

# Early Adventists Plunged Into New Zealand Politics

by Peter H. Ballis

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Adventists were drawn to the forefront of New Zealand's political arena during the first 30 years of Seventh-day Adventist presence in the country. Between 1886 and 1918 Adventists found themselves taking definite political stances and lobbying for community support.

Seventh-day Adventism's radical social reformism during its first 30 years in New Zealand illustrates the dynamic interplay of social forces and religious ideology. This movement's campaign for temperance reform and enthusiastic defence of New Zealand's secular education demonstrates how this minority was stirred into effective action. As Seventh-day Adventists attempted to influence society they were at the same time influenced by it.<sup>1</sup>

During those first three decades of Seventh-day Adventist presence, New Zealand was experiencing a major social, political, and economic transformation—stepping out of colonial adolescence into national adulthood. This period of rapid social change was characterized by industrialization and modernization.<sup>2</sup> During these years, New Zealand's politics were coming of age, polarizing the country into government and opposition, working class and property owners.<sup>3</sup> This was also a period of economic prosperity. New

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Zealand's economy slowly edged its way out of the trade depression of the 1880s.<sup>4</sup> This setting of social, political, and economic unrest had the effect of enticing, if not forcing, Seventh-day Adventists out of their relative socio-religious introspection.

Beneath the surface of the church's participation in the prohibition movement, the Bible-in-schools debate, and later, the issue of military conscription, Adventists can be seen entering the political arena, sometimes in search of a New Zealand identity and social respectability, at other times being compelled to speak politically for fear of their religious liberty, and still other times dragged into conflict with government authorities when they would very much have preferred to have been left to their own devices.

The various forces at work mobilizing this minority into effective action also helped shape its political conscience during the formative decades of Adventist history in New Zealand. The examination of Seventh-day Adventist activities in prohibition politics, Bible-in-schools polemics, and the issue of conscription, presents a certain vantage point from which to examine the inner logic of religious minority groups.

## *Prohibition*

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Seventh-day Adventists in the United States developed early a concern for temperance reform.<sup>5</sup> By June 1863, the date of Ellen White's memorable health vision, Sabbath-keeping Adventists were already in pos-

session of the main outlines of their future health message. The prophetess' vision served to legitimize this emphasis and systematized the loosely held teachings of early Adventists into an ordered whole. Three decades later, when the church commenced sending missionaries to other countries,<sup>6</sup> the principle that it was a religious duty for God's people to care for their health and not violate the laws of life, was woven into the fabric of Adventist belief.<sup>7</sup>

Early Adventist evangelists in New Zealand quickly discovered their health message was an excellent means of establishing contact with potential converts. S. N. Haskell's first contacts in Auckland, in October 1885, were for the most part vegetarians, and, upon visiting the Hare household at Kaeo, Haskell was not slow to observe "only one of their number uses tobacco in any form, and all of them are temperate people."<sup>8,9</sup>

A. G. Daniells, Haskell's successor, likewise used the subject of health to capture and maintain the interest of his large audiences during his evangelistic meetings. His tent meetings at Ponsonby's Surrey Hills Estate were from their commencement well attended, with as many as 300 people reported being present nightly to hear the visiting American lecture on the prophecies, the law of God, the seventh-day Sabbath, and the nearness of the Second Advent.<sup>10</sup> On 8 February 1887, after lecturing in his tent three or four times a week during the previous two months, Daniells announced he was to present a lecture on temperance. His choice of subject catapulted him to the forefront of political discussions of his day.

One reason for Daniells' choice of subject was to keep a hold on his audience during the crucial stage of his evangelistic campaign. A more important reason was that he wanted to say something of community relevance during the weeks immediately prior to the 1887 elections.<sup>11</sup> Public feeling in favour of prohibition had rapidly taken hold among New Zealanders since the foundation of the New Zealand Alliance in February 1886.<sup>12</sup> To his surprise, the 28-year-old Adventist evangelist found himself addressing audiences three or four times the numbers present at his tent meetings. For the next few weeks, his peculiarly

Adventist doctrines were temporarily put to one side, as hundreds of Aucklanders clamoured to hear him repeat his presentation.<sup>13</sup> Daniells was also requested to address small private gatherings, local temperance meetings, and a large audience in the Auckland Town Hall, organized by the Auckland branch of the New Zealand Alliance. The young Adventist had touched a sensitive political nerve, and for a short time became an active participant in New Zealand's prohibition politics.

Midway through 1888, Daniells turned his attention to Hawke's Bay. What is noteworthy of

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his Napier programme is the conspicuous absence of the subject of temperance from his lectures. Only three of the 92 sermons and lectures Daniells presented in Napier between 28 October 1888 and 4 April 1889, were devoted to the subject of health.<sup>14</sup> Although his lecture on "Health: Cause and Cure of Indigestion" was "packed. . . to capacity," he does not seem to have stirred the imagination of the masses as he had done the year before in Auckland.<sup>15</sup> This is even more evident in his Wellington campaign between 4 May 1890 and 15 March 1891, where the subjects of health and temperance did not feature at all.<sup>16</sup> It seems Daniells was making a conscious and deliberate attempt to avoid being drawn into the prohibition debate. One suspects the experience of William Cage, an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister who was elected mayor of Battle Creek in 1882 and who was subsequently censured by Ellen White for his political activities as "wholly unfit to engage in the work of God," had something to do with Daniells' decision to avoid public statements on this subject.<sup>17</sup>

However, Daniells was not against lay partici-

pation in the temperance cause. Shortly before he left Auckland for Napier in 1888, Daniells announced that he had “organized a Health and Temperance and Social Purity Society, with a membership of about 50 to 60 persons.”<sup>18</sup>

During the 1890s, prohibition became an issue of national importance to New Zealand. The Alcohol Liquor Sale Control Act of 1893 was seen by many prohibitionists as a partial victory for the cause. The introduction of licensing districts was also interpreted as a preliminary step

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toward the abolition of the liquor trade. In 1893, Ellen White came to New Zealand.<sup>19</sup> Together with G. B. Starr, a former associate of D. L. Moody, Ellen White conducted an evangelistic campaign in Wellington. Her decision to open the campaign with a lecture on “Jesus Christ and Temperance Reform” was calculated to establish the Adventist presence among prohibitionists.<sup>20</sup> The *New Zealand Mail* presented her as standing midstream on the subject of temperance. Before an audience of “more than 250 people,” she was quoted denouncing

strong drink ... [as] the principal agent in the devil’s work, the purpose of which was to deprive man of his reason, to brutalize his character, and to extinguish his conscience. The man who fell under the thralldom of strong drink virtually sold his soul to the arch-enemy of mankind. . . .<sup>21</sup>

What Ellen White had to say on temperance was neither new nor profound. For a decade or more the same thing was being said by other New Zealand Christian groups. The one fundamental difference between her message and that of other New Zealand churches, who were campaigning for prohibition, was that of motive.

