

Resource Community Formation & Change:
A Case Study of
RUNANGA

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INTRODUCTION

This paper reports the findings of a case study of Runanga. It is one of a series of three case studies of mining communities in New Zealand which are part of a project entitled "Resource Community Formation and Change" that has been funded by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology. The other two case studies of mining communities in this series are Waihi (WP 9) and Ohai-Nightcaps (WP 11).

A variety of research methods were used in this case study which focuses on the history of Runanga since the early 1950's. These methods included an analysis of census statistics, a review of published documents about the town and mining sector, and several days of interviews in Runanga and Greymouth during November 1997.

THE MINING AND QUARRYING SECTOR

An overview

The following description of mining and quarrying in New Zealand has been based on an earlier working paper which examined the regional, national and international trends and linkages of the sector in New Zealand from the early 1970's to the present (Fitzgerald, 1997).

The sector comprises 0.3 per cent of New Zealand enterprises (652) and 0.3 per cent of employment. Enterprises in this sector have an average of just over seven workers compared with just under six workers for all sectors combined. Mining and quarrying accounts for a slowly increasing proportion of GDP; from 1.2 per cent in the 1987/88 year to 1.8 per cent in the 1992/93 year. By 1995 the sector employed 4,500 people (3,800 males and 700 females), with the vast majority of them (91%) working for private corporations.

The regional significance of the mining and quarrying sector varies enormously in terms of both numbers of enterprises and the level of employment. Regions where the sector makes an important contribution to the economy are the West Coast (coal and alluvial gold), Taranaki (oil and gas), Waikato (coal), Bay of Plenty (gold) and Southland (coal).

Coal mining

Most of New Zealand's coal is produced from mines in the Waikato, West Coast (in the Greymouth and Buller districts) and Southland (Ohai and Nightcaps). The West Coast has a one billion tonne resource of highly bituminous coal which is good for coking, blends well with other coals, and is ideal for manufacturing steel (Yarwood, 1996: 110). In 1994 there were 17 operating mines in the Waikato, 28 on the West Coast (13 of which were underground mines), and 10 mines in Otago and Southland. Two-thirds of production originates from eleven mines owned by Solid Energy, a state-owned enterprise, that supplies 60 per cent of the local market (Statistics New Zealand, 1997: 482).

Open cast mines, exploiting the surface proximity of deposits, produce over 80 per cent of the nation's coal. The importance of open pit methods has grown steadily during the 1990's with the need for high and reliable production volumes, the development of transport and civil engineering technologies, and the drive to cut the cost of production in the new corporate era. While in underground mines, new

techniques and technology, such as long-wall mining, road headers etc, have also reduced the costs of production, and greatly increased the productivity of labour.

Another recent trend in the industry has been the closure of many small private and cooperative mines - there are only 50 of these mines left out of more than 100 in the 1970's. Although some of these closures were undoubtedly the result of economic factors, others were the result of new regulations imposed on the industry by the Resource Management Act and the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Since deregulation of the industry in the 1980's the production of coal has gradually increased from 2.5 million tonnes in 1986 to 3.5 million tonnes in 1995 (Department of Statistics, 1987: 474; Statistics New Zealand, 1997: 481). Exports of high quality coal began the previous decade, and grew eightfold between 1980 and 1994. Nowadays, about a quarter of the annual output is shipped to steel and chemical producers in Japan, Chile, India, Australia and China (Statistics New Zealand, 1997: 482).

COAL MINING AND THE RUNANGA DISTRICT

Runanga is a town a few kilometres north of Greymouth on state highway 6. It was established during the early 1900's with the sole purpose of extracting coal for the New Zealand market. Runanga became a borough in 1912 with a population of 1,500 and an area of 1,210 acres (Ewan, 1986: 74-75). Miners dwelling in Runanga worked in several state-owned mines and numerous smaller mines operating in the district. Many of them had lived in close proximity to their workplace, but shifted to Runanga because of its pleasant environment and greater amenities (West Coast Regional Council, 1992).

In 1902 the Seddon Government proclaimed an area north of the Grey river as a State Coal Reserve. Coal was first produced from the Point Elizabeth No. 1 mine at Dunollie on 17 March 1904. The initial output of the mine was 250 tons per day, but reached a record 1,280 tons daily in 1908. When the mines at Dunollie were nearing the end of their economic lives, the Public Works Department built a three mile railway line to Rewanui which used a central braking rail. The Liverpool mine at Rewanui was opened in 1913. Ten years later a branch line was constructed to Rapahoe where the James mine operated between 1925 and 1940. After further surveys in the district the Mines Department opened the Strongman mine in 1940. In 1923 the government granted leases to mining cooperatives to exploit small seams of coal in the district. There were about a score of these small mines around Runanga in the 1960's (Ewan, 1986: 74-75).

Coal mining activity peaked in the Greymouth district between 1939 and 1942 (West Coast Regional Council, 1992). Since then the industry has been gradually declining particularly after the Dobson Mine was closed in 1968. The number of workers employed in the industry fell to seven per cent of the district's workforce by the mid 1970's mainly as a result of decreasing demand for coal by the railways and shipping. At that time most of the miners in the district were working at the Liverpool and Strongman mines. The decline in the coal mining industry, however, was offset by the growth of the farming, forestry and tourism sectors in the district during the 1960's (Bennett, 1980: 110 & 113).

