



Charles Boreham was born near Hobart Town in Tasmania, the son of a farmer. He worked as a shearer, sail-maker, drainer, blacksmith, station hand, and general labourer – and at age 14 as a seaman, serving in British, German, Spanish, and American windjammers., and in the British and Spanish navies. He left the sea in 1884, married, and with his wife arrived in New Zealand in that same year. He took up shearing and in one notable incident, after fomenting a strike on a Waitaki station was chased by the runholder and shot ‘in the nethermost region of the trousers.’ He was soon involved in shearer unionism, and served as an organiser for the Amalgamated Shearers’ Union of Australasia. In the 1890s he lived in Oamaru where he organised the local branch of the Amalgamated Shearers’ and General Labourers’ Union of New Zealand – he pushed hard for a union for rural workers – inducing the farmers of North Otago to mobilise against him. Boreham did not hold any official posts – partly because his views were considered too radical – but he never slackened in his efforts to organise unions. In 1901 he founded the Waimate Workers’ Union for farm workers and threshing-mill hands – the first substantial farm workers’ union. He promoted the break-up of the great estates – he was an ardent prohibitionist, but clearly enjoyed a drink – he was given to settling disputes physically – and not above challenging others to combat. In 1906 he moved to Dunedin and continued to organise all sorts of unskilled workers’ unions – he was a regular speaker at the Fountain on Sunday evenings – he sold the *Maoriland Worker* in the city streets. In 1915, Boreham became secretary of the Otago Rural Workers’ Union – and later vice –resident of the New Zealand Workers’ Union. Despite his radical views and unruly nature, Boreham gained wide respect for his contribution to the trade union movement. Emerging drunk from a pub one evening, he was hit by a motorcycle and died on 21 May 1925 aged 68 . The funeral cortege to the Southern Cemetery was one of the largest seen in Dunedin in many years.