be determined by local conditions. Carter was one of those supporting the censure.³⁰⁹ One miner noted that, out of 500 members at Waihi, 'only eighteen (if they are miners) were for disunion', and reminded the branch

³⁰³ See *Ohinemuri Electoral Rolls, 1896*, p. 8; *1900*, p. 14; advertisement, *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 26 April 1906, p. 3.

³⁰⁴ See *Auckland Star*, 14 July 1896, p. 5, 29 April 1922, p. 11; *New Zealand Tablet*, 19 August 1898, p. 15; *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1900*, p. 66; *Observer*, 19 October 1901, p. 17, 4 June 1902, p. 16, 26 July 1902, p. 16; Death Certificate of Charles Joseph Molloy, 28 April 1922, 1922/2645, BDM.

³⁰⁵ *Thames Star*, 6 July 1899, p. 2, reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 7 July 1899, p. 4.

³⁰⁶ *Waihi Chronicle*, 5 July 1899, reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 8 July 1899, p. 2, and *Thames Star*, 8 July 1899, p. 4.

³⁰⁷ For the revised 'order of reference', see *Thames Star*, 3 August 1899, p. 1.

³⁰⁸ *Thames Star*, 11 June 1899, p. 2, and *Thames Advertiser*, 14 July 1899, p. 4, recorded him as a Congregationalist; *New Zealand Gazette*, 20 January 1898, p. 104, recorded him as a Baptist

³⁰⁹ *Thames Star*, 19 July 1899, p. 1.

that union was strength and those who would conduct the case were 'honorable and upright' and could be 'confidently' relied on 'to carry out the trust imposed in them even to appear before the bar of the House of Representatives'.³¹⁰ At Golden Cross, members censured the union for proposing to reduce the wages of inexperienced miners, truckers, and mullockers without consulting those working in Ohinemuri. In a 'very full reply', O'Keeffe explained that the dispute was solely with the Waihi Silverton Company and that the scale submitted was copied from that paid by the Waihi Company; the alternative scale drawn up by the Waihi branch was received subsequently.³¹¹ When he attended a meeting at Waihi, 'questions of all sorts were asked and answered at considerable length', and the resolution censuring the Thames committee was rescinded.³¹²

O'Keeffe concluded his report to the July annual meeting by hoping that the board's hearing would provide 'a satisfactory solution'.³¹³ At the beginning of August, when the board met at Waihi it was told by the shift bosses that they did not agree to the sliding scale, 'but as they were union men, they left the matter to the union. They refused to work, however, at the proposed rate'.³¹⁴ O'Keeffe led the case for the union, arguing that 'men sometimes took contracts, and after a trial found that they could not make a living at them, and had to throw them up', which under present arrangements meant that they lost 25 per cent of their earnings. 'He thought some provision should be made, so that men should receive sufficient for a living'. After confirming that this system was not used in the Silverton mine, he explained how the shift bosses had been asked to accept a sliding scale. 'This alteration was made without warning, and entirely against the wish of the shift bosses, and in discussions with the company the union had been unable to settle the dispute. 'He wanted the board plainly to understand he did not take up the position of an Asiatic hawker, asking 25 per cent more than he was entitled to, but he asked a fair rate, and expected in some cases to get more than he asked. The scale was not an excessive one'. He was particularly concerned about overtime, against which the union had been battling: whilst acknowledging the need to work on Sundays at the pumps and repairing unsafe ground, 'they drew the line at

³¹⁰ Letter from T.M., *Thames Advertiser*, 24 July 1899, p. 1.

³¹¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 31 July 1899, p. 4.

³¹² *Thames Advertiser*, 4 August 1899, p. 3.

³¹³ *Thames Star*, 31 July 1899, p. 4.

³¹⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 August 1899, p. 2.

ordinary mining'. To make the companies 'realise it was not to their advantage to work on Sundays, they asked that such work should be paid double time'. He concluded by seeking the reinstatement of the shift bosses:

These men now positively stated they would only go back to the Silverton if invited by the manager, and at the rate of wages fixed by the board. The matter opened up a serious question of others taking up the work of those men who have gone out on principle. He did not think that three men could be found in Waihi to do this, and consequently he was considerably annoyed. He asked the board to deal very strongly with the three men who did accept the position.³¹⁵

Subsequently, 'a somewhat detailed argument' took place between O'Keeffe and Sorenson regarding contractors. The board gave 'every possible latitude of speech' to their argument over wages at Thames and Waihi, Collins saying that it wanted the two sides to settle as many points as possible, 'leaving to the board only those points on which no agreement could privately be made'. Although Sorenson claimed the demands were excessive, he was willing to adopt the Thames scale of wages, but as the union did not agree, the board had to determine an award.³¹⁶ It accepted the union rates, 'a complete victory for the Miners' Union' that gave 'great satisfaction to the mining community'.³¹⁷ The Thames newspapers reported that the result had given 'very great satisfaction' there. The decision was 'generally regarded as a just one', and it was hoped that it would prevent 'any similar cases arising in the future'. As the board was unable to require the reinstatement of the shift bosses, Collins hoped this would happen. O'Keeffe, asked for his response, said that although the union's schedule of wages for blacksmiths and tool sharpeners had not been accepted, 'on the whole, I take it as most satisfactory. In accepting this award, I shall take this opportunity of tendering my sincere thanks, also the members of the Union, specially due to the reverend and very much respected Chairman of the Board'.³¹⁸

³¹⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, 3 August 1899, p. 4.

³¹⁶ *Thames Star*, 4 August 1899, p. 4.

³¹⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 4 August 1899, p. 2, 5 August 1899, p. 3; Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 4 August 1899, p. 4.

³¹⁸ Editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 7 August 1899, p. 2; *Thames Star*, 7 August 1899, p. 1.

As the company accepted only two recommendations and rejected the other four, the dispute had to be referred to the Arbitration Court.³¹⁹ Collins expressed ‘very deep regret’ that its award had not been accepted. ‘We are obliged to Mr O’Keeffe for the remarks which have passed from his lips. We have only tried to do what is courteous and fair between man and man’.³²⁰ The *Waihi Chronicle* considered the ‘genial’ O’Keeffe had ‘conducted the case in an honourable and worthy manner, and we have no hesitation in saying that an abler man would have been hard to find’.³²¹ This newspaper, written by a future mayor of Waihi, William Wallnutt,³²² believed O’Keeffe had correctly said that ‘he had nothing to answer’ after the company replied to his case.³²³ As the union’s scale of wages was fair, it lamented that ‘the greedy instincts and grab all propensities of a certain section of humanity’ was ‘gradually forming man into two distinct classes, viz, the despot and slave’.³²⁴ Jack and Jill, two of Wallnutt’s ‘materialised imaginative creations’, discussed the case, Jack being amused that O’Keeffe (O’Keeffe in this account) referred to Collins as ‘the Reverend Chairman’:

Jack: ... “Mick O’Keeffe opened the case for the miners, and made a very good case of it too.... But I nearly died when Mick said ... that if the divil went down to the shaft, the truckers would be sent to turn him out” – “and the Chairman a parson too”....
 “Mick O’Keeffe said he had to pay 1s for a stick of tobacco in Waihi, while at the Thames he only paid 8d 1/2, and had a box of matches thrown in!”

Jill: “Good for old Mick, and did he say anything else?”

Jack: “Oh yes, he said that since Gavin Wallace [a storekeeper]³²⁵ came to the Thames things were very cheap. The Board wanted to know, if he got anything for this cheap ad. – and that caused a laugh.”³²⁶

³¹⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 9 August 1899, p. 2.

³²⁰ *Thames Star*, 7 August 1899, p. 1.

³²¹ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., cited in *Thames Advertiser*, 9 August 1899, p. 2.

³²² See paper on prospectors’ and miners’ skills in general and in the Te Aroha district in particular.

³²³ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., W. Wallnutt Papers, Scrapbook, p. 20, 84/173, 923N, Waihi Museum.

³²⁴ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in editorial, *Thames Advertiser*, 12 August 1899, p. 2.

³²⁵ See advertisement, *Thames Star*, 31 August 1896, p. 2.

³²⁶ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., W. Wallnutt Papers, Scrapbook, p. 23, 84/173, 923N, Waihi Museum; reprinted (inaccurately) in *Thames Advertiser*, 14 August 1899, p. 3.

Three ‘Thames Queries’ appeared in the *Observer* in mid-July:

Whether the genial Michael will be opposed for the Presidentship of the Union at the next election?

If a better man has ever filled the position for one that has the interests of the miners – especially the sliding scalers – at heart, cannot be found?

Why Michael was so anxious to argue the Union’s case before the Conciliation Board, and if he thought his brogue would fetch ‘em?³²⁷

A POPULAR PRESIDENT FACES INCREASING CONFLICTS

The answer to the last question had been revealed already: his brogue charmed the board but not the company. The answer to the first two came in the elections of early August, when Burrett stood against him once more. Although the Waihi branch, before the board’s hearing, had nominated one of its members,³²⁸ he dropped out before the ballot. ‘A good deal of interest’ was shown in the election.³²⁹ O’Keeffe received 142 votes to his rival’s 83 at Thames, 215 to 131 at Waihi, 121 to 4 at Karangahake, 76 to 7 at Golden Cross, 43 to 1 at Coromandel, 19 to 1 at Tokatea, all 35 at Kuaotunu, all 25 at Tapu, and all 16 at Komata, making a combined total of 702 to 227.³³⁰ The main reason for his sweeping victory was because, as one union member later commented, ‘we never had a live president until Mr O’Keeffe’.³³¹ In his honour, the *Observer* published a cartoon sketch of ‘“Micky”, the Thames Miners’ Union’s Own’; it gave him intense, staring eyes.³³² A photograph of the executive published in 1900 showed him slouching in his chair in the middle of his more formal colleagues, showed that he did have such eyes.³³³

Shortly after being re-elected, he was involved in the continuation of a dispute with the Thames Hauraki Company. In late July, men working in

³²⁷ ‘Thames Queries’, *Observer*, 15 July 1899, p. 20.

³²⁸ *Thames Star*, 19 July 1899, p. 2.

³²⁹ *Thames Star*, 5 August 1899, p. 4.

³³⁰ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 August 1899, p. 3, 9 August 1899, p. 3, 10 August 1899, p. 4.

³³¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 December 1899, p. 4.

³³² *Observer*, 26 August 1899, p. 7.

³³³ *New Zealand Graphic*, 23 June 1900, p. 1180.

the Queen of Beauty shaft had asked that their shifts be reduced from eight hours to six, this shorter time being, O’Keeffe explained, ‘a custom long recognised on this goldfield for men working in wet shafts’. Having received no reply for more than a week, the men approached the union, and, in O’Keeffe’s words, he and the secretary, ‘those two arch-professional agitators’, interviewed the manager and were awaiting his response;³³⁴ he had to obtain the views of the London directors.³³⁵ It was assumed that a negative response probably meant the union would take the company before the Conciliation Board.³³⁶ The *New Zealand Herald* used this example to criticize some Liberal Government’s policies, claiming that under the Conciliation and Arbitration Act the company would ‘have a very poor show’.³³⁷ O’Keeffe rephrased this statement to be that ‘as a matter of course the company would not have a ghost of a show. This speaks well for the justice of the demands made by the men, else the company would have as good a show as the Miners’ Union’. He believed that the board’s intervention at Waihi had ‘averted a serious labor strike in that district, and a labor strike is like a fire – when once started there is no knowing where it ends’.³³⁸

In late September, O’Keeffe addressed a large gathering of Coromandel members. He had been asked to interview the manager of the Hauraki group of mines about altering the hours of work, and to encourage him to come to Coromandel he had been told a meeting would be arranged for him to talk about the union. In the words of the steward there, the question was ‘freely asked, when is our president coming again’.³³⁹

In opening, Mr O’Keeffe quoted the words of the immortal Burns, “Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless millions mourn,” and proceeded to state that if [in]humanity was non-existent, then there would be no occasion for a Miners’ Union or any other labour association. For the object of all labour associations was to uphold the rights and privileges pertaining to the district in which such an association existed to prevent any inhuman tyrant

³³⁴ Letter from M.D. O’Keeffe, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 September 1899, p. 4.

³³⁵ *Thames Star*, 29 July 1899, p. 2.

³³⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 30 August 1899, p. 6.

³³⁷ Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 1 September 1899, p. 4.

³³⁸ Letter from M.D. O’Keeffe, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 September 1899, p. 4.

³³⁹ John Fathers to W.H. Lucas, 22 August 1899, printed in *Thames Advertiser*, 28 November 1899, p. 4.

transforming respectable working men into slaves at his will. The word “union” was a very appropriate one, for their association was the means of combination under one flag and one fold, and with one head, for the purpose of holding their own against all comers. The great power held by the working masses was unknown even to the workers themselves; if they only joined together for a common purpose there was no power which could resist them for a moment. There was no time in the history of the working men when it was so necessary for them to be united as at the present time, for it was only within the last few years that the doors of the Conciliation Board and Arbitration Act were thrown open to the labour association, and this was the most popular court that ever existed in New Zealand, from a working man’s point of view; but there was a possibility that it would have to go before long, for the employers of labour were using all their influence against it, and he saw by the Parliamentary reports that their member, Mr McGowan, had made a fierce attack on the Conciliation Board, as being too easy of access to any labor agitator who might see fit to raise a disturbance.

He then explained the board’s hearing at Waihi, announced that about 1,000 miners had joined the union during the past year, and asked for changes to the draft rules. ‘He dealt with the Mining Act at great length, and complained bitterly of the enactment from a working man’s point of view, and especially the regulations, which allowed 6 acres to one man as being the labour conditions required’. He wanted the retention of the earlier requirements of one man to three acres for the first two years and one per two acres for the rest of the term of the lease, and opposed large amalgamations with few men employed. After his address, ‘several questions were asked and answered to the satisfaction of all concerned’.³⁴⁰

‘Miner’ was not satisfied with his comments on the board and McGowan, for it could be used against workers who attacked employers. He considered McGowan was correct in saying that access to it was too easy for agitators, who were dangerous members of the community. ‘The name of the Board is “Conciliation”, not “Disturbance”, and I would direct Mr O’Keeffe’s attention to the fact’.³⁴¹

O’Keeffe then had ‘very good meetings’ at Opitonui and Kuaotunu, but before returning to Thames was not able to meet the Coromandel committee to discuss the hours of work in the Hauraki group of mines, leaving this

³⁴⁰ *Coromandel County News*, 25 September 1899, p. 3.

³⁴¹ Letter from ‘Miner’, *Coromandel County News*, 27 September 1899, p. 3.

matter 'in abeyance'.³⁴² He had earlier discussed labour conditions with one Coromandel mine manager, trying to obtain an agreement that work should finish at 8.00 p.m. on Saturdays.³⁴³ This issue was not resolved until mid-1900, when employers agreed to this request.³⁴⁴

An aftermath of the introduction of a sliding scale by the same general manager, Stanley Sorensen, at the Waihi Silverton and Kuranui Caledonian was a boycott by Waihi companies of two of the underground bosses who had resigned rather than accept the new scales.³⁴⁵ The *Waihi Chronicle's* suggestion that they be set up in business by the union³⁴⁶ was not taken up.

At the quarterly meeting held in October, members proposed that unionists be levied 6d to raise funds to compensate a miner who had lost an eye and a hand in an accident more generously than the rules permitted. 'The President explained that by the passing of the resolution the meeting was binding 3000 members to pay the levy, and that a levy could only be struck in the case of an accident which proved fatal'. When the resolution was carried, O'Keeffe, asked whether it was in order, 'said that the meeting had held that it was. He had explained matters beforehand, and did not take the responsibility'. When the Waitekauri Golden Cross branch requested £200 to erect a hall, O'Keeffe pointed out that the rules permitted granting only £50, but if they granted £200 'they would have his hearty support'; it was agreed to. The meeting then addressed the Waihi Silverton dispute, O'Keeffe opening discussion by reporting that the Waihi branch 'had been pressing the matter of citing all the mining companies in Waihi, so that the decision in the Waihi-Silverton case would affect the whole of that district. He wanted the opinion of the meeting on the subject'. By one vote, it was agreed to cite all the companies; O'Keeffe was not recorded as expressing an opinion.³⁴⁷

THE 1899 GENERAL ELECTION

³⁴² *Coromandel County News*, 29 September 1899, p. 3.

³⁴³ *Coromandel County News*, 25 September 1899, p. 3.

³⁴⁴ *Thames Star*, 3 August 1900, p. 2.

³⁴⁵ *Thames Advertiser*, editorial, 13 September 1899, p. 2, 18 September 1899, p. 2, 20 October 1899, p. 4.

³⁴⁶ *Waihi Chronicle*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Advertiser*, 18 September 1899, p. 2.

³⁴⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 30 October 1899, p. 3.

In the election campaign at the end of 1899, O’Keeffe chaired a meeting of the Reform candidate for Ohinemuri, Mervyn Stewart, in the Miners’ Hall at Thames, but limited his involvement to ‘a few brief remarks’ of introduction. Stewart advocated various ‘progressive’ measures, including the single tax and binding referenda, but did not mention any policies of specific advantage to miners or unionists.³⁴⁸ This was the extent of O’Keeffe’s involvement in the Ohinemuri election; he may have chaired the meeting as a courtesy and because it was being held in the Miners’ Hall. One Waihi unionist, Drumm, did stand in this electorate, but retired in favour of Jackson Palmer, the government candidate, who won with 1,765 votes, Stewart coming fourth with 762.³⁴⁹ In the Thames seat, the former union candidate Edmund Harvey Taylor stood once more,³⁵⁰ this time without union backing.³⁵¹ Greenslade, as a Liberal and a supporter of the Seddon Government, sought the union vote by supporting its views on several issues, such as the sliding scale for tributers in the Kuranui-Caledonian.³⁵² At the end of his first election address, O’Keeffe moved the vote of thanks, seconded by a member of the union executive, and took the opportunity to urge the provision of old age pensions for miners when they turned 60.³⁵³

The campaign in Thames was marked by conflict between O’Keeffe and McGowan, the official government candidate, precipitated in the latter’s opening address by his referring to O’Keeffe’s speech at Coromandel in September citing McGowan as saying the Conciliation Board was too easily accessed by agitators. McGowan read from the Hansard report to show that O’Keeffe ‘had put a construction on his remarks’ which was ‘not warranted’. In a possible dig at O’Keeffe, he said that he would not like to see the Conciliation and Arbitration Act ‘prostituted by base and unscrupulous men’.³⁵⁴ In a speech at Coromandel two days later, McGowan ‘refuted’ O’Keeffe’s statement ‘that he had condemned the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, and stated that at a meeting of the union O’Keeffe’s expenses were reported as £9 18s, ‘his business being apparently to travel

³⁴⁸ *Thames Advertiser*, advertisement, 11 November 1899, p. 3, 13 November 1899, p. 3.

³⁴⁹ *Thames Advertiser*, 5 December 1899, p. 1; *AJHR*. 1900, H-26, p. 1.

³⁵⁰ For his life and earlier candidature, see paper on the Thames Miners’ Union.

³⁵¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 14 November 1899, pp. 2, 4.

³⁵² *Tnames Advertiser*, 18 November 1899, p. 2.

³⁵³ *Thames Advertiser*, 18 November 1899, p. 3; note 6 December 1899, p. 2.

³⁵⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 13 November 1899, p. 4.

through Coromandel with a certain Parliamentary candidate, and to dissemble misrepresentations concerning himself.³⁵⁵ In response, John Fathers,³⁵⁶ the Coromandel union steward, showed the local newspaper his letter of 22 August to the union secretary proving O’Keeffe’s visit was arranged a month before his arrival at Coromandel. His visit, independent of any candidate’s visit, was in response to the branch requesting him to meet the manager of the Hauraki group of mines about members’ complaints. Fathers had suggested 23 September as the most suitable day, as being payday there would be a good attendance at the union meeting. On 9 September, the executive had instructed O’Keeffe to visit the region on this date.³⁵⁷ Fathers omitted to mention that on 23 September Greenslade had been in Coromandel, attending a concert in aid of funds for a public battery and experimental plant, and urging the government to give it more assistance to this, along with mining generally, and gave £5 towards the cause; O’Keeffe was not present.³⁵⁸ The same issue of the newspaper published a second speech by McGowan at Coromandel in which he repeated his denial of O’Keeffe’s claim that he opposed the Act. He stressed that the union ‘was a non-political body, and should not be used as an instrument to further anything political’, and stressed that he had chaired its first meeting.³⁵⁹ Eleven days later, the *Thames Advertiser* quoted the secretary of the union, William Henry Lucas,³⁶⁰ that he had been instructed to deny accusations made by McGowan of misappropriation of funds by the executive, meaning its paying O’Keeffe to visit Coromandel to attack McGowan. Lucas reproduced Father’s letter, and stated that the executive was ‘of the opinion that the only party guilty of misrepresentation in the matter’ was McGowan.³⁶¹ Two days later, O’Keeffe wrote to the newspaper:

It is with regret that I feel called upon to defend myself through the press against the charges Mr Jas. McGowan has seen fit to make against me during his election campaign throughout the Coromandel district, namely: that I used the funds of the union in canvassing for votes on behalf of one of his political opponents,

³⁵⁵ *Coromandel County News*, 15 November 1899, p. 3.

³⁵⁶ See *Thames Star*, 28 November 1900, p. 2, 29 November 1900, p. 2.

³⁵⁷ *Coromandel County News*, 17 November 1899, pp. 2-3.

³⁵⁸ *Coromandel County News*, 25 September 1899, p. 3.

³⁵⁹ *Coromandel County News*, 17 November 1899, p. 3.

³⁶⁰ See *Thames Star*, 28 July 1902, p. 6; *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, p. 474.

³⁶¹ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 November 1899, p. 4.

and to disseminate falsehoods about him. Now, as to the former part of this charge, here is a fair challenge: I will pay over to the Thames Hospital building fund this £9 18s – which has gone so near breaking Mr McGowan’s heart, and to which he did not contribute one penny – if he or any of his supporters can find any respectable elector between Thames and Kuaotunu, who will come before a Justice of the Peace, and, in my presence, prove to the satisfaction of such Justice that I did in public, or in private, ask any elector to vote for or support Mr Greenslade against Mr McGowan in this election, from the time I left home until I returned to the Thames again.

He admitted having criticised McGowan’s attack on the board, the ‘only difference’ being ‘that I said he made a violent attack, and that when he was drubbing down agitators he did not have myself in his mind at all, but some agitator at Dunedin’. O’Keeffe believed the cap was ‘made to fit my head’, especially as his union had put its case to the board at Waihi a few weeks before McGowan ‘delivered himself of this unfortunate oration’. In his opinion, ‘the working men of this country owe infinitely more to agitators for the reforms they have obtained than they owe to any effort made by Mr McGowan in their behalf’. When the union interviewed McGowan and Cadman, O’Keeffe criticised the clauses in the new Mining Act that reduced manning levels, allowed claims to be protected for 42 years, and encouraged amalgamation of claims. He had warned McGowan then that, if he did not pay attention to the needs of working miners, ‘my voice would be heard at the door of every polling booth in the Thames electorate next election day’. He concluded with the hope that he would ‘live till election day to redeem my promise’.³⁶²

‘A Union Member’ complained that, in his effort to assist Greenslade, O’Keeffe was misconstruing McGowan, who had not accused O’Keeffe of asking for votes. Although O’Keeffe may not have done so, ‘he misconstrued statements’, which was ‘a good deal worse. He may have gone to Coromandel on union business, but why did he visit Opitonui and Kuaotunu, he having visited these places just previously?’³⁶³ (O’Keeffe’s critic clearly had missed the resolution of the executive that he should visit these places.)³⁶⁴ ‘A Union Member’ wondered why O’Keeffe had not gone to Waitekauri, ‘a place he had not visited, and yet the first place he promised

³⁶² Letter from M.D. O’Keeffe, *Thames Advertiser*, 30 November 1899, p. 4.

³⁶³ Letter from ‘A Union Member’, *Thames Advertiser*, 4 December 1899, p. 4.

³⁶⁴ *Thames Advertiser*, 28 November 1899, p. 4.

to visit if elected president? Was it because it was out of the Thames electorate?' He claimed that O'Keeffe had accompanied Greenslade because, like Lucas and most of the executive, he was supporting him; as the executive had asked O'Keeffe to visit these places, 'I think we must admit that some of the union funds founds their way into the electioneering campaign'. O'Keeffe 'virtually taxes Mr McGowan with uttering an untruth, which, of course, proves Mr O'Keeffe is a gentleman!' He concluded by stating that O'Keeffe had been 'continually throwing dust in the eyes of the electors'.³⁶⁵

'A Genuine Unionist', whose pseudonym indicated his view of the previous letter-writer, quickly responded that, in the light of the explanation by Lucas, this letter was deliberately lying in claiming union funds were being used for electioneering. 'We must admit we never had a live president until Mr O'Keeffe won for himself the honorable position. Since then our members have greatly increased, and the best proof of Mr O'Keeffe's ability as president was by the overwhelming majority he had over his opponent' at the last election. O'Keeffe was not 'throwing dust in the eyes of the electors' but doing the reverse, opening their eyes to the need for 'a live member' who would change the mining laws. This 'genuine unionist' hoped to see 'A Union Member' contest the next election against O'Keeffe, 'so that he can see how much his argument is worth'.³⁶⁶

In the election for the Thames seat, Greenslade received 1,389 votes to McGowan's 2,573; Taylor obtained 715.³⁶⁷

CONTINUING TO WORK FOR THE UNION

In 1900, O'Keeffe's union work did not receive as much publicity. The first time he was mentioned was when he came first in the committee members' race at the Miners' Union Day in March.³⁶⁸ In May, he opened the Miners' Union Hall at Golden Cross; to show their appreciation of his interest in their affairs, Golden Cross members presented him with 'a handsome union collar and a gold pendant'.³⁶⁹ Presumably this was the decoration he wore in the photograph accompanying his biography in the

³⁶⁵ Letter from 'A Union Member', *Thames Advertiser*, 4 December 1899, p. 4.

³⁶⁶ Letter from 'A Genuine Unionist', *Thames Advertiser*, 5 December 1899, p. 4.

³⁶⁷ *Thames Advertiser*, 8 December 1899, p. 2.

³⁶⁸ *Thames Star*, 6 March 1900, p. 4.

³⁶⁹ *Thames Star*, 31 May 1900, p. 4.

Cyclopedia of New Zealand; he described the collar as being 'richly chased'.³⁷⁰ In June, he represented the union in the warden's court to oppose protection being granted to the Victoria Company, arguing against the protection of large areas because on 31 March only 210 miners were employed at Thames. If the ground was not being worked, it should be let on tribute. After hearing his argument, the warden accepted the union's conditions for tributing.³⁷¹

At the annual meeting in August, O'Keeffe reported the union to be 'in a satisfactory state', despite having to expend £1,000 on accident payments, the highest amount ever in one year. Offices had been purchased at Coromandel, a hall erected at Golden Cross, and assets had increased by £416 4s 3d to £3,842 1s 4d. He noted that the system of protection had grown to a 'serious extent' and that he had impressed upon the warden 'the necessity of mines being thrown open to tributers', which he claimed 'had had the desired effect'. When members mentioned men receiving accident pay after returning to work, he responded that there had been 'a good deal of trouble' over this and supported a successful motion to fine any member acting in this way.³⁷²

In July, when it was stated that O'Keeffe would not stand for re-election, a Waihi correspondent reported that this news had been 'received with much regret' there.³⁷³ Two days later it was announced that he would stand.³⁷⁴ His sole opponent was Potts, whom he had defeated two years previously. This time, Thames voted for Potts by 103 to 79; Waihi also supported Potts by 252 to 118, and Waitekauri by 7 to 3. O'Keeffe won Karangahake 82 to 44, Coromandel 27 to 5, Komata 9 to 2, Golden Cross, where he was considered to have 'strong support',³⁷⁵ 63 to 40, and received all 4 votes cast at Tapu. Potts obtained an overall majority of 68, being 453 votes to 385.³⁷⁶ Nobody voted at Kuaotunu, nor would in future elections, this branch having expired after its brief revival. The result reflected dissatisfaction with the operation of the union, and therefore with

³⁷⁰ *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 473-474.