Miners and their families left Runanga as the fortunes of the industry declined. Newcomers purchased houses when prices were relatively cheap during the late 1960's and early 1970's, and the town became more of a dormitory suburb of Greymouth than a traditional mining settlement. Moreover, the reorganisation of State Coal in 1987 helped accelerate this process as older miners sold their houses, left the town, and were replaced by welfare beneficiaries, retired people and other newcomers who were employed in Greymouth.

Solid Energy has recently opened a mine at Mount Davey, while the Greymouth Coal Operating Limited, a joint venture company owned by Solid Energy, Kanematsu Corporation (based in Japan) and Viking Coal Ltd (a subsidiary of the Todd Corporation), announced plans in 1997 to develop a mine near Rapahoe to process 1.7 million tonnes of coal over the next forty years (Nunn, 1997).

DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES¹

Demographic characteristics

Between 1951 and 1996 the population of Runanga fell steadily as the mines in the district shed their staff or closed down. At the beginning of this period the town's population was 1828, but by 1996 it had fallen to 1395 (see Table 1). Although there were very few Maori residing in Runanga in 1951, they comprised nine per cent of the population in 1996.

Socioeconomic characteristics

The proportion of residents of working age was relatively higher than the rest of the country until at least 1971. By 1991, however, the unemployment rate in the town was greater than the national average. About two-thirds of Runanga's workforce were employed in blue-collar occupations in 1971, while by 1991 only a half of the workforce belonged to this category (see Table 2). Over the same period, moreover, the proportion of the workforce employed in the mining/quarrying sector declined from 37 to 12 per cent.

Residents of Runanga had lower levels of formal education than their counterparts in the rest of the country in 1991 (see Table 3), while the distribution of household incomes in the town revealed that its residents received lower incomes than the rest of the nation (see Table 4). The high incidence of home ownership has been a significant feature in this town since 1951 when 88 per cent of dwellings were occupied by their owners (see Table 5). During recent years, however, there has been a growing number of rental dwellings as many older residents have sold their properties and left the town.

¹Please note that all census statistics from 1951 to 1976 are for the Runanga Borough, while the statistics for the 1981 to 1996 period are for Runanga-Rapahoe.

Table 1: Runanga - Population changes 1951-1996

| Census Year | Runanga | | New Zealand | |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|
| | No. of Persons | % Change in Pop. | No. of Persons | % Change in Pop. |
| 1951 | 1828 | - | 1939472 | - |
| 1956 | 1804 | -1.3 | 2174062 | 12.1 |
| 1961 | 1735 | -3.8 | 2414984 | 11 |
| 1966 | 1683 | -3 | 2676919 | 10.8 |
| 1971 | 1449 | -13.9 | 2862631 | 6.9 |
| 1976 | 1478 | 1 | 3098900 | 9.1 |
| 1981 | 1392 | -5.8 | 3143307 | 1.4 |
| 1986 | 1488 | 6.5 | 3263283 | 3.8 |
| 1991 | 1398 | -6 | 3373929 | 3.4 |
| 1996 | 1395 | -0.2 | 3618302 | 7.2 |

Note: Data for the 1951 to 1971 years are for the total population and that from 1976 onwards are for the usually resident population. Changes in population from the 1976 year are calculated using data for the usually resident population as these figures for 1971 & 1976 were published in the 1976 census reports.

Source: New Zealand Census 1951-1996

Table 2: Occupational status of the workforce of Runanga - 1971 & 1991

| Occupational category | 1971 | | 1991 | |
|---|--------|----------|--------|----------|
| | Male % | Female % | Male % | Female % |
| administrators/managers | 1.2 | - | 9.2 | 9.4 |
| professionals & technicians | 3.8 | 8 | 13.2 | 21.9 |
| clerks | 6.9 | 35.8 | 1.3 | 31.3 |
| service/sales | 7.4 | 35.8 | 6.6 | 21.9 |
| agriculture & fisheries workers | 1.4 | - | 2.6 | 3.1 |
| trades workers/machine operators/ elementary occupations | 78.3 | 17.5 | 65.8 | 12.5 |
| Total Number of Persons | 419 | 137 | 228 | 96 |

Source: New Zealand Census 1971-1991

Table 3: Highest educational qualifications held by residents of Runanga - 1991

| Highest educational qualification | % of residents | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Runanga | New Zealand |
| University & other tertiary | 25.4 | 34.5 |
| Secondary | 14.8 | 18.8 |
| No qualifications | 41.9 | 30.6 |

Source: New Zealand Census 1991

Table 4: *Distribution of Household Incomes in Runanga - 1991*

| Household income range | % of households | |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | Runanga | New Zealand |
| Less than \$10,000 | 11.3 | 7.5 |
| \$10,000 - \$30,000 | 49.7 | 34.6 |
| \$30,000 & over | 23.2 | 44.4 |

Source: New Zealand Census 1991

Table 5: *Tenure of Dwellings in Runanga - 1951, 1971 & 1996*

| Form of Tenure | % of dwellings | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|------|------|
| | 1951 | 1971 | 1996 |
| Provided rent free | 3.1 | 2.6 | 2.2 |
| Rented | 9.4 | 9 | 14 |
| Owned with a mortgage | 34.8 | 18.5 | 36 |
| Owned without a mortgage | 52.9 | 69.8 | 40.4 |
| Total Number of Dwellings | 492 | 454 | 534 |

Source: New Zealand Census 1951, 1971 & 1996

INDUSTRY, WORK AND OCCUPATIONS

The role of the state

The state has had a significant role in the development of the coal mining industry around Runanga since the beginning of this century when the Seddon government decided to open mines in the area. The town itself was established on Crown land, and from 1904, when the first coal was produced at the Point Elizabeth mine, the government has operated a series of large-scale mines in the district. The outputs of the four largest of these coal mines (until 1975) were as follows: Point Elizabeth No. 1 State Colliery (1901-1928) - 2,431,725 tons, James State Mine (1922-1943) - 663,085 tons, Liverpool State Colliery at Rewanui (1913-1975) - 663,085 tonnes and the Strongman State Mine (1940-1975) - 3,869,831 tonnes (Hawker, nd: 47,49,50,52).