A. R. Grigg has argued that the New Zealand

church’s involvement in prohibition was very much an attempt to “assert the church’s authority in society at a time when it was only too well aware that its influence was waning among a steadily increasing population.”<sup>22</sup> By the 1880s, New Zealand’s churchmen were realizing the country was progressively becoming de-Christianized as a growing portion of the population was either nominally attached to the institution of the church, or did not profess any belief at all.<sup>23</sup> The church’s involvement in prohibition was an attempt to legislate New Zealanders into goodness by forcing the masses *out of the tavern* and *into the church*.

Early Adventists had other reasons for entering the debate. Involvement in prohibition was a means of gaining acceptance in the community by becoming associated with an emphasis which was also popular among the established churches. In 1902, Ellen White declared temperance reform was “the right arm of the gospel.” She saw this subject as a successful means of “removing prejudice,” “softening the heart,” “gaining confidence,” and as an “entering wedge” for the Adventist message.<sup>24</sup> Before the turn of the century, Adventists were sympathetic to the growing temperance debate and, from a politically “neutral” position, sought to promote their own teaching.

By 1900 the Adventist presence had spread to most of the main centres with a total of 35 organized churches and companies.<sup>25</sup> The 1901 census numbered Seventh-day Adventists at 864. At this time, Adventists in New Zealand were entering a period of self-awareness, characterized by the desire to erect “respectable” church buildings, and the commencing of church schools and hospitals. Changes in the church’s self-awareness were accompanied by a corresponding change in social emphasis.

An early sign of a shift in Adventist attitude toward prohibition was evidenced at the 1901 conference session.<sup>26</sup> One of the resolutions passed during this session stated:

that as a Conference we express our interest and sympathy in every Christian effort to abolish the liquor traffic; and that we co-operate, as far as we consistently can, with all temperance organizations, in obtaining laws

laws prohibiting the importation, manufacture, and sale of intoxicating liquors.<sup>27</sup>

When it came to implementing this recommendation at the local church level, the matter as to whether Seventh-day Adventists should involve themselves with politics was passionately debated. In a business meeting, Ponsonby Church members were divided as to the extent of Adventist involvement in the prohibition cause, but were unanimous in recognizing prohibition as a political matter.<sup>28</sup> From this time on, with each succeeding conference session, the “political” implications for the church’s statements on temperance become increasingly pronounced.

The 1903 conference session voted to establish a fund for the distribution of literature on “special issues,” and undoubtedly prohibition was one of these.<sup>29</sup> The following year, conference delegates discussed the possibility of introducing medically trained persons to labour alongside ministers.<sup>30</sup> They were hoping to establish the “right arm of the message” as a bridge for the introduction of Adventist doctrinal views. Although no resolutions were passed at the Island Bay Camp meeting on January 1906 specifically dealing with temperance, several lectures were delivered by Dr. D. H. Kress on “Health as Related To Temperance.”<sup>31</sup>

During these years, prohibition had gained much popular support. By 1908, 12 licensing districts elected to go “dry.” Until now the law required a three-fifths majority of votes to ban licensing liquor outlets. Had the principle of simple majority been operative, no less than 50 no-licence districts would have resulted from the 1908 elections. Realizing this, the alliance commenced lobbying for the replacement of the licensing district scheme with the principle of simple majority.<sup>32</sup>

With increased temperance agitation came a corresponding proliferation of Adventist statements. The 1908 session authorized the conference executive committee to make vigorous efforts to distribute nationally Ellen White’s *The Ministry of Healing*, which dealt with health reform.<sup>33</sup> The following year Prime Minister Joseph Ward introduced the Licensing Amendment Bill, advocating that local option polls were to be decided by a 55 percent majority vote, with a

resolution demanding colonial option by the same majority. The introduction of the bill caused “unprecedented political melee,”<sup>34</sup> and with this Seventh-day Adventists entered the political arena with vigour.

At the 1910 camp meeting, the conference committee on plans and recommendations presented two recommendations which were carried unanimously. The first called upon Adventist

ministers, teachers, physicians, nurses, and people generally [to] engage in a vigorous campaign on behalf of total abstinence, by means of lectures, demonstrations, and the distribution of health and temperance literature, and that whenever consistent, our people by voice and vote, place themselves on record as favourable to its restriction and entire prohibition.

The second recommendation urged church members to study the principles as given in the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy, and seek, with the Lord’s help, to carry them into effect; and that our labourers throughout the conference be urged to carry on an active campaign on behalf of health reform principles.<sup>35</sup>

The subject of temperance was featured also at the Petone camp meeting, and daily newspapers were not slow to detect the enthusiasm with which

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Adventists involved themselves in this issue.<sup>36</sup> Any apprehension Adventists might have had toward becoming politically involved was by this time totally overcome. At the Petone Camp, conference delegates once again stated they were “unalterably opposed to the liquor traffic, and in favour of municipal, national and world-wide prohibition.”<sup>37</sup>

R. Newman rightly observed that the contribution of smaller Protestant bodies to the alliance was in providing the latter “with a body of devoted workers and lay propagandists whose efforts accelerated the spread of temperance ideals in some electorates.”<sup>38</sup> Seventh-day Adventists canvassed the community for support. Mrs. I.