³⁷¹ Warden's Court, *Thames Star*, 5 June 1900, p. 2.

³⁷² *Thames Star*, 4 August 1900, p. 4.

³⁷³ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 14 July 1900, p. 4.

³⁷⁴ *Thames Star*, 16 July 1900, p. 1.

³⁷⁵ *Thames Star*, 7 August 1900, p. 4.

³⁷⁶ *Thames Star*, 6 August 1900, p. 2, 7 August 1900, p. 4, 8 August 1900, p. 2, 9 August 1900, p. 1.

O’Keeffe’s leadership. ‘A Miner’ working in Ohinemuri wrote that, as nobody else bothered to protest about how the union was run, he would. ‘It is a down right disgrace to those at the head of the Union to have its affairs carried out like they are, and what is the consequence? Men are leaving the Union month after month’, because it gave them no protection apart from £1 a week if injured at work.

Although there have been several men killed in one way or another in the various mines in the up-country district, but the Miners’ Union never even enquired as to how they were killed or went to see. Is it any wonder that I say that our Union is no good, and with such members at the head of affairs our Union can never prosper. Our ex-President O’Keeffe and his officers struck a rate of wages for the miners in the Waihi-Silverton case, and since then every man employed in the mines up-country as fillers in – better known as “mullockers” – were cut down from 8s to 7s 6d a shift, so they turned around and left the Union. Nice men those are to have at the head of a Union. It was easily seen that they were Thames men, as nobody is so fond of working for low wages as they are.

Whereas in Reefton miners ‘go in a body and get what they want’, in Hauraki miners were ‘afraid to open our mouths. We have not even a scale of wages struck, and if we are working in a wet place and stick out for higher pay we get sacked. If we appeal to our Union they do nothing’. This had happened in two Ohinemuri mines, ‘and until this state of affairs is mended we cannot expect unity’.³⁷⁷

This defeat did not end O’Keeffe’s involvement with the union. In early September he complained to the Thames press that ‘far too much protection’ was granted. As a mine not being worked was ‘quite valueless’ to its owners ‘as well as being inimical to the interest of a people who must make a living by mining’, no claims should be left unworked. They belonged to the people, and should be let to tributers if individuals or companies holding them did no work.³⁷⁸ In November, at the quarterly union meeting he claimed some of its officers were unfinancial; although he had informed Potts, the latter had permitted this. His motion that Potts’ ruling was wrong and should be referred to the executive was lost.³⁷⁹ His old friend from Waiorongomai,

³⁷⁷ Letter from ‘A Miner’, *Thames Star*, 21 September 1900, p. 2.

³⁷⁸ Letter from M.D. O’Keeffe, *Thames Star*, 5 September 1900, p. 2.

³⁷⁹ *Thames Star*, 1 November 1900, p. 2.

John O'Shea, seconded his motion;³⁸⁰ O'Shea had failed to be elected to the executive either that year or the previous one, but would be elected in 1904 and in subsequent years.³⁸¹

At the end of October, a *Thames Star* editorial about bullion worth £1,000 being stolen from the Waikino battery complained that such thievery would

cause many persons to abstain from speculating in our mines. The ordinary risks are sufficiently numerous to deter timid people from investing capital in mining enterprises, but if a suspicion should get abroad that even when gold is being won from any mine, the shareholders are not to derive any benefit from it, but that it may be "commandeered" by the men and the managers for their own exclusive use and benefit – then we fear that even the most enthusiastic mining speculator would be justified in declining to sink capital in a mine which never gave him any return for his expenditure, but which was exploited by workmen whose wages his capital assisted to pay.³⁸²

This editorial prompted a demand that William McCullough, the proprietor,³⁸³ should apologise. When he refused to do because no insult to miners had been intended, the union decided to boycott his newspaper; there was even a suggestion of establishing a rival one.³⁸⁴ McCullough then offered to pay £2 2s to the Thames hospital if any unionist could 'define the alleged slanderous words' in the editorial, 'competent judges' to examine the submissions.³⁸⁵ At a 'friendly interview' between McCullough, O'Keeffe, and other unionists, O'Keeffe challenged McCullough to submit the matter to the warden; he 'at once accepted the challenge'.³⁸⁶ Politics was believed to be in part a cause of this conflict, for McCullough was a former Liberal Legislative Councillor, and, according to 'Observer', all the speakers apart from one or two at the 'interview' were members of Greenslade's election

³⁸⁰ *Thames Star*, 1 November 1900, p. 2.

³⁸¹ *Auckland Weekly News*, 11 August 1899, p. 10, 18 July 1907, p. 36, 10 August 1911, p. 49; *Thames Star*, 9 August 1900, p. 1, 12 August 1904, p. 4, 7 August 1906, p. 2.

³⁸² Editorial, *Thames Star*, 29 October 1900, p. 2.

³⁸³ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 96, 241.

³⁸⁴ Editorial, *Thames Star*, 3 November 1900, p. 2.

³⁸⁵ Advertisement, *Thames Star*, 5 November 1900, p. 2.

³⁸⁶ *Thames Star*, 19 November 1900, p. 2.

committee.³⁸⁷ On the day after it O’Keeffe stated that the issue he submitted to the warden had ‘no bearing on any matter in dispute’ between McCullough and the union, being ‘purely a private matter’.³⁸⁸ The nature of this private dispute cannot be determined because the warden declined to adjudicate, and the £5 both men staked went to the hospital.³⁸⁹

TROUBLE AT WAIHI

In 1901, a dispute over wages at Waihi embroiled the entire union. An Arbitration Court ruling in 1900 raising the wages of South Island hard rock miners had prompted the Waihi men to press for increases: three were higher than at Reefton, three were the same, and 12 were lower.³⁹⁰ When the Waihi Company rejected the proposed wage scale, the miners voted overwhelmingly to refer the dispute to the Conciliation Board; in response, the superintendent for the company, Hubert Percy Barry,³⁹¹ dismissed 12 union officials and activists.³⁹² This was done quite blatantly: one dismissed official would tell the board that he was dismissed two days after notice seeking increased wages was served on the company (on 19 February), despite the shift boss telling him that he was satisfied with his work. ‘It was strange that out of 1000 men only the officials were singled out and sacked’.³⁹³ The dismissals caused a ‘sensation’, and although no reason was given were assumed to have been because of the pending sitting of the board, creating ‘great indignation’ at Waihi.³⁹⁴ The *Observer* headlined its report: ‘Terrorism at Waihi’.³⁹⁵ Dismissals then occurred at the Waikino

³⁸⁷ Letter from ‘Observer’, *Thames Star*, 19 November 1900, p. 2.

³⁸⁸ Letter from M.D. O’Keeffe, *Thames Star*, 20 November 1900, p. 2.

³⁸⁹ *Thames Star*, 21 November 1900, p. 2.

³⁹⁰ Jeremy Mouat, ‘The Ultimate Crisis of the Waihi Gold Mining Company’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 26 no. 2 (October 1992), p. 185; *New Zealand Herald*, 20 April 1901, p. 3.

³⁹¹ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 504, 840; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 2 October 1918, p. 2.

³⁹² Mouat, p. 185 [number of men dismissed incorrectly given as 11]; *New Zealand Herald*, 20 April 1901, p. 3.

³⁹³ Evidence of William Guilder, *Thames Star*, 22 April 1901, p. 3.

³⁹⁴ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 22 February 1901, p. 2, 23 February 1901, p. 1.

³⁹⁵ *Observer*, 2 March 1901, p. 2.

Battery.³⁹⁶ To counter the accusations being spread, Charles Rhodes,³⁹⁷ attorney for the Waihi Company, issued a statement:

There is evidently a misapprehension on the subject of the dismissal of some miners employed at the Waihi mine. No instructions to that effect were issues from the London office or the office at Auckland. He states that the men have not been dismissed by reason of their connection with the Miners' Union, and that the management have not caused lists to be sent around, with a view of intimidating the men into signing that they are satisfied with the present scale of wages. Mr Rhodes denies that there is any intention whatever of intimidation on the part of the company.³⁹⁸

At the board's hearing, after first refusing to say why he had dismissed the men, Barry stated that he had acted in the best interests of the company and the main body of workers. 'On reflection he was prepared to admit that in dismissing the men he might have acted impulsively', and should the board determine that he had acted contrary to the Act, 'he would be prepared to frankly admit having committed an error of judgment'.³⁹⁹ He did not, however, offer to re-employ the men. The denials that the dismissals were the result of a direct order from the directors may have been technically correct, but Rhodes and Barry would have been very conscious of the financial difficulties of the company and its desire to reduce expenses.⁴⁰⁰ A letter dated 12 February from the chairman of directors to Barry contained 'very peremptory instructions' to cut costs, which prompted the dismissals; it would have been received after he started dismissing men, unless sent by cable.⁴⁰¹ At the same time as the first men were dismissed, the company stated that although its miners were paid 6d per day more than Thames miners, it was now being asked to pay an extra 1s per day.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁶ *Thames Star*, 26 February 1901, p. 2.

³⁹⁷ See *Auckland Star*, 21 November 1932, p. 5.

³⁹⁸ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 26 February 1901, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ *Thames Star*, 24 April 1901, p. 4, 25 April 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁰ See Mouat, p. 186.

⁴⁰¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 September 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁰² *Thames Star*, 28 February 1901, p. 4.

As more men were dismissed, politicians became involved, the Member of Parliament for Ohinemuri, Jackson Palmer,⁴⁰³ speaking to McGowan, the Minister of Mines since January 1900, 'who expressed his sympathy with the miners'. Palmer decided to consult the Waihi union leaders, and in early March addressed 'a large and enthusiastic meeting' of miners there.⁴⁰⁴ Charles Molloy, secretary of the branch,⁴⁰⁵ and one of the first to lose his job,⁴⁰⁶ sent details of the dismissals of unionists to Seddon, who sent a copy to the company so that Cabinet could consider its response.⁴⁰⁷ The company continued to deny that any union officials had been dismissed because of their positions.⁴⁰⁸ Palmer and Edward Tregear, of the Labour Department,⁴⁰⁹ discussed the dismissals with Barry, who refused to reinstate them:

Mr Palmer asked how it was that the executive of the Union had been singled out and dismissed.

Mr Barry replied that if they were unsuitable he would not keep them. His decision would not be altered.

Barry also sent a telegram to Seddon stating that 'the demands of about 20 per cent increase in wages and stoppage of contract work' were 'most preposterous', and claimed to be dismissing 'unsuitable men' who were 'actively employed in promoting strife and inciting their fellow workmen to quarrel with their employers'. Seddon commented that this message would 'not tend to solve the difficulty, its tone being anything but conciliatory'.⁴¹⁰ Barry was reported to have said that men dissatisfied with their wages could leave 'and if they like outside the mine to make others dissatisfied, but they are employed to work, not to cause dissatisfaction among others working'.⁴¹¹ However, after several more discussions with

⁴⁰³ See *New Zealand Herald*, 14 August 1919, p. 8, 18 August 1919, p. 8; *Observer*, 23 August 1919, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁴ *Thames Star*, 28 February 1901, p. 2, 4 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁵ See *Thames Star*, 15 October 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁶ *Thames Star*, 22 February 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁷ *Thames Star*, 1 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁸ *Thames Star*, 2 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁹ See *Evening Post*, 28 October 1931, p. 11, 6 November 1931, p. 3; *Auckland Star*, 31 October 1931, p. 8.

⁴¹⁰ *Thames Star*, 7 March 1901, p. 3.

⁴¹¹ *Thames Star*, 8 March 1901, p. 2.

Tregear, he offered to reinstate all the dismissed men ‘if they drop the matter of the original dispute’,⁴¹² or in other words withdrew the demands for increased wages. An ‘immense meeting’ held at Waihi, which included hundreds of men from Waikino and Waitekauri, unanimously resolved to reject his offer. It was also unanimously agreed that no dismissed man should return to work unless all were re-employed and that all Waihi companies should be cited before the board in order to adopt a new scale of wages.⁴¹³ In a ballot of Waihi members, 268 voted to take the dispute to the board, eight voted against, and two votes were informal.⁴¹⁴ Potts stated that the Waihi miners were ‘in earnest’ and intended ‘to see the matter through’.⁴¹⁵ One man at the meeting had proposed that, as the board could not order their reinstatement, two of the leaders should accept Barry’s offer of work: ‘there was no seconder’.⁴¹⁶

As the union paid the dismissed men a total of £30 per week while the dispute lasted, it was anxious for a quick settlement.⁴¹⁷ At the preliminary meeting of the board at Waihi on 26 March the union was represented by Potts and two members of the Waihi committee, George Morgan⁴¹⁸ and Edward James Drumm.⁴¹⁹ Drumm, one of those dismissed, was chairman of the Waihi branch.⁴²⁰ Charles Rhodes, representing some Waihi companies, wanted all Hauraki to be cited to appear and be bound by the award because it would ‘pretty clearly be taken as the basis of any award in a similar dispute’ elsewhere. All the other company representatives concurred.

Mr Potts objected to the application, but after consultation with his colleagues, said they would agree on condition that the Board would cite every district separately. It would not be fair to ask the Waitekauri, Thames, and Coromandel people to come to Waihi,

⁴¹² *Thames Star*, 9 March 1901, p. 3.

⁴¹³ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 11 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴¹⁴ *Thames Star*, 11 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴¹⁵ *Thames Star*, 13 March 1901, p. 1.

⁴¹⁶ *Thames Star*, 13 March 1901, p. 2.

⁴¹⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 March 1901, p. 5.

⁴¹⁸ See *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 11 November 1908, p. 2.

⁴¹⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 March 1901, p. 5; for the union’s demands, see *Thames Star*, 27 March 1901, p. 3.

⁴²⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 September 1901, p. 7; see also cross-examination of Barry by Drumm, *New Zealand Herald*, 24 April 1901, p. 6.

and moreover, what suited the southern portion of the peninsula would not suit the northern part. The conditions were altogether different.

The union wanted hearings held in each district, with different awards in different places; the board agreed to separate hearing and to involve all companies.⁴²¹ As the *Thames Star* commented, it was 'interesting to note that by a single act in a single day the dispute was extended from one company to every company on the Peninsula'.⁴²²

An offer by Barry to re-employ the 12 dismissed men as contractors was overwhelmingly rejected by the Waihi branch, they sought reinstatement as wages men against the recommendation of the executive,⁴²³ which had unanimously resolved to 'strongly advise the discharged men at Waihi to accept the work offered'. The executive considered 'it would be a very serious mistake' not to accept the offer, 'and would greatly prejudice the case before the Board and Court'. According to the *Thames Star*, Thames miners agreed that the offer should have been accepted. It was 'generally admitted that the conditions under which the men were to work were in every way favourable, and that good wages could be earned'; indeed, the work offered was presently being done 'at a much cheaper rate' than offered. 'It must cost the Union a considerable sum to keep the discharged men on strike pay', and many considered that it would have been 'an act of policy on the part of the men if they had decided to accept the company's very fair offer'.⁴²⁴

According to the *New Zealand Herald*, extending the Waihi wage question to the whole of the peninsula transformed the dispute into one 'of national importance'. Using statistics of the number of people employed in mining, it proved that this industry was 'peculiarly dependent upon the encouragement offered to adventurers of the necessary capital'. As most of this money came from outside New Zealand, it feared that 'adventuring capital' which the colony required might 'be diverted to other fields if we unreasonably harass it'.⁴²⁵ This, as probably the editorial writer knew, was

⁴²¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 March 1901, p. 5.

⁴²² *Thames Star*, 19 April 1901, p. 1.

⁴²³ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 March 1901, p. 5, 2 April 1901, p. 5; *Thames Star*, 1 April 1901, p. 2.

⁴²⁴ *Thames Star*, 3 April 1901, p. 4.

⁴²⁵ Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 3 April 1901, p. 4.

to be the employers' case, and was one reason they wanted to include mines outside the most profitable area, Waihi.

Almost immediately after the rejection of Barry's offer to reinstate the dismissed miners as contractors, the company heightened tension by dismissing 30 men and, it was reported, planning to dismiss 30 more 'so as to shorten hands and cut down expenses'. Either the Waihi Correspondent or the *Thames Star's* sub-editor asked in a headline: 'Has It Anything To Do With the Dispute?'⁴²⁶

ASSISTING THE UNION'S CASE

O'Keeffe was not involved at the issue at this stage, at least not publicly, but in response to a letter to the *New Zealand Herald* complaining that Lucas, the secretary, who sat on the board, could not be unbiased,⁴²⁷ denied that this had deprived the employers 'of that fair play which they are so well known to administer to those dependent on them'. He argued that Lucas' reputation was 'above suspicion' and he was 'incapable of descending to a paltry act'. Giving examples of employers' representatives trying cases 'which they were themselves interested in', he commented that the 'representatives of capital' considered that 'they can do anything with impunity' and without question. The two union representatives would 'do justice to their cause, and be a credit to themselves and to us. They are another splendid illustration of the intelligence and open-mindedness which the workers impart into politics when they get a show to represent their class'. He concluded by quoting Arthur Balfour in the House of Commons praising 'the intelligence and common-sense manner in which the Labour party' interpreted the Local Government Ireland Act, for 'with expressions like these coming from an autocrat like Mr Balfour, I think the Labour party have very little to fear the world over'.⁴²⁸ The *Observer* unkindly considered him incapable of writing such a letter, asking who wrote it 'and where did he get his great knowledge of Mr Balfour from?'⁴²⁹

When the board briefly met at Paeroa in mid-April, the union representative successfully obtained its adjournment to Waihi, where Potts

⁴²⁶ *Thames Star*, 3 April 1901, p. 2.

⁴²⁷ Letter from 'Justice', *New Zealand Herald*, 28 March 1901, p. 3.

⁴²⁸ Letter from M.D. O'Keeffe, *New Zealand Herald*, 3 April 1901, p. 7.

⁴²⁹ *Observer*, 6 April 1901, p. 20.

opened the union's case with the others in support.⁴³⁰ From the start, according to one correspondent, both sides were 'very determined', and he correctly anticipated that progress looked likely 'to be slow, as both sides look like stonewalling'. He quoted Morgan, of the Waihi branch, claiming that all the union's witnesses 'were terrorised and would either have to lie or be dismissed'.⁴³¹ When the hearings commenced, the union added two additional claims: to forbid Sunday work except when 'indispensable' and for wages to be paid fortnightly in cash.⁴³²

When the board moved to Thames in May, O'Keeffe and James Hardman,⁴³³ the vice-president, joined Potts and Drumm. O'Keeffe immediately made his mark by commenting, when it was suggested that the owner of a tailings plant be asked to appear, that 'Mr Judd might shoot a man sent from the Union to invite his attendance'.⁴³⁴ He then protested at a solicitor appearing on behalf of the owners, claiming that he 'had in a manner been smuggled in', but as his involvement had been agreed to at Waihi, 'the Chairman advised Mr O'Keeffe to sit down, which he did'.⁴³⁵ Later, when questioning witnesses to prove the dangers and unhealthy conditions of mining at Thames, especially because of gas and compressed air,⁴³⁶ one question, about when a miner ceased work, provided unintended amusement: ' "Well to avoid any misunderstanding ... will you state whether it was half-past eleven in the morning or half-past eleven in the afternoon?" A smile passed over the faces of those present, but Mr O'Keeffe was too much in earnest to notice the slip, and resumed the examination'.⁴³⁷

On the third day, O'Keeffe gave evidence, stating that he had mined for 21 years and been in all the mining camps of Hauraki. He considered the Thames mines 'were more dangerous than in any other part of the goldfield' because its youthful geology consisted of a series of small breaks, or faults,

⁴³⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 19 April 1901, p. 6, 20 April 1901, p. 3, 22 April 1901, p. 6, 24 April 1901, p. 6, 25 April 1901, p. 3, 26 April 1901, p. 6, 27 April 1901, p. 3, 29 April 1901, p. 6, 1 May 1901, p. 6, 2 May 1901, p. 6, 3 May 1901, p. 6, 4 May 1901, p. 6.

⁴³¹ Paeroa Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 18 April 1901, p. 2.

⁴³² *Thames Star*, 19 April 1901, p. 2.

⁴³³ See *Thames Star*, 4 October 1895, p. 2, 22 June 1901, p. 1, 30 September 1908, p. 2.

⁴³⁴ *Thames Star*, 8 May 1901, p. 2.

⁴³⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 9 May 1901, p. 3; *Thames Star*, 8 May 1901, p. 2.

⁴³⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 9 May 1901, p. 3, 10 May 1901, p. 6; *Thames Star*, 9 May 1901, p. 2.

⁴³⁷ *Thames Star*, 10 May 1901, p. 4.

soapy heads, slides, throws, heaves, and fissures: 'That is why he considered it very dangerous. (Laughter.)'. At this point Frederick Daw interjected to ask whether they had finished with the geology; Potts responded that he had 'nothing to do with that', presumably indicating that he had no control over O'Keeffe's evidence.⁴³⁸ He then provided details of the unhealthy effects of gas and dust, which created 'the dreaded disease of miners' consumption'.⁴³⁹ Describing how the dense gas drove the air from the lower workings, he said that 'if a workman should happen to be caught in these great volumes of gas he would lie down (laughter) and sleep the sleep of death'. Having had 'some experience with rock drills', he considered that their compressed air was 'injurious to health' because no fresh air was delivered to the face of the drive. Gelignite fumes were also unhealthy.

It is a big order to explain why wages are lower on the Thames than elsewhere. At the time the Union fixed the minimum of 7s 6d the field was suffering under a depression, and wages were then down to 5s per day. It was well known that the miners on the Thames were a peaceful people, and did not believe in quarrelling, especially as some of the mine managers kept faith with the men, and did not seek to reduce the wages below 7s 6d.⁴⁴⁰

Thames miners, 'in order to keep the peace', had 'refrained from causing trouble by asking for a higher rate. The present trouble had been forced upon the miners'.⁴⁴¹ He claimed that 'the condition of mining at Thames was worse than in Waihi; it is the worst mining place in the world', and consequently 'the Thames miners deserved more pay than the Waihi men'.⁴⁴²

Was very much opposed to Sunday work in mines. Disapproved very highly of it. It was a bad moral principle to lay down in a colony like this. Efforts were being made to prevent our posterity from becoming slaves. Sunday work is against the law of God, and the law of man, and to break both is as bad as to bag gold, or steal specimens. Did not approve of overtime. There are plenty of men to do all the work.

⁴³⁸ *Thames Star*, 10 May 1901, p. 2.

⁴³⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1901, p. 3

⁴⁴⁰ *Thames Star*, 10 May 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁴¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁴² *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 3.

He was opposed to classifying miners into such categories as 'inexperienced' and 'aged'.⁴⁴³ In reply to a question from the manager of the Kuranui-Caledonian, he stated that having worked in it he considered it 'one of the best ventilated in the field'. Referring to the Silverton dispute, he explained that there had been 'great discontent among the men, but his exertions had prevented the question being pressed'.⁴⁴⁴ Asked when he considered a miner to be old, he responded: 'He does not hardly exist. He is dead before he gets old'. A miner was old at 50. Classification of miners was impossible, and 'the demands of the Union were not such as would be to the detriment of the small struggling companies'.⁴⁴⁵

He considered the condition of struggling companies would be improved through the increased rate of pay. He did not think the increase would have an injurious effect, but rather the contrary, his reason for this being that when the present dispute was settled, and the award made, matters would quieten down.

Although not personally against contracting, he objected to abuses, suggesting that no miner should be allowed to work below an agreed minimum rate and that any contractor's large wage should be reduced to 'a fair maximum'. 'Struggling companies' gained from tributers discovering new runs of gold, and their manning ground prevented its forfeiture. 'Witness had known of contracts being suspended before the distance contracted for was completed'.⁴⁴⁶

In response to questions from Drumm, O'Keeffe gave details of union payments for accidents and funerals totalling £3,108. No companies paid into the accident fund, 'but the mine managers, to their credit, be it said, did contribute in the case of accident'.⁴⁴⁷ 'Mine managers and their families had contributed splendidly. Mine-owners may have contributed to the funds of the union without witness knowing'.⁴⁴⁸ He could not see how companies had any 'reasonable excuse' for paying miners monthly instead of fortnightly. Monthly payments forced working men to obtain goods on credit

⁴⁴³ *Thames Star*, 10 May 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁴ *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁵ *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁷ *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1901, p. 3.

and thereby pay 'say 5 per cent more. Wages could be paid fortnightly and in cash. He did not think there was any extra danger in mine managers being robbed if they lived in isolated positions than they ran by living in towns'. In concluding his evidence, he described the conditions applied to Waihi contracts as 'obnoxious, and should be removed. They did not have such conditions in force on the Thames. It was a form of tyranny if a manager could come up and sack a man because he was dissatisfied with the contract'.

Cross-examined by Daw, when his geological knowledge was challenged he denied saying that he had been 'a close observer of the geological formation of the Thames', despite having said that 'the Thames formation was the most recent in the world. He did not know whether they lived in an inorganic or organic world', and insisted that 'he must draw a line at these questions. The miners had nothing in their schedule dealing with the payment of geologists, otherwise he might have had someone there to answer the question'. Being pressed, he explained why he considered the information was useful but 'declined to go into the question of geology, for if he did he would keep them there until Christmas'. He insisted that 'the Thames mines were dangerous – they must be – but he declined to go into the question of the formation or peculiarities of gases in mines'. He knew of men being killed by gas, although with proper management and vigilance 'the dangers were not then great', and repeated that compressed air was not like fresh air: 'he had been instructed that in the process of pressure the moisture was taken away and that the air was polluted, and therefore rendered dangerous'. A man using candles and gunpowder required 100 cubic feet of air per minute, a fact derived from the reports of the Mines Department's Inspecting Engineer.

'The raising of wages would assist the development of mines' because managers 'would be able to get better men'. Asked by Daw about contracts in his Crown mine, O'Keeffe responded that it was 'the worst system in the world' because of being one-sided. 'There are no contracts for you can terminate them when you please'. Asked if he believed Daw's statement that the contractors were satisfied, he said he 'would like to believe it', and accepted that Daw was speaking honestly. Told that contractors had written to Daw asking that the contract system be continued, O'Keeffe said he did not 'pay any attention to such letters. They can easily be obtained and are worth nothing'.

How do you account for the communication then? – Easily. It is easy to obtain such documents. There is a system of pressure, you know, Mr Daw.

If I tell you this came to me quite unexpectedly would you believe that? – I would not question your word, but the contractors can exercise influence.

Asked whether he had investigated the ‘many’ complaints about contracts at Karangahake, O’Keeffe admitted that he had not made ‘full enquiries’, but was satisfied that they ‘were justified, and that the Crown system was the worst’. Daw explained the only causes that led to changes to a contract, ‘which Mr O’Keeffe said were fair enough, but added: You have no contract at all, I hold’.

Mr Daw here put some scientific questions to witness as to the constitution and peculiarities of certain gases.

Mr O’Keeffe: I must draw my imaginary line again, Mr Chairman. I am not a chemist.

You cannot answer the question? – No I am no chemist. If I were I should not be in the witness box, but would be drawing £1500 a year, the same as you are. (Laughter.)

How about ventilation in the Crown mine? – Oh it is good.

Plenty of ventilation? – Plenty of ventilation! Why there is so much ventilation that it blows the hair off, and every man in the Crown mine is bald-headed. (Loud laughter.)⁴⁴⁹

Another version of this bout was published in the *Observer*. Like other reports, it hinted unsubtly at his ancestry for referring to ‘Mishter Michael O’Keeffe’, and said that after his training at the Thames School of Mines he was ‘qualified to speak on geological formations’. When Daw

put a simple question to Mick, which the latter answered with an expression as who should say “Ask me something hard?” Mr Daw did. He dived deep into the bowels of earth, talked of sub strata, purple andesite, and lots of things that sounded unfamiliar.

