From the 1870s to the 1940s the social assumptions of New Zealanders were so powerful that the realities of economic and social change were forced to adapt to a common myth.\(^1\) The heart of the New Zealand belief system is revealed towards the end of William Satchell's novel, *The Land of the Lost* (1902). Upon learning about the death of the evil publican, a questioner raises the issue of the future of the gumfield frontier once the gum has gone. In answer a visionary, Jess, prophesies:

'\ldots there is a better day coming. Every year the settler is extending his landmarks and rooting himself like the trees he displaces. As the gum goes he advances'.

He turns his face beyond the settlement—a look of inspiration in his eyes. 'I see the apple orchards and the vineyards of the future', he says, 'The men we know — the reckless, the hopeless, the unhappy — are gone to their appointed places. I hear the voices of the children at play among the thick-leaved trees. I hear the mothers singing at their work. Over all the land rests the peace of God'.\(^2\)

What is significant about Jess's vision is the association of the frontier with nature's untamed wilderness which feeds the beast in men. Beneficent nature, by contrast, is identified as the garden paradise, which is nature both cultivated and domesticated by man. It is this conception of nature as Eden, of apple orchards and vineyards, of children playing in thick-leaved trees and singing mothers, that is affirmed as God's destiny for man. The connections here are plain: nature which is tamed into the cultivated and domesticated garden, is God's Own Country. Life in unnurtured nature was placed outside the ambience of the good life. Satchell connected it with impenetrable native bush, Maoris, and male bestiality on the frontier. But if arcadia had nothing to do with untamed nature, it was equally removed from the forces of the city. In *The Land of the Lost* the city was the place of the 'confidence man, the spieler, the fille de joie, the predatory cabman'.\(^3\)

Jane Mander in *Allen Adair* (1925) presents a similar view that human
happiness is derived from a family haven in civilized nature. She makes the additional point that women have an essentially ambiguous role to play in the taming of the wilderness. On the one side, as Allen, the hero discovers, the female presence ('the girl in blue waving from the front door') is essential to transform wild nature into the garden, for women symbolize that touch of homeliness which stems the lonely savagery of men when they live too close to the soil. On the other side, the female presence can tilt the life close to nature towards the artificial society represented by the city, as women are more inclined to 'fussiness' and the attractions of over-refinement than men. As the plot itself demonstrates, Allen's wife, Marion, is incapable of fitting into the spontaneous community, possesses little sensitivity to the beauty of nature, and longs only to take up her place in fashionable Auckland society, the expectation of which had first led her to marry Allen. Complicating matters, there was an inherent anomaly in the act of the garden's cultivation. Allen's excitement about his part in a 'procession of events in the transmutation of bush land into prosperous farms, of isolation into settlement, of lonely tracks into railway lines.' was supportive of the same material progress that initiated the growth of the town. Not that the town itself was necessarily undesirable. As long as it retained its village character it could be accepted as a civilizing influence. At some point, however, the town became the city. It was then that New Zealanders grew alarmed about cancerous urban growth, and condemned this evil force that violated the purity of God's Own Country.

Close examination of public discussion on the panoply of legislation in New Zealand on land, housing, social welfare, education and so on reveals that New Zealanders rarely, if ever, perceived these ambiguities. They were unaware of the intrinsic threats contained in their view of paradise. The moral issues were either black or white. Civilizing the country was wholesome. Yet the city was impure. Inconsistency aside, the city's capacity to evoke hostile responses came basically from two closely related images. The first was that the city, in a primary producing country, was an artificial excrescence, as it possessed no productive base which it could call its own. In consequence the lingering of men about the town detected by New Zealanders from the late 1870s, and the rural/urban drift perceived from the late 1890s, aroused wide-ranging emotional feeling. Apparently every section of opinion attacked the city for being parasitic and predatory; farmers in particular, though by no means exclusively, viewed urbanization as an incubus upon the man on the land. In the popular mind urban growth occurred because the artificial economy of the city attracted, trapped and sustained the unfortunate, the degenerate, the weak-willed and the idle.

The unnatural economy of the city was commonly linked also to urban congestion and overcrowding, and these conditions in turn to a wide variety of physical, moral, social and political ills. Perhaps because his knowledge was limited to the squalor of the East End or a Manchester the New Zealander's bleak perspective on urban culture would have been
quite alien to the proud burgher of a European centre who revered his city as a source of protection and the repository of social symbols associated with a glorious tradition. The New Zealander by contrast perceived the city as a breeding ground for such fearful diseases as consumption and V.D. Even more seriously it was seen as a bacterial culture that contaminated the nuclear family institution. The slum, inextricably connected with city life in the mass mind, led to the mixing of the sexes in one room and hence to immorality. And since close confinement forced children to spend a large part of their time on the street, parental influence and authority were also undermined when son and daughter came into close contact with degenerate adults and the unruly child street gang.

