

W. H. Oliver and B. R. Williams, eds., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. Pp. 572, tables, maps, index. \$39.95.

Composite volumes on African or Asian history are also studies in self-awareness by professional historians formed in the new states. So it has been with much of New Zealand's historiography. Over eighty years ago William Pember Reeves, the country's first intellectual (he would have deplored the term) pioneered the effort of New Zealand writers and historians to overcome their British legacy and come to terms with their environment in his *Story of New Zealand*. The book had a lasting influence on the main themes of the colonization period and attitudes to Maoris (heroic adversaries) and left a tradition of Liberal "radicalism" as the mainspring of the social welfare practiced by a small democracy. The analysis in terms of settler advances and legislation for security served the country until the end of the 1920s, when it was eroded by the depression.

A second historiographical advance by professional historians in the late 1950s centered on two books by Keith Sinclair and W. H. Oliver which embodied general accounts of the country's settlement and growth from differing standpoints. Sinclair's *History of New Zealand* (1961) emphasized the influence of the local environment; Oliver's *Story of New Zealand* (1960) made more of the British cultural baggage imported with the settlers. It is curious that neither book, though widely read abroad, features in the bibliography of sources used in this volume by a generation of younger historians. For, with a few exceptions, the contributors to the *Oxford History* belong to a school of academic teachers and researchers formed in the 1950s, and they draw on a vastly improved accumulation of published and unpublished materials. They are aware that the prosperous years may be over in a society more open to protest in extra-parliamentary ways. Their mood is introspective and soberly cautious about judgments on the recent performance of the welfare state.

Their *History* will be judged abroad, however, for its exposition of the main lines of social, economic, and political change over the past 200

years and for its reinterpretation of previous work. For Americans and Pacific islanders the Kiwi viewpoint has a special interest. New Zealand was a group of Pacific islands settled by Europeans with results that have much in common with other Pacific communities down to about 1840. Thereafter, colonization and responsible government within a British imperial framework mark the country's extraordinary progress economically and politically as a dependency and an autonomous state. It did not go the way of Latin American states; nor did it become a republic or even join with other Australian colonies at the period of federation. It is uniquely parochial within the South Pacific.

The sixteen chapters of the book which must account for this successful democracy with its patchy race relations and very high standard of living are grouped in four major sections to cover the four chronological periods of the country's settlement and progress. Divisions between sections turn on the crisis periods of the 1840s and the two depressions of the 1890s and the 1930s, all of which heralded periods of conflict and political change. Within each section contributors have been disciplined to concentrate on political, economic, social or Maori history. There is a concluding chapter by the editor summarizing the contribution of the arts and literature to a sense of identity in contemporary New Zealand society.

The value of this structure is that we are given a fairly complete economic or political history as chapters are read in sequence. There is some overlap, but not enough to disturb a student of New Zealand's social history or race relations who can browse through three or four chapters without distraction by political historians or economists. It is difficult to justify the description of "social history" claimed for the book in the editor's introduction, however, because only three chapters are devoted to this theme. Two of these by Erik Olszen and Graeme Dunstall on the demographic and social changes from 1890 to the 1970s are solid expositions based on statistical materials, while the earlier chapter by Jeanine Graham on settler society is impressionistic and lacks an account of the origins of immigrants, their values, and their social mobility within the rapidly changing regional economies of the mid-nineteenth century. It is clear that New Zealand history still requires a thorough study of its earliest Australian, British and other elements, before natural increase and the locally born changed the pattern of population growth from the 1880s.

The conclusions reached by Olszen and Dunstall, however, stress the homogeneity of rural and urban communities by the end of the century, despite some radicalism in the depression years, curbed by state inter-

vention and the industrial legislation of the Liberals as well as the quiet revolution in expectations fostered by rising prices, refrigeration, guaranteed markets in Britain and adequate credit at home for communications and closer settlement by small farmers. They also stress that problems of reconstruction after the early 1890s were primarily ones of affluence in a society which was increasingly employed in the service sector and whose income derived from wages and salaries to a greater degree than income from farming and investment. Given this paradox from about 1900 that smaller numbers of richer farmers supported greater numbers of blue and white collar workers, both contributors have trouble applying "class" terminology to a society which refused to believe in conflict theory and which stressed consensus behavior in its higher income groups and left a good deal of personal initiative to its mobile work force to change occupations and adopt the lifestyles so carefully imported from Edwardian England. There were occasional challenges to this consensus from industrial workers and a general acceptance that the state had to save society from the worst effects of the 1930s. But New Zealand's version of the "New Deal" contained a far greater acceptance of state control than America's, and this approach to the problem of disadvantage and misfortune was not really questioned until minority counter-culture protesters made their challenge in the 1960s, when politicians' ability to deliver the security taken for granted from 1938 began to fail.

The reasons for this failure were primarily economic. Economic themes provide some of the best historical writing in the volume, and it is not too much to claim that a good deal of New Zealand history will be reinterpreted in the light of the contributions by W. J. Gardner who covers the "Colonial Economy" and Tom Brooking and G. R. Hawke who deal with two separate periods from the 1890s and the 1930s. Gardner's chapter makes clear why early hopes for revenue from Crown preemptive rights over Maori land foundered in financial debt and absentee speculation, leaving the North Island land market in confusion and conflict. Early development, such as it was, depended on South Island runholders and provincial governments with close control over indirect taxes. It is clear (as it was not in older histories) that colonial banking, joint stock ventures, and mortgage finance took root very quickly, providing the essential business infrastructure to the state borrowing of the Vogel period. Taken together with Brooking's analysis of the reasons for farming efficiency at the end of the century, the gradual shift to the tertiary sector and political control of the country's reserve bank in 1933, following devaluation, the economic history sections are required reading for students of other developing societies in Asia or Latin America.

