



IN THE END

by Mal Peet • illustrations by Andrew Burdan



School Journal Story Library is a targeted series that supplements other instructional series texts. It provides additional scaffolds and supports for teachers to use to accelerate students' literacy learning.

In the End has been carefully levelled. While the contexts and concepts link to English and social sciences at level 3 of the curriculum, the text has a reading year level of year 4.

Teacher support material (available at www.schooljournalstorylibrary.tki.org.nz) contains key information to help teachers to provide the additional support and scaffolding that some students may need to meet the specific reading, writing, and curriculum demands of *In the End*.

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Andrew Burdan



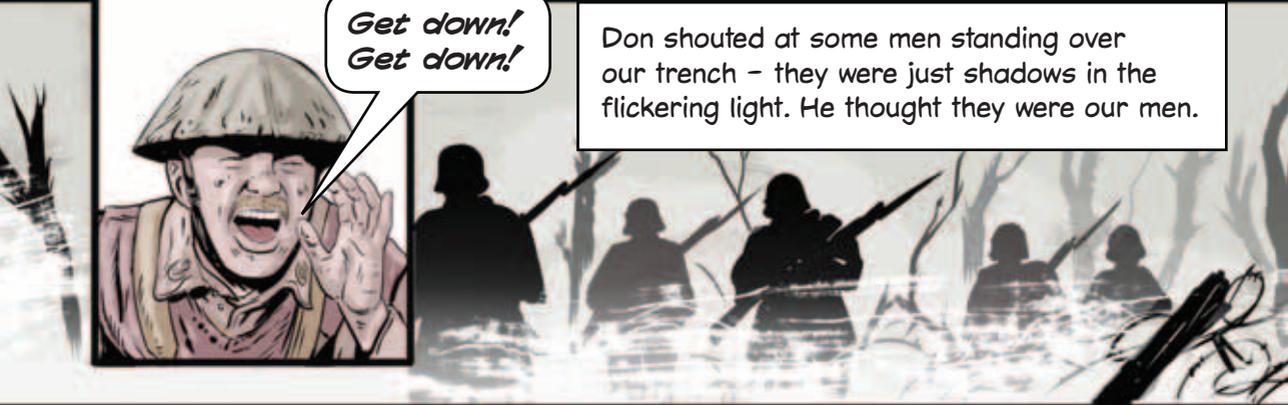
My mate Don Curry took the hit that killed him on the third of *October* 1917. We were trying to capture a bunch of trees where the Germans were dug in.



Bullets sang through the air like insects. I was sure I was going to die.



*Get down!
Get down!*



Don shouted at some men standing over our trench - they were just shadows in the flickering light. He thought they were our men.



They weren't.

One of them threw something into our trench, then they took off.



Don fell back on top of me, and I put my hands around him. His body was all warm and wrong and slushy.



I don't remember doing it, but I dragged him back to our lines, yelling and screaming for the stretcher bearers.

Next thing I remember, a medic was bending over me.

*It's all right, son.
It's all right.*



Two days later, there was a pause in the fighting. I went to the field hospital to see how Don was doing.

When I told the nurse his name, she didn't need to say anything. The truth was in her face.



I'm a goner, Billy.



Don't say that. You'll be all right, mate.

No, listen, Billy. There's something ... something I've got to tell you before I go.



What is it?



It's about the strike.

I knew Don meant the goldminers' strike in Waihi in 1912. Don had worked in the Martha Mine with my dad. We liked to talk about home and the good old days, which Don said weren't that good at all. He was dead right.



What about the strike, Don?

Don's eyes had closed, and he didn't answer. So I waited, remembering.

Waihi: Five years earlier ...



What I remembered most about the strike was how quiet things were. Well, at least until the rioting and shooting happened.



When the miners went on strike, there was no rock to feed the battery.

The battery was where they crushed the rock to get out the gold. Its huge steam-driven hammers pounded away, day and night.

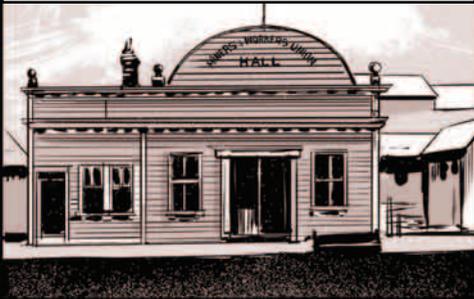
When the pounding stopped, it was wonderfully strange.