Mick O’Keeffe wasn’t to be beaten. “Misther Daw,” he replied, “the question yez axes me is a difficut wan, and if I was getting £1500 a-year I could answer it aisy. It’s 8s a day I’m getting’ meself.” Mr Daw wanted to know if Mr O’Keeffe had been in the Crown mine. “I have!” said Mick. “Is it well ventilated?” “It’s that well vintilated,” replied the O’Keeffe, turning to Mr Daw, who has but a slight ring of hair left on his cranium, and pointing to him,

⁴⁴⁹ *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 4.

“that ivery man who works there anny toime at all gits bald-headed.” Even the Crown Mines manager is said to have chuckled.⁴⁵⁰

It published a cartoon of O’Keeffe pointing to Daw’s head and saying: ‘Shure it’s most beautiful ventilation. Why, I’m told that the min there are all bald-headed with the draught of it’.⁴⁵¹

O’Keeffe’s evidence during this ‘lengthy spar’ with Daw, the *Thames Star* reported, ‘simply convulsed those present with his prompt and peculiar answers’. Its version of his answer to the question of whether the Crown was a well ventilated mine was:

“Well ventilated! Why the ventilation is so good that the hair is lifted off the moiners’ hids, and that’s why all the min in the Crown are bald, Mr Daw.” This last sally simply “broke up” Court, mining and Press representatives, and audience, and for a minute nothing but shouts of laughter could be heard.⁴⁵²

O’Keeffe was next questioned by an attorney for English-owned companies. After mentioning the problems of gas and mineralized water at Thames, he stated that the cost of living had not been taken into account to support the claim for increasing the wages for miners there. When Thames was depressed, about 12 years previously, there had been ‘a tendency to bring the wages down below the minimum wage – 7s 6d. When the Union was formed the minimum wage was raised to 7s 6d’. As no Conciliation Court existed then, a demand for an increase would have ‘meant a strike. There had been an agitation for an increase of wages, but no general demand had been made, though individual managers had been approached’. Asked about the dispute with the Waihi Silverton Company, he stated that he had conducted the case for the union, which had no complaint against the other mines. The board’s award, accepted by the union, ‘did not raise the wage above the Waihi Company’s then present scale’, and contracts at Waihi had not been mentioned.

Witness did not state that the members of the Thames branch were brought into the present dispute against their will. What he did say was that they drifted into this dispute through being cited

⁴⁵⁰ *Observer*, 2 August 1902, p. 4.

⁴⁵¹ Cartoon, *Observer*, 18 May 1901, p. 12.

⁴⁵² *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 2.

by the Waihi Company. If it had not been for this action the Thames branch might have kept peace for a little longer: he did not mean that there would have been no dispute – they might have held out for the rest of the year. He thought the present an opportune time – it was a beautiful time – to ask for an increase because it could not affect the companies. He thought a time of depression a good time to ask for an increase....

He thought an increase of 20 per cent on all wages would give a great impetus to the mining industry. He would not include mine managers and superintendents in the increase – he would take it off their salaries. (Laughter.) He thought it would be a great advertisement for the colony. The Stock Exchange Jews and others would be attracted to New Zealand and its splendid gold mines. The Union only wanted a fair day's work – but it appeared to him the higher the increase of pay the better it would eventually be for the goldmining industry. He was asked to imagine the result if the Board did not increase the wages of the men, but he found it impossible.⁴⁵³

As well, 'the adoption of the proposed scale of wages would cause a more settled state of things during the term of the Board's award, and perhaps longer. It might even last 50 years'.⁴⁵⁴ Accepting that some conditions of the Waihi contracts were reasonable, he agreed that a miner should be dismissed if he was 'incompetent, intoxicated, or a thief'. If a man's character was 'above suspicion', he should be told why he had been dismissed, but 'if he was not above suspicion he should be sacked by all means'. Agreeing that it would be awkward for managers to have to provide the real reason for every man's dismissal, he said he could 'give him an Irish hint the same as the Chairman had given Mr [Thomas] Cotter at Waihi. (Laughter.)'.⁴⁵⁵ This jibe was a reference to Cotter, a solicitor, being required to sit apart from the employers' representatives at the hearing.⁴⁵⁶

Questioned about employing boys, he replied that, 'to make a good miner, it was necessary for a boy to commence fairly young. He knew that in some trades boys had to work for a small wage, and in some instances pay a premium. This was God's country, however, and not old Ireland'. Not until they were 20 should boys be paid the full rate, 'although the schedule said 18 years. Boys, as a rule, were the hardest worked of anyone employed

⁴⁵³ *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 11 May 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁵ *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 20 April 1901, p. 3.

underground, and 7s a day was not sufficient for them'.⁴⁵⁷ The union's scale of wages for boys working in tailings plants was too low,

for the lads had to undergo such hardships. He did not consider that because there were boys out of work the wages of those in work should be cut down or that they should be underpaid. If he knew that the increased wages would have the effect of closing such plants he would still be in favour of the increase, as the effect would be to abolish slavery.

Despite not knowing the wages paid in these plants, he considered they were 'very low. He declined to make enquiries as to the wages paid at Thames tailing plants; he had given his reason on a previous occasion'.⁴⁵⁸ 'He considered the Thames mining camp was the worst in the world, and that more mining accidents occurred in it than any other camp in the peninsula'. In his opinion 'the Waihi camp was entitled to a rise and the Thames to a greater rise'. He estimated the proposed wages would not cost the companies more than five per cent, but admitted he was not including tributers or contractors in that figure. An increase of 1s a day paid to 1,500 miners 'would amount to about £8000'.⁴⁵⁹

This performance brought him to the attention of the wider public. The *Observer* published a two-page series of seven cartoons, of which four were about O'Keeffe. One board member was portrayed telling the others that he had 'never enjoyed myself so much before'. O'Keeffe was shown posturing dramatically, with intense, staring eyes;⁴⁶⁰ the *Thames Star* considered he was 'well depicted'.⁴⁶¹ In one cartoon, he asked a witness: 'After breathing the gas, do you ivver feel a wiolent tindincy to "wammit" '. In a sketch about his giving evidence, the following exchange took place:

MR O'KEEFFE: If the divil himself came down into the flat street, it is the truckers would be sent to put him out.

MR ALISON: But, Mr O'Keeffe, we have no evidence that the devil goes down the mines.

MICHAEL: Shure, you have the minister beside you, and he knows all about it.

⁴⁵⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 13 May 1901, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁸ *Thames Star*, 11 May 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 13 May 1901, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁰ Cartoons, *Observer*, 18 May 1901, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁶¹ *Thames Star*, 16 May 1901, p. 2.

In a joke based on one of his listeners falling asleep, he was declaiming: ‘And then the gas overtakes the miner, and he lies down and (solemnly) shlapes the shlope of death’.⁴⁶² One week later, the same journal reported:

Conciliation Board business is not devoid of humour, and the whole province knows that comic questioner, Mr O’Keeffe, by this time. Mr O’Keeffe to miner: “You knock off at eleven o’clock?” “Yes.” “Now, would you mind telling me if you mane eleven o’clock in the morning, or eleven o’clock in the afternoon?” The laughter was so profound that you couldn’t have heard a pin drop.⁴⁶³

In the same issue, the third instalment of S. Gee’s poem on the hearing was published.⁴⁶⁴ Gee had

... skipped away to the Thames and heard the marvellous
O’Keeffe;
For Owld Oireland was his burrth-place, and this jolly, witty
wight
Made me laugh the livelong day, and very far into the night.

The fun was great, the questions straight, O’Keeffe’s replies
sublime,
And they kept the canny lawyer Tunks quite up to proper time,
Severial times O’Keeffe (whose native wit can never roam
Far from the subject) brought a very lively answer home.

Gee described O’Keeffe asking a witness ‘do you think that breathing golden gas is absolutely safe?’:

And then O’Keeffe was questioned all about the atmosphere,
As to whether, when not underground, a fellow could breathe
freer.
He replied to Mr Daw (amid laughter loud and rare
In court), that men who’d felt it go deprived of all their hair.

You should have seen his funny phiz as Mr Daw stood there,
And O’Keeffe let fall the reason why he’d lost his head of hair;

⁴⁶² ‘The Mining Dispute – Gleanings from the Conciliation Board Evidence’, *Observer*, 18 May 1901, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁶³ *Observer*, 25 May 1901, p. 15.

⁴⁶⁴ For the first two instalments, see *Observer*, 11 May 1901, p. 23, 18 May 1901, p. 9.

It made me laff profusely till my very sides were sore –
The funny phiz I laffed at till I couldn't laff no more.

And I notice in the picture of your last week's threepenny red
That neither of these persons has much hair upon his head;
O'Keeffe appears to have a few – perhaps he's three or four –
And Mr Daw possesses p'raps a paltry couple more.

But of all the funny evidence which hitherto was called,
The funniest is – “Why does a man get prematurely bald?”
The evidence would seem to show it's brought about by draught,
Which, like a stiffish breeze at sea, doth catch you fore and aft.

The poem concluded with three stanzas about the devil going down the mine and O'Keeffe suggesting that the chairman should be asked about the details of Hell, 'as he had not been there'.⁴⁶⁵

Two weeks later, after commenting that O'Keeffe's evidence had caused 'so much amusement', the *Observer* referred to his 'sense of honesty that puts to shame some of Auckland's "white-washed" society leaders', the slang description of those going through the bankruptcy court,⁴⁶⁶ explaining how he had paid his creditors in full.⁴⁶⁷ In August, it described him as 'a sterling and able man, and as full of dry humour as they make them. His disquisitions on geology and atmospheric air ... will not soon be forgotten by those who heard them. Though only a working miner', he had spent several years studying at the School of Mines to qualify as a manager by examination as well as by long service, and was high in the miners' estimation.⁴⁶⁸ In its Christmas Annual for that year, as part of an illustrated fantasy about the future, there was a cartoon of O'Keeffe arm in arm with Daw, both in formal attire, including top hats. As the guide to the visitor to the future explained,

Mr Daw was once the sole great mining authority on the Peninsula. Now there are two. O'Keeffe is the other, and they run the Crown mine, one of the greatest on earth, together. It was in the Conciliation Court that Daw recognised and bared his head to O'Keeffe's knowledge, and he never rested until he had secured his aid. It is Professor O'Keeffe now: professor of geology and

⁴⁶⁵ S. Gee, 'The Board at the Thames', *Observer*, 25 May 1901, p. 23.

⁴⁶⁶ Jonathon Green, *The Cassell Dictionary of Slang* (London, 1998), p. 1282.

⁴⁶⁷ *Observer*, 15 June 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁶⁸ *Observer*, 17 August 1901, p. 8.

compressed air. They pay him £1500 a year, so he works no longer.

But didn't the Arbitration Court treat Daw very badly?

Oh, yes, they suppressed the monthly "take" system [paying miners monthly] at that time, the best in the world. Now, however, they run it on a better – "the give-and-take system." Daw gives, and Michael takes. Oh, it is a splendid thing, and they are making heaps of money.

Daw and the Professor begged us to come and visit the mine, and see the model underground cottages, where the miners lived in great luxury and happiness on a natural gas discovered after great research by Professor O'Keeffe.⁴⁶⁹

After the Thames hearing, the board moved to Coromandel, where O'Keeffe appeared along with Potts, Morgan, and Drumm; it must be assumed that his involvement was a result of his performance at Thames. When this hearing commenced, he withdrew his Thames statement that the consequence of seeking an average increase of 1s a day would cost an extra £8,000: 'He had made the statement on the ground of a document handed to him, which proved erroneous',⁴⁷⁰ but did not give the correct estimate. Potts led the case for the union once more, with O'Keeffe asking supplementary questions.⁴⁷¹ He created amusement by asking a witness: 'Do you think that a man, by right of his nationality as a New Zealander, should always have a shilling in his pocket (laughter)?'⁴⁷² When he cross-examined John Goldsworthy, a manager there (and formerly one at Waiorongomai),⁴⁷³ about conditions in the Kauri Freehold Gold Estates mine at Opinonui,⁴⁷⁴ the *Thames Star* noted some 'interesting evidence':

Mr O'Keeffe: You said that, if this increase of wages were granted, the poor worker would go to the wall? Have you got any of these men in your mine out of charity? – Well, you know there are all sorts in a mine.

Do you think that contractors work too hard? – No, although it is well known that they work harder than wages men.

⁴⁶⁹ *Observer*, Christmas Annual, 1901, p. 12.

⁴⁷⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁷¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 16 May 1901, p. 6, 17 May 1901, p. 3, 20 May 1901, p. 7, 22 May 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁷² *Thames Star*, 18 May 1901, p. 1.

⁴⁷³ See paper on the Goldsworthy brothers.

⁴⁷⁴ *Thames Star*, 23 May 1901, p. 4.

Are the demands of the Union not considerably less than this 12s 9d per day? – Yes I suppose so.

Have you paid this 12s 9d to contractors without any objection from your company? – Yes.

Do you think a manager should have power to dismiss a man from a contract because of strong political opinions? – No.⁴⁷⁵

When the board moved to Paeroa, O’Keeffe no longer represented the union.⁴⁷⁶ One manager, Alexander Montgomery, refuted the argument that ‘compressed air was unhealthy, as stated by a witness at the Thames’,⁴⁷⁷ which was confirmed by another mining engineer and manager. Daw insisted that ‘there could not possibly be any chemical change in compressed air. He concurred with Mr Montgomery that the statement to the contrary was nonsense’.⁴⁷⁸ Union representatives continued to insist that compressed air was injurious to health, to the derision of the managers, whose view was accepted by the board.⁴⁷⁹ The hearing then shifted to Waihi, with the same three men again representing the union.⁴⁸⁰

When the companies offered to raise the wages of Thames miners by 6d per day and of ‘up-country’ miners by 4d, a hurried meeting of the union leaders agreed that ‘it would not be fair to force the hands of any branch’. As it was important to have a general scale of wages throughout Hauraki, if necessary they were prepared to go to the Arbitration Court on this point.⁴⁸¹

In their closing addresses, company representatives warned against making an award that would discourage English investment.⁴⁸² Responding to the claim that the cost of living had increased at Waihi, one quoted O’Keeffe’s evidence in the Waihi-Silverton case:

During the opening of that case Mr O’Keeffe was asked whether any other mining company beside the Silverton was to be cited. He said, “No, they had no complaint against other mines.” An attempt has been made to explain this statement of Mr O’Keeffe’s on the ground that the case arose over the question of the

⁴⁷⁵ *Thames Star*, 24 May 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁷⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 24 May 1901, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 28 May 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁷⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 30 May 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁷⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 1 June 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 3 June 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁸¹ *Thames Star*, 30 May 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁸² *New Zealand Herald*, 4 June 1901, p. 6, 5 June 1901, p. 6.

dismissal of certain shift bosses of the Silverton Company, and that what was meant was that there was no complaint of that kind against other mines, and that it did not refer to wages. This very lame explanation is absolutely negated by a further statement made a little later, when dealing with the very question of wages, for Mr O’Keeffe made this statement: “With regard to this scale of wages (i.e., Silverton scale), I can bring witnesses to prove that the scale is under the current rate of wages paid. We are well satisfied with the Waihi Company’s rate of wages, the premier mine of the peninsula, if not of Australasia.” It was recently admitted by Mr O’Keeffe in his evidence at the Thames, that the recommendation of the Board was accepted by the union, but refused by the Silverton Company, and that the recommendation did not raise the wages above the Waihi Company’s then scale.⁴⁸³

Potts, Drumm, and Morgan made short speeches, Potts again implying that compressed air was unhealthy.⁴⁸⁴ The decision gave Thames miners more pay, but others received less, there were no separate rates for Waihi miners, and in general the rates were lower than the union wanted. The board did not order the reinstatement of the dismissed Waihi miners, considering this a matter for either the mine management or a court to decide.⁴⁸⁵ According to *Thames Star*, their increase gave ‘great satisfaction’ to Thames miners but those at Waihi were ‘not so pleased’.⁴⁸⁶ According to the Waitekauri newspaper, the increase of 4d in the wages of skilled miners there was at the expense ‘of many not so skilled or so numerous’. Battery hands who had ‘been condemned to a reduction’ were ‘not the only victims of the process which has cut off skin from some to provide plaster for others’.⁴⁸⁷

Almost immediately after the decision was made, employers took action that provoked the union. Barry, under instructions from the London directors, was cutting costs by dismissing wages men and hiring contractors, thereby replacing the daily wage with the ‘energy wage’.⁴⁸⁸ On 20 June, it was reported that during the past week or so men had been

⁴⁸³ *New Zealand Herald*, 5 June 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 June 1901, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁵ *Thames Star*, 10 June 1901, p. 2, 11 June 1901, p. 2, 12 June 1901, p. 4; *New Zealand Mines Record*, 16 June 1901, pp. 493-495; Mouat, p. 185.

⁴⁸⁶ *Thames Star*, 12 June 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁷ *Waitekauri Age*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 20 June 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁸⁸ Mouat, pp. 186-187.

dismissed at Waihi 'almost every day', with contracts being called for, or let privately, 'not only for stoping, but for filling trucks, and it has been reported that even tool sharpening will be, in some cases, let by contract'.⁴⁸⁹ Four days later, it was reported that 'a large number' had been dismissed there 'to keep expenses down' and that 'a large number' of miners at Komata Reefs had been dismissed through the introduction of 'single-handed work',⁴⁹⁰ a reference to a method of drilling. As soon as owners and company representatives heard that the union was attempting to stop this method they pledged to give the Komata Reefs Company's superintendent 'all the moral and actual support possible'.⁴⁹¹ After investigating, the union decided to take no action in this matter.⁴⁹² By 27 June it was confirmed that over 100 men were out of work at Waihi because of the contract system, although the majority were non-union members, as the shift bosses were giving preference to unionists. A reduction in the workforce at Karangahake was also anticipated.⁴⁹³

The conflict caused by replacing wages men with contractors resulted in 'a considerable amount of unrest amongst the residents of Waihi', one man even describing the district as almost being in 'a state of depression'.⁴⁹⁴ Miners were warned not to go there for work, as the supply of labour was 'in excess of the demand'.⁴⁹⁵ At the beginning of August, Seddon was asked whether he was aware that the company had dismissed witnesses who had given evidence for the union, along with 150 other unionists. Seddon pronounced himself to be sorry to hear this 'and said the Company was only injuring itself by coercive measures. His sympathy always would be with the oppressed'; his solution was to investigate providing work for them on the Paeroa-Waihi railway.⁴⁹⁶

The Waihi branch, encouraged by the Reefton miners, increased its resistance to the contract system.⁴⁹⁷ Some unionists wanted to introduce the rate of pay at Reefton, 9s 6d per day, in the North Island, despite companies

⁴⁸⁹ *Thames Star*, 20 June 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁰ *Thames Star*, 24 June 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁹¹ *Thames Star*, 24 June 1901, p. 4, 25 June 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁹² *Thames Star*, 29 June 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁹³ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 27 June 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁴ *Thames Star*, 6 July 1901, p. 2, 13 July 1901, p. 4, 23 July 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁵ *Thames Star*, 1 August 1901, p. 4.

⁴⁹⁶ *Thames Star*, 2 August 1901, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 24 June 1901, p. 6, 27 June 1901, p. 5.

warning that this would kill the industry.⁴⁹⁸ A notice posted on the door of the union hall declared that as from 24 June the branch would not tender for any contracts, and requesting that

all members in particular, and all who hold Union principles dear, to refrain from tendering. The hearty co-operation of one and all is specially requested to assist the Union in obtaining a fair living wage for the district, and thus protect men who have hitherto been compelled through force of circumstances to work for less than a fair recompense.⁴⁹⁹

On 27 June it was reported that the Waihi branch would tender for contracts itself, all tenders won going to those longest out of work. 'An elaborate scheme' was being arranged, but some miners doubted if it would 'work to the satisfaction of all'.⁵⁰⁰ The union asked all miners 'to stand together and assist them in carrying out this scheme'.⁵⁰¹

One branch after another rejected the award.⁵⁰² The Waihi miners were reported to have felt that they had come out of the hearing 'little if any better off, while the Thames and Coromandel men have been granted a substantial increase'.⁵⁰³ As the executive was divided, it resolved to hold a ballot of members; it realized rejection would lead to the Arbitration Court making a binding decision.⁵⁰⁴ At a special meeting at Thames, the award was accepted. O'Keeffe, seconded by John Seymour, had moved as an amendment that the 'unfair and unsatisfactory' award be rejected:

In speaking to the amendment, Mr O'Keeffe said he thought it would be ill-becoming for the parent branch of the union to accept an award which outside branches thought was unsatisfactory to them. They should see that the outside districts were fairly treated. He considered they were not fairly treated by the award of the Board, and pointed out as an instance that whilst 37 wages men at present employed in Thames mines would receive an increase of 10d per day by the award, yet over 100 wages men employed at the Great Barrier mines would receive 8d per day

⁴⁹⁸ *Thames Star*, 8 July 1901, p. 2.

⁴⁹⁹ *Thames Star*, 24 June 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁰⁰ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 27 June 1901, p. 2.

⁵⁰¹ *Thames Star*, 22 July 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁰² *New Zealand Herald*, 22 June 1901, p. 6, 2 July 1901, p. 5.

⁵⁰³ Editorial, *Thames Star*, 24 June 1901, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁴ *Thames Star*, 22 June 1901, p. 4.

less by the same award that they were now receiving. He also thought the Board had treated the union unfairly by allowing a solicitor to appear as one of the companies' representatives at the hearing of the dispute.

His amendment was defeated by 20 votes to 36, several members abstaining.⁵⁰⁵ Only the Thames branch accepted the award, by 59 votes to 53; everywhere else it was overwhelmingly rejected, the total votes being 612 for rejection (and therefore reference to the Arbitration Court) and 103 for acceptance.⁵⁰⁶ At Waihi, only 20 accepted it and 290 rejected it.⁵⁰⁷ The companies also rejected it, unanimously, at a meeting that established 'a mine representatives' association', soon called the Auckland Mine Owners' Association.⁵⁰⁸ The Waihi Company continued to heighten the conflict by dismissing wages men.⁵⁰⁹ Accordingly, the dispute was referred to the Arbitration Court, where O'Keeffe would, in introducing the union's case, explain why it had rejected the award:

The award of the Board gave great dissatisfaction to the miners, as before submitting their reference they gave it very careful consideration, and were satisfied that the demand was only a moderate one. The increase granted by the Board was only a fraction of what we are justly entitled to. No provision was made for wet places other than shafts, whereas the water is as unhealthy, disagreeable, and as expensive to the miner in the matter of clothing in any part of the mine as it is in the shafts. In the matter of boy labour, their finding was far too low for boys who are called upon to do very heavy and unhealthy work in mines. The increase of wages for men who entail additional risk in winzes and rises was not pronounced enough, being 2d per shift, when we produced strong evidence to sustain our claim for 6d. Again, the Board scarcely touched upon the contract system at present in force, still leaving the abhorrent conditions in contracts almost in their entirety, the men completely at the mercy of the superintendents and the managers without any means of redress for wrongful dismissals.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 1 July 1901, p. 6.

⁵⁰⁶ *Thames Star*, 3 July 1901, p. 1, 4 July 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁷ *Thames Star*, 2 July 1901, p. 2.

⁵⁰⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 25 June 1901, p. 6; *Thames Star*, 9 July 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁰⁹ *Thames Star*, 9 July 1901, p. 2, 11 July 1901, p. 2, 19 July 1901, p. 4.

⁵¹⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September 1901, p. 6.

The *Thames Star*, which regretted having another hearing because of the cost and ‘months of uncertainty’, warned that going to the court was ‘all for a doubtful advantage. Experience has shown that in all parts of the colony the Arbitration Court has very seldom made any very great alterations in the awards of the Conciliation Boards’.⁵¹¹ In April the following year, a leading Reefton unionist told O’Keeffe that his union may have chosen an inopportune time to seek wage increases because of the state of the industry. ‘Some years back’, presumably when Potts was president, there had been a move to have wages considered, ‘but the Thames Union at that time took no action’, despite mining then being much more flourishing.⁵¹² This time it took action, despite the warnings.

PRESIDENT ONCE AGAIN

The reason why O’Keeffe outlined the union’s case was because, in July, he stood against Potts for president.⁵¹³ No details were reported of his campaigning, and at the annual meeting at the end of that month his only recorded action was to move, successfully, that a recommendation to increase auditors’ fee should be remitted for consideration by the executive committee.⁵¹⁴ Voting took place in August: at Waihi he received 85 votes to Potts’ 143; at Thames 42 to 63; at Coromandel 5 to 12; at Golden Cross 65 to 21; at Opitonui 35 to 18; at Karangahake 75 to 53; at Great Barrier 29 to 9; at Komata 11 to 6; and at Waikino all 20 votes. As there was no voting at Tapu and Whangamata, he won by 43 votes overall. Seymour, who had supported O’Keeffe’s opposition to accepting the award, was overwhelmingly elected as treasurer.⁵¹⁵ They took up their posts at a time when, in the words of the *Thames Star*, mining at Thames was ‘about as dull as it could be’ and there was what it hoped would be only ‘a temporary state of depression’.⁵¹⁶

One of O’Keeffe’s first tasks was to represent the union in opposing the application by the Ethel Reefs Company for renewed protection. At the first

⁵¹¹ *Thames Star*, 24 June 1901, p. 2.

⁵¹² *Thames Star*, 8 April 1902, p. 1.

⁵¹³ *Thames Star*, 6 July 1901, p. 2.

⁵¹⁴ *Thames Star*, 29 July 1901, p. 3.

⁵¹⁵ *Thames Star*, 5 August 1901, pp. 2, 4, 6 August 1901, p. 3, 7 August 1901, pp. 2, 4, 9 August 1901, p. 4, 10 August 1901, pp. 2, 3.

⁵¹⁶ *Thames Star*, 12 August 1901, p. 1.

hearing, the warden agreed with his insistence that the manager should be present to be cross-examined on the amount spent on acquiring machinery.⁵¹⁷ At the adjourned hearing, O’Keeffe stated that the time had come when the warden

would have to take steps to prevent this extensive system of protection and deal with such matters with a firm hand. It had reduced the district from the place of prosperity to a place in which the miners had to depart to obtain employment. That was due to the large areas being locked up, and the extensive system of protection observed. He hoped that in such cases the land would be thrown into the gold fields.⁵¹⁸

In response, the warden commented that companies were attempting to obtain protection by providing him with false information:

He was very often misled, and would be only too pleased to have facts brought before him by the Miners’ Union representative. He suggested that Mr O’Keeffe should watch such cases. Mr O’Keeffe (significantly): Oh, I’ll do that, your Worship; I’ll watch them.⁵¹⁹

Late in August, O’Keeffe visited all the mining areas of Ohinemuri, and in ‘a lengthy and eloquent address’ at Waihi told his audience that ‘the only power they had to fear was themselves’.⁵²⁰

THE ARBITRATION COURT HEARING

In mid-August, the *Observer* published a cartoon showed Potts placing on O’Keeffe’s back a large and heavy swag labelled ‘Miners Dispute’: ‘Here you are, O’Keeffe, you are President now, and you will have to take up the burden that I have carried so long. I wish you luck of it’.⁵²¹ Regulations prevented any of the evidence presented to the board being re-submitted to the court, meaning the union had spent £650 in vain and would have to

⁵¹⁷ *Thames Star*, 20 August 1901, p. 3.

⁵¹⁸ Warden’s Court, *Thames Star*, 3 September 1901, p. 2.

⁵¹⁹ Warden’s Court, *Thames Star*, 4 September 1901, p. 2.

⁵²⁰ Cartoon, *Thames Star*, 22 August 1901, p. 4.

