Paul Spoonley, *The Politics of Nostalgia: Racism and the Extreme Right in New Zealand*. Palmerston North, N.Z.: Dunmore Press, 1987. Pp. 318. NZ$38.95.

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New Zealand's tranquil reputation and geographical isolation have made it appear a somewhat unpromising subject for scholars interested in political extremism in its various forms. Even so, particularly in recent years commentators both from within the country and overseas have discovered a more complex and less attractive reality beneath the much more familiar bland and benign image. While not surprisingly much of the analysis has concentrated on relations between the indigenous Maori inhabitants and the non-Maori population, focusing on contemporary issues against a backdrop of accumulated grievances, other features of racism and prejudice have not gone unrecognized.

A principal contributor to the study of New Zealand racism and political extremism has been Dr. Paul Spoonley, a social scientist at one of the country's tertiary institutions, Massey University.[1] His investigations of the country's political psychopathology have gone some way towards stripping New Zealand of its smug claim (once widely heard) to have developed a society characterized by race relations uniquely harmonious in the contemporary world. His studies, beside those of others, have had the perhaps paradoxical effect of making this island state seem more "normal," vulnerable as are others to poisonous political perspectives that those committed to more rational and humane outlooks have an obligation to expose.

In *The Politics of Nostalgia*, Spoonley draws upon his doctoral research into neofascism and racism to provide an important overview

of some ugly tendencies imperfectly concealed behind New Zealand's much more pleasant facade. His review places on record detailed information about the existence and activities of a remarkable array of individuals and organizations. In doing so, he documents fairly meticulously the persistence in New Zealand—and, through comparative analysis, in the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada—of political movements and visions deeply inimical to those values and conventions central to the democratic process.

The book's theoretical perspectives and cross-national material, though useful, are overshadowed by the sheer density of bizarre material scrupulously summarized by the author. An interesting feature of the book in this connection, however, is a brief methodological appendix acknowledging various ethical considerations associated with the research. In it the author makes clear not only the distasteful character of his subject matter but, more strikingly in the circumstances, the guidelines that disciplined his relationship with those leaders and participants interviewed in the course of the study. Spoonley's sensitivity to "the rights of the researched," and his open and candid approach in terms of his own values and objectives, appears to have made possible access to materials and viewpoints from sources typically disposed towards suspicion and truculence.

Most of the groups analyzed in this work have displayed limited strength and authority within the New Zealand political process and there seems little likelihood that any of them will gain much of a public following in the foreseeable future. This reflects particular economic, political, and cultural conditions, including a disinclination among most New Zealanders to take political and religious controversies terribly seriously. Despite the absence of traditions of intense political argument, however, Spoonley makes clear the affinities that at times exist between aspects of neofascist and racist claims, on the one hand, and viewpoints more acceptably held within the wider community.

Spoonley also notes briefly the weakness of New Zealand's media in reporting about fringe political movements and consequently the contribution that clumsy reportage can make to legitimizing a group's policies and purposes. This observation underscores the distinctive value of his own endeavors, as do other, almost parenthetical statements about the damage such groups can do to the well-being of those they choose to target.[2] Prospects for lives free from politically induced stress and harassment are enhanced neither by what Spoonley terms "a relatively free market in prejudice," nor by a generally pervasive complacency in New Zealand about the country's ostensible immunity from pernicious political strains.

Despite the variety of extreme thought and behavior encompassed within this study, a unifying feature for many of the groups and personalities discussed is found in the virulent anti-Jewish sentiments to which they subscribe.[3] These obsessions, although corresponding to some extent to what Spoonley characterizes as "relatively low-level prejudice, or folk anti-Semitism," politicize anti-Jewish feeling well beyond what most New Zealanders appear prepared to endorse.[4] Nonetheless the author does not discount the possibility that policies and philosophies antagonistic to Jews may yet gain a higher place on New Zealand's political agenda, with adverse effects for its small Jewish community as well as the country's wider political environment.

NOTES

1. His studies include "New Zealand First! The Extreme Right and Politics in New Zealand, 1961-1981," *Political Science* 33, no. 2 (1981): 99–127; "Race Relations," in *New Zealand: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Paul Spoonley et al. (Palmerston North, N.Z.: Dunmore Press, 1982), 265–290; "The Politics of Racism: The New Zealand League of Rights," in *Tauiwi: Racism and Ethnicity in New Zealand*, ed. Paul Spoonley et al. (Palmerston North, N.Z.: Dunmore Press, 1984), 68–85; *Racism and Ethnicity* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1988); "Racism and Ethnicity," in *New Zealand: A Sociological Introduction*, ed. Paul Spoonley et al. (Palmerston North, N.Z.: Dunmore Press, 1990), 82–97.

2. These issues are considered at greater length in Paul Spoonley and Walter Hirsh, eds., *Between The Lines: Racism and the New Zealand Media* (Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1990), particularly in Spoonley's "Racism, Race Relations, and the Media" (pp. 26–37) and in Lesley Max, "Talkback Radio: Airing Prejudice" (pp. 76–79).

3. This is also the case in David Harcourt, *Everyone Wants to Be Fuehrer: National Socialism in Australia and New Zealand* (Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1972), which reviews some of the same personalities as are found in Spoonley's much more methodical study. Spoonley distinguishes New Zealand's "New Right," with its libertarian economic policies to some extent adopted by the Labour government in 1984 and by the National Party subsequently, from fringe groups promoting racist and anti-Jewish ideologies. A much more extensive critique of dimensions to "New Right" thought within the New Zealand context is provided in Paul Spoonley et al., *Revival of the Right: New Zealand Politics in the 1980s* (Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1988).

4. These attitudes have at times been given expression in policy environments, especially in the hands of bureaucrats administering regulations impinging on Jewish immigration to New Zealand. Ann Beaglehole's history, *A Small Price to Pay: Refugees from Hitler in New Zealand, 1936–46* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1988), and Fred Turnovsky's autobiographical memoir, *Turnovsky: Fifty Years in New Zealand* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990), chronicle the often explicitly anti-Jewish recommendations articulated by officials possessing considerable discretionary powers to admit Jews to the country.