For a while, people sort of tiptoed around town, speaking in whispers, as though the silence were made of the most fragile glass.

Me, I felt like the headache I'd had my entire life had just gone away. I felt light, as if I might float free from Earth.

The days were peaceful; the evenings less so. The yelling was almost as noisy as the battery. The miners' hall would be full of union men from Auckland. They had come to Waihi to urge the strikers to hold on and not give up.



I was in the hall with Mum and Dad one night when the great Pat Hickey was speaking. Some fool at the back called out ...



Pat, do you believe in the British flag?

Pat pointed at the union's blood-red banner and thundered ...

That is the only flag I believe in — the flag of the people!

His reply nearly brought the house down with cheering, stamping, and whistling.



Other nights, silent films were shown in the hall. Westerns were our favourites.



We'd sit there with our hearts in our mouths while cowboys on horseback charged towards us, blasting their pistols.



Silent gunfire. How ridiculous that seems now.

Up until then, the strike had been peaceful. It didn't last. The new government sent in the Police Commissioner, John Cullen, to sort it out.



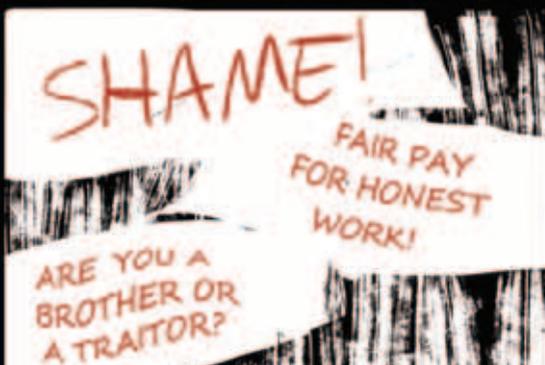
He was a brute and marched a whole troop of hard-faced policemen into town.



And after Cullen's bully-boys had softened up the strikers, the mine owners sent in the strikebreakers. The scabs, the blacklegs.



I guess there were unemployed miners with hungry families among them. But some were scum. Drunks. Troublemakers.



Mum and the other wives gathered on the street when the blacklegs came to the mine under police escort. They told the blacklegs they weren't real men. They made them feel small.

So it was understandable, I suppose, that the scabs eventually went on a rampage.



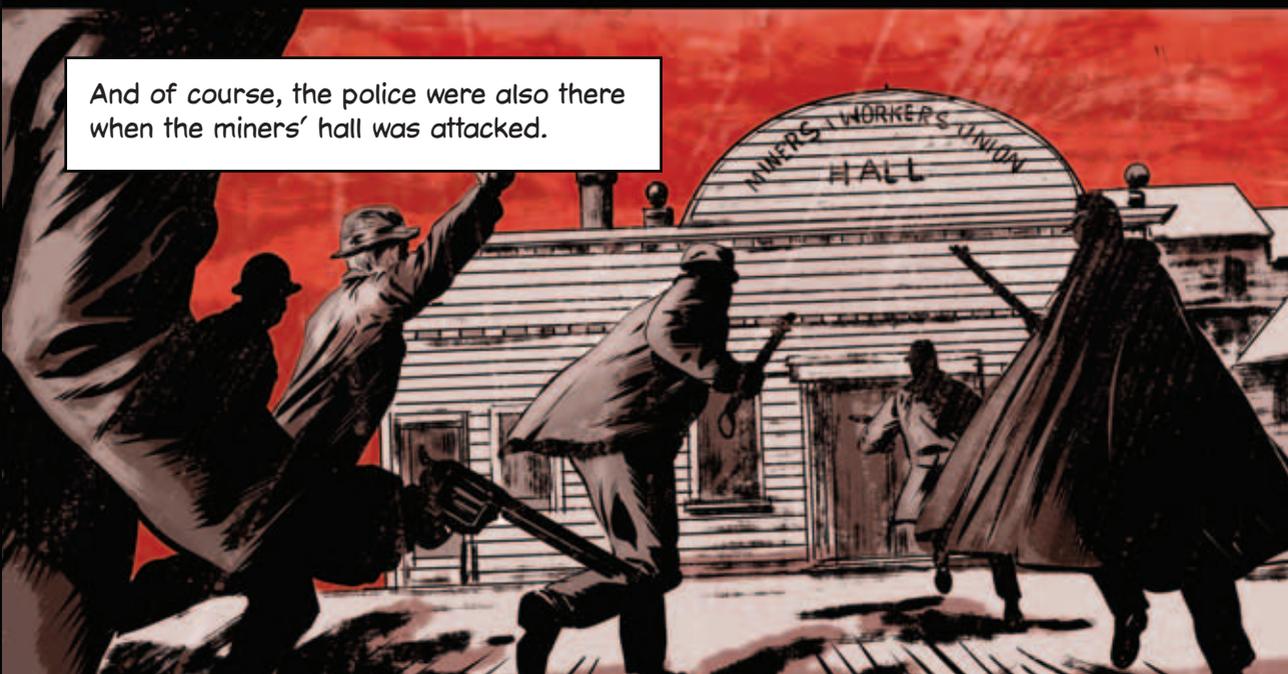
One day, instead of going up to the mine, they roamed the streets in gangs, lashing out at strikers and their families.