⁵²¹ *Observer*, 17 August 1901, p. 14.

make its case once more.⁵²² O’Keeffe, supported by Morgan and Drumm, chairman of the Waihi branch,⁵²³ represented the union at hearings commencing at Waihi.⁵²⁴ These were held before Theophilus Cooper, who had been appointed to the Supreme Court in February that year.⁵²⁵ The *Thames Star* believed his appointment would be

hailed with universal approval. No member of the Bar in Auckland is more universally respected than Mr Cooper. He is an exceptionally clear-headed man, and his manner both in court and private, is kind, amiable, and without ostentation. In politics he is a Liberal, but not of the noisy class. He holds strong opinions on social subjects, but is not given to parade them except when occasion calls.

It anticipated that in the Arbitration Court he would be ‘sure to give satisfaction’, for he was ‘well posted in all questions affecting capital and labour’ and would ‘hold the scale of justice with equal poise’.⁵²⁶

As at the board hearings, O’Keeffe complained at the presence of a solicitor. When he said that the union had no solicitor ‘and no talented men’, Cooper raised a laugh by responding, ‘I’m not so sure of that’.⁵²⁷ In his opening address, O’Keeffe made what the *Thames Star* headlined as ‘Some Startling Assertions’. Reviewing the dispute with the Waihi Company, he referred to its dismissal of men:

He contended it was Mr Barry’s object to strike terror into the miners by so doing. Since the Conciliation Board had heard the dispute 150 Union members had also been dismissed, including witnesses who were before the Board. He would ask the Court that his judgment should be very pronounced regarding this point.

Mr O’Keeffe then briefly reviewed the clauses of the wages demands, and stated further that the Waihi Company had defied the Union by instituting extra hours.⁵²⁸

⁵²² *Thames Star*, 31 July 1901, p. 2.

⁵²³ *Thames Star*, 13 August 1901, p. 2.

⁵²⁴ *Thames Star*, 17 August 1901, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 7 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵²⁵ See *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, vol. 2, pp. 272-273; *New Zealand Illustrated Magazine*, vol. 3 no. 6 (March 1901), p. 425.

⁵²⁶ Editorial, *Thames Star*, 14 February 1901, p. 2.

⁵²⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 7 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵²⁸ *Thames Star*, 9 September 1901, p. 2.

In outlining the various union demands, the *New Zealand Herald*, as previously, left out O’Keeffe’s more colourful statements. He claimed the hours asked for had ‘been recognized in this peninsula for the last twenty years’, and expected the rates of pay requested to be ‘much debated’:

Representations will be made by the other side that this is equal to a rise of 1s per day all round, but this is entirely incorrect. It will be shown that in a great many instances as high wage as asked for has been paid. During the inquiry before the Board the only arguments used by the employers’ representatives were that the mining industry cannot stand this rise in pay; that if granted, it would be ruinous to the struggling companies, and would be the means of frightening away foreign capital; and that the mining industry was at present in a languishing condition. Now, as to the argument that the industry cannot stand this extra burden, Your Honor will permit me to say that the labourer is worthy of his hire, and that the mining industry has not been more prosperous for a long time, as the exportation of gold and silver from New Zealand for the last three years was greater than it has been for any similar period during 27 years. As to struggling companies, the argument as to their ruin falls to the ground when you consider that some of their superintendents receive £1500 per year as salary. There is also an army of what are called attorneys attached to these struggling companies in receipt of high salaries, as well as boards of directors, and the argument from the other side will go to show that everybody ought to be paid excepting the man who bears the brunt.⁵²⁹

The *Thames Star* quoted him saying that ‘some superintendents receiving £1000 salary were not worth twopence, and could not tell the difference between a gad and a crosscut saw. They were no good except to breed mischief.’⁵³⁰

It will also be argued that we can live upon less money and rear our families. In reply to this I am in a position to state that there are families at Waihi, Thames, and Coromandel who have not sufficient house room to observe the dictates of common decency; their children have not sufficient food to eat, nor sufficient warm clothing to cover them day or night.

⁵²⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September 1901, p. 6.

⁵³⁰ *Thames Star*, 9 September 1901, p. 2.

After describing conditions in a wet shaft, where shorter working hours were requested, he commented that ‘when a man has stood this for six hours it ought to satisfy the cravings of the hardest taskmaster’. Overtime was ‘not required’, as there were ‘plenty of men to do the work needed in the recognised hours, and men working overtime only take the bread away from those who most require it’. He asked Cooper ‘to stop all unnecessary Sunday work by enforcing double time’. As those aged 18 or 19 were ‘as good men as ever they will be’, they were ‘entitled to the minimum of pay’. All contractors should be paid not less than the minimum wage; unless this was done, managers would make any minimum wage ‘abortive by letting all the mines on contract in order to evade the award of the Court’. The union also wanted all men dismissed to be given ‘a valid reason’. The clause requesting preference to unionists was ‘the keynote’: unless granted, it would ‘be the death knell of unionism on this peninsula, as our present opponents would make it a point that any of us who hold strong union principles should not make a living on this goldfield’.⁵³¹ Another report of his speech recorded his claim that if there was no preference ‘none of the prominent members of the union would get employment again. They had stigmatized them as agitators – everything short of anarchists’.⁵³² All those discharged by Barry because they requested the union rate should be reinstated. ‘The union, in accordance with our registered rules, has paid these men’s wages from the time they were locked out of the mine, and now ask that they be recouped their expenses’. After listing the defects of the board’s award, he ended by stating that his members felt ‘strongly’ about abuses under the contract system and that paying contractors the minimum wage was ‘the only means to do justice to the workers’.⁵³³

Drumm gave further details of the union case, and was the principal questioner of the Waihi witnesses.⁵³⁴ O’Keeffe questioned Barry about the dismissal of unionists. Barry insisted that he ‘drew no distinction between union and non-union men. He only knew certain men were agitating and stirring up strife between the men and the employers’:

Mr O’Keeffe: What salary do you receive?

⁵³¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September 1901, p. 6.

⁵³² Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵³³ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September 1901, p. 6.

⁵³⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 September 1901, p. 6, 11 September 1901, p. 7, 12 September 1901, p. 6.

Mr Barry: Isn't that a private matter, Your Honor?

His Honor: We cannot allow that question. We disallowed a similar one down South.

O'Keeffe also questioned him about whether he always let tenders to the lowest bidders.⁵³⁵ After three days at Waihi, the court sat for one day at Thames, where the union was represented by vice-president Hardman along with E. Graham of the Karangahake branch, presumably Ernest Albert Graham,⁵³⁶ in addition to the original three. O'Keeffe led the cross examinations, concentrating on the hazardous and unhealthy conditions of work, before giving evidence himself. Having worked 'in nearly all the mining camps on the Peninsula', he 'believed he knew all the departments of mining. It would take an intelligent man 3 years to become a practical miner, but to become a "competent miner" was another question – he had been mining for 21 years and had not learnt all he could learn – he was learning every day'. He knew 'from experience' that compressed air was 'injurious to health' because some of the moisture was removed;⁵³⁷ it was especially harmful when mixed with gelignite fumes. 'Gelignite was a mountain of gas in a small parcel, and was undoubtedly injurious'.⁵³⁸

Witness had worked for 11 years in Thames mines, and had had experience of gas. In all the mines on the Thames flat there was gas. Where he worked the temperature was 100 degrees F. He wore no clothing except trousers and boots without any socks. The mineral water affected the boots, and he had seen the sole and upper parted in less than a fortnight.⁵³⁹

Indeed 'Thames was the worst hole he ever put his foot in to earn a day's pay'.⁵⁴⁰ He noted that Waihi members had opposed his action over the Waihi Silvertown, wanting 'to cite all the companies, but witness preached peace. He was not afraid of the superintendents, and wanted no favour from them, but he wanted to protect the wives and children who might have

⁵³⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 12 September 1901, p. 6.

⁵³⁶ See *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1902*, p. 28; *Thames Star*, 12 September 1901, 2, 14 July 1903, p. 1; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 25 March 1903, p. 3.

⁵³⁷ *Thames Star*, 14 September 1901, p. 4.

⁵³⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵³⁹ *Thames Star*, 14 September 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁴⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1901, p. 3.

suffered if the dispute then became general'. Asked by Cooper to clarify, he explained that some branches thought the rates proposed were too low. 'The Thames branch approved of the schedule, and gave it their hearty support, and also decided that they would fight out this present dispute while there was one penny remaining'.⁵⁴¹ If preference for unionists was not granted, 'none of the prominent members of the union would get employment again. They had stigmatised them as agitators – everything short of anarchists'.⁵⁴²

When questioned by Drumm, he gave as his personal opinion that 9s per day was insufficient: 'with the attendant dangers and under present conditions he thought 10s per day was a fair wage'. He argued that 'the mine managers and superintendents had combined', intending to let the men compete for contracts while they watched 'their expenses being cut down'. As few wages men were employed at Thames, most work being done by tributers, the wage issue was not as significant as in other districts. At this point there was the following diversion with Barry:

Mr Barry: Mr O'Keeffe has said that mine managers would not let him a contract. If he comes to Waihi I tell him that if he tenders for a contract he will get it.

Mr O'Keeffe: Thank you, no. Not while you are there. You and I can't live in the same district, we can't get on together.

When asked by the Komata Reefs manager whether the union had published a report on its working, O'Keeffe replied that he did not know. Told that this should have been done 'so that the men would know if they had the Union's support or not', he retorted: 'Why didn't you publish the report yourselves?'⁵⁴³

When the case was heard at Coromandel, O'Keeffe was assisted by Drumm, Morgan, and Graham, but did most of the examining of witnesses and provided additional evidence. Asked by Drumm to explain why he believed mining was in its most flourishing state ever, O'Keeffe referred to the returns for the last three years as tabulated in the *New Zealand Mines Record*. Asked by one manager why, if it was so prosperous, so many shafts had closed down at Thames, he replied that more gold was being recovered there now 'than for three or four years. The Thames goldfield was not properly scratched'. Responding to a prompt from Drumm, he said that 'the

⁵⁴¹ *Thames Star*, 14 September 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁴² *New Zealand Herald*, 14 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁴³ *Thames Star*, 14 September 1901, p. 4.

minimum wage clause in contracts asked by the union was not new. It had been in existence for four years in a mine where he worked'. This, he said in reply to Cooper, 'was no part of the company's obligation, but to show appreciation of good men'.⁵⁴⁴

At a brief hearing in Auckland, where O'Keeffe and Drumm did most of the cross-examination of employers' representatives, he asked directors and the attorney of an English company about their salaries.⁵⁴⁵ At Paeroa, O'Keeffe, Drumm, Morgan, and Graham were the union representatives, with the first two again doing most of the questioning.⁵⁴⁶ O'Keeffe still tried, unsuccessfully, to get managers to agree that compressed air was unhealthy.⁵⁴⁷ The court concluded its hearings at Waihi, again with the same union representatives, O'Keeffe, Drumm and Morgan asking most of the questions.⁵⁴⁸ Once all the evidence was taken, the employers' representatives gave their closing addresses, followed by O'Keeffe, Morgan, and Drumm, in that order.⁵⁴⁹ In O'Keeffe's 'very lengthy' address, which took an hour to deliver,⁵⁵⁰ he claimed that the owners' representatives had 'failed to show why the miners should not receive their just demands' and that their witnesses had agreed that the union demands were 'reasonable', quoting some of the evidence to show this. He claimed to have proved that miners at Thames 'incurred terrible danger and great risk in working in hot and gassy places'. Evidence taken at Waihi proved that the contract system was

a preconcerted but illogically-worked-out device to defeat the too straightforward action of the union by not only showing that the Waihi Company could dispense with wagesmen, but that they could regulate exactly as they wished the price of labour, and strikes a blow at unionism and at the very Government itself. Mr O'Keeffe continued to criticise at some length the attitude of the company and its superintendent. Coming to Mr Barry's offer to reinstate certain men, he submitted that the offer was not one of reinstatement at all, as the men were not to be allowed their

⁵⁴⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 17 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁴⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, 19 September 1901, p. 6.

⁵⁴⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, 20 September 1901, p. 7, 21 September 1901, p. 3, 23 September 1901, p. 7.

⁵⁴⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, 21 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁴⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, 24 September 1901, p. 3, 25 September 1901, p. 6.

⁵⁴⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 September 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁰ *Thames Star*, 26 September 1901, p. 2; *New Zealand Herald*, 27 September 1901, p. 3.

usual work on wages, but were offered contracts, the very system the union were trying to put down.

After reviewing other aspects of his case he returned to the contract system, 'a most one-sided and pernicious system, favouring only the companies and doing incalculable harm to the toilers'. Employers were fighting so hard for it 'on account of its easy facilities in sweating men', and their arguments were 'weak in the extreme'.

There was a general consensus of opinion amongst the workers that the contract system was the cause of all the misery. It held out a false incentive to the worker, causing him to sweat and kill himself in desperate efforts to overtake a phantom goal of prosperity. Contract work caused rush and hurry, and therein lay the great secret of most accidents. It opened the door to incompetent labour, killed unionism, and was undoubtedly the greatest evil which tradespeople had to contend against, because they supplied the food, but the contract rarely supplied the equivalent in cash.

The argument that the union demands would irreparably damage the industry was a 'bogieman', and he denied that struggling companies would fail because 'the cause of poverty was the centralisation of capital in one particular direction'. Directors and managers 'swallowed up the cream of the returns, while the balance was spread over an army of toilers who won the gold'. Should the union's demands be accepted, 'the companies should reduce their well and overpaid officials and return to the workers their fair share for honest toil'.⁵⁵¹

Immediately after the Union's demands were first made a hue and cry arose amongst these figure-heads whose fat salaries were threatened, and exaggerated accounts were spread regarding the injury done to the industry, etc, and in consequence of all this turmoil orders were received [from England] to cut down the expenses of the best paying mines in the colony. So the statement has been made. We have nothing to show that these peremptory orders were not sent out as part of the scheme to defy the law and the Union. We know nothing of other correspondence which may have taken place; and finally I submit such instructions are of no worth whatever considering the possibility of the circumstances as evidence or anything else concerning the employers' case, but on the other hand I submit that it strengthens the Union's case

⁵⁵¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 September 1901, p. 3.

by showing that some motive must have existed other than to reduce expenses, especially when it is considered that the Waihi Gold Mining Company has now a record return almost every month. Its dividends are numerous, and its value as a property is increasing almost weekly by further development and the intersecting of new lodes. Since the present dispute arose conditions have been changed all round, and a scheme has been set up antagonistic to the best interests of the country and of the workers. This action on the part of the Waihi Gold Mining Company has undoubtedly been induced by the action of the Union on January 7th, when it asked for some moderate concessions as to the hours of a shift in a wet shaft. The only reply which the company gives is by increasing the hours of labour. The several conditions governing the industry of mining in these parts calls for a healthy readjustment whereby the workers may obtain their proper share of the results of their toil in conjunction with the protection of the law against tyranny, injustice, and coercion. If any mine is worth working then the labourer is worthy of his hire, but if it is not then let it be shut down before any man is compelled by circumstances to forfeit his independence, his right to live, and his right to fair treatment.

He concluded by thanking Cooper for ‘the kindly and courteous manner’ in which the union representatives were treated, for they had received ‘fair play’, and wished him ‘every grace and blessing’ to enable him ‘to perform the several duties’ imposed by his ‘exalted position’. He thanked his opponents for ‘the gentlemanly manner in which they have treated us’, and even thanked the police for discharging ‘their arduous duties in a kindly and gentlemanly manner’.⁵⁵² In a cartoon commenting on his performance, ‘Blo’ of the *Observer* showed him being told by a miner that he looked warm. ‘Michael Dineen: Warm? I should think so. I have just finished my “spache.” But if I am warm, Mr Barry must be boiling’.⁵⁵³

THE AWARD, AND THE RESPONSES

According to one journalist, ‘the utmost harmony’ prevailed amongst the two sides, who awaited the award ‘with a great deal of interest’.⁵⁵⁴ Cooper fixed wages at levels below those offered by the board, and, as Barry informed his directors, really legitimised the policies of the Waihi

⁵⁵² *Thames Star*, 28 September 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁵³ Cartoon, *Observer*, 5 October 1901, p. 19.

⁵⁵⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 27 September 1901, p. 3.

Company.⁵⁵⁵ The *Observer* stressed that this award furnished ‘a complete contradiction to the popular idea that a Labour demand necessarily means higher wages and shorter hours’. For six months the union had been ‘lavishly spending’ its funds to maintain men dismissed at Waihi, had then been put to ‘considerable expense’ in conducting its case at several mining centres, ‘and now, after this considerable lapse of time and ruinous outlay’, stood ‘practically in the same position as when they started’. Slight improvements in wages and conditions had been granted to some miners, but most were either no better off or worse off. ‘If they had been content with the Conciliation Board award, they would at least have had a moderate increase all round. But, in grasping at the shadow, they have lost the substance’. The essence of the award was that although the miners deserved higher wages, to grant these ‘would deprive the men in a large measure of their work’ because of the ‘overwhelming’ evidence that increases meant the loss of British capital and the closing of mines. As ‘mining at the Thames and Coromandel was never so dull’, it hoped the award would ‘restore confidence’ and provide ‘steady work’; it also hoped that Barry’s ‘arbitrary and unfair’ dismissals would be reversed.⁵⁵⁶ A series of *Observer* cartoons showed the union as a dog dropping a bone labelled ‘Conciliation Court Award’ into a pond whilst grasping at one under the water labelled ‘Arbitration Court Award’. Barry was shown being whitewashed by Cooper.⁵⁵⁷ The following issue included one about ‘the conversion of the capitalist’ to the virtues of arbitration because of this outcome.⁵⁵⁸

The *New Zealand Herald* considered that the case involved ‘probably the existence of mining in the district’. The award ‘ought to satisfy all parties’, for although it largely rejected the miners’ claims, it was ‘really in their interest. Indeed, we are informed that a very great number of miners did not coincide with the demands made by the union, which, we fear, has been guided by an extreme party’. They had learnt from the evidence produced that ‘there was a great danger that if the union were successful in their demands the result would be that many of the mines which are now being worked by capital furnished from England would be shut down’. The

⁵⁵⁵ *Thames Star*, 5 October 1901, pp. 2-3; *New Zealand Herald*, 5 October 1901, p. 6; Mouat, pp. 187-188.

⁵⁵⁶ *Observer*, 12 October 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁵⁷ Cartoons, *Observer*, 12 October 1901, p. 12.

⁵⁵⁸ Cartoon, *Observer*, 19 October 1901, p. 12.

editorial considered that ‘this important case has been very ably conducted’ before both Conciliation Board and Arbitration Court,⁵⁵⁹ presumably meaning by the union leaders as well as the employers’ representatives. A later editorial believed there was ‘no question’ that ‘a prime factor’ in the award was the evidence about ‘a large withdrawal of English capital from the industry and the miners and the country would have suffered very greatly. The Court was largely guided in its judgment by threats from London’.⁵⁶⁰

In their comments, employers moralised about ‘the folly of going to extremes’, for the miners’ representatives had declined their prior concession because they did not believe the court would fix wages below the level set by the board. The miners were wrong to reject the latter’s ruling, and the employers praised the Thames miners for not being like the ‘extremists in other parts of the district’.⁵⁶¹

At the first union meeting after the award was announced ‘general disapproval was expressed’.⁵⁶² A Coromandel correspondent reported ‘surprise’ and anger at the loss of 6d per day, although ‘some of the old miners’ considered that ‘an increase of anything approaching the union demands would have been suicidal’. It was expected that wages would not be reduced there because ‘most managers would sooner pay first-class men 8s than indifferent hands 6d less’.⁵⁶³ There was ‘general disappointment’ at Waihi, for in two mines the award meant 1s less per shift than the existing rates.⁵⁶⁴ The *Thames Star* quoted several ‘leading miners’ who considered it a bad award, whilst O’Keeffe was ‘characteristically candid and outspoken’:

“What do I think of the award,” he queried, in answer to our representative’s question. “Well I can hardly say, I don’t know whether I am awake or dreaming. It is an award that I think the Arbitration Court will be sorry they gave, for it is unfair to the miners. In Coromandel it has reduced the pay of the men, and it is anomalous, and I think altogether that it is an award that those responsible should be ashamed of. My the divil floiy away wid the mimbers av the Board for putting their fists to such a statement.”

⁵⁵⁹ Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 October 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁶⁰ Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 8 January 1902, p. 4.

⁵⁶¹ *Thames Star*, 5 October 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁶² *New Zealand Herald*, 5 October 1901, p. 6.

⁵⁶³ Coromandel Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1901, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁴ Waihi Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 7 October 1901, p. 5.

“What do I think of the award? Haven’t I said what I think of it,” he continued in answer to another query. “What can I say except that I think it a most disgraceful one, and one that never should have been. D—n the award say I, and there you have my opinion!”⁵⁶⁵

Three days later, in ‘Our Telephone: Last Night’s Chatter (Overheard by the Office Boy)’, a series of imaginary conversations with people in the news, it dramatized O’Keeffe’s response:

T-r-r-n-g! T-r-r-n-g!
 The top av the marning!
 Yes, who’s speaking: Yes, I’m here.
 How are you, Michael Dineen?
 Well, O’m shlowly recovering. But ’tis in a nashty timper O’m in, bedad!
 I’m sorry to hear it, Mick. Too much conciliation and arbitration of late.
 Look here now; if you shrart and reproduce my remarks on Theo. Cooper’s judgment – may the divil floiy away wid’ him – I’ll cut you dead, and nary another glass of hops shall we have together.
 Well, you did your best, Mick, and if the Court thought different to you that’s no fault of yours. You’re no perpetual disturber of the peace, and you haven’t been mixed up in several strikes.
 Drop that now. If I were not at the other end of this infarnal machane I’d take part in a heavy shtrike now, and you’d be the man that’d get hurt.
 Well between you and I Mick, what do you think of the award!
 The award be ----.
 I beg your pardon. I didn’t catch that last remark. There is no such obstruction up the creek. Candidly now what do you think.
 I think that of all the ----- ..
 Comment of the operator: “There’s something wrong with the circuit. It must have been struck by lightning. I’d better call Mr Beale.”
 The sulphuric storm passes, and conversation continued. “What were you saying Mick. I heard you shouting ‘Hillo! Hillo! Hillo!’ several times. But come to bedrock: What do you think of the award?
 If I could get at the other end of this telephone I’d make you floiy faster than ivir you went in all your natural.
 But answer the question please – in your own way.
 Well, you’re a -----, and the award is -----.
 Operator: Gentlemen, gentlemen. This cannot continue. The wires are flying round like the arms of an octopus. Already three

⁵⁶⁵ *Thames Star*, 5 October 1901, p. 3.

of our telegraph operators have succumbed, and the remainder are asking Mr Steward to lead them in "Pull for the Shore."

Are you there, Mick!

There's somebody interfering with my eloquent speech.

Chief Postmaster Coney (to both): "The telephone office is closed for the day, gentlemen, and we have wired for police assistance.

Ring off, please."⁵⁶⁶

O'Keeffe's angry response to the award prompted an *Observer* cartoon showing him swearing about it while Potts said: 'Take it easy Michael, old man, I was afraid you were going to ride it to death. Better to have taken my advice after all & accepted the Conciliation award'.⁵⁶⁷ The *Coromandel County News* published a report of an alleged meeting of 'the Loyal Coromandelites':

Mr Snapgrip expressed a hope that some of America's vigorous Anarchists would visit Coromandel and ass-----

Mr Cripplegate: Chair, chair. I respectfully ask the honorable member to ward -----

Mr O'Moses: Hang the award.

The President: Order.

Mr O'Moses: I am simply quoting a brother president's feeling.

Mr Cacklehen:

Of all the phrases ever I hear

I think the most absurd,

I do indeed upon my word,

Is "compulsory arbitration."

For if you think your wage too small,

Upon the Court you have to call,

A Court that knows just anything at all

About the situation.

But there it will sit,

And puzzle its wit,

And draw a jolly good screw for it.

The next, and last, stanza, after suggesting that those making the decisions were ignorant and produced 'absurd' rulings, recommended that 'Jack and his boss' toss for the result: 'There's much less bother and much less loss'.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁶ 'Our Telephone', *Thames Star*, 8 October 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁶⁷ Cartoon, *Observer*, 12 October 1901, p. 12.

⁵⁶⁸ *Coromandel County News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 31 October 1901, p. 3.

An indication of the attitude of more militant miners was published in 1913, when the history of the union's 'concerted effort' to obtain an award for all Hauraki mines was summarized, omitting O'Keeffe's contribution:

No stone was left unturned in order to make this endeavor as successful as possible. Two members of the Union - Drumm and Morgan – were specially appointed to prepare the case for the Union and to accumulate and arrange the necessary evidence in support of that case. They did their work very skillfully, and prospects, from the men's point of view, were most encouraging. Never was there a more favorable opportunity for testing the value of the Arbitration Court. Owing to the extended organisation no difficulty was encountered in obtaining evidence overwhelming at once in bulk and force in support of the men's demands. After several weeks' hard fighting, and an expenditure of over £1000, the eagerly-looked-for award was given with all the ceremonial inseparable from the deliverances of such institutions. On this occasion, however, the workers did not mistake legal phraseology for hard cash, and their disappointment was keen.⁵⁶⁹

In fact, the cost of conducting the case and paying those locked out had been £783 2s,⁵⁷⁰ but the authors correctly reported the disappointment at the employers' case being accepted.

Two weeks after the award was announced, O'Keeffe addressed a special meeting of the Thames branch:

Personally it is not my present intention to make any strong remarks with reference to the award, but I cannot help saying that I am dissatisfied with it, as I consider it unjust and unfair. I cannot help thinking that the whole award has been a pre-arranged affair, and that the union would have got the same conditions had they not been represented by anybody or called no witnesses to give evidence before the court. The whole thing appears to me as if Judge Cooper's only function was, as the Auckland Observer aptly put it, to whitewash Mr Barry for trampling upon and breaking the laws of this country with impunity. His Honor seems to have taken great trouble also, for to legalise the whole of Mr Charles Rhodes' closing address [for the employers]. As the award bristles with that gentleman's closing remarks. I regret Judge Cooper saw fit to insult tributers and contractors by including them in the award and as it were

⁵⁶⁹ H.E. Holland, 'Ballot Box', and R.S. Ross, *The Tragic Story of the Waihi Strike* (Wellington, 1913), pp. 15-16.

⁵⁷⁰ *Thames Star*, 1 September 1902, p. 4.

compelling them to pay the minimum rate of pay when it was proved conclusively both by the tributers and contractors who entered the witness box that they not only paid the minimum but the maximum rates of pay when they employed men. In conclusion I wish to impress upon members that this defeat, great as it is, should not dishearten us, but that we should keep banded together in the future as we have been in the past, and be again ready for battle when this two years' penal servitude has expired.⁵⁷¹

(Despite this rallying cry, he was personally disheartened, earlier on the same day applying to be a mining inspector. Despite informing the department he had 22 years of 'hard practical experience', a long service certificate, had acquired a first class mine manager's certificate through examination, and had 'numerous Class Certificates issued by the Thames School of Mines',⁵⁷² his application was unsuccessful.)

At the end of his speech, O'Keeffe 'said he did not want to dictate to the meeting, but it appeared to him that the award was an unfair one'. Although it 'could not be justified, it existed for two years. At the end of that time, the miners could work together again and in the meantime prepare for battle and the time would come when they would come again'. After a motion was proposed that the award be condemned as 'unjust and unfair and unsatisfactory to the Union', O'Keeffe again declared that it 'could not be justified in any way', pointing out that wages had been reduced by 6d a day in the Coromandel district and 1s a day at Great Barrier. After the resolution was carried unanimously, he, Potts, 'and the up-country officials who had assisted in conducting the miners' case' received a 'hearty vote of thanks'.⁵⁷³

The *Thames Star* commented on his speech:

"Personally," said Mr O'Keeffe at the meeting of the Miners' Union on Saturday night, "it is not my intention to make any strong remarks," and he then proceeded to make a speech. It is unnecessary to say Mr O'Keeffe is an Irishman, and an Irishman, it is said, is allowed to speak until he makes himself understood. That may be one reason why Mr O'Keeffe spoke at considerable length. Could his remarks be said to be strong, is a matter we

⁵⁷¹ *Thames Star*, 21 October 1901, p. 4.