Gary Hawke's contribution on the growth of the economy from 1938 tackles the different historical problem of explaining why the Labour policy of insulating the economy from the effects of cheap imports, while maximizing exports in conditions of full employment, faltered and failed under successive governments. The underlying growth trends were remarkable, while inflation was held down and international prices were favorable; and there was a surprising shift to new trading partners and expansion of manufactures for export by the end of the 1960s. It would seem, however, that the price of goods and services traded internally rose more than external trade; diversification created regional disparities and political problems, as labor drifted North; the system of licensing rather than imposing tariffs in the Australian style gave the governments of the day influence but not control over the economy. The argument is incomplete (Just why were internal costs so high relative to GNP?) and will be debated by other economic historians, particularly as there is no adequate study yet of the role of the budget in New Zealand's fiscal and trading history. But the broad trends of prosperity and borrowing, recession and retrenchment from 1870 till the oil crisis of the 1970s are clear enough and this is a major advance in New Zealand historiography.

So much so that the chapters on political history can be read as a commentary on the efforts of coteries of farmers, businessmen and labor leaders to preserve the benefits of dependency, while claiming autonomous controls over domestic policies and enlarging their power base by forming true political parties from the 1890s. A chapter by Raewyn Dalziel skillfully narrates the well-known establishment of responsible government stressing the politics of jobbery rather than the evolution of an unwritten constitution. Len Richardson deals with the Liberals drawing on more recent work on elections and makes clear why they refused to accept all the implications of Reeves' program and why Massy's Reform party kept ahead of Labour's rising vote for so long. Robert Chapman balances his account of Labour's triumph in 1935 with new material on the reorganization of the conservatives (National), as the country reached the limits of socialization in a mixed economy.

By the 1950s and 1960s there were signs that the political system was incapable of radical change as neither party swung the marginal seats very far, and New Zealanders were content to reap the benefits of wartime and post-war prices and expanded health and education services, while their trading economy became more uncertain, as Britain entered the EEC. Chapman faults Labour on electoral tactics. But there were wider issues and the "golden 1960s" marked a change in New Zealand's external position, just as its political system was tested by internal protest

movements and Labour was trounced. It is a major weakness in the whole of this volume that so little is written about the influence of foreign policy on domestic history, and the rather lame excuse offered in the introduction that the theme has been "thoroughly explored elsewhere" does not meet the requirement of a general history to cover all aspects of the country's development. Imperial relations, two world wars, participation in decolonization in Western Samoa and the international policies of a small power in the United Nations are as much a part of New Zealand's history as sheep farming and of critical importance to its society's self-awareness.

As one might expect, race relations are generously covered in five chapters which will be of special interest to students of the Pacific. Janet M. Davidson makes a thorough analysis of the archeological evidence for 900 years of Polynesian settlement, carefully stressing regional variations and avoiding any stereotype of a "generalised New Zealander." This emphasis on the variety of Maori regional communities and their response to external contact is continued by J. M. R. Owens in a chapter on European trade and settlement before 1840. Owens questions earlier conclusions about the incidence of depopulation and "anarchy" without entirely reconciling this revisionist viewpoint with his own descriptions of the effects of firearms and warfare. But the all-purpose "noble" Maori of Grey, Reeves, Best and others has clearly been banished along with his cannibalism which we are told "left a serious gap in diet" (p. 39). The period of land purchase and the wars is analyzed by Ann Parsonson and M. P. K. Sorrenson with some repetition, but from slightly differing standpoints and contains greater detail than many standard accounts of the ambiguities of the Treaty of Waitangi and settler infiltration and conquest.

"Neither peasants nor yet proletarians," the Maoris retreated in the last decades of the nineteenth century from other mainstreams of New Zealand development and remained a marginal rural community whose demographic revival and economic integration are thoughtfully described by Michael King. King's chapter explains why a general ethnic identity became more important than Maori tribal identity, and he touches on the economic variety in Maori subsistence and cash farming ventures which were improved by state aid and Maori leadership in the 1920s. There is important new material on the effects of wartime recruitment and Maori self-help in political organization just when rapid urbanization from the 1940s created new tensions between the races which have not yet been fully resolved.

Altogether, then, this *History*, which is handsomely produced in its *taniko* designed dust cover, meets the requirements for any general study

of a nation state in terms of its internal development. The latest research is incorporated; and the exposition of internal themes is clearly structured with excellent maps and tables where necessary. The notes are adequate as references, but there is needless repetition of bibliographical sources in the works listed by chapter. The absence of a chapter on New Zealand's place in the world must be a matter of regret and a serious weakness for the chapters on the economy. One misses, too, an account of the civil service, its origins and structure in a state which is so dependent on the administration of effective agricultural and welfare programs and which has produced an efficient foreign service. A future generation of New Zealand historians may take external affairs more seriously in their explanation for domestic success or failures, but their debt to this summation of historical writing to date will be in no way lessened.

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