The police encouraged them, although they pretended to keep the peace.



And of course, the police were also there when the miners' hall was attacked.



That's when Constable Wade took a bullet in the guts.

They say Fred Evans shot him. But Dad said that it wasn't Fred. He reckoned Fred didn't know one end of a gun from the other. Whatever the truth, Fred was the one they caught.

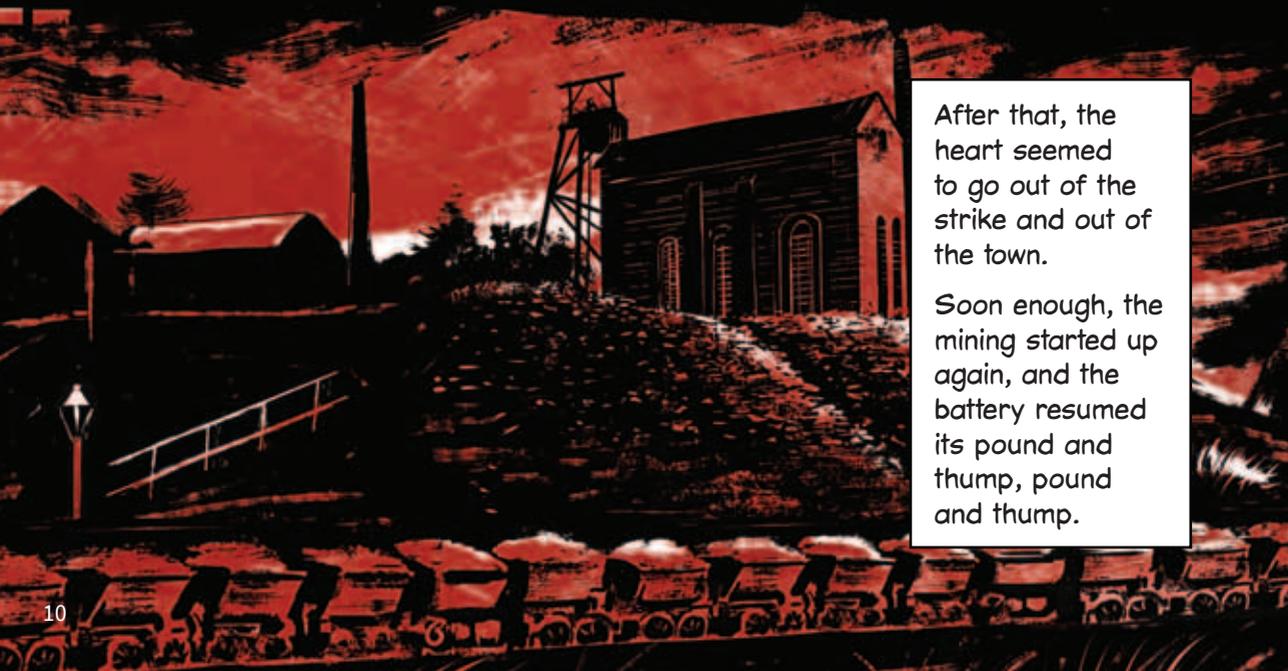


The police and scabs beat him so badly that he died in his prison cell.



After that, the heart seemed to go out of the strike and out of the town.

Soon enough, the mining started up again, and the battery resumed its pound and thump, pound and thump.



I heard Don draw a sticky-sounding breath like he was trying to speak.