⁵⁷² M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Minister of Mines, 19 October 1901, Mines Department, MD 1, 06/458, ANZ-W.

⁵⁷³ *Thames Star*, 21 October 1901, p. 4.

were asked today. As we are not anxious for another deputation of the Miners' Union until the last is apologized for we answered cautiously, "it is a matter of opinion."⁵⁷⁴

O'Keeffe's attacks on Cooper led to both humorous comment and controversy. In a letter to the press, mine manager John Watson Walker⁵⁷⁵ referred to 'my fiery friend, Mr Michael O'Keeffe'.⁵⁷⁶ A poem by 'A Thames Resident' entitled 'Good Times Ahead' included the following stanza:

Why not send the miners' good President
Down South to a sitting of the House,
He'd lay down the law to Judge Cooper,
He would pose as the cat with the mouse.
I'm sure Mick would make things so merry,
In debating he'd have a record;
And he'd soon turn Judge Cooper from office,
For pronouncing an unfair award.⁵⁷⁷

After a pause in hostilities, at the beginning of 1902 O'Keeffe with two other union officials interviewed McGowan. As the spokesman, he raised several points, the first being the system of granting protection; in his words, the union

desired to know whether it was to be continued for all eternity? The system of protection had brought what was once a prosperous and flourishing goldfields to its present state of poverty. The men had been compelled to leave the district and seek work elsewhere, and leave their wives and families. In the speaker's opinion the district did not want foreign capital for the development of the field or the employment of the men. If the ground were open they could make their own living in the district. The Miners' Union had sent him to the Warden's Court to object to various claims getting protection, and yet protection after protection had been granted for periods up to three years. The Warden simply sat on the Bench, heard the same rigmarole of gigantic expenditure supposed, in many cases, to have been expended, and granted the protection. In some instances the expenditure referred to dated through a period from 30 years ago – he referred to the Victoria mine in this particular instance. Those making these statements

⁵⁷⁴ *Thames Star*, 21 October 1901, p. 2.

⁵⁷⁵ See paper on his life.

⁵⁷⁶ Letter from J.W. Walker, *Thames Star*, 30 October 1901, p. 3.

⁵⁷⁷ 'A Thames Resident', 'Good Times Ahead', *Thames Star*, 28 October 1901, p. 4.

were not in a position to work their grounds, and they kept the properties on the off chance of something turning up. The fact that the Warden insisted that the ground should be opened to tributers does not raise any objections from the companies because when the tributers applied for portions of the mine they were pointed out the surface workings and told that they could have tributes there. As the Minister knew the surface had been raked over and over again, and the men might just as soon be put to work in the Hauraki Gulf as to endeavour to find gold where they were asked to work.

After describing how different companies allotted tributes, he argued that when the warden required a company to employ four men, these should be wages men not tributers. And the latter should have access to all parts of the mine. 'They also thought that no further protection should be given after two or three periods had been obtained – the Almighty surely never put the gold there for the benefit of a few capitalists in London'. In referring to the Thames Hauraki Company and its pumping plant, he asked whether a subsidy to develop its lower levels would be granted. 'The Miners' Union and the people were unanimous that something should be done and as for the £25,000 granted the Government might have thrown it out in the tide for all the good it had done'. It was the government's duty to provide a subsidy for this purpose. (His predecessor had attempted to prevent continuing protection if this mine remained unworked.)⁵⁷⁸ 'Some said the district was worked out but those who said such a thing were stupid in ignorance'. After appealing for assistance for the district where McGowan 'had lived and prospered – to the place that had made a man of him', he asked for continued work on the Paeroa-Waihi railway.

And now, said Mr O'Keeffe, he came to an important matter – the removal of Judge Cooper as Chairman of the Arbitration Court. The miners had no confidence in him, and they thought – and the speaker was of the same opinion – that influence of the Auckland companies had something to do with the decisions of the Judge. The Judge had been brought amongst them, he had been hand in glove with Mr Charles Rhodes, he had been solicitor for the companies cited, and the speaker would not hesitate to say that he had not been an impartial judge. He had lowered the standard of wages from 8s to 7s 6d in Coromandel, from 9s to 8s at the Barrier, he had given an impetus to the shielding of Sunday labor. The speaker thought that for Sunday labor double pay

⁵⁷⁸ *Thames Star*, 24 July 1901, p. 4.

should be given. Raids had been made on the batteries for the detection of employment of Sunday labor, and about 50 men had been found, but when the cases were tried the companies were fined a paltry few pounds and costs after having offended twice in that manner. What they wanted anyhow was that Judge Cooper should be removed from the Arbitration Court – not from the Supreme Court – as he was hand in glove with the employers.

McGowan agreed that Sunday labour should be stopped, promised to consider grants to projects that would create employment, insisted that he had given Thames a fair share of funding, and did not think that the law could be changed to require employing wages men instead of tributers.⁵⁷⁹ When he expressed surprise that the union was supporting John Watson Walker's application for 640 acres when O'Keeffe was asking that protection should not be granted in such cases, O'Keeffe responded 'that although this recommendation was forwarded by order of the majority of the union's committee, he himself had always opposed the scheme. Mr Walker had written him a letter asking him to simplify matters by speaking to the Minister for Mines, but he had refused to do so'.⁵⁸⁰ He had indeed; his letter to Walker was shown to the *Observer*, which commented that 'for sweeping invective' it 'fairly takes the cake':

So far, the letter has not been published, but this is a pity, as it is a contribution to trades union literature that should not be lost to the world. Mr O'Keeffe's ire is chiefly roused against foreign capitalists, a class of people that Mr Walker is solicitous of interesting in our goldfields. Christ-killers is what Mr O'Keeffe calls them. It is the "budle" they are after, says Mr O'Keeffe, who probably means by this that they are lusting for "boodle" from the Thames goldfields.... Mr O'Keeffe thinks the "Christ-killers" aforesaid should open soup-kitchens at Waihi for the relief of the victims of the recent mining award.⁵⁸¹

The apparent anti-Semitic tinge to this letter may be just another example of his use of hyperbole. It may have been published later in *Liberty Review*; 'with all its eccentricities of grammar and spelling', the journal claimed it was written by a 'typical New Zealand democrat'.⁵⁸² O'Keeffe's

⁵⁷⁹ *Thames Star*, 4 January 1902, p. 4.

⁵⁸⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, 4 January 1902, p. 3.

⁵⁸¹ *Observer*, 11 January 1902, p. 5.

⁵⁸² *Auckland Weekly News*, 6 November 1902, p. 32.

stance was a repudiation of that of his predecessor, who, when asked in June by Walker about his scheme, replied that, if Walker could bring £100,000 into the district, 'We'll do all we can, and I'll furnish you with a testimonial as long as from here to Shortland wharf'.⁵⁸³ Shortly before O'Keeffe became president, the union executive gave 'hearty approval' to Walker's scheme;⁵⁸⁴ clearly O'Keeffe did not consider this prevented him from opposing it.

Regarding his 'very serious charge' against Cooper, McGowan was 'sorry to hear the remarks passed', for they 'were not deserved'. He would not attempt to remove Cooper, who 'was actuated by the highest motives' and 'endeavoured to the best of his ability to administer the law and give his decisions upon the evidence'. After expressing 'his appreciation of Judge Cooper's ability and legal acumen', he insisted that the courts should be free 'from anything approaching political influence or interference'.⁵⁸⁵

The *Thames Star's* Auckland Correspondent reported 'considerable surprise' at the demand for Cooper's removal, 'as in Auckland, at all events, the greatest confidence' was felt in his 'integrity and judgment'.⁵⁸⁶ Editorial writers agreed. The *New Zealand Herald* considered the interview to be 'remarkable', and used the demand as the basis for arguing against any political interference with the Arbitration Court, claiming O'Keeffe wanted the government to appoint someone 'satisfactory to Mr O'Keeffe and the union'.⁵⁸⁷ Noting that he had raised 'threadbare subjects', the *Thames Star* considered that had O'Keeffe 'confined himself to such subjects little fault could be found with him, beyond that he used a great many words to express his views'. In criticizing Cooper, he 'not only departed from his proper functions as the President of a Union of working men, but showed want of respect for a Minister of the Crown, and utter disregard for the institutions of the country'. 'As an instance of cool impertinence, bad taste, and reckless assertion', his utterances were 'not to be passed', being 'a display of vindictiveness', and to claim that Cooper was not impartial was 'a libel of the worst character and utterly unjustifiable'. It believed that the miners would repudiate his statements.

⁵⁸³ *Thames Star*, 26 June 1901, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁴ *Thames Star*, 24 July 1901, p. 2, 25 July 1901, p. 2, 26 July 1901, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁵ *Thames Star*, 4 January 1902, p. 4.

⁵⁸⁶ Auckland Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 4 January 1902, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁷ Editorial, *New Zealand Herald*, 8 January 1902, p. 4.

It bodes ill for a country when the administration of justice is held in contempt, and speaking ill of and libelling a Judge of the Supreme Court in this colony is going far to undermine the confidence the community have in the administration of our laws and the purity of the Bench. Mr O’Keeffe’s utterances are usually not taken seriously, and if he had used the language he did to Hon. Mr McGowan at the street corner, his hearers would probably have laughed at him, but when in his position as President of the Miners’ Union, and on behalf of the members, he expresses such opinions, his utterances call for more than laughter. The Minister of Justice, in his reply, was sorry to hear the remarks made by Mr O’Keeffe, but we should have liked him to have read Mr O’Keeffe a stiff lecture, and called upon him to withdraw his statements as unfitting to be listened to by a Minister of the Crown.

After praising Cooper’s legal skills and impartiality, the newspaper was sure that all unionists would endorse its view of Cooper and ‘utterly disagree’ with O’Keeffe.⁵⁸⁸ And in the same issue Alexander Whitley, a Thames miner manager and future mining inspector,⁵⁸⁹ wrote that he was ‘surprised and astonished’ by the ‘wholly unjust and uncalled for’ attack, which he felt certain did not reflect the opinion of most miners.⁵⁹⁰ However, in the next issue ‘Not a Miner’ declared that ‘most fair-minded men must admire the manly and outspoken President’, for ‘opinion was almost unanimous among miners and others that some weighty influence was brought to bear on the court’ to produce such a bad award.⁵⁹¹ John Seymour,⁵⁹² the union’s treasurer and a member of the delegation to McGowan, wrote that Whitley was not really expressing his ‘candid opinion’ but had a particular reason for writing his letter, by implication to obtain a job. ‘Now I have heard some of our prominent mine managers say the men ought to have more pay than the award granted’.⁵⁹³ Two days later, ‘A

⁵⁸⁸ Editorial, *Thames Star*, 4 January 1902, p. 2.

⁵⁸⁹ See *Thames Star*, 15 July 1899, p. 2, letter from Alexander Whitley, 13 November 1902, p. 2, 19 November 1906, p. 2, 16 August 1911, p. 2.

⁵⁹⁰ Letter from Alexander Whitley, *Thames Star*, 4 January 1902, p. 2.

⁵⁹¹ Letter from ‘Not a Miner’, *Thames Star*, 6 January 1902, p. 3.

⁵⁹² See *Thames Star*, 14 July 1897, p. 2, 24 March 1899, p. 4, 16 July 1900, p. 1, letter from John Seymour, 21 June 1901, p. 4, 5 August 1901, p. 2, 22 November 1902, p. 6, 1 August 1913, p. 5.

⁵⁹³ Letter from John Seymour, *Thames Star*, 6 January 1902, p. 4; see also his letter in 8 January 1902, p. 1.

Miner for 20 Years' claimed O'Keeffe's 'intemperate remarks and indiscretion' had misrepresented his members' views:

If instead of gassing about the district the miners' representatives had favoured the acceptance of the Conciliation Board's award better work would have been done. But our representatives were having a good time – and there was a chance of more to come. They couldn't let well alone and the result was a hash-up for which they are now blaming others.⁵⁹⁴

A letter sent by 'A Voice from Waihi' was not published because it was 'too personal, our columns are open to a discussion of Mr O'Keeffe's utterances, but not to personal reflections on himself'.⁵⁹⁵ A 'Liberal Miner' was not published by the *Observer* because he was 'a trifle too severe on Mr O'Keeffe'; this journal believed that 'the heads of the Miners' Union at Waihi' had 'repudiated his sentiments', resulting in his 'probably feeling sorry now'.⁵⁹⁶

Some newspapers did make personal reflections. The *Evening Post* of Wellington saw the reference to Cooper's previous association with Charles Rhodes as 'an impudent personal suggestion':

The fact that the Union's demands failed is not the slightest evidence of judicial bias. The presumption from the outset was that they would fail, because the Union's case started with the immense handicap of local industrial depression. The Union allowed the prosperous times of 1895 to go by, and made its first demands during the mining slump of 1900 or 1901. The miners stood to lose as well as to win; a large number, if not the majority of them, considered the demands ill-timed; it is principally the Waihi branch that led the Union into the position.

It did not think that miners would wish the judiciary to be 'made subject to political wire-pulling', and wondered whether O'Keeffe's 'Parthian shaft will turn out to be a removing "boomerang"'.⁵⁹⁷ The *Coromandel News* also disapproved of the 'cool effrontry and impudence' of the demand, for as there was no other judge in whom the public had 'fuller confidence' it was 'futile and childish' of O'Keeffe 'to try and injure him'. If he lacked

⁵⁹⁴ Letter from 'A Miner for 20 Years', *Thames Star*, 7 January 1902, p. 3.

⁵⁹⁵ 'Notice to Correspondents', *Thames Star*, 9 January 1902, p. 2.

⁵⁹⁶ 'Our Letter Box', *Observer*, 18 January 1902, p. 24.

⁵⁹⁷ Editorial, *Evening Post*, 6 January 1902, p. 4.

confidence in Cooper, why had he not objected before the hearing to his adjudicating? His subsequent discreditable appeal to McGowan for his dismissal ‘savours of spleen’.⁵⁹⁸

The *Observer*, under the heading ‘A Startling Demand’, argued that O’Keeffe was ‘such a droll and inveterate joker’ that it was ‘scarcely safe to take seriously his demand’. He had appeared to be ‘a thorough admirer’ of Cooper, having concluded his case with ‘a very eloquent peroration in which he eulogized, with silvern tongue, Mr Justice Cooper’s strict impartiality’. It found it ‘difficult’ to regard his ‘demand for a new President as anything else but one of those dry and caustic jokes for which he is famous the goldfields over’. But assuming, ‘for the sake of argument’, that he was serious, it warned of the dangers to unionism of making the court subject to political control, for his ‘immoral precedent’ would be used against unions by an unsympathetic government. His demand was ‘an utterly preposterous and unworthy one – that is, if it is not an audacious joke’. If the demand were granted, not only would popular confidence in the court be destroyed but in criminal and civil cases the government would be asked to remove judges, magistrates, and Justices of the Peace; ‘the whole thing is preposterous’.

So far as Mr O’Keeffe and his “little request” are concerned, we incline to the opinion that he is quietly pulling the leg of the Hon. James McGowan. But, if that is the case, his joke implies an unworthy and unmerited reflection upon the impartiality of Mr Justice Cooper – a reflection that is absolutely and thoroughly refuted by that gentleman’s professional record.

Although the union was ‘chagrined and disappointed at the outcome of the recent dispute, from which it expected so much’, the *Observer* regretted the ‘unjust and unworthy reflections’ on a court which had administered the Act ‘with dignity and freedom from bias’.⁵⁹⁹ Citing this view of O’Keeffe, the *Thames Star* considered it to be ‘not a bad joke in itself’ to accuse him of making a joke, for ‘all who have the honour of Mr O’Keeffe’s acquaintance know that unnatural seriousness characterises all his official utterances, and if he were as wise as he looks, he would be wise indeed’.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁸ *Coromandel County News*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 14 January 1902, p. 1.

⁵⁹⁹ *Observer*, 11 January 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁰⁰ *Thames Star*, 9 January 1902, p. 2; *Observer*, 25 January 1902, p. 5.

At the same time, the *Observer* published another cartoon about O’Keeffe showing McGowan a wheelbarrow labelled ‘Miner’s Union’ and made to look like a miner with a pick and shovel:

MICHAEL O’KEEFFE DOESN’T WANT MUCH.

Look here, McGowan, we miners are not satisfied with Mr Justice Cooper’s award. We want you to appoint a new President to the Arbitration Court. Now, what do you say to this wheelbarrow that we have fixed up? It would make a most excellent President, and I’ll write the awards myself. I’m a great hand at writing.

For some reason, he was shown smoking a large cigar.⁶⁰¹

When visiting Waihi at this time, McGowan described being in mining when there were no unions. These, ‘when well organised, were the best thing that could be introduced into a country, but when badly managed they were the worst’.⁶⁰² Reporting his remark, the *Observer* asked: ‘Ahem! Who was this Parthian shot intended for?’⁶⁰³ When a Waihi delegation informed McGowan ‘that they did not concur with’ O’Keeffe’s remarks about Cooper ‘and that such statements had not emanated from the Union’, the *Thames Star* was impressed, for its members ‘were, possibly are, Mr Michael O’Keeffe’s strongest supporters’. It applauded their repudiation of his claim to speak for members, for his ‘absurd statements’ discredited the union. ‘In our opinion he presumed too much, he apparently forgot that other branches of the Union possessed brains as well as himself, and that they had the power to exercise them’. Every branch must disclaim O’Keeffe’s remarks, for members were ‘being held up to ridicule’ throughout New Zealand ‘as a body of men possessing little intelligence and being barren of common-sense’ because of his words.⁶⁰⁴ This hope that O’Keeffe would be repudiated was immediately dashed when a deputation of Karangahake miners asked McGowan to remove Cooper.⁶⁰⁵

A columnist wondered whether ‘Judge Cooper and Michael Dineen will not have a pleasant chat on Wednesday when the Arbitration Court sits at Paeroa, and if Jimmy Hardman, the Vice-President, has not been told off to keep the President well under control. Another outburst might prove

⁶⁰¹ Cartoon, *Observer*, 11 January 1902, p. 13.

⁶⁰² *Thames Star*, 13 January 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁰³ *Observer*, 18 January 1902, p. 16.

⁶⁰⁴ *Thames Star*, 11 January 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁵ *Thames Star*, 14 January 1902, p. 1.

fatal'.⁶⁰⁶ Nothing untoward occurred at this hearing, which concerned interpretations of some of the clauses of the award.⁶⁰⁷

RESIGNATION

In early February, the executive had 'a long and at times animated discussion' about O'Keeffe's attack on Cooper.

It was stated that the statement made was unauthorised and that the President was not expressing the opinions of the Union when he said such a thing.

They also stated that perhaps the statement had been made without due consideration, and that the President did not seriously mean to suggest to the Minister that he should remove Cooper from his position.

Mr O'Keeffe said he made the statement and he would stick to it. He had thought over the matter and it was not a hasty assertion that he had made. He had made the statement deliberately after giving the matter serious consideration.

After a motion was put that the meeting 'heartily approves' of O'Keeffe's call for Cooper's removal, an amendment was carried by eight votes to six repudiating the attack on Cooper but stating that O'Keeffe had 'voiced the views and sentiments of a majority of the members of the union'.⁶⁰⁸ The *Thames Star* regretted this confusing repudiation.⁶⁰⁹ When the Waihi branch repudiated O'Keeffe's attack it agreed that he had expressed the opinions of most Waihi miners.⁶¹⁰ At the executive meeting, O'Keeffe response to the vote was that

the amendment did not express the opinion of members when called to consider the award directly after it was given, for at that time, he said, the members were very pronounced in their condemnation of the award, and therefore he could not accept the amendment and hold the office as president of the union as well.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁶ 'Our Telephone', *Thames Star*, 22 January 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁰⁷ *Thames Star*, 21 January 1902, p. 2, 22 January 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁰⁸ *Thames Star*, 8 February 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁰⁹ Editorials, *Thames Star*, 10 February 1902, p. 2, 21 February 1902, p. 2.

⁶¹⁰ *Thames Star*, 21 February 1902, p. 3.

⁶¹¹ *New Zealand Herald*, 10 February 1902, p. 6.

As 'he had decided to pursue a course and if the verdict was against him he would have to submit', he announced his resignation, which was formally submitted some days later.⁶¹² The *Thames Star* considered that the executive had 'done well' by repudiating him:

This will in some measure undo the harm done by Mr O'Keeffe. And how great the harm is to the cause of labour may be estimated by the use made of it by the opponents of the law in force in New Zealand. In the last number of the Review of Reviews [published in London and New York], there is a reference to Mr O'Keeffe's request, under the heading "Attacking a Judge". The writer says "the whole business of arbitration by the Courts it is clear would break down hopelessly if, wherever a judge gave a decision in favour of one side, his removal was indignantly demanded by the other side." Repudiation would have been more complete if Mr O'Keeffe had acknowledged his error.

It considered it 'would have been more gracious on his part to admit that he had erred, than to earn for himself the character of a man who cannot be convinced, even when his executive are against him'. Referring to President Kruger of South Africa as 'a synonym for obstinancy', it wondered if O'Keeffe wished to emulate him.⁶¹³

Two days later, John Seymour, in informing this newspaper of the resolution (which it had not published) declaring that O'Keeffe 'voiced the opinion of the majority of the miners in the District', added that 'a great portion of the members present at the meeting gave their opinion and said had they been personally in the President's place they would have more forcibly expressed themselves'.⁶¹⁴ The *Waitekauri Age* wrote that, whatever people thought of O'Keeffe's 'now famous commentary on Justice Cooper's decision', it was 'pleasant to note that the ex-President had the courage of his opinion and stuck to it even in the teeth of a hostile meeting'.⁶¹⁵ The *Evening Post* congratulated the union on its 'refusal to endorse the charges so recklessly brought' by O'Keeffe against Cooper, for it had not believed he was 'expressing the considered opinion of the miners, and the result proves that we were correct in our reliance upon their good sense'. It has 'no doubt

⁶¹² *Thames Star*, 8 February 1902, p. 2, 15 February 1902, p. 2.

⁶¹³ Editorial, *Thames Star*, 8 February 1902, p. 2.

⁶¹⁴ Letter from John Seymour, *Thames Star*, 10 February 1902, p. 1.

⁶¹⁵ *Waitekauri Age*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 13 February 1902, p. 4.

that his discomfiture will bring home to the miners the need of choosing as officers men of ripe judgment and self-restraint, and not merely men who are ready to go to any lengths in support of what they may mistakenly believe to be the cause of Labour'.⁶¹⁶ Its satisfaction at the outcome was premature.

A columnist asked whether endeavours were being made to induce Potts to contest the presidency and whether he was 'not better pleased and more inclined to stand by and watch the fun?'⁶¹⁷ At the first executive meeting after his resignation, it was proposed that O'Keeffe represent it at a meeting with the Waihi branch. Some members moved an amendment that Potts do so, but as he 'declined to act, and said that the committee had made a good choice', O'Keeffe was 'eventually' chosen. By that date, it was understood that O'Keeffe would stand for president again and that it was 'unlikely that any opposition will be raised to his candidature'; Potts, asked to stand, had declined.⁶¹⁸

RE-ELECTED

Although several Waihi miners said that they did not intend to nominate anyone against O'Keeffe, the Waihi branch asked Potts to oppose him, a renewal of their 'historic fights' for the position that created 'every prospect of a keen contest'.⁶¹⁹ It was anticipated that O'Keeffe would win a good majority.⁶²⁰ The election created 'a good deal of interest', and he did indeed win every district, receiving 65 votes to Potts' 46 at Thames, 121 to 106 at Waihi, 20 to 9 at Waikino, 18 to 12 at Coromandel, 92 to 4 at Opiotoni, 153 to 23 at Karangahake, 45 to 16 at Golden Cross, and 14 to 4 at Waitakauri, giving him 536 votes to 222, a majority of 314, before the Great Barrier results were received.⁶²¹ (They were never received: presumably nobody voted.) O'Keeffe 'expressed himself well pleased at the issue of the contest, which ... showed that the majority of the miners fully endorsed his sentiments concerning the Arbitration Court and its President.

⁶¹⁶ Editorial, *Evening Star*, 12 February 1902, p. 4.

⁶¹⁷ 'Our Telephone', *Thames Star*, 11 February 1902, p. 4.

⁶¹⁸ *Thames Star*, 18 February 1902, p. 4.

⁶¹⁹ *Thames Star*, 24 February 1902, p. 4, 13 March 1902, p. 2; *Observer*, 8 March 1902, p. 5.

⁶²⁰ 'Our Telephone', *Thames Star*, 13 March 1902, p. 1.

⁶²¹ *Thames Star*, 17 March 1902, p. 3, 18 March 1902, p. 3, 19 March 1902, p. 2, 20 March 1902, p. 1, advertisement, 21 March 1902, p. 3.

He was especially gratified at obtaining a majority in Waihi, where he least expected it'.⁶²² The Waitekauri newspaper disagreed, believing his victory was 'undoubtedly a tribute to the untiring zeal of the President rather than the vindication of his attitude in any other respect'.⁶²³ The *Observer* noted that he had accepted his victory 'with becoming modesty', and saw it 'simply as the assertion of a principle' and not implying 'any particular preference for himself over Mr Potts. It was, he says, not a question of individuals so much as principles'.⁶²⁴

CONFLICT WITH THE WAIHI BRANCH

In October 1901, at the quarterly union meeting, O'Keeffe read a letter from the Waihi committee that he considered was 'of such interest that it should be discussed'. It requested the payment of £50 each to Drumm and Morgan 'for loss they have suffered in the interests of the Union' and £30 each for four other dismissed members, and that a meeting of the full executive be called to consider these matters. When Potts pointed out that the committee had already dealt with the matter, O'Keeffe responded that he did not want 'to force the correspondence on the meeting if the meeting did not want it, but he thought that those present should give an expression of opinion'. As it involved such a large expenditure, it should come before the meeting, and he denied any 'desire to reflect upon or throw discredit on the proceedings of the Central Committee'. Others doubted that the meeting should consider the matter; when a point of order was raised opposing Potts making a personal explanation, O'Keeffe rejoined: 'No, he should speak. I like to hear him'. After further debate, he reported that the committee had rejected the Waihi requests as it 'did not consider the expenditure warranted'. In drawing attention to a newspaper report that the Waihi branch intended to appoint a permanent and salaried secretary he stated that 'he had no official information of that fact'. After those present agreed with the decision, O'Keeffe pointed out that the Waihi branch could request a meeting of the whole executive council.⁶²⁵

At an executive meeting in early February 1902 the Waihi branch again sought £50 for each man who represented the union at the

⁶²² *Thames Star*, 19 March 1902, p. 2.

⁶²³ *Waitekauri Age*, n.d., reprinted in *Thames Star*, 20 March 1902, p. 1.

⁶²⁴ *Observer*, 29 March 1902, p. 4.

⁶²⁵ *Thames Star*, 21 October 1901, p. 4.

Conciliation Board and Arbitration Court, and £30 for each discharged man, in one version, or in another to the four men who had assisted the union's case. As well, it asked for a paid secretary. Several members thought that the men had already been 'amply rewarded', and after 'an animated discussion' the Waihi proposal was defeated by ten votes to four (or nine to six).⁶²⁶ O'Keeffe voted against the proposals.⁶²⁷ One newspaper columnist considered that the Waihi members were 'endeavouring to force the hands of the parent body for their own special benefit', and the *Thames Star* favoured the executive decision.⁶²⁸ In contrast, the *Observer* described the treatment of the Waihi men, who had lost all possibility of being employed there, as 'shabby'.