M. Sharp reported in the *Australasian Record* that she “found the majority of the people in favour of no-licence and prohibition” and was sure the prohibitionists would have “no difficulty” in forcing the country “dry.”<sup>39</sup> J. Pallant, the conference president, announced that a special temperance edition of *Signs of the Times* was being produced in time for distribution before the elections. This was to be “the best temperance *Signs*” ever produced by the denomination, and the New Zealand Conference ordered 100,000 copies.<sup>40</sup>

In an attempt to resolve the deadlock between prohibitionists and the liquor trade, the government introduced an amendment to the Licensing Amendment Bill returning to the previous three-fifths majority with local and national option. At the 1911 polls, prohibition won 55.83 percent of the votes, and along with other New Zealanders who had taken to the road in favour of no-licence, Seventh-day Adventists experienced disappointment. For a time church members continued their activities as if little had changed with elections. In 1914 the union conference collected £845 16s 4d for the dissemination of temperance literature.<sup>41</sup> However, the church’s reformist impulse was short lived, being distracted by the more urgent matter of Bible-in-schools. Moreover, the out-

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break of World War I and the crisis brought about by military conscription accelerated the church’s shift of emphasis from social reform to social withdrawal. In the following years the Adventist temperance emphasis became preoccupied with educating its own constituency.

Adventist participation in the temperance movement highlights one anomaly of this minority. Contrary to expectation, preoccupation with prophecy and apocalyptic eschatology does not exclude a resurgence of reformist activity. This suggests that a movement’s social and political attitudes are conditioned more by the social and political milieu than its theological tenets. This

had led G. Schwartz to conclude “the eschatological doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism obscured the fundamental optimism of their ideology.”<sup>42</sup>

## *Bible-in-Schools*

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Adventist involvement in the campaign to counter attempts to introduce religion into the state school curriculum grew at the same time as its developing interest in New Zealand temperance reform. Thus it presents an interesting comparison to perceive Adventism’s social and political ideology during these years. Seventh-day Adventist response to this issue fits the typical sectarian mould. Adventists preferred *no religion* to *wrong religion*, because they assumed their cause would better succeed among those who were religiously neutral than among the churched.<sup>43</sup>

With the passing of the Education Act of 1877, the state took on itself the responsibility of educating New Zealand’s young. The act stated that New Zealand education was to be free, compulsory, and secular, with religious instruction being left to individual preference.<sup>44</sup> Official denominational reaction to the settlement varied, but by the 1890s churchmen were beginning to express doubts concerning the wisdom of New Zealand’s secular education. It was becoming apparent that church ministers did not have the necessary skills to retain the interest and attention of their Sunday school pupils. Also churches were poorly equipped and lacked suitable educational facilities to do justice to their cause.

In no time the movement seeking to amend the Education Act grew from local and regional protest groups to national proportions. Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist churches formed the backbone of the Bible-in-schools campaign.<sup>45</sup> Along with Roman Catholics,<sup>46</sup> and Baptists,<sup>47</sup> Seventh-day Adventists played an important part in defending New Zealand’s secular education.

The *Auckland Star* of 19 February 1895 described Seventh-day Adventists as a people who “hold to the rightfulness and necessity of civil government, believe in paying taxes, and in pa-

tronizing and supporting the State Schools.”

But this attitude was conditioned upon the state’s noninterference in matters of religion. From its earliest years, the Adventist church in New Zealand looked with disfavour upon those groups seeking to introduce religion in state schools. They feared that the kind of religion taught in schools would leave no room for denominational preference.<sup>48</sup> In a lecture on “Church, State, and the Bible in Public Schools” presented to a mixed audience in Napier, A. G. Daniells was quoted as being:

strongly opposed to the State interfering with moral or religious matters. Civil matters had only to do with man’s relation to man, and when the Government went so far as to deal with moral questions it was intruding upon the sacred rights of the individual. A true Civil Government would not make distinctions in its subjects because of their opinions. The infidel, the Jew, and the Christian were equally entitled to all the rights of the Civil Government. Concerning the Bible in public schools he said that would be impossible without wronging some of the citizens for it would be making them pay for having their children taught something they did not believe. The Government should teach civility.<sup>49</sup>

Daniells’ position was typical of early New Zealand Adventists.

Along with the subjects of home missions, foreign missions and temperance reform, separation of church and state was a theme frequently raised at the Auckland Tract Society. The meetings of the tract society were designed to keep the “prophetic” and evangelistic emphasis of early Adventists in focus by studying local issues against the backdrop of Adventist prophetic interpretation.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the 1896 Sabbath school lesson quarterly on “The Reformation” emphasized separation of church and state. The Edendale Church Sabbath School Minutes record that during one Sabbath School lesson, church members stressed “God had separated the Church and the State” and the “true Protestants will protest when any church urges the State to enact religious laws.”<sup>51</sup> The notion that politics and religion should be kept separate was deeply etched in the Adventist mind. The growing number of voices calling for change to the Education Act accentuated Adventist fears of a church-state alliance. In response, Seventh-day Adventists launched their

vigorous and enthusiastic campaign in favour of maintaining New Zealand’s present secular education.

The earliest evidence of Adventist involvement in Bible-in-schools polemics dates to 1903. The secretary to the New Zealand Tract Society reported to the conference delegation that one of its most important activities during the previous 12 months involved distributing the tract *Religion and the State Schools* “to every minister in the colony, to every member of Parliament, and to many of the State School teachers.”<sup>52</sup> Mrs. Caro, a member of the Napier Adventist Church, reported that three Napier members posted 1,250 copies of the same tract to influential persons all over the country.<sup>53</sup> At the following year’s camp meeting, the Bible-in-schools issue was debated at length. Delegates at this camp meeting pledged their support to combat the introduction of religion in public schools, and sufficient funds were donated to obtain 12,000 copies of Ellen White’s *Education* for distribution.<sup>54</sup> It was also an-

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nounced that the March issue of *Signs of the Times* was to feature the subject of religion in schools. Sufficient copies were ordered to send one to every teacher in the country.<sup>55</sup>