All of these mines were originally operated by the Mines Department, but after the reorganisation of the state sector in April 1987 the Liverpool and Strongman No. 1 mines were managed by the Coal Corporation. Since then the Coal Corporation, a state-owned enterprise which now trades as Solid Energy, has closed both the Liverpool and Strongman No. 1 mines. Meanwhile, it has opened the Strongman No. 2 mine which is exploiting the Doherty block to the east of the No. 1 mine, and is developing another mine at Mount Davy.

The changing structure of coal mining in the Greymouth district

Many small private mines in the Greymouth district exhausted their reserves of coal during the 1960's and wound up their operations. The government closed its mines at Blackball (1964), Dobson (1968) and Paparoa (1971). Moreover, it weakened demand for the district's coal by replacing steam locomotives on the South Island railway network with diesel traction. Another contributing factor to the declining production of the district's mines from the 1960's onwards was the growing belief in

Christchurch that the domestic use of coal aggravated the city's smog problem. This belief led to the installation of open fires in new buildings being prohibited by the Christchurch City Council and many consumers switched to other forms of space and water heating.

Coal mining is now very much a capital intensive operation as demonstrated by the two new mines, Strongman No. 1 and Mount Davy, which recently have been established in the district. Small private mines are now less evident in the industry than they were thirty years ago. Changes in production technology, moreover, require different skills than those which have been traditionally associated with underground mining.

The culture of mining

Miners have a very distinctive male-dominated occupational culture. It "is based on a common workplace, a strong identity with small town lifestyles and a keen sense of history" (Wilkinson and Barker, 1986: 11). Working conditions are often hazardous, tedious, and dirty. There is a strong comradeship between miners that spills over into their recreational activities outside the mine. Major mine facilities are often owned by large national and multinational corporations. And in localities where it takes several decades to exhaust large mineral deposits mining becomes an intergenerational occupation (Wenner, 1984: 102-103). Furthermore, in many mining settlements in New Zealand (e.g. Huntly, Ohai and Runanga), there are families whose association with the occupation begun several generations ago in the coalfields of Scotland, England and Wales (Stokes, 1978: 3, Wilkinson and Barker, 1986: 11).

Another feature of the culture of coal mining has been the strong allegiance of miners to their trade unions. Some political leaders from Runanga, such as Robert Semple and Patrick Webb, not only battled to improve working conditions in the mines, but were also associated with the development of the New Zealand Labour party (Ewan, 1986: 75).

The organisation of work

Yet this culture of mining was not uniform. Before the state coal mines were placed under the control of the Coal Corporation there were already differences between the attitudes and work practices of miners employed by the state and those employed by small private enterprises. One of our informants, for instance, observed that during the 1960's the philosophy of private operators was very different from that prevailing in state mines. He described miners, who worked in private mines and were sometimes part-owners, as "*very free, self-dependent and multi-skilled*". Often these private mines were operated by a cooperative of miners who shared the profits among themselves. When the seam of coal was exhausted these cooperatives usually disbanded, although occasionally some members would combine their capital to purchase another mine.

The organisation of work in the state mines was more bureaucratic with clear lines of demarcation between particular work activities. Trade union officials played a major role in securing safe working conditions and adequate pay for their members. Moreover, there was a definite occupational hierarchy with the mine manager at its pinnacle and miners working at the coalface at its base. In between were supervisors and engineers who ensured that proper procedures were followed.

Miners make status distinctions amongst themselves which are based on their different skills. The 'hewers', for instance, have the highest prestige. They set the pace of the work, and operate in pairs

at the coal seam. ‘Truckers’, who also work underground, are next in the hierarchy, while the men operating the screening plants and outside bins on the surface have the lowest prestige. A miner usually begins his career on the surface. He progresses up this hierarchy by initially working underground as a ‘trucker’, before he is eventually teamed up with a more experienced miner as a ‘hewer’.

Miners have worked shifts in the state mines for decades, but since the 1980's the pattern has changed. In the Strongman No. 2 mine, for example, there are two twelve-hour shifts per day. Each miner works for three days and then has three days off. At the Mount Davy mine, however, there are three shifts of 8½ hours per day (including ½ hour of overtime). A union representative, we interviewed, observed that it takes six months for a miner to adapt his lifestyle to this pattern of work as night shifts disrupt household routines and restrict leisure activities. He explained that the previous practice was to work three shifts of six hours per day; with the night shift being used for maintenance tasks.

Today, management organises individual miners into production teams. The size of a team may vary from mine to mine. The Strongman No. 2 mine, for instance, has four production teams of 12 men including seven working at the coal face, two operating the pumps and an electrician-fitter. Two or three of these teams produce up to 27 tonnes per man per shift. A mine manager, we interviewed, stated that his production crews have a small-mine attitude. There is no job demarcation except for the tradesmen. The work is now “market orientated”. The teams are close-knit with individual miners being allocated tasks according to their particular skills. Another informant observed that there is still a sense of mateship in underground mining which is expressed through mutual care in the face of danger.