True, the Union has a reason for its refusal, and certainly at first blush, that reason appears to be a sufficient one. The advocates of the Union were paid a guinea per day and actual travelling expenses. But, looking beneath the surface, they were entitled beyond this to special consideration. So also were the dismissed men who accepted martyrdom in the endeavour, whether wise or otherwise, to uphold the interests of unionism.

It is no secret that the men who were conspicuous in the management of the Union have absolutely lost their employment in the Waihi mine. None of them have been taken back. To be vetoed in the big mine at Waihi is to lose all chance of employment in the other mines, so that these members of the Executive who were dismissed at the outset of the dispute have suffered martyrdom for the cause. There is no alternative for them but to break up their homes at Waihi and go elsewhere with their families in search of employment, and this is no easy matter to a man depending on a small weekly wage.

The situation of the men who conducted the case before the two labour courts is equally hard. None of them has any chance of getting employment in the Waihi mine again....

It is to the credit of the Waihi section of the Union that it has remained staunch and loyal to the men who fought this dispute out for them. The recommendation that the advocates should be paid £50 each, and the dismissed men £30 each, emanated from them. Naturally, they will feel chagrined that the Executive of the Union, representing the whole of the goldfields camps, has taken a sordid view of the matter and refused to grant the men

⁶²⁶ *Thames Star*, 8 February 1902, p. 2; Waihi Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 10 February 1902, p. 6.

⁶²⁷ *Thames Star*, 21 February 1902, p. 1.

⁶²⁸ *Thames Star*, 'Our Telephone', 12 February 1902, p. 4, editorial, 17 February 1902, p. 2.

injured by the dispute the special consideration that the circumstances demanded. However, the decision emphasizes more strongly than ever that the branch in Waihi is out of sympathy with the parent Union at the Thames, and, seeing that Waihi is the largest centre and possesses the majority of the members, we shall not be surprised if it separates from the Thames and forms an independent Union.⁶²⁹

At his meeting with the Waihi branch to discuss paying for a secretary and a creating a federal structure for the union, there was 'a heated passage of arms' between O'Keeffe and the chairman, George Morgan, during a 'lively quarter of an hour'.⁶³⁰ Their dispute arose after Morgan asked him to respond to a member's request to explain why he had voted against the Waihi men being compensated. O'Keeffe commenced by stating that 'the meeting had heard the executive abused and ridiculed all round. As a matter of fact the executive had wisely administered the affairs of the Union', and he gave details of the payments made to those who participated in the two cases: Drumm had received £152 19s 3d, Morgan £147 16s 6d, and the other four lesser amounts, the lowest being £38 16s.

He asked the meeting what position the Executive could take, more especially in view of the number of men walking round idle, who were not remunerated. A number of men had left for the King Country, leaving their wives and families behind. The case of such men was equally as hard as that of the men whom the Executive were asked to pay compensation to. He did not know how they were going to pay one without the other.

When O'Keeffe began discussing his interview with McGowan, Morgan called him to order. 'Upon which Mr O'Keeffe said the Chairman wanted to shut his mouth, this he declined to do, and said he would shut his mouth for no man. (Applause)'. Told by Morgan that he 'had got off the subject and would have to keep to the point or sit down', O'Keeffe sat down, but later, with Morgan's permission, returned to the topic. 'The subject, he said, had now got historical, and in a few days his name not as plain Mr O'Keeffe, but as President of the Thames Miners' Union, had become known from one end of the colony to the other'. He had told McGowan that Cooper 'was not an impartial judge; that he was hand in glove with the mining companies',

⁶²⁹ *Observer*, 15 February 1902, p. 2.

⁶³⁰ *Thames Star*, 19 February 1902, p. 2, 'Our Telephone', 20 February 1902, p. 4.

having acted for 20 years on their behalf. ‘The miners had only themselves to fear. Their strength could never be broken. (Applause.)’. Returning to the branch’s request for extra payments, he stated that ‘the Union had to pay the piper, and he be made the scapegoat’, and charged Morgan with ‘betraying the interests of the Union’. In concluding, ‘he said he would contest the presidency at the next election against all-comers, and would ask Mr Morgan to contest it with him. (Applause.)’. Morgan responded by denying being disloyal: in fighting for the union’s interests ‘he had lost everything’, and the allegation was ‘unworthy’.⁶³¹ As noted, the branch nominated Potts, not Morgan, to contest the election.

The branch decided to pay its secretary despite the executive’s wishes.⁶³² While at Waihi, O’Keeffe was able to convince Barry to reduce by one hour the time men worked in the surface drives in the open cut on Martha Hill, and also asked that ‘men who had worked the extra hour be now paid overtime’.⁶³³

In early May, he told the Waihi branch that ‘with regard to the misunderstanding’ between it and the executive, ‘it would be better to at once bury the hatchet’, admitting that its representation on the executive ‘was unfair’ and recommending ‘an immediate settlement’.⁶³⁴ Despite his attempts to heal the rift, the branch’s experience of losing its bid for higher wages through being linked to less profitable mines elsewhere prompted its forming its own union later that year.⁶³⁵ In publishing the first report that the branch was to discuss separating, the *Thames Star* asked: ‘Was this unexpected?’⁶³⁶ The annual meeting held in August approved the separation.⁶³⁷

Despite these conflicts, O’Keeffe continued to be active on behalf of Waihi miners. In May, he investigated breaches of the award in the letting of contracts. The union had a list of all unemployed miners, and expected the companies to apply to it for men before employing new workers.⁶³⁸ The Department of Labour agreed that there had been a breach of the award,

⁶³¹ *Thames Star*, 21 February 1902, p. 1.

⁶³² *Thames Star*, 27 February 1902, p. 4.

⁶³³ Waihi Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 22 February 1902, p. 1.

⁶³⁴ *Thames Star*, 6 May 1902, p. 4.

⁶³⁵ Holland, pp. 15-16; Mouat, p. 188.

⁶³⁶ *Thames Star*, 26 June 1902, p. 4.

⁶³⁷ *Thames Star*, 1 September 1902, p. 4.

⁶³⁸ *Thames Star*, 6 May 1902, p. 4.

and an emergency sitting of the Arbitration Court was to be held at Waihi.⁶³⁹ The *Observer* cryptically reported that ‘*They Say That Michael Dineen O’Keeffe is to have a turn with the Waihi Company before the Arbitration Court next Monday. Breaches of award alleged. But “can you tell us the price of a sitting hen?”*’.⁶⁴⁰ No hearing was held, the dispute being settled privately.

OTHER UNION ACTIVITIES

During all these controversies, O’Keeffe continued to conduct ordinary union business. In a reference to conflict between the union and McCullough of the *Thames Star*, a cartoon published on 11 January 1902 showed Potts leading McCullough by a halter round the latter’s neck.⁶⁴¹ Six days later, when commenting on the attacks by his newspaper on O’Keeffe, a columnist wondered: ‘If Michael Dineen and the Pressman have arranged about the hoisting of another flag of truce “just to who they’re friends while the holidays were on”’.⁶⁴² At the end of the month, he asked: ‘When the *Star* and *Tiser* [*Advertiser*] representative and Mick O’Keeffe are going to hoist the flag of truce again?’⁶⁴³ At the start of March, he asked: ‘What price the duel between the newspaper man and the ex-boss of the Miners’ Union’,⁶⁴⁴ Potts. O’Keeffe responded to McCullough, the owner of these newspapers, in a way that has not come down to posterity, being only hinted at in the *Observer*: ‘Talking of jokes, have you ever heard Michael Dineen on William McCullough?’⁶⁴⁵ By July, in a cartoon poking fun at McCullough for imagining he was to be knighted, the *Observer* showed him being friends once more with Potts and O’Keeffe, the latter saying: ‘A real Sir are yer, Bill Mac? Huroo! an’ I always thot ye was descinded from the Irish Kings’.⁶⁴⁶

O’Keeffe continued to oppose unworked ground being granted protection.⁶⁴⁷ He reminded the warden of earlier promises not to grant

⁶³⁹ *Thames Star*, 10 May 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁰ *Observer*, 17 May 1902, p. 7.

⁶⁴¹ Cartoon, *Observer*, 11 January 1902, p. 13.

⁶⁴² ‘Our Telephone’, *Thames Star*, 17 January 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁴³ ‘Our Telephone’, *Thames Star*, 30 January 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁴⁴ ‘Our Telephone’, *Thames Star*, 6 March 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁴⁵ *Observer*, 25 January 1902, p. 5.

⁶⁴⁶ Cartoon, *Observer*, 5 July 1902, p. 19.

⁶⁴⁷ *Thames Star*, 21 January 1902, pp. 2, 3.

protection for the Thames Hauraki Company, which was having difficulty in raising capital to sink a shaft to test the lower levels, because it was 'not fair that 4000 inhabitants should have to depend on the operations of that mine'. When the Ironcap Company sought renewed protection, he pointed out that it had received several protections and had not complied with the conditions imposed.

Mr O'Keeffe said if the company would employ six wages' men he would withdraw the objection.

Mr Macky said he could not understand what the objection had been lodged for.

The Warden: Oh! to keep you up to the mark I suppose.
(Laughter.)

O'Keeffe objected on the same grounds to the New Alburnia having renewed protection and claimed that its bad condition prevented tributers working in it.⁶⁴⁸

At the Miners' Union Sports held in March 1902 he came fourth in the committeemen's race.⁶⁴⁹ In early April he chaired a meeting addressed by Tom Mann, the English unionist and socialist, and briefly introduced him.⁶⁵⁰ In mid-April, he proposed the vote of thanks to a speaker who suggested ways to restore prosperity to Thames.⁶⁵¹

THE END OF HIS PRESIDENCY AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE UNION

By June 1902, O'Keeffe was mining at Coromandel; despite reports of a revival there, he claimed mining was as bad as at Thames, but with 'indications of an improvement'.⁶⁵² Because of working there he did not stand for re-election, and Seymour was unopposed as his successor.⁶⁵³ O'Keeffe and Potts were elected to the executive, the former receiving 54 votes to the latter's 47; the other two candidates failed to be elected.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁴⁸ *Thames Star*, 22 January 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁴⁹ *Thames Star*, 4 March 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁰ *Thames Star*, 9 April 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁵¹ *Thames Star*, 18 April 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁵² *Thames Star*, 26 June 1902, p. 2; see also 6 September 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁵³ *Thames Star*, 14 July 1902, p. 2, 8 September 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁴ *Thames Star*, 5 August 1902, p. 1, advertisement, 8 August 1902, p. 3.

At his last annual meeting as president, O’Keeffe had to report that the auditors had not been able to report on the finances in time, and recommended that the rules needed revision.⁶⁵⁵ At its conclusion, he said that he had ‘discharged his duties to the union honestly and faithfully, and to the best of his ability’, and thanked both officers and members for ‘the hearty support they had accorded him’. In a ‘lengthy reference’ to Cooper’s award, he

spoke in strong terms against the Court’s decision. His advice to the members was to buckle themselves together, canvass for all they were worth for new members, and prepare for another squabble. He also strongly advised the union to become a political body, for until it did so it would never, in his opinion, have any influence.⁶⁵⁶

The union marked his retirement by a ‘complementary social’. As he had been ‘an ardent worker’, the *Thames Star* believed he would ‘be greatly missed in mining circles on the Thames’, and trusted that miners would ‘afford him a worthy farewell’.⁶⁵⁷ There was indeed a ‘good attendance’, with union officials being ‘well represented’, including some from Waihi, Waikino, Karangahake, Waitekauri, and other ‘distant parts’:

Speeches were made by several members as to the splendid work performed by Mr O’Keeffe on behalf of the Union, the speakers adding their testimony to the fact that he had been sincere in his desire to further the interests of the Union and its members.... Several presents were made to Mr O’Keeffe – a handsomely framed illuminated address and marble clock from the Waihi branch, a gold ring for Mr O’Keeffe and a silver tea-pot for Mrs O’Keeffe from the Thames branch, also a handsome butter dish. Mr O’Keeffe returned his thanks in a temperate, well-chosen speech, in which he regretted taking his departure from the Thames district. He thanked his many friends for their kind expressions and complimentary remarks, wished every prosperity to the Union, and congratulated members upon the choice of officials. Several toasts were proposed, that of Mr O’Keeffe being drunk with musical honours, and with songs, gramophone selections, and short speeches a very pleasant evening was spent.

⁶⁵⁵ *Thames Star*, 29 July 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁵⁶ Thames Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 29 July 1902, p. 6.

⁶⁵⁷ *Thames Star*, 3 September 1902, p. 2.

In acknowledging the presents, he revealed that 'kindness' was the 'only one way in which you can kill an Irishman'.⁶⁵⁸

For a time, O'Keeffe continued to be active in union affairs. Just before his farewell social, he was the first to speak at a public meeting called to consider 'the extreme depression existing in local mining'. He condemned 'the present system of protection', and pointed to 'the great distress existing amongst the working miners and their families. He advocated that no claim should be more than 100 acres in area'. His motion stating that too much protection had been granted and that 'excessive protection should now cease except in special cases' was carried unanimously.⁶⁵⁹ The following month, he was to have attended a conference of district representatives to discuss mining in Thames, but apologised for being unable to do so.⁶⁶⁰ He asked the Minister of Mines to interpret the clause about contracts in the new Mining Bill.⁶⁶¹ In November, he did not attend a meeting of the Goldfields' Improvement Committee,⁶⁶² and was not recorded as playing any further role in the union before July 1903, when he did not stand for any position.⁶⁶³ No further participation in union affairs was reported.

INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Periodically O'Keeffe participated in non-union matters affecting Thames, as when he wrote to the press in January 1899:

The year 1898 has come and gone, and has certainly left its footprints in the Thames sands, inasmuch as we have got our railway completed and doing good work, and it promises well, to contradict the prophecy of those chaw-bacons ['yokels']⁶⁶⁴ who argued many years ago that the Thames Valley Railway was not required for the welfare of the country, but was only meant as a political job.

⁶⁵⁸ *Thames Star*, 8 September 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁹ *Thames Star*, 6 September 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁶⁰ *Thames Star*, 8 October 1902, p. 2, 15 October 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁶¹ Cartoon, *Observer*, 11 October 1902, p. 12.

⁶⁶² *Thames Star*, 22 November 1902, p. 6.

⁶⁶³ *Thames Star*, 20 July 1903, p. 2.

⁶⁶⁴ Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8 ed., ed. Paul Beale (London, 1984), p. 202.

Although the railway and the Big Pump were working well, ‘we must not sit on a rail, but take time by the forelock and keep doing’. He recommended that now the new mayor, Greenslade, had ‘the harness of his office on, before he strains the traces’, he should be sent with his family for a holiday at Te Aroha:

Let him take a stroll around the Domain, see the beautiful shade trees, the nice, comfortable seats, and the swings for the children, and don’t let him forget taking a “header” into the cold water swimming bath. Let him also see his brother Mayor (Mr Mills) and Mr Thomas Gavin, late Chairman of the Domain Board; have a talk with those gentlemen and come back home with some tangible scheme to lay before the Thames people with a suitable recreation ground and a swimming bath. It must be humiliating to the Thames local bodies to think that they are the only local bodies of any importance in New Zealand who have not at least provided a comfortable place for women and children to sit on a Saturday night, or in holiday time. This matter of a recreation ground and swimming bath has been flounced around at every Mayoral election while I have been a resident of the Thames, and still nothing practical has been done, and it is now high time that a start should be made, if it was only to procure one acre of land in a suitable place, and we will very soon plant it ourselves with shade trees. The thing only wants to be given a fair start, and leave the rest to time.⁶⁶⁵

In April, he was appointed vice-president of a provisional board to form a co-operative boot factory; Greenslade was chairman.⁶⁶⁶ Later that year, he decided to stand for a vacancy on the borough council, but as he signed his nomination form ‘Michael Dineen’, omitting his surname, it was informal, and his opponent was elected unopposed.⁶⁶⁷ ‘Thames Queries’ in the *Observer* asked: ‘Why Mick forgot to complete his signature?’, and whether ‘it was not a cunning dodge of his?’⁶⁶⁸ The logic of this ‘cunning dodge’ is elusive, unless another query was accurate: it asked whether it was true that he had admitted that ‘he had not a ghost of a chance, seeing that it is reported his better half was going to vote for Little Billee?’⁶⁶⁹ This, one of only a couple of references to Margaret after their marriage, it did not

⁶⁶⁵ Letter from M.D.O’Keeffe, *Thames Star*, 5 January 1899, p. 4.

⁶⁶⁶ *Thames Star*, 11 April 1899, p. 2.

⁶⁶⁷ *Thames Star*, 29 August 1899, p. 2, 7 September 1899, p. 3.

⁶⁶⁸ ‘Thames Queries’, *Observer*, 16 September 1899, p. 20.

⁶⁶⁹ ‘Thames Queries’, *Observer*, 16 September 1899, p. 20.

explain why she would want to vote against her husband. The only other time that an opinion of hers was recorded was in 1889, when along with her husband she signed a petition supporting forming a Te Aroha borough.⁶⁷⁰

In August 1899, he chaired a meeting by a visiting prohibitionist, prompting a correspondent to wonder whether the 'jaynial President' was 'really a Prohibitionist, or whether he was only rung into the chair for a "draw" at Isitt's meeting?'.⁶⁷¹ He was not a prohibitionist. A prominent Catholic, he was the third of nine signatories to a 1900 address to Monsignor O'Reilly, Dean and Rector of Thames.⁶⁷² He was also associated with members of other faiths, as indicated in April 1902 when, on behalf of the union he attended a farewell to Daniel James Murray, a Wesleyan minister.⁶⁷³ According to the *Observer*, Murray was held in 'high esteem' by miners, who 'deeply regretted his departure', and O'Keeffe's 'few words'

were of a characteristic kind. For example, the good Wesleyans caught their breath when Michael Dineen ventured the opinion that it was a pity Mr Murray was not a Roman Catholic priest, because he was sure he would make a perfect priest. Some of the more unregenerate laughed gleefully, but the average Wesleyan face was tightly drawn and wore a severe look. But Michael Dineen never wavered. He had taken up the parable, and he pursued it enthusiastically, eventually concluding a capital speech with this graceful sentiment:- "The Thames will be poorer to-morrow and the days after – poorer in intellect, poorer in virtue, and poorer in manliness – because of Mr Murray's removal." Bravo, Michael Dineen!⁶⁷⁴

Late in April, he attended a meeting of householders of the Waiotahi School. As only enough men were nominated to fill the number of vacancies, he 'hoped that an election would be held, and he would be disappointed if there was no election'. Four more names were then proposed, including his own, but as 'he would probably be engaged at Coromandel during the present year' he 'did not think there was any use electing him'. His name

⁶⁷⁰ *Te Aroha News*, 23 October 1889, p. 2.

⁶⁷¹ 'Thames Queries', *Observer*, 19 August 1899, p. 20.

⁶⁷² *Thames Star*, 8 August 1900, p. 4.

⁶⁷³ *Thames Star*, 10 April 1902, p. 2; *New Zealand Gazette*, 24 January 1902, p. 117.

⁶⁷⁴ *Observer*, 19 April 1902, p. 5.

was duly 'erased from the blackboard, regret being expressed that Mr O'Keeffe was about to leave the Thames district'.⁶⁷⁵

THE 1902 GENERAL ELECTION

O'Keeffe was interested in wider political issues. As noted, in April 1902 he chaired the Thames meeting at which Tom Mann spoke on trade unionism and social reform.⁶⁷⁶ Shortly afterwards, it was rumoured that 'a prominent member' of the union would 'probably' be a candidate for either the Thames or Ohinemuri seats, and a columnist wondered whether the local bookmakers were 'laying starting prices about Michael D. O'Keeffe for the next Thames election'.⁶⁷⁷ Others also believed he was interested in standing for parliament. The *Observer* commented, after his re-election, that 'Michael's star with the miners of the Peninsula was never so much in the ascendent as it is to-day, and if he carries out his intention of standing for the Thames seat at the coming election he will make the pace pretty lively'.⁶⁷⁸ In May, he announced that he would not stand for Ohinemuri, but, as the *Observer* pointed out, he had not mentioned McGowan's Thames seat; 'When it is mentioned, he twinkles his eye and looks serious'.⁶⁷⁹ At the end of September, although there was still 'some talk' of his standing against McGowan, he reportedly had 'no intention of coming out as a candidate'.⁶⁸⁰ Shortly afterwards, O'Keeffe said that there should be some opposition to McGowan, and that if Lucas, still secretary of the union, did not stand, then he would.⁶⁸¹ When Thomas Day, formerly associated with the Queensland Labor Party,⁶⁸² was asked to stand as a Labour candidate, he said that he would do so only on condition that O'Keeffe declined nomination.⁶⁸³ As the *Observer* noted, the latter seemed 'to show no

⁶⁷⁵ *Thames Star*, 29 April 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁷⁶ *Thames Star*, 9 April 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁷ *Thames Star*, 19 April 1902, p. 2, 'Our Telephone', 24 April 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁸ *Observer*, 29 March 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁷⁹ *Observer*, 10 May 1902, p. 4.

⁶⁸⁰ *Thames Star*, 29 September 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁸¹ *Thames Star*, 10 October 1902, p. 2.

⁶⁸² See *Thames Star*, 29 July 1898, p. 2, 2 January 1902, p. 3, 6 January 1902, p. 2, 1 February 1902, p. 4, 6 February 1902, p. 2, 15 November 1902, p. 2, 19 November 1902, p. 2, 9 October 1903, p. 2.

⁶⁸³ *Thames Star*, 13 October 1902, p. 2.

inclination to enter the lists, though he would certainly have made the running warm'.⁶⁸⁴

Lucas did stand against McGowan, supported by the union,⁶⁸⁵ but not all miners or unionists approved of his decision. At Coromandel, where O'Keeffe participated in the campaign, a leading mine manager was chairman of McGowan's election committee and another prominent miner urged support for him.⁶⁸⁶ 'Miner and Unionist' of Thames claimed that Lucas was nominated by a few extremists and that the decision to back him was made at a meeting attended by only 16 unionists, of whom only ten supported him.⁶⁸⁷ After McGowan gave his election address at Coromandel, he replied to 'a series of questions' by O'Keeffe:

Mr McGowan stated he had never heard of a proposal to reduce the area of amalgamated claims to 100 acres; he had embodied the proposal to make the miners' 8 hours from bank to bank in the Mining Act Amendment Bill, by Governor's message; if he was again elected he would pursue the same policy, carefully considering all applications for protection and then doing as his judgment indicated.

As the meeting passed a unanimous vote of confidence in McGowan and the government,⁶⁸⁸ either O'Keeffe voted for him or abstained. When O'Keeffe was involved in the later stages of the campaign, the local newspaper ignored him. Only the *Observer* referred to an address he made that seemed to continue the union's conflict with McCullough rather than deal with the election: 'They say that Michael's open air speech at Coromandel on the little newspaper man nearly brought down the heavens'.⁶⁸⁹ The content of his speech was not recorded. McGowan was re-elected with 2,457 votes, Lucas receiving 1,573, and a prohibitionist 36.⁶⁹⁰

MINING AT COROMANDEL AND KUAOTUNU

⁶⁸⁴ *Observer*, 18 October 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁵ *Thames Star*, 23 October 1902, p. 1; *Coromandel County News*, 4 November 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁶ *Coromandel County News*, 7 November 1902, p. 3, 21 November 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁷ Letter from 'Miner and Unionist', *Coromandel County News*, 14 November 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁸ *Coromandel County News*, 11 November 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁹ *Observer*, 6 December 1902, p. 7.

⁶⁹⁰ *Coromandel County News*, 28 November 1902, p. 3.

In mid-July 1902, O’Keeffe and his partner Thomas Millett, signed an agreement with the Hauraki Company of Coromandel whereby, on payment of £100, they obtained all its tailings, which they would remove and treat for five years.⁶⁹¹ Millett, an Irishman who had lived in New Zealand for 38 years, was an experienced miner in his sixties and a member of the union.⁶⁹² In November, the county council received an application, presumably from them, for water to use in the tailings plant being erected near the Hauraki Battery.⁶⁹³ Their relationship soon turned sour, and on 10 January O’Keeffe assaulted Millett, for which he was fined £1 and required to keep the peace.⁶⁹⁴ Although he denied the charge, O’Keeffe was convicted after several witnesses gave evidence.⁶⁹⁵ Eleven days later, he sought sureties that Millett would keep the peace as he was ‘in fear that grievous harm may be done to him’.⁶⁹⁶ He also applied for a prohibition order against Millett, which would have banned him from drinking in hotels, but then withdrew it.⁶⁹⁷ The violence may have been the fault of Millett, for in June that year he was fined for being drunk in a public place, and six months later he sought ‘sureties of the peace’ from another man.⁶⁹⁸ One month after O’Keeffe was fined, he and Millett were sued for wages owing amounting to £6, and judgment was made against them for £3.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹¹ Agreement between M.W.D. O’Keeffe and Thomas Millett and Hauraki Gold Mining Company Ltd., 15 July 1902, Hesketh and Richmond Papers, Box 65, 1380/H, MS 440, Auckland Public Library.

⁶⁹² See Thames Hospital, Register of Patients 1884-1902, folios 101, 106, YCAH 14975/1a, ANZ-A; *Thames Star*, 27 July 1894, p. 2, 28 January 1895, p. 4, 6 February 1896, p. 3, 27 August 1896, p. 2, 19 March 1897, p. 4.

⁶⁹³ *Coromandel County Council*, 28 November 1902, p. 3.

⁶⁹⁴ New Zealand Constabulary, Summons Book, Coromandel, 1891-1924, no. 332, entry for 15 January 1903, ZAAN 14294/1a; Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Criminal Cases 1898-1904, 8/1903, BACL 13751/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁹⁵ Magistrate’s Court, *Coromandel County News*, 23 January 1903, p. 2.

⁶⁹⁶ New Zealand Constabulary, Summons Book, Coromandel, 1891-1924, no. 335, entry for 21 January 1903, ZAAN 14294/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁹⁷ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Criminal Cases 1898-1904, 9/1903, BACL 13751/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁹⁸ Coromandel Magistrate’s Court, Criminal Cases 1898-1904, 18, 101/1903, BACL 13751/1a, ANZ-A.

⁶⁹⁹ Coromandel Warden’s Court, Record Book 1899-1911, 2/1902, ZAAP 14047/5a, ANZ-A; Warden’s Court, *Coromandel County News*, 13 February 1903, p. 3.

After their partnership ended early in 1903, by June O’Keeffe was a partner in a prospecting claim in the Waitaia range at Kuaotunu. In that month his mate, Joseph Dyer, of whom nothing is known, applied for a subsidy of 3s per foot to drive a tunnel about 100 feet ‘to cut a leader which is payable but which has not been cut at any low level’; they hoped to ‘meet with a rich reward’.⁷⁰⁰ The mining inspector, James Coutts, recommended that £15 be paid, for the ground, formerly the Mint, was adjacent to the Waitaia Company’s mine, which had been payable lately. ‘Nothing of any consequence has been found outside of this mine and the applicants are confident that if they can get a little assistance it will enable them to put in the proposed tunnel and prove if the Waitaia reef extends southwards’.⁷⁰¹ In August a mining columnist, ‘Obadiah’, wrote that O’Keeffe had ‘blossomed out into a full blown mine owner at Kuaotunu, where he has applied for and obtained a subsidy of £15’ for the Mint. ‘Obadiah’ wondered whether he would appear on the owners’ side at the next sitting of the Arbitration Court: ‘Imagine Mick O’Keeffe and Manager Daw in sympathetic accord’.⁷⁰² The *Thames Star* also reported the latest venture of its ‘old friend’.⁷⁰³ The partners did not find anything payable, and, after receiving £12 15s by the end of March 1904 for driving 85 feet, abandoned the claim.⁷⁰⁴ This seems to have been the end of their partnership. In April the following year, Dyer was granted a prospecting license over 100 acres, and in May 1906 he applied for one over 80 acres, but no partner was mentioned.⁷⁰⁵ For the whole of 1905, Dyer and an unnamed mate, seemingly not O’Keeffe, received a subsidy of £30 to drive for 200 feet in the Waitaia area to

⁷⁰⁰ Joseph Dyer to Minister of Mines, 22 June 1903; Joseph Dyer to Coromandel County Council, 22 June 1903, Mines Department, MD 1, 1903/691, ANZ-W.