During these years Adventist Bible-in-schools polemics consisted primarily of literature distribution. In 1905 the Tract Society secretary informed the church that a letter had been sent to judges, barristers, magistrates, and members of education boards, warning them of the dangers threatening the religious freedoms of New Zealanders by the Bible-in-schools movement and called for more definitive action. The necessary impetus for greater Adventist involvement in the debate came quite by surprise.<sup>56</sup>

From earliest times Adventists maintained that the issue they were combating involved more than a threat to Adventist belief. In their thinking, the Bible-in-schools movement threatened the religious liberties of all New Zealand minorities. This emerged into the open in 1906. At the Island Bay camp meeting, Conference President W. A. Henning informed his constituents:

New Zealand had been taking backward steps during the past year. The New Zealand Methodists had adopted the resolution posed by their brethren in Victoria re Sunday desecration. He quoted for his reports of their meeting as to their plans from the enforcement of Sunday legislation. In New Zealand the Presbyterians had united with the Methodists in bringing about Sunday legislation. The Presbyterian Conference just closing in Dunedin had also endorsed this work.<sup>57</sup>

In the minds of Seventh-day Adventists, a connection was made between this resurgence of Sabbatarianism and the Bible-in-schools emphasis, and the latter was seen as a forerunner of a more insidious plan to enforce a Sunday-keeping Christianity by the union of church and state.

The experience of Seventh-day Adventists in the United States just a decade earlier loomed large in Adventist thinking. More than 100 Seventh-day Adventists were imprisoned as a result of Sunday blue laws.<sup>58</sup> The possibility of New Zealand Adventists also being persecuted for

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their faith was not out of the question. After all, at least two Sabbath keepers in New Zealand were known to have been summoned to court on charges of Sunday desecration.<sup>59</sup>

From its beginning in the 1840s the Seventh-day Adventist movement had developed an elaborate and complex picture of end-times using the books of Daniel and the Revelation. They maintained that a period of intense trial would engulf the world just prior to the second advent of Christ during which time Seventh-day Adventists would be persecuted for their faithful obedience to God's

law.<sup>60</sup> In *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White outlined in graphic detail the steps leading to this eschatological crisis.<sup>61</sup> Cooperation between church and state was the pivot in this apocalyptic drama, and to Bible-instructed Adventists, the subject of the Bible-in-schools was like "a red rag to a bull."

Current interest in Sunday legislation by New Zealand Presbyterians and Methodists, and the Bible-in-schools emphasis appeared so close to Adventists, and sounded so much like what Ellen White had described that they felt they had no option but to protest. Seventh-day Adventists were driven to defend New Zealand's secular education because of fears arising from their eschatology.<sup>62</sup>

The first move toward mobilizing Adventist forces to counter the Bible-in-schools campaign was the organization of a religious liberty department. Delegates at the 1906 Island Bay Camp voted to establish:

a Religious Liberty Department...in the New Zealand Conference, consisting at present of a committee of three persons, one of whom shall be a secretary who is alive to the question and through whom there may be the free-est [sic] co-operation with the Union Conference.

They also stressed that in planning for this work "such appropriations be made from the ordinary income of the Conference or by special collections as may be deemed necessary to meet the demands of educating the public in the principles of Religious Liberty."<sup>63</sup> At the Masterton Camp the conference president highlighted the dangers of legislation affecting religion, and called upon church members to become thoroughly instructed in the principles of religious liberty.<sup>64</sup>

The next three years saw a fine tuning of the religious liberty department, finally replacing it with a state religious liberty secretary. To assist him the 1909 conference session called on each church to appoint "one of its most wide awake members" to report on developments in other parts of the country.<sup>65</sup>

The formation of the Bible-in-schools League in 1912 precipitated the most trenchant phase of Adventist protest. Adventist ministers became militant on the issue.<sup>66</sup> At this time the *Ne Temere*

decree was passed ruling as invalid, as well as illicit, marriages contracted by Catholics otherwise than before priests. Adventists interpreted this as a marshaling of Catholic forces against God's people, and read this action into present issues. Church members seriously and sincerely believed

the success of this (Bible-in-Schools) movement means the welding together of the first link of the chain that will bind Church and State together, and that after the first link is formed the chain will rapidly be completed, and then freedom of conscience is lost.<sup>67</sup>

Adventists all over the country became busy circulating the tracts *Religion in the State Schools, Principles Too Little Understood, and Shall the State Teach Religion?*<sup>68</sup>

Midway through 1913, W. H. Pascoe, New Zealand Conference president, announced the unprecedented action that one of the church's full-time ministers was to be given leave on full pay to campaign against the Bible-in-schools League. C. K. Meyers was told to disconnect from his Wellington evangelistic programme and appointed to "throw all his energies into the conflict of opposing the union of Church and State by the introduction of religious teaching in the State schools."<sup>69</sup> When it is considered that the total Adventist ministerial workforce at this time consisted of no more than 10 full-time ministers, this action displayed considerable commitment to the issue.

Soon Meyers was elected president of the Auckland branch of the National Schools Defence league and a member of this league's central executive. The league was composed of representatives from a wide range of ideologies opposing the introduction of the Bible into public schools. Meyers found himself working alongside representatives of the Anglican, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Congregational, Baptist, and Church of Christ churches, as well as many nonbelievers.<sup>70</sup> Adventists feared papal influences were at work in the Bible-in-schools movement, engineering the union of church and state. Ironically, in the National Schools Defence League, Adventists found themselves siding with Catholics against a *common foe!*

Meyers launched an aggressive campaign to

undermine the "iniquitous proposals" of the Bible-in-Schools League.<sup>71</sup> He travelled to Auckland, Hamilton, Napier, Hastings, Wanganui, Palmerston North, Wellington, and as far south as Christchurch holding public meetings and soliciting signatures for his petition in defence of New Zealand's present education system. Meyers reported his work was proving successful—Auckland alone yielded 6,000 signatures<sup>72</sup> with

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corresponding successes in other centres.<sup>73</sup>

The experience of working alongside clergy of other denominations raised a number of Adventist eyebrows. In a report to the *Australasian Record*, Meyers assured his readers his association with these men had evangelistic potential: "there are some outside of us who feel the need for vigilance, and sometimes their alliance with us may be closer."<sup>74</sup>

To what extent had Meyers allowed his Adventist apocalyptic eschatology influence his public presentations as president of the Auckland branch of the National Schools Defence League? If his address at Napier as reported in the *Hawke's Bay Herald* is typical of his campaign speeches, the league provided him with a convenient platform from which to promote his Adventist cause.<sup>75</sup> As well, the opportunity of an Adventist minister lecturing to such a wide cross section of the population no doubt kept alive Meyers' proselytizing hopes.