Although the hours of work are longer, the higher degree of mechanisation has reduced the physical effort required by miners. Safety is a big issue for both management and workers. Solid Energy, which operates the Strongman and Mount Davy mines, has a one week induction programme with an emphasis on health and safety matters for all its underground workers. Furthermore, experienced miners provide on the job training to new entrants to the industry. Basic skills required nowadays by miners are pit development design, ventilation, roof support, washing out and pit sense. Mine managers are expected to be technically competent, and are more likely to be graduates than previously when practical experience was the key criterion.

Technological change in the industry

Recent technological changes in the state sector of the coal mining industry have been associated with greater labour productivity. The production of state-owned mines on the West Coast, for instance, rose from 534,342 tonnes in 1986 to 613,137 tonnes in 1991, while over the same period the workforce employed in those mines declined from 378 to 170 persons (see Figures 1 & 2).

Production at the Strongman and Mount Davy mines is highly automated and continuous. Miners operate “a million dollar piece of equipment” (Yarwood, 1996: 115), known as a road header, to develop underground roadways in both rock and coal, and for room and pillar extraction. Furthermore, they cut the coal with hydromonitors:

“...energy, in the form of large quantities of water, is piped from outside the mine to the coal face. At the coal face it is directed by a nozzle onto the seam of coal, causing the coal to break from the solid and leaving a large pile of broken coal in the face area.

This coal is removed down the gradient using the flowing water from the face and controlled in steel flumes. The flume roads lead eventually to the dewatering plant and then by conveyor to the surface (Nunn, 1997).”

Figure 1

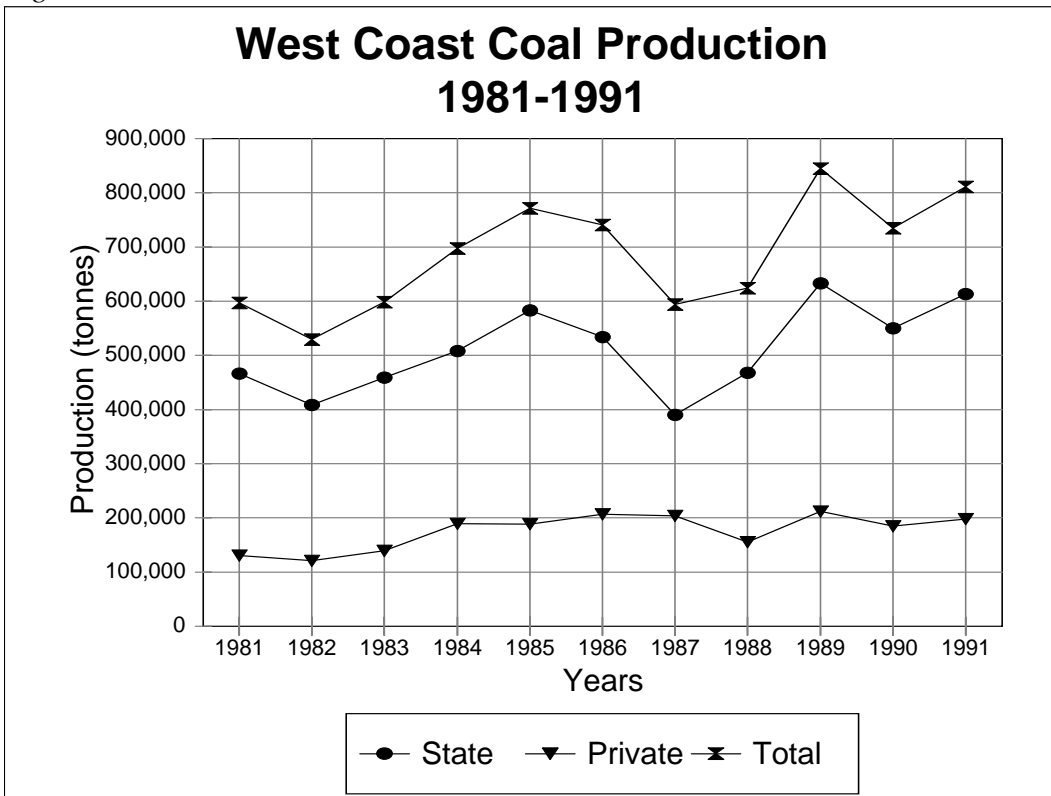
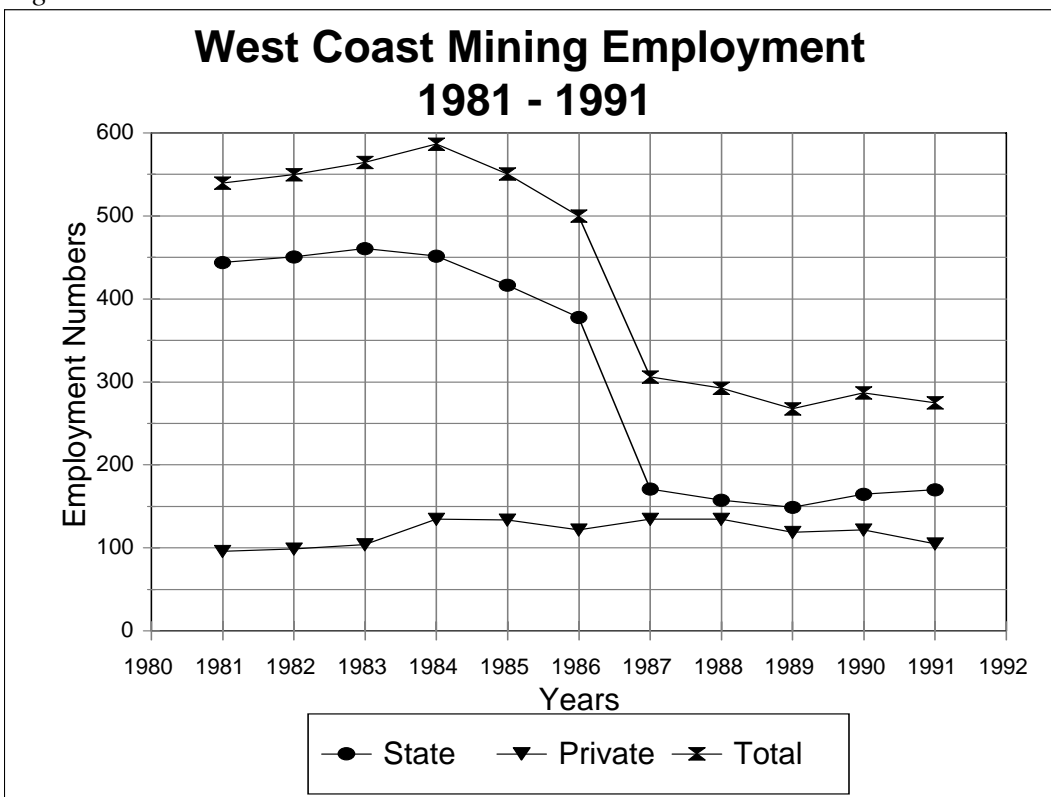