⁷⁰¹ James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 3 July 1903, Mines Department, MD 1, 1903/691, ANZ-W.

⁷⁰² ‘Obadiah’, ‘Shares and Mining’, *Observer*, 15 August 1903, p. 10.

⁷⁰³ *Thames Star*, 8 August 1903, p. 1.

⁷⁰⁴ Certificates by Inspector of Mines of work done, 20 November 1903, 31 March 1904, Mines Department, MD 1, 1903/691, ANZ-W.

⁷⁰⁵ Coromandel Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1902-1905, Hearings of 31 January 1905, 15 February 1905, 12 April 1905, ZAAAN 14039/1b; Register of Applications 1901-1912, Hearing of 9 May 1906, ZAAAN 14035/6a, ANZ-A.

intersect a reef that gave 'good prospects on the surface'.⁷⁰⁶ Although Coutts believed the tunnel was 'in a good locality' with 'a fair chance' of striking payable gold, there was no record of anything worthwhile being found.⁷⁰⁷

O'Keeffe was involved in other claims in the Kuaotunu district over the next few years. In November 1903 he was held 250 of the 80,000 scrip shares in the Golden Spark Company.⁷⁰⁸ Six months later, he applied to remove the Makakirau battery from Mercury Bay to Kuaotunu.⁷⁰⁹ In late May 1905, with John Carroll, another mine manager,⁷¹⁰ he applied to McGowan, still Minister of Mines, who was visiting Kuaotunu, for £60 towards driving a low level in the Otama. They estimated having to drive for 400 feet, of which 80 had already been driven. McGowan promised that if he received a favourable report he would grant 3s per foot, but he would not meet any of the costs of earlier driving.⁷¹¹ Coutts reported early the following month that the party wished to drive on Rowe's leader, 400 feet from the portal of the main tunnel, which was in 691 feet, to pick up a payable shoot previously worked in the upper levels. 'Good payable ore has been obtained from this mine from time to time but the present party have been very unsuccessful although they have worked very hard for nearly two (2) years', and as they were 'still sanguine of success' he recommended their application be approved.⁷¹² If O'Keeffe had been associated with this party for the past two years, he must have been working off and on in it and the

⁷⁰⁶ Joseph Dyer and mate to Chairman, Coromandel County Council, 19 December 1904; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Joseph Coutts, 24 January 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1905/727, ANZ-W.

⁷⁰⁷ James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 3 January 1905; James Coutts, Certificates of work done dated 10 June 1905, 27 October 1905, 13 December 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1905/727, ANZ-W.

⁷⁰⁸ *New Zealand Gazette*, 5 November 1903, p. 2364.

⁷⁰⁹ Inspector of Mines, Thames, Letterbook 1903-1906, p. 102, 20 April 1904, YBAZ 1240/3, ANZ-A.

⁷¹⁰ See *Thames Star*, 10 March 1899, p. 2, 25 July 1901, p. 4, 14 May 1902, p. 2.

⁷¹¹ Memorandum recording discussion between Minister of Mines, M.W.D. O'Keeffe, and John Carroll, n.d. [26 May 1905?], Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷¹² James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 6 June 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

Mint at the same time. In late June, he was informed that, because of his 'personal application' to McGowan, £48 would be granted.⁷¹³

Also in June, William Ellings, another local miner, then aged 48,⁷¹⁴ and an unspecified partner applied to the council for aid for prospecting in their Otama, stating that they had been promised £60 by McGowan to drive on Rowe's leader.⁷¹⁵ Ellings had been granted this ground in February the previous year, and all the legal dealings concerning it were in his name alone.⁷¹⁶ The Mines Department, confused by this application, asked Coutts: 'Are Ellings & Party connected with Carroll and O'Keeffe?'⁷¹⁷ Confusion increased when Thomas Cunningham⁷¹⁸ applied to the council for £30 towards driving to cut Rowe's reef from his ground on the northern boundary of the Otama.⁷¹⁹ Coutts replied that he could not 'understand how they sent in so many applications for the same work. Ellings & party are the same as O'Keeffe & party': John Bray,⁷²⁰ Cunningham, Ellings, and O'Keeffe were all in the same party.⁷²¹ The under-secretary explained to the county clerk that it seemed 'that Ellings, Cunningham, and O'Keeffe, who compose the same party, have each made separate applications for subsidies for the same work without informing the other members of the party'; consequently, the applications of Ellings and Cunningham were declined.⁷²²

⁷¹³ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to M.W.D. O'Keeffe, 22 June 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷¹⁴ See *Thames Electoral Roll, 1902*, p. 23; Marriage Certificate of William Ellings, 23 February 1898, 1898/2306, BDM; Death Certificate of May Ellings, 14 December 1916, 1916/7193, BDM.

⁷¹⁵ William Ellings and party to Coromandel County Council, 1 June 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷¹⁶ Coromandel Warden's Court, Register of Applications 1902-1905, Hearings of 12 February 1904, 27 February 1905, 12 April 1905, ZAAAN 14039/1b, ANZ-A.

⁷¹⁷ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to James Coutts, 26 June 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷¹⁸ Not traced.

⁷¹⁹ Thomas Cunningham to Coromandel County Council, 17 June 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷²⁰ See *Thames Star*, 21 December 1904, p. 2; *Thames Electoral Roll, 1905*, p. 7.

⁷²¹ James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 3 July 1905 (3 letters), Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷²² Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to County Clerk, Coromandel County Council, 7 July 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

This decision prompted Carroll to protest that there was 'absolutely no connection between Cunningham & Ellings and O'Keeffe'. His sketch showed that Cunningham's drive was heading for a different part of Rowe's Reef and that Ellings' tunnel, being driven by Ellings and O'Keeffe, was in the Juno ground. He asked for reconsideration of the refusal to assist Ellings and O'Keeffe, 'as they have already done a good deal of work on the strength of the grant, and it would certainly be a hardship to deprive them of it because another party applies for a grant to drive for the same reef in adjoining ground'.⁷²³ The county clerk confirmed there were three separate parties,⁷²⁴ whilst Carroll told Coutts that Cunningham was not in Ellings' and O'Keeffe's party and that there was 'a very Vindictive individual here who is at Variance with O'Keeffe, and he may have made some false statements to the Minister on the matter'.⁷²⁵ Coutts informed his department that it was unreasonable to assist Cunningham because he was heading for the same reef;⁷²⁶ did Coutts also believe or know that Cunningham was the 'vindictive individual' who had quarrelled with O'Keeffe?

In early October O'Keeffe and Ellings were reportedly on a 'good run of gold':

They have been for several months past driving on a leader that has had little work done on it previously, and did not get anything until about a week ago, when they dropped on some good prospects. They have now had a run of good payable dirt for upwards of 20ft with every prospect of it making specimens. The show is considered a good one, as they have about 120ft of backs and good driving country.⁷²⁷

⁷²³ John Carroll to Minister of Mines, 18 July 1905, with sketch plan of workings, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-A.

⁷²⁴ County Clerk, Coromandel County Council, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 18 July 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷²⁵ John Carroll to James Coutts, 18 July 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷²⁶ James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 22 August 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷²⁷ *Thames Star*, 3 October 1905, p. 4.

By December, they were paid £48 once Coutts certified that the work had been done,⁷²⁸ indicating that they were working full-time on their drive. When McGowan revisited Kuaotunu in mid-December, they applied for additional aid to put in an air shaft.⁷²⁹ In January, when they wanted a subsidy to drive and rise 200 feet, Coutts reported that ‘they have done a large amount of work’ and that it was ‘a reasonable request’ to ask for a new grant as the subsidy did ‘not much more than pay for the explosives, candles, etc’.⁷³⁰ The £30 granted was paid by the end of September.⁷³¹ In February 1907, Ellings surrendered the claim.⁷³²

In July 1905 O’Keeffe applied to be assistant inspector of mines at Thames, informing McGowan when making this second unsuccessful attempt that he had been ‘again persuaded by many of my friends to renew my application’.⁷³³ In the following April he built a water race at Kuaotunu with Ellings,⁷³⁴ his last new initiative there. He abandoned Kuaotunu in April 1907 and returned to Thames, where he was welcomed back by the *Thames Star*.⁷³⁵ At some time before then he was granted a subsidy of £125 to enable him and a new mate, Stackpole, whose identity has not been traced, ‘to drive 500 feet of tunnel at the South British claim at Kapanga, at the rate of 5/- per foot’.⁷³⁶

⁷²⁸ Certificates by James Coutts of work done, 18 September 1905, 27 October 1905, 13 December 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷²⁹ Minister’s Notes in Kuaotunu, 18 December 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷³⁰ James Coutts to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 15 January 1906, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷³¹ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to James Coutts, 19 January 1906; Certificates by James Coutts of work done, 14 March 1906, 10 July 1906, 28 September 1906, Mines Department, MD 1, 1906/12, ANZ-W.

⁷³² Coromandel Warden’s Court, Register of Applications 1901-1912, Hearing of 1 February 1907, ZAAAN 14035/6a, ANZ-A.

⁷³³ M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Minister for Mines, 24 July 1905, Mines Department, MD 1, 05/1038, ANZ-W.

⁷³⁴ Inspector of Mines, Thames, Letterbook 1903-1906, p. 635, 3 April 1906, YBAZ 1240/3, ANZ-A.

⁷³⁵ *Thames Star*, 30 April 1907, p. 2.

⁷³⁶ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Inspector of Mines, 1 February 1909, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, Sundry Incomplete Subsidy Applications, BBDO 10046, S149, box 6, ANZ-A.

MINING AT KARANGAHAKE

In March 1908, O’Keeffe took out a miner’s right for Karangahake, where he was then living; later ones were taken out in 1909, 1911, 1912, and 1914.⁷³⁷ In November 1909, he was granted a residence site there, but sold it three months later for £20.⁷³⁸ By this time he was living alone, for in December 1908 Margaret died at Ponsonby, where she had presumably gone for medical treatment. Aged 67, she had suffered from inflammation of the kidneys and a cardiac lesion for some time, possibly years.⁷³⁹

Also during 1908, O’Keeffe was a prominent member of the Karangahake community. In February, on behalf of local Catholics he made a presentation to their priest, and when the Karangahake branch of the union held a sports day ‘the veteran, Mr M. O’Keeffe’, was ‘on the warpath’ to collect money for prizes for the children’s races.⁷⁴⁰ In November he was involved in an apparently non-partisan way in the election campaign, for after moving a vote of thanks to the Liberal member at his June meeting he chaired the Opposition candidate’s meeting in October.⁷⁴¹ A ‘Random Jotting’ written by the ‘Man in the Street’ mentioned a curious event:

My old friend Mick O’Keeffe has been looking for me – not with a club this time. Mick and I have had many “healthy” discussions on public matters, and I have a hazy recollection of an invitation to the seashore to settle a difference – but that is long past. Naturally Mick took a prominent part in the Ohinemuri election, and if there was any excitement it was Pollen Street to a brick that he was there. There are tales of some exciting scenes in connection with the election and that many matters other than that of politics entered into the fray. This is to be regretted, for surely under present conditions ... religious differences can surely

⁷³⁷ Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Miners’ Rights 1906-1912, nos. 70419, 77686, 82423, 91550, ZAAP 13769/1a; Index of Miners’ Rights 1912-1952, entry for 16 November 1914, BAFV 13688/1a, ANZ-A; see also *Ohinemuri Supplementary Electoral Roll, November 1908*, p. 33.

⁷³⁸ Paeroa Warden’s Court, Register of Licenses 1909-1910, folio 40, entry for 4 November 1909, ZAAP 13294/7a; Thames Warden’s Court, Registrations 1910-1913, no. 4209, BACL 11343/14a, ANZ-A.

⁷³⁹ Death Certificate of Margaret O’Keeffe, 8 December 1908, 1908/6875, BDM.

⁷⁴⁰ Karangahake Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 12 February 1908, p. 1.

⁷⁴¹ Karangahake Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 23 June 1908, p. 1, 27 October 1908, p. 1.

be kept in the background.... The picture of Mick fleeing from a band of infuriated females, raging with the pangs of defeat, must have been a great and glorious sight!⁷⁴²

No surviving newspaper reported this incident, apart from the above 'jotting'. The Waihi newspaper for the period survives, but with some sections cut out of three issues;⁷⁴³ perhaps a souvenir hunter removed the only other record of this stirring occasion, which was clearly caused by religion becoming an issue. The *Thames Star* noted that a majority of electors at Waihi had voted against the Liberal candidate because Opposition canvassers used his religion against him: 'So many workers in Waihi voting on religious grounds alone has created a mild stir'.⁷⁴⁴

O'Keeffe was mine manager for the Crown Royal Company, established in 1909, but by September 1910 had resigned.⁷⁴⁵ In March 1909, clearly wishing to repeat his attempt to become a farmer, he asked the government to set aside a block of land in Piako 'as a special settlement for the gold miners and their families'. This block, of about 5,600 acre, was between the Piako and Waitoa Rivers, and had been drained already. He wanted an association to take up this land, with each settler receiving 'between 150 and 200 acres'. He said 'they would be prepared to find as much capital as the Government required immigrants to have. They were getting this way that unless they could get a piece of land they would have to fall back on the old age pension'.⁷⁴⁶ (He was aged 57,⁷⁴⁷ but clearly looking ahead.) Two months later, he was one of the 35 Karangahake miners who petitioned parliament to have a block of the Hauraki Plains set aside for selection by miners.⁷⁴⁸ This attempt to obtain preference to land

⁷⁴² 'Man in the Street', 'Random Jottings', *Thames Star*, 26 November 1908, p. 2.

⁷⁴³ *Waihi Daily Telegraph*, 4 November 1908, p. 2, 18 November 1908, p. 2, 21 November 1908, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁴ *Thames Star*, 26 November 1908, p. 4.

⁷⁴⁵ Company Files, BADZ 5181, box 244 no. 2433, ANZ-A; *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 October 1910, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 March 1909, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁷ Marriage Certificate of Michael O'Keefe, 31 October 1884, 1884/1749, BDM.

⁷⁴⁸ *Te Aroha News*, 25 May 1909, p. 2; 'Report of the Lands Committee', *AJHR*, 1909, I-5, p. 5.

'handy to their present work' failed because the government could not see its way to give them 'preference over others'.⁷⁴⁹

O'Keeffe had not lost interest in Te Aroha mining. In January 1909, 'O'Keeffe and Hanley' tendered to drive 100 feet in Murphy's Find, part of the original field,⁷⁵⁰ unsuccessfully.⁷⁵¹ Thomas Hanley was another Karangahake miner who was a leader of the local branch of the union.⁷⁵² In February 1910 O'Keeffe revealed his fond memories of mining at Waiorongomai by suggesting to the *Te Aroha News* that for the thirtieth anniversary of the proclamation of the goldfield in November 'my good friends at Te Aroha' should arrange 'a reunion of old pioneers':

I know of fully a dozen people living at Waihi and Karangahake who would give a hand to the committee to arrange for such a reunion. It need not be an elaborate affair, merely to arrange a day's sports and at night a social and dance in which the sons and daughters of pioneers would meet and make the acquaintance of the friends of their mothers and fathers of thirty years ago, and finish up on the night of the 28th with a banquet when we could talk over the ups and downs of the last thirty years over a social glass.⁷⁵³

In October a meeting of 'pioneer residents' appointed a committee to devise a 'fitting celebration'.⁷⁵⁴ O'Keeffe sent a gold bracelet as a prize for a race between the daughters of pioneers, but, despite being referred to as 'the prime mover of the Old Pioneers' Re-union', was unable to attend because of a severe cold.⁷⁵⁵

In October 1910, O'Keeffe was appointed manager for the New Telluride Company at Maratoto.⁷⁵⁶ He described himself to a Te Aroha friend as the superintendent of a mine that was 'prospecting excellently,

⁷⁴⁹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 3 March 1909, p. 2.

⁷⁵⁰ See paper on Denis Murphy.

⁷⁵¹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 13 January 1909, p. 2.

⁷⁵² See *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 27 March 1907, p. 3, 3 July 1907, p. 3, 10 January 1908, p. 3, 7 February 1908, p. 2, 24 July 1908, p. 2, 8 November 1909, p. 3.

⁷⁵³ Letter from M.D. O'Keeffe, *Te Aroha News*, 3 February 1910, p. 3.

⁷⁵⁴ Te Aroha Correspondent, *New Zealand Herald*, 21 October 1910, p. 7, 28 October 1910, p. 8.

⁷⁵⁵ *Te Aroha News*, 20 October 1910, p. 2, 29 November 1910, p. 2; *Te Aroha Mail*, 22 October 1910, p. 2.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 12 October 1910, p. 2.

and likely to become a large concern'.⁷⁵⁷ By at least early the following year he was replaced.⁷⁵⁸

MINING IN MARLBOROUGH

In October 1913 the *Thames Star* reported that 'our old friend "Mick" O'Keeffe, well known at Thames', was 'now engaged at the Dominion Consolidated Gold and Scheelite Company's mine, at Wakamarina, in the Marlborough district'.⁷⁵⁹ Its correct name was the Dominion Consolidated Development Company; in August that year he was appointed manager of its mine at Golden Bar, on the Wakamarina River, near Queen Charlotte Sound. When he arrived, he found that the miners, all members of the new Wakamarina Miners' Union, were on strike because the company had replaced wages men with contractors. As only a few men were opposed to taking up contracts, work resumed once the dissidents left.⁷⁶⁰

MINING IN OHINEMURI AGAIN

Possibly his earlier opposition to contracts made O'Keeffe unwilling to continue as manager, for, although still at Wakamarina in February 1914,⁷⁶¹ in September he applied for assistance to drive a prospecting tunnel 150 feet in his Talisman East mine at Karangahake.⁷⁶² In December, he wrote to the mining inspector, Matthew ('Mathue', in his version) Paul:

I have been wondering whether you will pay a Visit to Karangahape before the Holladays sets in as I require a progress payment from old Massey [the Premier], especially now that he is almost shure to beat Towey.

I am in 50ft at presant I will be in a few more by Christmas.

⁷⁵⁷ *Te Aroha News*, 15 October 1910, p. 2.

⁷⁵⁸ Frank Reed to Minister of Mines, 28 April 1911, *AJHR*, 1911, C-3, p. 22.

⁷⁵⁹ *Thames Star*, 13 October 1913, p. 4.

⁷⁶⁰ Mike Johnston, *Gold in a Tin Dish: The search for gold in Marlborough and Eastern Nelson* (Nelson, 1992), p. 494.

⁷⁶¹ *Te Aroha News*, 4 February 1914, p. 2.

⁷⁶² M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Ohinemuri County Council, 2 September 1914, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S117, ANZ-A.

If the cheque is not forthcoming the Christmas bottle will only be doubtful.⁷⁶³

Paul responded that, after he received his application, he visited Karangahake on two occasions, 'but was informed that you were engaged carrying out a contract on a county road at Netherton'. He should not have started driving before Paul had reported, for he could not be paid for work already done.⁷⁶⁴ Paul informed his department that O'Keeffe and his mate had 'recently taken' up their claim of five acres adjoining the southern boundary of the Talisman Consolidated Company's property. 'A fair amount of surface prospecting has been done & loose boulders of quartz found have averaged as high as £30 per ton'. To locate the lode, they had driven a crosscut 30 feet through 'favourable country' with a 'reasonable chance' of striking it.⁷⁶⁵ The mate was Thomas Handley, another old miner.⁷⁶⁶ In January 1915 they were granted a subsidy of £37 10s to drive 150 feet.⁷⁶⁷ Immediately after receiving this money, O'Keeffe informed Paul that he had driven 80 feet. 'Thos Handly had again to sease work this week and go to the Thames Hospital for repairs since then I have been doing no work as I know it is against the Law to be underground by my self'.⁷⁶⁸ Handley was in poor health: he had been admitted to hospital in November the previous year, once more in January and would be again in March.⁷⁶⁹ In July, when

⁷⁶³ M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Matthew Paul, 15 December 1914, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S117, ANZ-A.

⁷⁶⁴ Matthew Paul to M.W.D. O'Keeffe, 22 December 1914, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S117, ANZ-A.

⁷⁶⁵ Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 22 December 1914, Mines Department, MD 1, 1915/387, ANZ-W.

⁷⁶⁶ See Thames Hospital, Fees Register, folios 1, 20, YCAH A431/76, ANZ-A; Coromandel Correspondent, *Thames Star*, 29 March 1894, p. 2, 30 January 1902, p. 1; not recorded in electoral roll, unless as Thomas Henley, a miner of Karangahake: see *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1914*, p. 41.

⁷⁶⁷ Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to M.W.D. O'Keeffe, 19 January 1915, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO A902, S117; Inspector of Mines, Waihi, Assistance to Prospecting (General), BBDO 10046, MM174; Prospecting Subsidy 12, Ohinemuri, BBDO 10046, MM89, ANZ-A.

⁷⁶⁸ M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Matthew Paul, 23 January 1915, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S117, ANZ-A.

⁷⁶⁹ Thames Hospital, Fees Register 1914-1916, folios 1, 20, YCAH A431/76, ANZ-A.

Paul visited, O’Keeffe was working alone; he had driven 50 feet, but was told that if he did not get another mate he would not be paid for the work done, as it was dangerous to work alone. ‘Recently O’Keeffe was offered and accepted the management of some mine in the South Island and handed over his claim together with Government subsidy’ to Handley and Burke.⁷⁷⁰ (The latter was probably Michael Burke, then a miner at Karangahake.)⁷⁷¹ By mid-August, the drive was in 138 feet, the last 88 feet having been driven by Handley and Burke after O’Keeffe left the district; they found stringers but no reef.⁷⁷² When the drive was abandoned, £34 15s of the subsidy had been spent without finding anything payable.⁷⁷³

MARLBOROUGH AGAIN

O’Keeffe was appointed in May 1915 as manager of the Deep Creek Syndicate, which held the Empire City at Deep Creek, near Wakamarina.⁷⁷⁴ By mid-September he had driven on four of the seven reefs and had commenced a low level tunnel.⁷⁷⁵ By the following May, having ceased working for this syndicate, he was prospecting a 100-acre claim nearby, for which he applied for a subsidy of 30s per man per week.⁷⁷⁶ Having received no response to his letter to the mining inspector, he complained to the department: ‘I wish to know if any action have been taken in the matter by the Mines Department. If not kindly put it right’.⁷⁷⁷ Prompted to inspect, the inspector described him as ‘a certified mine manager of extensive experience and should therefore be a good prospector’. He intended to prospect ground adjoining the Dominion Consolidated Mining Company’s

⁷⁷⁰ Matthew Paul to Hugh Poland, M.P., 10 July 1915, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S117, ANZ-A.

⁷⁷¹ See *Ohinemuri Electoral Roll, 1914*, p. 12.

⁷⁷² Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 18 August 1915, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S117, ANZ-A.

⁷⁷³ Inspector of Mines, Waihi, Prospecting Subsidy 12, Ohinemuri, BBDO 10046, MM89, ANZ-A.

⁷⁷⁴ Johnston, p. 523; Death Certificate of Michael O’Keeffe, 14 May 1931, 1931/3999, BDM.

⁷⁷⁵ *Marlborough Express*, 16 September 1915, p. 3.

⁷⁷⁶ M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Inspector of Mines, Reefton, 22 May 1916, Mines Department, MD 1, 16/646, ANZ-W.

⁷⁷⁷ M.W.D. O’Keeffe to Mines Department, 10 July 1916, Mines Department, MD 1, 16/646, ANZ-W.

properties, and as there was 'a reasonable probability of scheelite-bearing lodes occurring therein' he recommended the subsidy.⁷⁷⁸ As O'Keeffe was not permitted to mine unaided, after he informed the department that Michael O'Keeffe was assisting him they were granted £78, being 30s per week for two men for six months.⁷⁷⁹ No other O'Keeffe was listed in the electoral roll: was he really working alone? Later that year he 'sought a prospecting license over land on the north side of the creek. On finding that the land was already under license he plaintively told the Warden, at the October 1916 sitting of the court, that George Humphries would, if he had half a chance, peg out Mars'. The warden 'considered this was a creditable objective for any miner', but Humphreys, his former employer, denied any such ambition.⁷⁸⁰ Because of the delay in responding to his request for a subsidy, the latter was to start from 1 July.⁷⁸¹ O'Keeffe prospected for longer than originally intended, working on and off until April 1918, when the final portion of the subsidy was paid. Although the mining inspector certified that the work was being done satisfactorily,⁷⁸² nothing of value was found. In 1919, he was still living at Deep Creek, presumably still prospecting.⁷⁸³

KARANGAHAKE AGAIN, THEN MARLBOROUGH AGAIN

In 1921, O'Keeffe was once more living at Karangahake, and applied on behalf of himself, James Barrett, a battery manager,⁷⁸⁴ and John Falvey,

⁷⁷⁸ Inspector of Mines, Reefton, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 11 August 1916, Mines Department, MD 1, 16/646, ANZ-W.

⁷⁷⁹ M.W.D. O'Keeffe to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 29 August 1916; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to Inspector of Mines, Reefton, 31 August 1916; Under-Secretary, Mines Department, to M.W.D. O'Keeffe, 31 August 1916, Mines Department, MD 1, 16/646, ANZ-W.

⁷⁸⁰ Johnston, p. 524.

⁷⁸¹ Inspector of Mines, Reefton, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 24 September 1916, Mines Department, MD 1, 16/646, ANZ-W.

⁷⁸² Inspector of Mines, Reefton, to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 4 February 1917, 4 July 1917, 24 April 1918, Mines Department, MD 1, 16/646, ANZ-W.

⁷⁸³ *Wairau Electoral Roll, 1919*, p. 103.

⁷⁸⁴ See Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 21 October 1921, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S116, ANZ-A.

a former Waiorongomai miner,⁷⁸⁵ for a subsidy of £200 to enable them to prospect the head of the Rotokohu Fall, in the Karangahake range.⁷⁸⁶ In October, Matthew Paul reported that they had been prospecting for two months behind the Talisman ground:

O’Keeffe, who is an old man, decided that the country was too rough for him, picked up his tools, and returned to Karangahake. I wrote to O’Keeffe asking him his reason for leaving this party, but received no reply, however, the other day, I met him in at Karangahake, and he stated that he had no intention of again joining this party, for reasons given above.

As both Barrett and Falvey were experienced miners with plenty of energy, he recommended that they be subsidised.⁷⁸⁷ They were, but having found nothing promising after seven months the subsidy ended.⁷⁸⁸ O’Keeffe remained at Karangahake for a time, taking out a miner’s right in April 1922,⁷⁸⁹ but then returned to Wakamarama. In February 1923, the Dominion Consolidated Development Company decided to wind up, its mine being taken over by the Golden Bar Syndicate.⁷⁹⁰ In May 1925, the manager of the Golden Bar section of the Dominion Consolidated mine was in charge of about 25 men in both mine and battery, but the following month he resigned. The main investor proposed a replacement who had worked for some years in the mine, but was informed that a certified mine manager must be in charge.⁷⁹¹ Accordingly, O’Keeffe was chosen, and during September was in charge of 22 men, 12 of them working underground; the mine was worked safely but returns were unprofitable, averaging only 4dwt

⁷⁸⁵ See Te Aroha Warden’s Court, Register of Licensed Holdings 1881-1887, folio 28, BBAV 11500/9a, ANZ-A; *New Zealand Gazette*, 29 December 1883, p. 1704; for his later involvement in Waihi mining, see his declaration of 14 November 1896, Mines Department, MD 1, 97/1499, ANZ-W.

⁷⁸⁶ Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S116, ANZ-A.