The Adventist campaign against the Bible-in-schools movement climaxed in 1914 at the Palmerston North camp meeting. The New Zealand members voted:

Inasmuch as it is advisable, in the interest of true liberty, that we resist every approach of Union of Church and State, we recommend to members of our Churches and isolated Sabbath-keepers to enlist in a vigorous national campaign against an effort of the Bible-in-Schools League to introduce Bible teaching into the State Schools during School hours, and to this end we



pledge ourselves to endeavour to obtain at least 2000 signatures for a petition to Parliament against submitting this or any other religious matter to the referendum, because in religion majorities have no right over minorities.<sup>76</sup>

At the same camp the decision was made to strengthen the New Zealand Adventist education system. The Bible-in-schools movement, therefore had the effect of adding impetus to the Seventh-day Adventist private-school system.<sup>77</sup> On this point New Zealand Adventists were caught between wanting to be a “church” and maintaining their own separateness as a sect. They desired New Zealand education to remain secular for the general population, but for their own children they sought an education system that incorporated and enhanced the church’s unique theological emphasis.

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On 26 June 1914, the minister of education presented to Parliament the “Religious Instruction in Schools Referendum Bill,” but this lapsed. The outbreak of war in that year brought an end to the activities of the Bible-in-schools League and the conclusion of Adventist Bible-in-schools polemics.

Seventh-day Adventists were just one of a number of bodies who refused by overwhelming majorities to have anything to do with the introduction of religion in public schools. Their participation in this campaign belied their small numbers. It is difficult to estimate with any exactness their contribution and influence in this debate. Adventists presented a total of eight petitions to Parliament opposing the “Religious Instruction in Schools Referendum Bill” —among them one by C. K. Meyers with 1,835 signatures.<sup>78</sup> Their enthusiastic and extensive literature distribution helped keep the issues before the New Zealand public.

## *Military Conscription*

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The outbreak of war in 1914 forced on Adventists a third political conflict. Unlike their participation in prohibition, which was motivated by a desire to ground the Adventist message in New Zealand soil by associating with an emphasis that was popular with many New Zealanders, and their Bible-in-schools polemic, which was generated by a potential threat to the movement’s religious freedom, the problem of conscription came uninvited. Adventists were drawn with reluctance into this conflict. However, they did not enter the “storm” of 1917, described as “one of the most bitterest and violent controversies,” without some prior warning.<sup>79</sup>

The first encounter between Adventists and government authorities over the military question dates back to 1901 when a Seventh-day Adventist teacher (possibly W. J. Smith) employed by the education department, refused to cooperate with the authorities over the requirement to teach military drill in school. He objected first because he was required to perform duties on the Sabbath, and secondly on the grounds that military drill was so full of the military spirit, “it was training the young how best to kill, and therefore was a violation of the sixth commandment.”<sup>80</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists at this time numbered no more than 1,000, and the fact that no reference is made again to this issue until 1908 indicates few of them were in positions to be affected directly by the military question. The problem of the status of Seventh-day Adventists in relation to military drill was first discussed by the church in session on January 1908, during the camp held on the Pukekura Training School ground, near Cambridge. At that time the Bible-in-schools movement was demanding Adventists to take a greater interest in community affairs and to monitor the various political developments. In the context of emphasizing the need for a vigorous and positive campaign to undermine moves to introduce religious instruction in public schools, conference delegates voted that:

the Religious Liberty Department encourage suitable

persons in the Conference to correspond with, or visit, resident members of the legislature upon the question of compulsory military training, also that suitable articles be prepared upon this subject for insertion in our leading papers.<sup>81</sup>

However no licence and the Bible-in-schools issues prevented Adventists from anticipating the full force of what lay ahead.

On 22 December 1909 the government passed into law the Defence Act, calling all males between 12 and 30 to register for conscription. The bill contained provisions for magistrates to impose penalties ranging from fines to disenfranchisement upon non-compliers. While the bill was being debated in Parliament, Adventists were busily occupied with their 14th annual camp meeting and conference session at Linwood, Christchurch. At this session, Adventists endorsed the Australasian Union Conference's action stating that Adventists were against military training.<sup>82</sup> Session minutes give the impression the bill did not cause undue anxiety among Adventists.

The 1910 Amendment to the Defence Act announced 3 April 1911 as the commencement date for registration. With their decision, New Zealand's army, previously composed of volunteers, was transposed into a compulsory military force. The formation of the Anti-Militarist League, the National Peace Council, and the Passive Resister's Union indicated that not all sections of the community accepted the announcement fully and without complaint. Up to this point Adventist discussion on the military issue was quite general, but the growing community reaction against compulsory military training finally pulled within as well the relatively young Adventist church. The minutes of the Petone camp meeting of February 1911 indicate Adventists had finally realized they too were indelibly implicated in present lively discussions. Action was taken to inform government authorities of Seventh-day Adventist attitudes to military drill. Dr. F. Caro, the church's religious liberty secretary, reported that as a result of his correspondence with the authorities, students at the Pukekura School were granted exemption for compulsory military training.<sup>83</sup> Dr. Caro added

that "if our young people wished to be exempt from Compulsory Military Training, they must become students of the Pukekura School."<sup>84</sup> Although heartened by this news, church members knew well this arrangement was but a partial reprieve, and that action had to be taken to discover ways of making provision for the majority of Adventist youth.