Figure 2



Hydraulic mining “has eclipsed the back-breaking drudgery of drilling charges by hand using metre-long bits and wielding the banjo shovel” (Yarwood, 1996: 103). On one hand, it minimises the dust, reduces the risk of spontaneous combustion and substantially increases productivity. On the other

hand, miners maintain that their work environment is wetter and colder, making them more susceptible to muscular strains.

Characteristics of the workforce and labour relations

Since the reorganisation of the state mines in 1987 and the introduction of hydraulic monitors, the type of skills required by miners has changed from an emphasis on practical experience and physical strength to a proficiency in operating highly automated equipment. At Strongman No. 2 mine, for example, the more experienced miners are mostly in their forties as older staff took redundancy after the reorganisation of State Coal. The younger miners who have entered the industry during the last decade come from many different settlements in the Greymouth district. Most of them live in Greymouth itself, some reside in Runanga and Rapahoe, while others commute from Blackball, Ngahere, Charleston and Hokitika. Some of the newcomers had previously worked with heavy machinery, and others worked in agriculture, forestry or with the railways. Many are school leavers with family associations with the industry. A mine manager we interviewed believes that these new entrants do not regard themselves as government employees, and are slowly developing an occupational culture that is more flexible than the work practices of the older generation of miners employed in state mines. A union official maintained that newcomers often do not have a good understanding of the role and function of the Miners Union.

Yarwood (1996: 115) reports that the annual pay of a miner at Strongman No. 2 in 1996 was \$40,000 plus bonuses. Miners at Mount Davy receive a hourly rate plus a bonus based on the quantity of coal they extract from the face. Overtime is available, but is difficult to obtain. The union official, we interviewed, mentioned that although there is still some room to bargain with management it is more restricted since the Employment Contracts Act was implemented.

REGIONAL AND LOCAL ECONOMY

The economy of the West Coast

The West Coast is the third largest region in New Zealand with an area of 2.3 million hectares. Eighty-seven per cent of the land is owned by the Crown. Some 35,000 persons resided in the region in 1997, and almost half of the population over 15 years held no educational qualifications. The region has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. There were 1,342 people on the unemployment register in October 1997, and 712 of them were on the books of the Greymouth office of the New Zealand Employment Service.

The economy of the West Coast has mainly been based on natural resources such as gold, coal, and indigenous forests. With such a high dependency on natural resources its development has not only been restricted by the depletion of those resources, but also by the cyclical nature of the prices of primary commodities. Thus communities in the region have always been subject to the boom-bust phenomenon, and the profits from these extractive industries have been transferred to other parts of New Zealand.

Coal mining, as we have already seen, employs a much smaller workforce than it did forty years ago. McCrae's Mining has placed its planned development of a gold mine at Reefton on hold pending an improvement in world market prices, while smaller operators in the industry have had their profit margins squeezed. At the same time many small sawmills have been forced to close as the government

has come under growing pressure from environmental groups to restrict the logging of indigenous beech forests. Dairy farming, fishing and tourism are other important economic activities in the region, but they are either subject to fluctuations in commodity prices or a downturn in visitor numbers.

Little value is added to primary products on the West Coast and this situation is unlikely to change in the immediate future given the national trend for processing activities to be centralised at multi-million dollar plants. In a further round of its restructuring programme, which was begun over ten years ago, the government reduced the number of staff at the regional offices of Income Support and the Inland Revenue Department in 1997.

The local economy of Runanga

Coal mining has been the major economic base of Runanga since the first decade of the twentieth century. The town became the main settlement in the district for housing the workforce of the state mines and the small private mines. That close link between the industry and town began to change during the 1960's, however, when falling production in the district's mines forced workers to leave the town. Further redundancies following the reorganisation of State Coal led to another exodus of miners from the town. On both occasions people without any previous association with the industry occupied houses in Runanga.