⁷⁸⁷ Matthew Paul to Under-Secretary, Mines Department, 21 October 1921, Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S116, ANZ-A.

⁷⁸⁸ Inspector of Mines, Waihi, BBDO 10046, S116, ANZ-A.

⁷⁸⁹ Paeroa Warden’s Court, Index of Miners’ Rights 1912-1952, entry for 11 April 1922, BAFV 13688/1a, ANZ-A.

⁷⁹⁰ Johnston, p. 514.

⁷⁹¹ Reports of Inspector of Mines, Reefton, for May 1925 and January 1926; Memorandum to Under-Secretary, 19 June 1925, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/110, ANZ-W.

per ton.⁷⁹² He was not recorded as being manager after that month, the mine being granted to two tributing parties, who were equally unsuccessful.⁷⁹³

For part of 1926 good ore was found, but it ran out during the following year.⁷⁹⁴ In May 1928, ten men were employed, O'Keeffe again being in charge of the five working underground. According to the inspector, 'work was being carried out in a safe manner, the working places being well secured with timber'. Only very poor ore was being treated, although O'Keeffe was stoping out a small block of stone believed to contain 'fair values'.⁷⁹⁵ He was managing the battery also by November, when the five tributers were producing an average of 20 tons a day. Only one stope was being worked, and the inspector revealed that the plant was 'most primitive, no cyaniding' taking place, nor any assays made. The ore contained gold valued at 32s per ton, of which the battery recovered two-thirds, 'the remainder going to waste'.⁷⁹⁶ In February 1929, he noted that O'Keeffe's services had 'been dispensed with'; other tributing parties later took over the mine, without finding any good values.⁷⁹⁷

DEATH

In 1931, when still living at Deep Creek, O'Keeffe suffered a heart attack, and died at the age of 79. His death must have been sudden, for the coroner was contacted, but he 'considered inquest unnecessary'.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹² Report of Inspector of Mines, Reefton, for September 1925, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/110, ANZ-W.

⁷⁹³ Report of Inspector of Mines, Reefton, for January 1926, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/110, ANZ-W.

⁷⁹⁴ Reports of Inspector of Mines, Reefton, for October 1926, December 1927, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/110, ANZ-W; see also Johnston, p. 514.

⁷⁹⁵ Report of Inspector of Mines, Reefton, for May 1928, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/110, ANZ-W.

⁷⁹⁶ Inspector of Mines, Reefton, to Inspecting Engineer, 20 November 1928; Report of Inspector of Mines, Reefton, for November 1928, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/110, ANZ-W.

⁷⁹⁷ Reports of Inspector of Mines, Reefton, for February 1929, December 1930, Mines Department, MD 1, 12/110, ANZ-W.

⁷⁹⁸ Death Certificate of Michael O'Keeffe, 14 May 1931, 1931/3999, BDM.

CONCLUSION

O'Keeffe's life was one of perpetual struggle financially, forcing him to keep mining until almost until he died. It was also notable for his strong ethical behaviour, illustrated by his insistence on paying his creditors in full after his bankruptcy, despite the law not requiring him to do so. As an illustration of his prominence during his presidency of the union and for some years subsequently, in 1904 his Karangahake priest, Dean Hackett, included a poem about him in his lecture on 'Irish wit, humour, and pathos':

Passing to the colonies, the Dean gave the following illustration, the hero of which is not unknown on the Ohinemuri goldfields:-

“The system of fossicker Michael O'Keeffe
 Got sadly out of repair,
 He went off his tucker and lost all his beef
 And was sore from his heels to his hair.

So he left his back gullies secluded and dry,
 And made for the turbulent town, -
 Passed all the shanties reluctantly by,
 And consulted the famed Doctor Brown.

Who ordered his patient to poke out his tongue,
 Which he scanned with a serious face;
 Examined each rib and sounded each lung,
 And pronounced Mick's a most serious case.

And he warned him unless on the 'home of old Nick,'
 Prematurely he wished to obtrude,
 To be careful in matters of diet – to stick
 To nothing but ANIMAL FOOD.

'I mightn't be able,' says Mick, 'but I'll thry,'
 So he settled the medico's score,
 Passed again the shanties all by,
 And sought his gullies once more.

Three weeks have passed by when at 'physicem's' door
 Again stood poor Mick sad and thin –
 He had left his secluded gullies once more –
 There was little left him but his skin.

'Good Lord,' cried the doctor, 'O'Keefe is it you,
 So wasted and wan that I see?'
 'Your're right docthor dear, your conjecthure is true,

I've raison to believe that its me.

'An its me that is sick of your ANIMAL FOOD
Which of late I've consumed to excess;
For bastes of the field no doubt it is good,
But for Christians its not a success.

'The pollard and bran weren't bad it is true,
I could make shift with them, but alas!
The chaff, docthor dear, was the divil to chew,
And I had to give in at the GRASS.'⁷⁹⁹

His stereotypical 'Irishness' made him well known, but may also have made him the butt of amusement and even prejudice. In his last decades he faded from public consciousness, and when he died no obituaries were published, as also happened with some other once-famous miners and prospectors. His colourful ways had been forgotten, for his prominence had ended 30 years before. But at the height of his involvement with unionism, he had expressed, in his own special way, the viewpoint of most of the organised miners of Hauraki. Undoubtedly he was the union's most visible and 'colourful' president, and indeed one of the most colourful men ever to have lived in this district.

Appendix

Figure 1: 'Micky': 'The Thames Miners' Union's Own', *Observer*, 26 August 1899, p. 7.

Figures 2-5: 'Blo' [William Blomfield], four cartoons from 'The Mining Dispute – Gleanings from the Conciliation Board Evidence', *Observer*, 18 May 1901, p. 12.

Figure 6: 'Blo', 'Something of a Load, Too', *Observer*, 17 August 1901, p. 14.

Figure 7: 'Blo', 'After the Arbitration Court', *Observer*, 5 October 1901, p. 19.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 22 July 1904, p. 2.

Figure 8: 'Blo', 'Arbitration Award in the Mining Dispute', *Observer*, 12 October 1901, p. 12.

Figure 9: 'Blo', 'Michael O'Keeffe Doesn't Want Much.

Michael O'Keeffe (to the Minister of Mines): Look here, McGowan, we miners are not satisfied with Mr Justice Cooper's award. We want you to appoint a new President to the Arbitration Court. Now, what do you say to this wheelbarrow that we have fixed up? It would make a most excellent President, and I'll write the awards myself. I'm a great hand at writing'. (*Observer*, 11 January 1902, p. 13.)

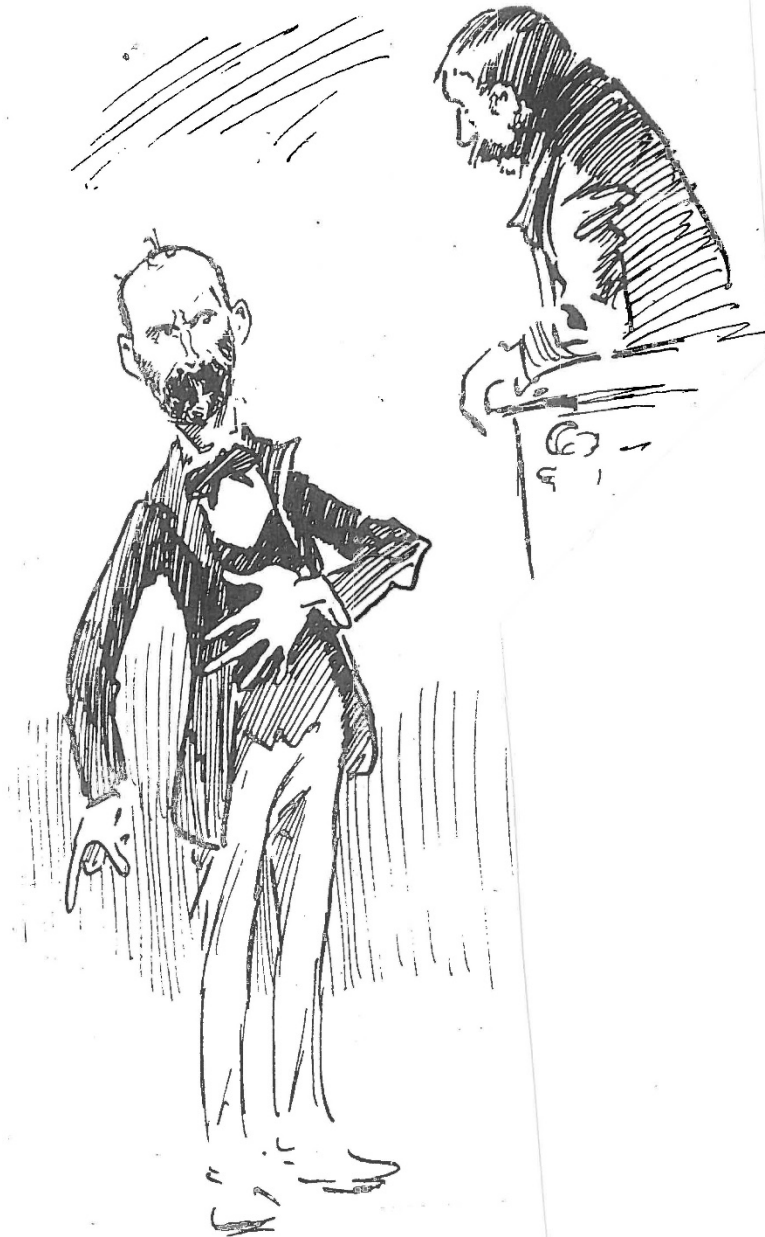
Figure 10: 'Blo', 'A Race to the Finish', *Observer*, 15 March 1902, p. 16.

Figure 11: 'Blo', 'Mick O'Keeffe: A real Sir are yer, Bill mac? Huroo! An' I always thot ye was descinded from the Irish Kings' [William McCullough had become a Legislative Councillor], *Observer*, 2 July 1902, p. 19.



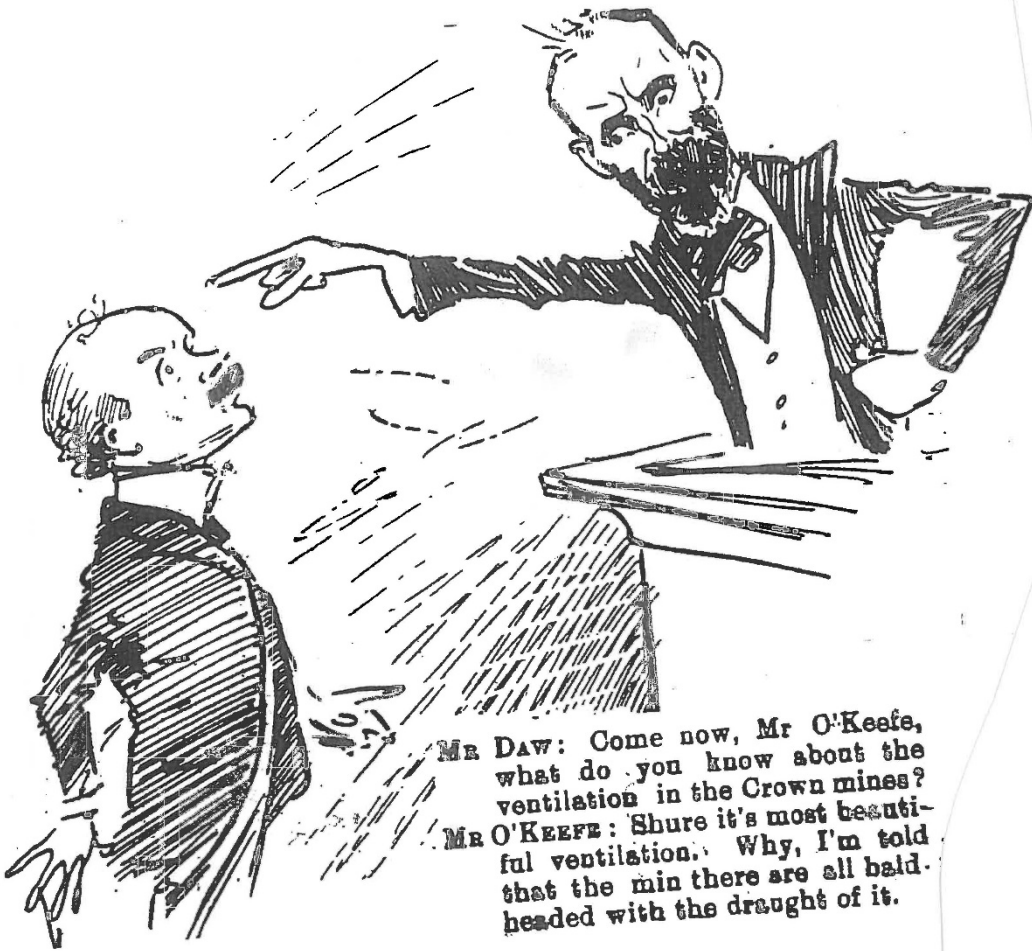
'MICKY'
'The Thames Miners' Union's Own.'

Figure 1: 'Micky': 'The Thames Miners' Union's Own', Observer, 26 August 1899, p. 7.



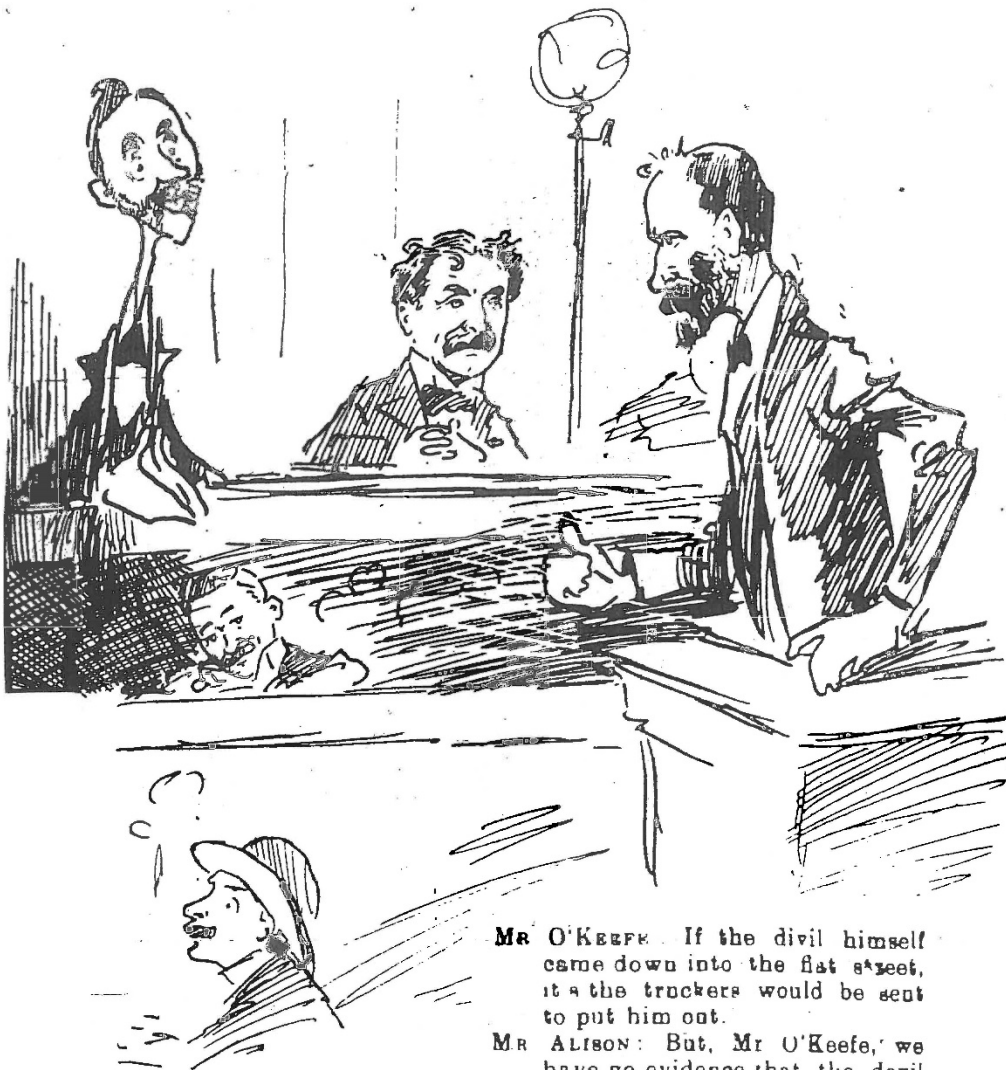
MR O'KEEFE (to witness): After breathing the gas, do you ivver feel a wiolent tindincy to 'wam-mit.'

Figures 2-5: 'Blo' [William Blomfield], four cartoons from 'The Mining Dispute – Gleanings from the Conciliation Board Evidence', *Observer*, 18 May 1901, p. 12.



MR DAW: Come now, Mr O'Keefe, what do you know about the ventilation in the Crown mines?

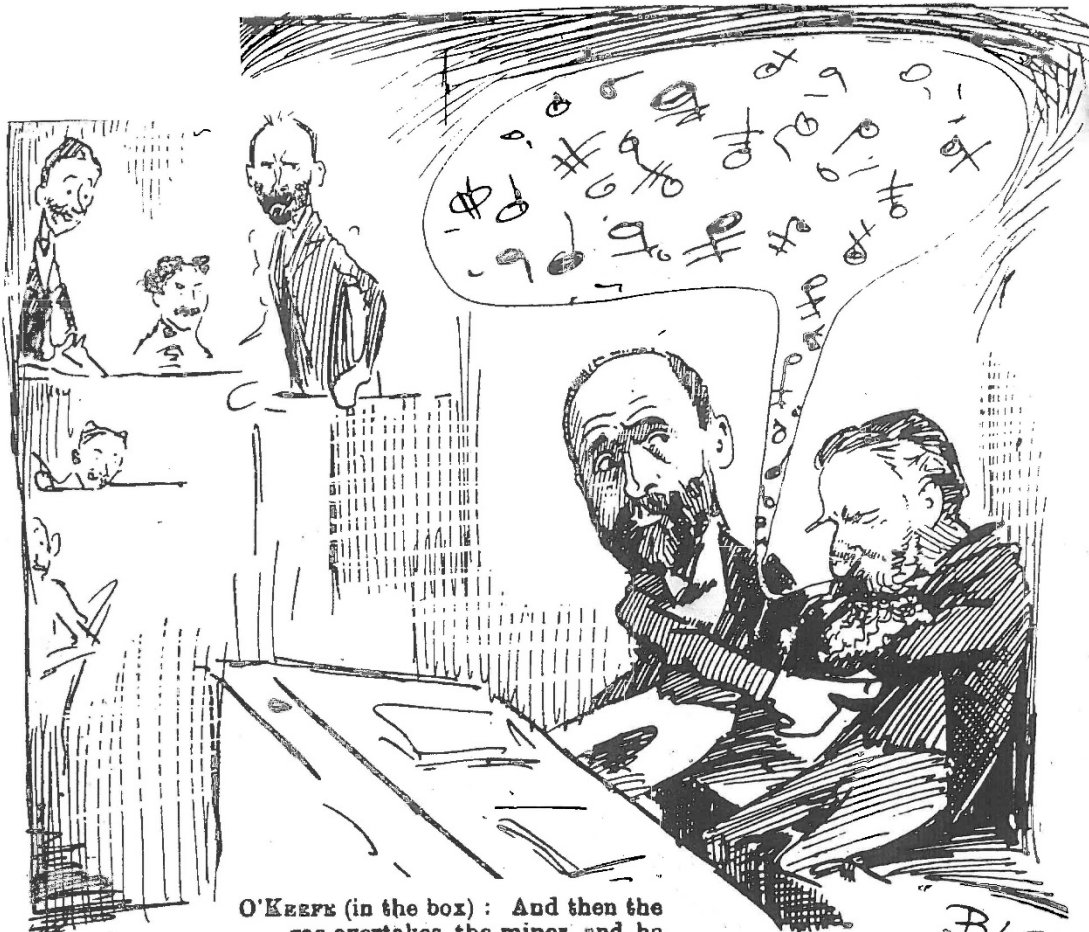
MR O'KEEFE: 'Shure it's most beautiful ventilation. Why, I'm told that the min there are all bald-headed with the draught of it.



MR O'KEEFE: If the devil himself came down into the flat street, it's the truckers would be sent to put him out.

MR ALISON: But, Mr O'Keefe, we have no evidence that the devil goes down the mines.

MICHAEL: Sure, you have the minister beside you, and he knows all about it.



O'KEEFE (in the box) : And then the gas overtakes the miner, and he lies down and (solemnly) shlapes the shlap of death.

Prod from Mr Bell into sleeping James Macky.

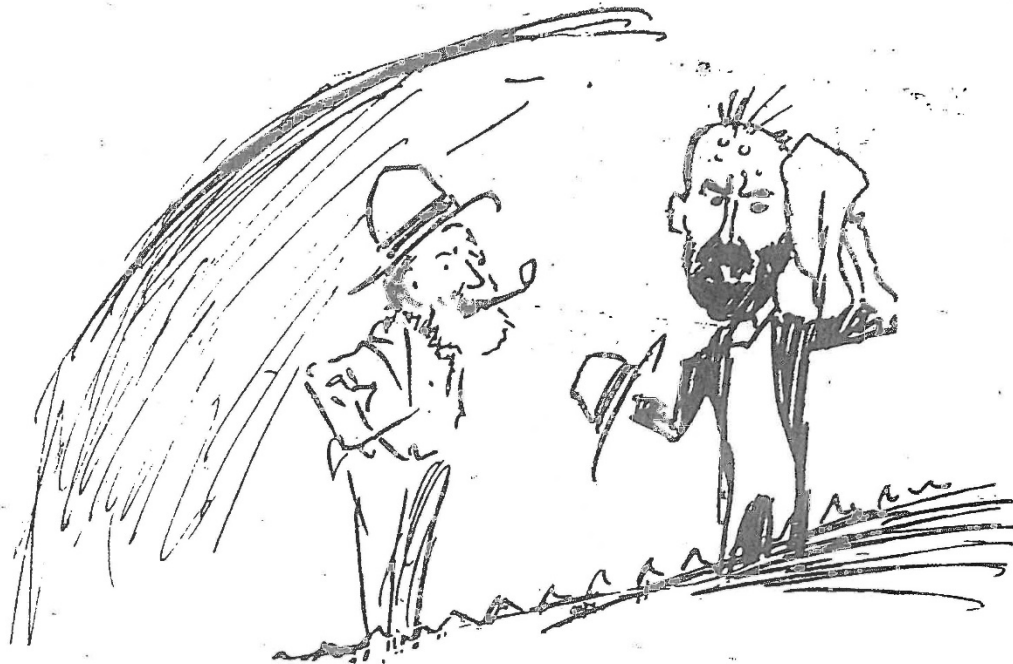
THE CHAIRMAN : That, I suppose, is what we might call the rude awakening.



SOMETHING OF A LOAD, TOO

Miners' Union Potts: Here you are, O'Keeffe, you are President now, and you will have to take up the burden that I have carried so long. I wish you luck of it.

Figure 6: 'Blo', 'Something of a Load, Too', *Observer*, 17 August 1901, p. 14.



AFTER THE ARBITRATION
COURT.

*Miner: You look warm, Mr O'Keeffe.
Michael Dineen: Warm? I should
think so. I have just finished my
"spache." But if I am warm, Mr
Barry must be boiling.*

Figure 7: 'Blo', 'After the Arbitration Court', *Observer*, 5 October 1901, p. 19.

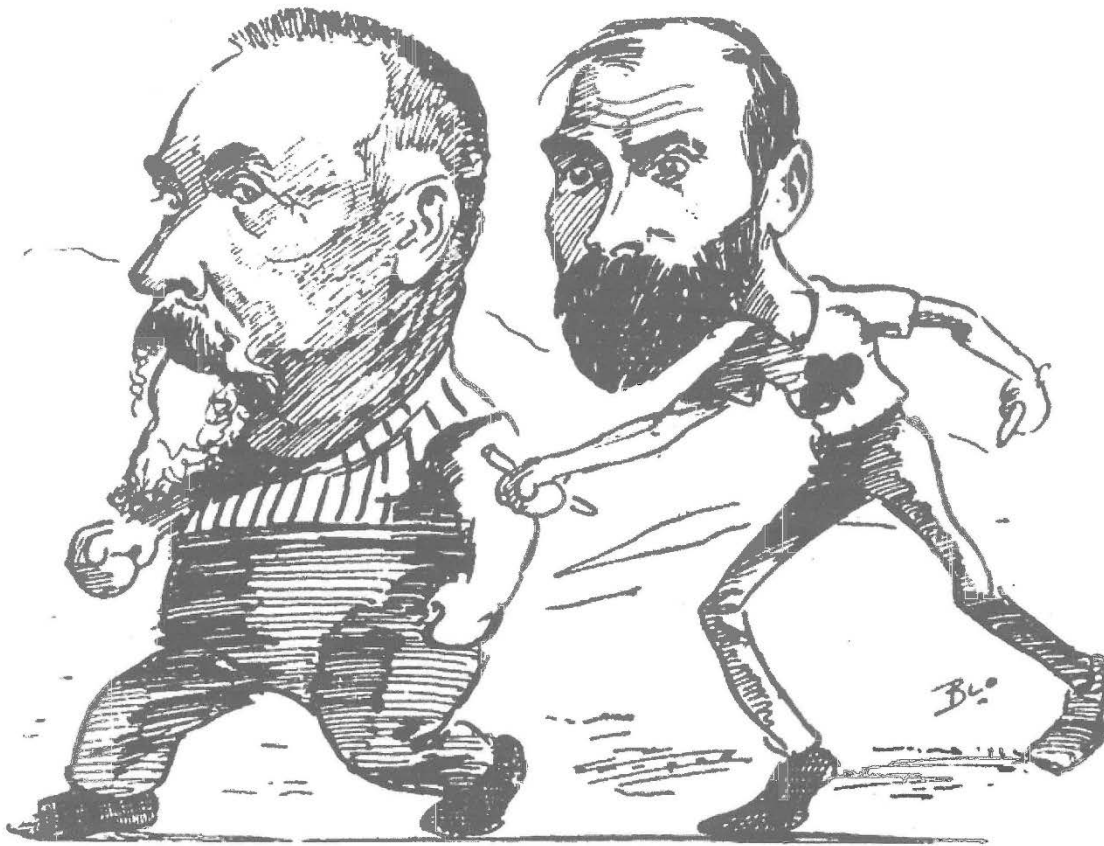


Figure 8: 'Blo', 'Arbitration Award in the Mining Dispute', *Observer*, 12 October 1901, p. 12.



Figure 9: 'Blo', 'Michael O'Keeffe Doesn't Want Much.

Michael O'Keeffe (to the Minister of Mines): Look here, McGowan, we miners are not satisfied with Mr Justice Cooper's award. We want you to appoint a new President to the Arbitration Court. Now, what do you say to this wheelbarrow that we have fixed up? It would make a most excellent President, and I'll write the awards myself. I'm a great hand at writing'. (*Observer*, 11 January 1902, p. 13.)



A RACE TO THE FINISH.

It starts on Saturday next, when ex-Presidents William Potts and Michael O'Keeffe run for the Presidency of the Thames Miners' Union. Mr Justice Cooper is expected to furnish the prize.

Figure 10: 'Blo', 'A Race to the Finish', Observer, 15 March 1902, p. 16.



Mick O'Keeffe: A real Sir are yer, Bill Mac? Huroo! an' I always thot ye was descinded from the Irish Kings.

Figure 11: 'Blo', 'Mick O'Keeffe: A real Sir are yer, Bill mac? Huroo! An' I always thot ye was descinded from the Irish Kings' [William McCullough had become a Legislative Councillor], Observer, 2 July 1902, p. 19.