In May 1911, conference presidents from Australia and New Zealand met at the church's administrative headquarters at Wairoa, Australia, to study the question of compulsory military training with a view to arriving at a consensus statement. The question of the denomination's official standing was causing growing confusion

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### **Some Australian Adventists had already been imprisoned for refusing military drill on the Sabbath.**

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among church members in Australia. Some Australian Adventists had already been imprisoned for refusing military drill on the Sabbath.<sup>85</sup> Others were acting irresponsibly by not cooperating with government authorities, and some going so far "as to refuse to have their youth register according to Government requirement." Such actions aggravated an already serious situation. The meeting of the presidents condemned as "evil" and "deplorable" such behaviour, and called upon the church to "be loyal to the Government, and go as far as possible in obeying all civil requirements for Government is of God."<sup>86</sup> The presidents concluded:

The members of the Australasian Union Conference Committee present, regard the action of the Defence Act which provides for Compulsory Military training for the young men, to be an infringement of the civil rights of the inhabitants of this country; and in that the Act makes no provision for exemptions from military training on the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week—it infringes the religious rights of Seventh-day Adventists. And while we may yield under protest to compulsory drill because it violates our civil liberties only, yet we cannot consent to military drill of any kind on the sabbath, because that would be a violation of the fourth commandment.<sup>87</sup>

This position outlined the direction New Zealand Adventists were to take throughout the crisis

years.

Adventist attitudes to war were fashioned early in the church's history.<sup>88</sup> During the American Civil War, after much soul searching and spirited debate, Adventists adopted a noncombatant stand. Although the present situation was of a different nature to that faced by Adventists during the Civil War, conclusions reached at that time moulded Adventist attitude and policy on the war question.

National registration had closed on 17 July 1911, and immediately government launched into proceedings against persons alleged to have failed to register. Nearly 25 percent of those eligible as senior cadets and territorials did not register.<sup>89</sup> By February the following year, 98 resisters had been prosecuted. The Defence Act did make pro-

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**Seventh-day Adventists faced the double burden of unwillingness to desecrate the Sabbath as well as objecting to bearing arms.**

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vision for objections to military service. However, before a religious objector could qualify to train as a non-combatant, the law required him to register, be enrolled, take the Oath of Allegiance, be ordered to parade, and only then apply for exemption.<sup>90</sup>

How Seventh-day Adventists fared during these years before the war is open to conjecture. The Pukekura School property was sold in March 1912, and the Oroua Missionary College in Palmerston North was not in operation until April the following year, so the previous exemption granted to Pukekura School students was no longer operative.<sup>91</sup> Still, there is no evidence in denominational literature from prewar years that suggests Adventists experienced hardship as a result of the Defence Act.

During 1913 and 1914, government stepped up its activities against antimilitarists, and community disfavour of the Defence Act grew proportionately. For a time it looked as if the Act might have to be amended to accommodate extreme and militant objectors, but the declaration of war in August 1914 gave the whole matter a new twist.

The patriotic atmosphere awakened by the outbreak of World War I overcame many of those who were less-than-staunch pacifists. The National Registration Act of 1915 was designed to survey the country's manpower, and as expected, was the prelude to military conscription introduced by the Military Service Act of 1916.<sup>92</sup> This act also made no provision for the religious and conscientious objector. J. A. Allen, the minister of defence, had hoped objectors could appeal for exemption before an appeal board but this suggestion was rejected by the cabinet as too open-ended.<sup>93</sup> In its place was introduced an amendment to the Military Service Act making the ground of appeal that on 4 August 1914 and continuously since, a man had been a member of a religious organization that prohibited military service and which made allowance for noncombatant service.<sup>94</sup> This amendment made no provision for conscientious objectors professing no religion. Many individuals suffered as a result. For Seventh-day Adventists, the amendment contained both good as well as bad news.

Once government had decided exemption to military service applied to members of churches with a *written* constitution forbidding bearing arms, Seventh-day Adventists had to admit they had "no man-made written constitution or creed."<sup>94</sup> The Adventist position was further complicated by its Sabbatarianism. In *A Call for Loyalty in the Present Crisis*, C. H. Watson noted that "the ordinary Christian conscientious objectors to bearing of arms had his difficulty settled when he is exempted from combatant duties and given non-combatant service."<sup>95</sup> Seventh-day Adventists, however, were faced with a double burden—unwillingness to desecrate their Saturday Sabbath as a result of military duties on this day, as well as objecting to bearing arms. In response, the second session of the North New Zealand Conference (January 1917) sought to improve the plight of Adventist young men with a resolution stating that the church endorses:

what is and has ever been our denominational attitude towards military service. That as loyal citizens we will conform to all the requirements of the government so long as they do not conflict with the law of God: that is, we will perform at any time, except on the Sabbath of the

Lord (from sunset Friday till sunset Saturday) non-combatant service which may be imposed on us by law.<sup>96</sup>

On February 15 of that year, a deputation of Seventh-day Adventists, headed by J. B. Donald, met with Sir James Allen to establish a non-combatant status for Adventists.<sup>97</sup> On 10 April 1917, the minister of defence wrote to W. H. Pascoe, North New Zealand conference president, informing him that “exhaustive inquiries have been made, but it cannot be found that your body claims, as a tenet of its Faith, that the bearing of arms is contrary to Divine Revelation.”<sup>98</sup>

Adjutant-General R. W. Tate also pointed out that no accommodation was made for British Adventists who were reportedly performing military activities on the Sabbath. Several telegrams back and forth to British military officials and the front lines in Europe finally clarified this matter and Adventists in the New Zealand Army were granted leave “from Friday nights to Saturday nights and that their services be invariably utilized for Sunday fatigues and duties and so relieve other men of Sunday work.”<sup>99</sup>

Tate was hoping once Adventists settled into military routine, they would discover that “fighting goes on irrespective of Sabbath” and thus view their Sabbatarian stand differently.<sup>100</sup> Fearing “that a very large proportion of the new men [at Trentham Camp] would claim to be of this religion in order to be set free on Saturdays,” Seventh-day Adventist servicemen were informed privately as to Sabbath leave arrangements!<sup>101</sup>

The situation of Seventh-day Adventists had improved midway through 1917 with the arrival of documentation from the church’s world headquarters clarifying the denomination’s stance as non-combatant ever since the American Civil War.<sup>102</sup> Soon military service boards directed appellants to serve on the state farm.<sup>103</sup> Subsequent correspondence between Adventist leaders and the defence department got bogged down over the issue of accommodating Adventist Sabbatarianism to conditions of active service.