One of our informants who has been associated with the town since 1958 recalled that before these two phases of redundancies there was a wide variety of shops including a grocery operated by a miners' cooperative, a baker shop and a drapery. More residents worked in Greymouth after the closure of the small private mines, the turnover of local retail businesses declined, and eventually the cooperative grocery closed. Other residents moved out and were replaced by welfare beneficiaries, and people seeking employment at the mines. This pattern was repeated with the second exodus from Runanga after 1987.

Mining provided jobs for 330 people (of a total workforce of 5,244) in the Greymouth area in 1976. Almost all these jobs were held by men. The Liverpool mine at Rewanui with 73 employees, and the Strongman No. 1 mine with 171, had the biggest workforces, while seven private coal mines had 28 working proprietors and 6 employees. The remaining 41 jobs in the mining sector were administrative positions (Ministry of Works and Development, 1979: 52).

Taylor and Fitzgerald (1988: 36) report that there were two churches, a combined primary and intermediate school, a hotel, a working men's club, a community centre, a St Johns hall, two general stores and a fire station in Runanga in 1988. Residents, however, obtained most of their goods and services from Greymouth. The Post Office had closed and there were very limited banking facilities available through the Borough office. The authors noted that residents were deeply concerned about the high levels of unemployment, the departure of teenagers and entire families from the town, and the limited opportunities for meaningful and skilled employment. Residents also felt that the nature of the town's productive and social base had changed with the arrival of newcomers on welfare benefits, the redundancies in the state sector and a growing proportion of people travelling to work in Greymouth (Taylor and Fitzgerald, 1988: 56).

The town has continued to lose small business enterprises since 1988 including a Four Square grocery and a drapery during the last two years. A local butcher, we interviewed, was the first person to sell buffalo meat in New Zealand. His customers are from Runanga and elsewhere in the district. There are two retailers selling paint and glass in the town, but there is no Post Shop or chemist.

The average personal income of the residents of Runanga in 1986 was \$10,954 (cf. \$10,761 for the West Coast and \$12,253 for New Zealand). By 1991 only 58 of the 645 residents of the town who were gainfully employed indicated that they were working in the coal mining industry. Twenty-five of them were employed by the Coal Corporation and the remainder by private mines. Local services provided some 70 jobs that year. There were also about 16 farms and small holdings in the area. Most of them were located on the river flats between Coal Creek and Taylorville (West Coast Regional Council, 1992).

Nowadays, the Strongman No. 2 (85 employees) and Mount Davy (40 employees) mines, are the major enterprises in Runanga's district.² Furthermore, the district will depend even more on the industry for its economic welfare once the Greymouth Coal mine at Rapahoe begins to produce coal. With many miners residing in Greymouth and other settlements, however, a large proportion of their wages will be dispersed more widely throughout the region. Although it may have been appropriate to describe Runanga as a mining community until thirty years ago, it also functions today as a dormitory suburb of Greymouth. Many residents of Runanga not only work in Greymouth, but also shop there.

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure and funding

Runanga is administered by the Grey District Council and a local community board. The latter is also responsible for the rural district around the town, including Taylorville, and had a budgeted expenditure of \$40,000 for the 1995/96 financial year (McAlister, 1995: 52). An oxidation plant was built to treat sewage in 1970 and has the capacity to cope with a significant growth in the town's population (Taylor and Fitzgerald, 1988: 35). Residents of Runanga obtain their water supply from the Coal Creek scheme which also services the nearby settlement of Rapahoe. The town also has a Service Centre and a library. A local resident, we interviewed, commented that the standard of street and footpath maintenance in the town has been lower since the Grey District Council took over this responsibility from the Runanga Borough Council in 1989. Other informants also maintained that the Council was not spending enough to adequately maintain the town's infrastructure, with one of them remarking that Runanga "*will simmer on, but never boil*".

Transport

The only public transport between Runanga and Greymouth is a twice weekly bus service on Tuesdays and Fridays. Even though the train service for miners has not operated for several years, the Strongman and Mount Davy mines provide buses to transport their workers from the Greymouth area when there is a change of shift.

Housing

The housing in Runanga was very rudimentary at the beginning of this century as illustrated by this short extract from a report written by the manager of the Point Elizabeth State Colliery in 1904:

²Workforces at November 1997.

“At present there is considerable difficulty being experienced by miners who are desirous of settling at or near the mine, for at present the streets in the new township have not been cleared; it is consequently very difficult for holders to get access to their sections. The result is that most of the workmen are squatting outside the township altogether (*sic*) wherever there is a chance and little clearing done. Most of these people are occupying small huts, and many are in tents.” (Ewan, 1986: 86)

Most miners resided near their workplace for the greater part of Runanga’s history, although the advent of a regular rail service to the mines allowed some of them to live in Greymouth and other townships in the district.

Home ownership has been a significant feature of community life in Runanga for many years, although the departure of many mining families from the town since the 1960's has attracted some newcomers who are occupying a slowly growing number of rental dwellings (see Table 5). These newcomers have mainly been city dwellers seeking cheap housing, although some came to Runanga to obtain employment in the mines.

The town may also be able to expand its role as a dormitory suburb of Greymouth. Taylor and Fitzgerald (1988: 35) report that Runanga had capacity for another 200 residential sections in 1988, 80 to 90 of which the Runanga Borough Council had reported as being serviced. There were also other areas of flat land in the locality that could be zoned for residential use.