The congested urban environment was, moreover, blamed as the ‘cradle of crime’. Working on the premise that crime was a learnt pattern of behaviour, many concluded that it was caused when the innocent mingled with the criminal in the crowded city surrounds. A more sophisticated version of this idea was that the young and the old alike were allured into criminal careers by the ‘temptations and vicissitudes’ of the town. The corrupt city was also damned as the procreator of poverty. Possessing an artificial economic base the city was thought to be incapable of generating sufficient employment, secure employment, and occupations in which one could, through hard and honest toil, become one’s own boss or a self-made man. It was mainly in the wholesome country that such opportunities existed.

Finally, especially to all those with a vested interest in the social order, the city with its manifold vices was popularly held to be a threat to social control. Vitiating parental authority over the young, it bred anti-social behaviour, and threw up a restless and dependent wage-earning class which was prone to discontent and susceptible to the leadership of the disloyal.

To the sceptical there might be good grounds for questioning the view that the New Zealand moral tradition repudiated the city and sanctified the family as a soil-rooted institution. After all, the preceding synthesis seems an implausibly static conception. Surely, it might be claimed, the high degree of change in the social and economic structures during New Zealand’s history must have modified, even transformed, the social vision of New Zealanders. Those, for example, who assume that the social structure determines social values, would argue that the organization of New Zealand society and correspondingly its culture changed radically from the 1870s to the period following the 1890s. They would suggest that the cessation of borrowing in the 1880s forced a political pattern consisting of a collection of local cliques into one of organized class-based parties. Paralleling this political transformation, the individual’s sense of self-identity was altered so that from an attachment to his local community he developed a self-conscious affinity to his occupation and the organization which represented its interests. Simultaneously a baggage of ideologies developed to rationalize these occupational self-interests.

But this analysis disguises the fact that the supposedly new social and
political organization was directed towards the same ends as the old — the attainment of familial arcadia, as it shall be called. It overlooks, too, the fact that ideological conflict between the newly-arisen occupational interest groups was superficial. The conflict was not over what the good life is, but the means of getting there — again to familial arcadia. Further, it implies that only with the formation of national interest groups could particularist sentiments be replaced by a sense of national self-consciousness. Yet it is most doubtful that a national identity developed after 1900, for the noises of Home and Empire which New Zealanders beat on the tom-tom in the 1920s were just as loud as those some forty or fifty years earlier. This phenomenon also occurred because the New Zealand spirit with its emphasis on familial arcadia was so derivative. The key questions that need to be answered, therefore, are these: from what sources did the notion of familial arcadia arise? Why did it transcend social change and social divisions? Why was it so unanimously agreed upon as the principle upon which the social structure should be based?

In origin the rural myth immigrated in the minds of men as three initially discreet arcadian visions. The first is the Victorian suburban arcadia of the middleclass sentimental family. Its intellectual origins have been extensively analyzed in the works of Lewis Mumford. He argues that the Victorian middle classes responded to the mammon they had created through the strength of their own uncontrolled entrepreneurship by fleeing to the suburbs. The pull of the suburban home was that it created the possibility of imitating in the kitchen, the workshop, and the garden, the exclusive older country house culture of the landed aristocracy, providing ‘a relief from the grim, monotonous, imprisoned collective routine of the city’ as well as the badge of social superiority. The push behind the suburban movement was the desire to create the home as a sanctuary in nature, a haven for women and children from the forces of the festering city slum and the cold-hearted regimen of an over-rationalistic capitalist system. From what Stone says about the Auckland experience, it appears that these impulses behind the Victorian suburban movement were adopted very early by the wealthy business and professional groups in New Zealand. The flight to suburbia in the larger centres became a significant development during the 1870s and 1880s when the influx of immigrants and Vogelite booms blighted the residential areas of the major centres. The country house spirit behind this movement and its attractions to the socially successful is perfectly expressed in Katherine Mansfield’s short story, Prelude (1920).