The war experiences taught New Zealand Adventists some important lessons. A. W. Anderson reported in the *Australasian Record*:

Never in the history of Australia (and New Zealand)

has it been necessary (for Adventists) to keep in touch with public affairs as during the period of war, and never before has it been necessary for us to study first principles and to keep absolutely sure of our ground before making requests of the governments under whose protection we live.<sup>104</sup>

For the next three decades the religious liberty secretary became the political watch dog of the denomination.

As with Bible-in-schools polemics, the deteriorating international situation of World War I precipitated wild speculation among Adventists. For many, the ominous war clouds signalled the fulfillment of Adventist millennial dreams.<sup>105</sup> From its inception in 1844, Adventism had shown a keen sensitivity to the day-by-day flow of world

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### **The church’s involvement in New Zealand’s social issues may have doubled its membership.**

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events. Wars and rumours of wars, famines and pestilences, earthquakes and persecutions, heralded the eschatological end-time. As early as 1911 Adventists began studying the Scriptures for explanations of the present world crisis, and at times indulged in fantastic interpretations based on prophecy.<sup>106</sup> World War I provided a new impetus to both Adventist journalism and evangelism.<sup>107</sup> A new Adventist literary genre came into being with the proliferation of books, tracts, and articles interpreting world events as the fulfillment of prophecy.

Adventist evangelists assumed the role of forecasters of international events. With the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation in one hand, and the daily newspapers in the other, they travelled the country lecturing on the changing political map of Europe.<sup>108</sup> Seventh-day Adventists saw in the present world crisis a literal fulfillment of those passages that depicted the events of “the last days” and acknowledged themselves as God’s remnant people whose task was to inform the world of unseen realities, promising redemption to the faithful and pronouncing warnings to the godless.<sup>109</sup> Throughout the war years, both in New Zealand and abroad, the church had an evangelistic success unprecedented in its history.

## *Summary and Conclusions*

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The first three decades of Seventh-day Adventists were truly the crisis years in the church's 100-year history in New Zealand. Yet these were also the most progressive years.

At the same time as Adventism in America was fraught with conflict and clashes over organizational ideas and theological emphasis, the Seventh-day Adventist millennial experiment was taking root in New Zealand.<sup>110</sup> The seed first planted by Haskell and Daniells quickly spread from centre to centre and by the end of the third decade, New Zealand Adventists boasted of a membership in excess of 2,000. Having survived the peril of beginnings, the movement entered its period of adolescence.<sup>111</sup> As an American millennial movement transplanted to a different world, the Seventh-day Adventist church embarked on a search for relevance by looking at ways of affirming its values and theology to an environment radically different from its motherland. Adventists found in prohibition politics and Bible-in-schools polemics an ideal platform from which to expound their theology and values to New Zealanders.

Breward has argued that in the areas of education and temperance agitation there is evidence of significant cooperation between the various denominations.<sup>112</sup> Surface study of church activities in these areas can be interpreted as examples of ecumenicity. At a deeper level, when motives are sought, such generalizations are anything but clear. Newman rightly observed that several groups were campaigning for prohibition, each for different reasons, and states that "support for temperance was largely symbolic."<sup>113</sup> For the larger church groups involvement in prohibition was an attempt to revitalize the institution and thus affirm its relevance at a time when traditional religious forms were increasingly being questioned. Whereas Seventh-day Adventist temperance agitation was calculated at winning friends by cashing in on an emphasis that was popular among large groups of New Zealanders.

Adventist involvement in the Bible-in-schools

debate was also symbolic. Adventists saw in this movement a prelude to a church-state union and sought to counter its influence in a bid to maintain its religious freedom.<sup>114</sup> Weber's observation that in order to maintain its true religious identity and effectiveness, "the genuine sect must demand the non-intervention of the political power and freedom of conscience for *specifically religious reasons*" is well exemplified in the Adventist experience.<sup>115</sup>

The campaign to combat the introduction of religion in state schools also proved to be for Seventh-day Adventists a public-relations exercise. Adventists found themselves joining committees, speaking before audiences that under different circumstances would have been inaccessible to them, and, at times, cooperating with clergy of other denominations. All this had the effect of creating a favourable image for the church.

The Adventist church also benefited from its social reformism in other ways. Prohibition, religion in schools, and military conscription provided church members with numerous opportunities to mix with a wide spectrum of the community. It is recorded, for example, that eight of the 50 members of the Edendale Adventist Church attended the Prohibition Convention held on 3 January 1915, as delegates.<sup>116</sup> Such interaction with the public served to acquaint Adventists with large numbers of people in the community.

The message being preached by Adventists, particularly during the first two decades of the present century, was also influenced by the political climate of the day. Public evangelists and pastors found themselves addressing issues and answering questions relevant to New Zealand. During this period the church's health emphasis as well as its eschatology became both relevant and significant.

This situation brought to the relatively small Adventist congregations a brief period of community prominence. Sinclair has pointed out that "some of the odder American religions made a great many converts during these years of New Zealand's insecurity."<sup>117</sup> Along with other religious minority groups, New Zealand Adventists benefited numerically by the times. The New

Zealand census revealed that between 1911 and 1921 the Seventh-day Adventist church experienced membership increases of 37.83 percent and 44.79 percent.<sup>118</sup> In the decade between 1911 and 1921 the church doubled its membership. It is tempting to conclude that it was the church's involvement in New Zealand's social issues that brought about this unprecedented growth rate.