There were 534 dwellings in Runanga in 1996. Most dwellings are of timber construction, and over fourth-fifths of them were between 40 and 90 years old. In 1991 the average value of a house in the town was about \$45,000, while the average value of a section was \$1,850 (West Coast Regional Council, 1992).

House prices were relatively static in Runanga during the latter part of 1997. A local real estate agent informed us that first home buyers from Greymouth and investors (both locals and outsiders) had purchased properties around their government valuation. Many sellers were either retired or unemployed people who had only lived in the town for a short period. There is some optimism in the district, however, as developments at Mount Davy and Greymouth Coal’s mine at Rapahoe are expected to attract an influx of miners and their families.

Health, education and training

The last general practitioner based at Runanga left in the 1970's. There also was an ambulance service in the town partly financed by a medical fund established by the state mines. Residents of Runanga requiring medical treatment may either attend the clinic of a visiting doctor or travel eight kilometres to Greymouth where there is a hospital, several general practitioners and voluntary agencies providing health-related services. The hospital has two orthopaedic specialists, but some illnesses require a visit to Christchurch.

The primary school at Runanga had a roll of 160 in 1997. It has a high turnover with 65 to 75 children enrolling/departing every year. There were seven classes, but the number of staff fluctuates due to the wide variations in the school roll. However, there are some contingency plans for new classrooms should the new mining developments in the district attract more families to settle in Runanga. The children of some residents who commute to Greymouth attend primary school there. The nearest secondary school is also in Greymouth.

Except for training provided to apprentices and other new employees at the two major mines³, people from Runanga must travel to Greymouth or other centres for work-related education. For any young person requiring training this is a major obstacle given that the bus service only operates twice weekly. There are thirteen training providers on the West Coast including the polytechnic at Greymouth and two secondary schools. About half of the courses provide basic education such as numeracy and literacy, while the remainder are vocational courses providing skills for trades, commerce, the service sector and coal mining. Solid Energy provides a training venue and helps to select trainees for the coal mining courses. The state-owned corporation intends to recruit more locals for the expansion of its operations in both the Buller and Greymouth districts.

Government agencies and services provided by voluntary organisations

Residents of Runanga must travel to Greymouth to obtain services from government agencies, such as the New Zealand Employment Service, Income Support, and the Inland Revenue Department, and voluntary organisations. The Post Office was closed during the 1980's, but there is a postal service operating from the Service Centre of the Grey District Council. There has been no police station in the town since the 1970's.

Some community-based welfare organisations operate in Runanga, however, including a Hall Committee, the Runanga New Cooperative which is working with the Community Employment Group, and a trust that was established to provide a roof for the swimming pool. The Hall Committee is planning the restoration of the Miners Hall as a community resource centre.

RESOURCE AND ECONOMIC PLANNING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government

Runanga was administered by a Borough Council from 1912 to 1989. Since then it has been part of the Grey District, and residents elect representatives on the Council and a Community Board. The Community Board meets monthly to discuss local issues and make recommendations to the District Council. At the time of amalgamation there was considerable opposition in the community to being incorporated into the Grey District. In 1991 the Grey District Council sought to have the Community Board abolished, but the Local Government Commission turned down the Council's application on the grounds that there was insufficient evidence to justify the Board's abolition (McAlister, 1995: 52).

Resource and economic planning

The mining industry on the West Coast is entering an expansionary phase as it seeks to increase its production from the Buller and Grey coalfields for export to overseas markets. The Mount Davy mine is being developed, while resource consents are being sought for a coal jetty near Westport, and for an automatic loading silo system for a mine operated by Greymouth Coal at Rapahoe.

Greymouth Coal plans to extract 1.7 million tonnes per annum of high volatile bituminous coal with a low ash (6%) and sulphur (0.4%) content from the Rapahoe mine, and transport it by rail to Lyttelton (Nunn, 1997). The mine is expected to be the deepest in New Zealand and to have a workforce of

³ Formerly there was a School of Mines based in Runanga that was operated by the Mines Department.

about 200 people (*Canterbury Today*, October 1996). Greymouth Coal has applied to the Grey District Council for a resource consent which would allow coal to be moved from the mine along a conveyor belt to an automatic loading silo on a loop in the railway line. This system is to be built within five years of the consent being granted. In the meantime permission has also been sought for coal to be temporarily stockpiled on land adjacent to the existing railway line until the loop is completed. Greymouth Coal obtained a licence to mine the coal in December 1993. That licence was granted under the authority of the Coal Mines Act of 1979 as the company had applied for the mining licence before the Resource Management Act had come into effect.

COMMUNITY

Industry as citizen

There has been a long history of cooperation between the state mines in the district around Runanga and community organisations. Both the management of the mines and the Miners Union played an active role in the town's affairs. For many years the state mines contributed to an amenities fund which provided finance for community activities, while the Miners Union opened a Cooperative Store in the town which was in business for over half a century. The state mines also supplied informal assistance such as donating materials to St Johns Ambulance or giving coal to miners' widows.

The Amenities fund has now been wound up, but Solid Energy, the state-owned enterprise which now operates the two major mines in the district, has continued to support the community by contributing funds for a memorial to the Strongman disaster, and by presenting computers to Plunket and the secondary school in Greymouth.