I lied to you, Billy. I wasn't in with the union. I was a blackleg. A scab.

I stared at him. I couldn't think of a thing to say.

I've been ashamed of it ever since. I was ashamed at the time. I need you to forgive me. Can you do that?

All I could hear was his scratchy breathing. Then, after a few minutes, I took his hand.

Something like a smile ghosted across his face.

You're all right, Don. We ended up on the same side in the end.

Yeah. We all finish up on the same side in the end.

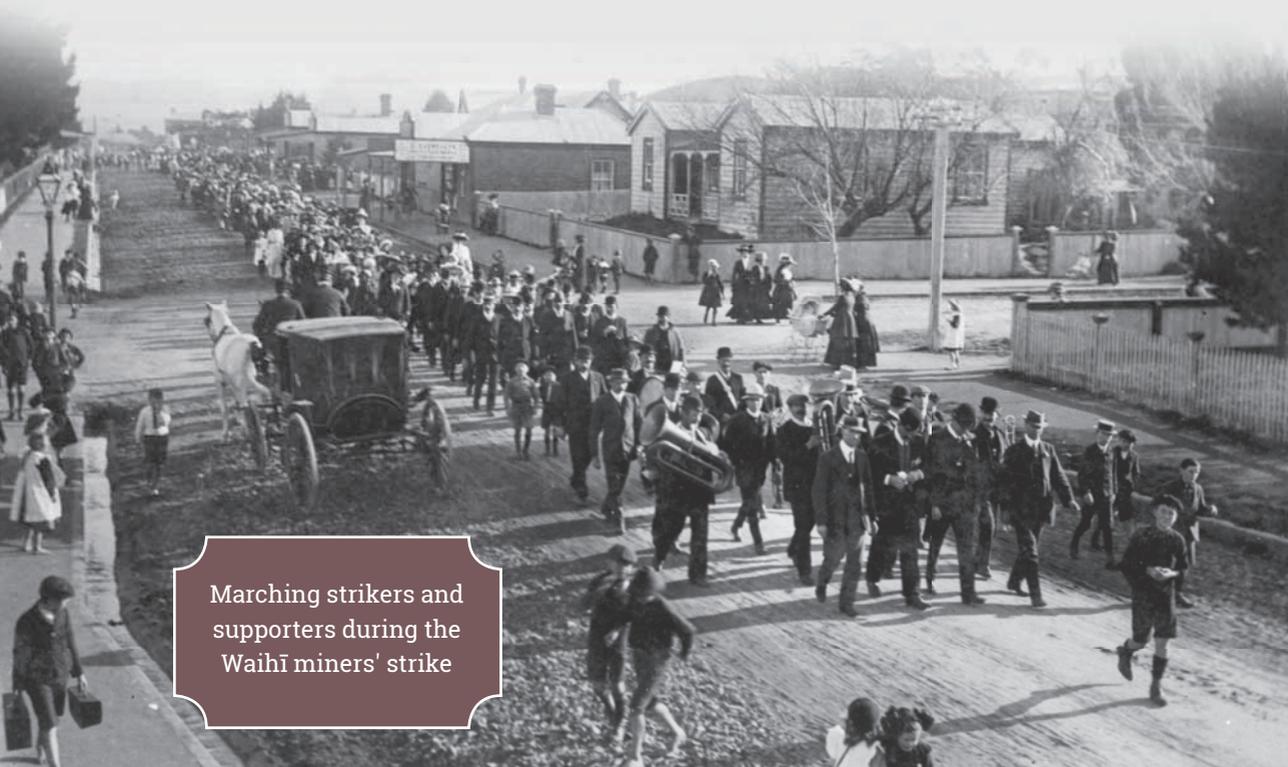
And then he closed his eyes.

The 1912 Waihī Goldminers' Strike

For many years, the mine workers at Waihī had been asking for better working conditions. Eventually, they disagreed among themselves about how the union* should negotiate with the bosses. In May 1912, one group, the goldminers, went on strike.

To keep the mine working, the mine owners brought in non-union miners (strikebreakers). This led to unrest and violence in Waihī. The trouble boiled over in November, when a policeman was shot and a striker was killed.

The strike lasted six months. Work at the mine slowly returned to normal, but many of the striking miners and their families had left town, never to return.



Marching strikers and supporters during the Waihī miners' strike

* A union is an organisation that protects and improves the rights of workers.

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