Following these years of rapid membership increase and intense social involvement, New Zealand Adventists gradually withdrew from their worldly engagement. For a time, Adventists came into conflict with authorities over compulsory unionism during the 1930s and again during World War II over military conscription; but gone were the days of social campaigning and political protest so characteristic of earlier decades.<sup>119</sup> Rapid membership gains forced the church to transfer its resources from converting the multitudes to consolidating and indoctrinating its more

recent gains. Temperance programmes and their emphasis on religious liberty became more tailored to the internal needs of the rapidly growing church, in contrast to earlier years when emphasis was primarily on educating the community.

By becoming involved in this country's social issues, Adventism in New Zealand during its first 30 years, 1886-1918, forged itself a place in the country's denominational landscape. Involvement in those same issues also affected the church's preaching agenda. In addition, by becoming concerned with current social events and interpreting and integrating these into their own prophetic framework, Seventh-day Adventists established institutions that would perpetuate their theology to the next generation. Hence the proliferation of Adventist Schools during this period. Involvement in New Zealand's social issues had lasting consequences for Seventh-day Adventists.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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89. R.L. Weitzel, 'Pacifists and Anti-Militarists in New Zealand, 1900-1914,' *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 7, 1973, pp. 128-147.

90. *ibid.*, p. 136.

91. *AR*, 28 Sept. 1914; W.J. Wilson, *The History of Seventh-day Adventist Education in Australia and New Zealand*, unpublished MS, p. 217.

92. O'Connor, P. S., 'The Awkward Ones—Dealing With Conscience, 1916-1918,' *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 4, 1974, pp. 118-136; 'Storm Over the Clergy—New Zealand, 1917,' *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 4, 1966, pp. 129-148.

93. PD, CLXXV, 1916, p. 646.

94. W.H. Pascoe to J.A. Allen, 26 Feb. 1917, WArc, File AD Series 82, 4.5/5.

95. Watson, C.H., *A Call for Liberty in the Present Crisis*, nd, Signs Publishing Company, p. 12.

96. *The Dominion*, 16 Feb. 1917; Minutes, NZCS, 18 Jan. 1917, p. 238; Edendale Church Minutes, 2 Dec. 1916; 17, 21 Feb. 1917.

97. Anderson, A.W. *Religious Liberty in Australasia*; Warbuton, Signs Publishing Company, 1917, p. 40 ff; *Seventh-day Adventists' Attitude to Warfare...*, Auckland, Wilkinson Printer, 1917; *Seventh-day Adventists and War: An Official Declaration*, Auckland, Morton and Turner Printers, 1918.

98. J. A. Allen to W.H. Pascoe, 10 April 1917, WArc, File AD Series 1, 10/407.1, part 2; Memorandum for the Minister of Defence, 2 April 1917, WArc, File AD series 82, 4.5/5.

99. R.W. Tate to the Major General, 2 April 1917, WArc, File AD Series 82, 4.5/5.

100. *ibid.*

101. G.M. Gibbon, Memorandum for the Minister of Defence, 3 May 1917. At least one soldier named 'Robinson' was being court martialled at Trentham, for refusing ambulance duties on a Saturday because he claimed he was a Seventh-day Adventist. It was later discovered that Robinson belonged to a movement known as 'The Lord Jesus Christ,' see Memorandum, 15 Feb. 1917, AD Series 1, 10/407, box 784.

102. *The Evening Post*, 13 June 1917.

103. Memorandum for the Adjunct-General, 11 May 1918, WArc, AD series 1, 10/407.

104. Anderson, A.W., 'Religious Liberty department,' *AR*, 21 Oct. 1918, p. 12.

105. For a detailed discussion on Seventh-day Adventist interpretations of World War I, see G. Land, 'The Perils of Prophecy: Seventh-day Adventists Interpret World War One,' *AH*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1974, pp. 28-33, 55-56; J. Butler,

'The Morning Newspaper and the Book of Daniel,' *AH*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1974, pp. 45-48; H.B. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, Review and Herald, 1969, pp. 74-83; E.K. Vande Vere, *Windows—Selected Readings in Seventh-day Adventist Church History, 1844-1922*, pp. 285-294.

106. Brock, P., 'The Problem of the Civil War,' p. 27.

107. Schwarz, R.W. *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, Mountain View, Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979, p. 424.

108. Weeks, H.B., *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, p. 81; 'Adventist writers and evangelists alike were sure that, guided by inspiration, they knew the meaning of world events and were ready to inform the public.' J. Butler, 'The Morning Newspaper and the Book of Daniel,' p. 46.

109. See summaries of C.K. Meyers' talks in the Edendale Church Minutes, 17, 31 Feb. 1917.

110. Olson, A.V., *Thirteen Crisis Years, 1888-1901*, revised edition, Review and Herald, 1981.

111. Potok, C., *In the Beginning*, Heinemann, 1975, p. 3: 'All beginnings are hard...especially a beginning that you make by yourself. That's the hardest beginning of all.'

112. Breward, J., *Religion in New Zealand*, Presbyterian Historical Society, 1979, p. 2.

113. Newman, R., 'New Zealand's Vote for Prohibition in 1911,' p. 66.

114. Olsen, E., 'Toward a New Society,' in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, p. 263, writes that the prohibition and Bible-in-Schools League were attempts by Churches to 'improve standards of worldly morality.' One must not misconstrue from this that groups like the Seventh-day Adventists who challenged the League were thereby affirming 'worldly morality'!

115. Weber, M., 'Sect, Church and Democracy,' in *Society and Economy*, Bedmister Press, 1968, pp. 1208-1209, emphasis supplied.

116. Edendale Church Minutes, 28, 30 March, 4 April 1914; cf. 25 May 1915.

117. Sinclair, K., *History of New Zealand*, revised edition, Penguin Books, 1980, p. 245.

118. Seventh-day Adventists as reported in the New Zealand Census:

	Total Membership	% Increase	% Population
1906	990	14.58	0.11
1911	1113	12.42	0.11
1916	1534	37.48	0.14
1921	2224	44.79	0.18
1926	2273	29.18	0.21

(Source: The New Zealand Census, 'Religions of the People.')

119. 'Seventh-day Adventists Protest,' *The Dominion*, 31 July 1936.