Cultural values

The occupational culture of miners, as described above, has dominated the values of Runanga's community for many years. Like a team of miners the community is "*close knit*". The Miners Hall became a focal point of the town's life with slogans such as "The World's Wealth, the World's Workers" and "United we Stand, Divided we Fall". Long-term residents still regard Runanga as a mining town, but believe the community spirit is not as strong as it was in the past because of changes in social behaviour and attitudes. A mine manager, we interviewed, noted that formerly foul language was only acceptable at the workplace, but now it is expressed in a wide range of contexts.

The Runanga Working Men's Club has a hall of fame which epitomizes the community's tradition of honouring folk heroes. Heroes such as Robert Semple and Patrick Webb, who were not only were union officials battling for the rights of miners, but also cabinet ministers in the First Labour Government. Or a long list of sportsmen, like Dave McKenzie (the marathon runner) and George Menzies (the rugby league stand-off), who are the foundation of the local myth that Runanga is the "*home of champions*".

Class and conflict

Mining has been the major economic activity in the district around Runanga since the beginning of this century. Many of the older people had immigrated from the United Kingdom to escape from the class system. Thus there was a strong egalitarian ethos with most residents sharing a similar social status in Runanga. Yet workers strongly supported the Miners Union as it confronted their employer (the government) on safety and economic issues.

People working in the industry have traditionally derived their social status from the position they hold in its occupational hierarchy. Mine managers and engineers were regularly paid and occupied houses in the town which were supplied by their employers. They were respected, but had to earn it by their practical knowledge as work practices were “*only as safe as the biggest fool in the mine*”. Mine managers with a university education did not have the respect of their subordinates, moreover, unless they had sufficient experience underground.

When miners and their families left Runanga after mine closures and redundancies, they were replaced by newcomers who usually had little association with the occupational culture of the industry. Many newcomers were attracted by the relatively cheap housing available in Runanga. These newcomers included retired couples, unemployed people, sole parent families, and members of a white power gang. Their lifestyles and values were very different from the long-term residents, and they were reluctant to participate in local activities. Thus the town became divided between long-term residents with a mining background who are more locally focussed and newcomers whose commitment to the community may be transitory. One of our informants, for example, described Runanga as “*a community in transition*”, and suggested that while the turnover of population added vitality to the town’s life it also raised issues of community loyalty. Whether newcomers are fully accepted into the community by long-term residents may well depend on their willingness to get involved in local sporting and recreational activities.

Community organisation and leadership

Runanga had a strong base of community leadership and a wider range of organisations some fifty years ago when it had a population just over 1,800 people. Then the town’s close association with the mining industry not only ensured it was well endowed with amenities, but also with strongly motivated people who contributed leadership skills to a wide range of community activities.

Since then some of the amenities have been closed (e.g. the Cooperative store) or are in need of restoration (the Miners Hall), and many people who were community leaders left the town after losing their jobs in the local mines. Furthermore, the new patterns of shift work, that have been recently introduced by the two major mines in the district, do not allow employees to participate as fully in recreational and sporting activities as they did in the past.

The Working Men’s Club is the main centre of community activities. The St John’s ambulance and volunteer fire brigade are still functioning, but the number and variety of sporting activities in the town has declined. Although there are two playcentres and Plunket in Runanga for families with young children, there are few recreational pursuits available for older children and teenagers. Our informants also indicated that it has become more difficult to find people willing to be committee members of local organisations.

Social problems

Runanga, like other rural towns in New Zealand, has experienced the negative effects of the restructuring of the economy during the 1980's. With the arrival of newcomers in the town there has been a growing incidence of welfare dependency, unemployment, problem drinking and cannabis use. The presence of a white-power gang in the community has not been welcomed by some long-term residents who believe members of the gang are growing marijuana and committing other crimes.

Maori

Although Maori comprised nine per cent of the residents of Runanga in 1996, they have only become a significant section of the community over the last two decades as the town has evolved into a dormitory suburb of Greymouth. These Maori newcomers have not always been readily accepted by other members of the community, but they are now trying to get Te Reo activities for their preschoolers and school children.

Women, young people and the elderly

Mining has traditionally been a male-dominated occupation with only administrative and secretarial employment being available for women. Moreover, there was little need for married women to work as miners were well-paid. Even today there are few women employed in the industry, so the working women of Runanga either have jobs in Greymouth or work for retail and other business firms in the town itself. The main occupations of the female workforce in 1991 were clerks (31%), service and sales workers (22%) and professionals and technicians (22%).

Parents sought a good education for their children in the past. They encouraged their children to leave Runanga so they could obtain higher educational qualifications and improve their employment prospects. This migration of young people to other parts of the region and the rest of the country continues today. Except for those who have been recruited by the district mines, young people who choose to remain in Runanga must travel to Greymouth for work or training. And there are few leisure activities to occupy them in the town apart from a skate boarding pit and drinking parties.

Some older residents of Runanga belong to families that have been associated with the coal mining industry for two or three generations. They often own older houses, occupying $\frac{1}{4}$ acre sections, which require a high degree of maintenance. Those older residents who are dependent on public transport rely on a twice weekly bus service to Greymouth. Many elderly people have shifted to other centres such as Greymouth and Christchurch where there are better facilities (e.g. pensioner flats) and they have easier access to medical services.

CONCLUSION

Over the last fifty years Runanga has evolved from a single-industry mining town to also become a dormitory suburb of Greymouth. From a homogeneous community whose economic base was based on the coal industry, it has become the home of a diverse group of residents from other parts of the Grey District and the West Coast. In future Runanga either may remain a suburb of Greymouth, or may once again become a mining town should a large proportion of the workers required for the expansion of the Mount Davey and Rapahoe mines choose to reside there.

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