

# Sidney Huguenot Fournier d'Albe

SID FOURNIER WHO DIED RECENTLY AT ASHBURTON IN HIS ninetieth year was by adoption one of New Zealand's most flamboyant and colourful personalities. He belonged to that same generation of rebels as Tom Barker whose life story was told in the June issue of *Monthly Review*. Fournier was a descendant of French Huguenots who fled to Prussia, and his grandfather was Colonel of the Death's Head Uhlans under Blücher in the final campaign against Napoleon. His father found exile in England after the abortive liberal revolt of 1848. Like his brother, the late Edmund Edward Fournier d'Albe who was to become a well known physicist and inventor, he received a scientific education in Germany and then in England; but later studied portrait-painting in Dusseldorf. It was a journey from Dusseldorf to England that determined his future.

A big strike was in progress in Brussels. On one side of the square were the strikers; on the other troops. Baring his chest one of the strike leaders walked across, calling on the soldiers to desert. He was shot dead. Sid Fournier never forgot this incident which influenced the whole course of his life. When he returned to England he joined the Fabian Society where he became acquainted with Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas and H. G. Wells. In Ireland with his brother, a lecturer in physics and an organizer of pan-Celtic congresses (author, also, of an English-Irish dictionary) he took part in the movement for the revival of Celtic learning, and under the Celtic spell went to Wales.

About this time his father died. 'I spent my patrimony

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like a gentleman' said Sid, 'and descended into the abyss.' This was literally true, for he became a miner and soon a member of the trade union executive. As such he took part in the great strike that led to the Tonypandy riots. The large surface scar on his face was caused by the rifle butt of a soldier; but he also received a sentence of three months.

His way was the way of a rebel; his life was a life of action. He joined the European brigade formed in support of the Greeks revolting against Turkey, and fought through the last stages of that campaign. In England he moved up and down the country from job to job, helping to organize trade unions, taking part in strikes, and carrying on socialist propaganda. His education, then so uncommon in the English working class, his fearlessness, and his skill as an orator made him a marked man. England grew too hot to hold him, so he went to sea. In New York he deserted and stayed about six months in the USA. His frequent comment was 'In the 19th century Africa was the dark continent; in the 20th it is the USA'.

He came to New Zealand three or four years before the first world war, and immediately plunged into work connected with the old 'Red' Federation of Labour and the Socialist Party. He was associated with the late George Winter in re-establishing studies in Marxist theory, using Mary Marcey's *Shop Talks on Economics and Value, Price and Profit*. During the 1913 Waterfront Strike in Wellington, Tom Barker and Sid Fournier were among those militants who took up quarters in the Albemarle Hotel in Ghuznee Street. This hotel was managed by a Scandinavian socialist and ex-watersider, Otto Englundh. Dozens of strikers—Peter Fraser was among them—slept there on the floors in the day-time and emerged at night to harass the authorities. Sid Fournier as strike marshal was a member of the Central Strike Committee.

After the defeat of the strike he worked for a time in the country, but during the first world war he was taking a leading part in the Conscription Repeal League in Wellington. When this League conducted a Free Speech Fight in January 1917, Fournier was among the speakers arrested for addressing crowded meetings in Clyde Quay. He was commended by the Magistrate for the ability with which he conducted his defence, but was sentenced to a year in prison. He shared the yard at the Terrace Gaol with Peter Fraser, Tom Brindle, and Jim Edwards, who was to achieve fame in the Auckland riots of 1932. Across the blank pages in Fournier's dues book the union secretary wrote: 'Twelve months' active service on behalf of unionism'.

On his release, the Government invoked the War Regulations to exclude him from working on the wharves. For a time he was in a scheelite mine in Nelson, and came to Christchurch late in 1919 where he was soon on the committee of the General Labourers' Union which put his name forward as an approved Labour candidate. In conjunction with the Socialist Party he started a small Marxist group which met first at his house and later at the Trades Hall. As a delegate from this group he attended the founding conference in Wellington of the New Zealand Communist Party.

Early in 1925, the Christchurch newspapers conducted an inspired campaign against Communist membership in the Labour Party. *The Lyttelton Times*, on 7th January, published a long article entitled 'Communist Creep'. That evening Fournier appeared outside the *Times* office, went down on his

hands and knees and crept along the footpath. A crowd quickly assembled and responded with hearty laughter when Fournier got up and asked, 'How's that for a Communist creep?'

At the Labour Party conference in April 1925, Fournier was the official spokesman for the Communist Party. Communists, he said, were in favour of the Labour Party objective but differed on the means of attaining it. They wished to work within the Labour Party for policies which they considered justified by circumstances. His pleadings were in vain, however. After a lengthy debate the conference decided to exclude Communists by enforcing a pledge on all members. Fournier had to resign from the North Canterbury LRC, but he remained active in the Labourers' Union which he represented on the Trades Council.

During the early thirties he took a prominent part in the Unemployed Workers' Movement; and even in his old age he joined in residents' activities at the Howardville pensioners' settlement. His death removes another of the early socialists who helped to build the New Zealand labour movement.

When at the time of the Korean war, a Korean committed suicide by jumping from a light tower in the Dunedin railway yards, Sid Fournier, aged 83, wrote the following lines:

*Sern Chu Song at Dunedin*

You leapt—but God's allseeing eye  
Vigil of mercy kept;  
And wrapt you to his immortality,  
Tenderly, as you leapt.  
Sern Chu! Your song is sung,  
But, mercifully hard.  
Our earth prompts one grey bard  
To greet you, where, beyond more harm,  
As at your birth, you see a great and peace-crowned  
Land of Morning Calm.

G. K.