From then until the 1940s who precisely joined in this unaided, spontaneous suburban development, research has yet to reveal. But from 1900 probably the return to prosperity, cheaper land at the city fringes, the growth of building societies, improvements in city transport, and the continuing spoliation of the inner city residential area, accelerated suburban growth, extending the privilege down the social scale. Later it will be shown how the Labour Party became attached to the suburban arcadia in
state housing policy which was conceptualized as creating the ‘garden city’ and the ‘garden suburb’ for workers’ families.

The second vision, equally middleclass, but humanitarian, was the arcadia of a sturdy yeomanry. Its origins have been analyzed by Coral Lansbury in her Arcady in Australia, an examination of images of Australia in early 19th century English literature. After the bleak convict image of Australia disappeared, the middleclass writer saw in Australia the possibility of salvation for a wide variety of social misfits. Eventually Dickens picked up and developed the image of Australia as the salvation for the slum poor, degraded by the inhuman factory, sapped by moral dissolution and disease. This idea he projected into a vision to resettle the victims of the factory and slum in a continental arcadia, a land of bountiful and surplus pasture, where limitless opportunity would convert the families of the slum poor into stocky yeomen. As a solution to the social problems of an urban society, Lansbury sees behind the image of Australia a humanitarian middleclass expedient to appease the conscience without jeopardizing self-interests, intending to reinforce the existing social order. Given the wide readership of such literature, it is plausible that this image of Australia as the salvation for the urban under-privileged, and the mixture of self-interested and humanitarian motives behind it, was very early internalized by the better-off and the well-established in New Zealand. This was first manifested by Grey and subsequently the dignitaries of the provincial governments when they implemented a multiplicity of measures providing the struggling small settler and the lower class immigrant opportunities to go on to the land. From this point the image became entrenched in the New Zealand humanitarian tradition and influenced a variety of middleclass and wealthy politicians who supported state intervention on closer land settlement with diverging rationalizations: the less doctrinaire, like the patrician Rolleston and the prosperous small-holder McKenzie; and the more doctrinaire, like Stout and Ballance, middleclass professionals, responsive to the imported agrarian creeds of Henry George and John Stuart Mill. By 1906 the tradition was so well established that Massey, the doyen of the conservative order, insisted that every worker should become his own landlord.

The third arcadian vision is also a small family farm one. It is implied by the composition of the mass of assisted British immigrants to New Zealand. Research is now revealing that partly because of the depression in British agriculture, and partly because of a deliberate bias in the Government’s policies on assisted immigration, during the 1870s especially, and in the periods 1904–15 and 1922–7, assisted British immigrants were to a significant degree rural labourers and domestic servants drawn from rural areas, and an unusual frequency of whole families seem to have comprised their number. Originating from economically distressed areas where opportunities for land-holding were few, it is logical to expect that they would have regarded land as a key source of social opportunity, and aspired to acquire land in New Zealand associating it with material
security and social success. As late as 1936 it could be said that ‘people overseas, either from misunderstanding or misinformation, still show themselves ready to take an over-romantic view of the possibilities of land acquisition’ in New Zealand. Moreover, the tendency for the whole family to emigrate to New Zealand from rural areas, where the family was customarily used as an economic unit, meant that the lower class rural immigrant had a strong sense of family cohesion which he transferred to New Zealand. This cohesion was probably reinforced by the shortage of labour on the frontier, which necessitated each family member assisting in the tasks of home or farm.

Transplanted separately into New Zealand, these three visions of arcadia — the suburban middle class, the middleclass Dickensian, and the lower class yeoman — merged together into an almost perfect harmony, to create the common rural myth: all rejected the city; and they equally idealized the soil-based family as the fundamental foundation of the social order. Where they could be divided was not over these principles but the means of achieving them — freehold or leasehold; industrial conciliation and arbitration or class war; social security or social insurance; greater or lesser state intervention. All assumed an economy based on bountiful nature, an inherent potential of perpetual surplus, which a simple institutional change here and there would release. Agreeing on this premise what could divide them was the method of facilitating the inevitable harvest: retrenchment or graduated taxation; self-reliance or borrowing; Douglas Social Credit or nationalization of everything. In short there was an implicit social contract binding them that New Zealanders lived or should live (the distinction was often blurred) in familial arcadia.

What forged this social contract was the common threat of the city. This serpent grew in the garden in two stages. First, it resulted from the gold and Vogelite booms of the 1870s. By 1881 just under 40 per cent of New Zealanders lived in urban areas, attracted or forced there, as the census tells us, by the fact that employment in farming grew more slowly from 1874 to 1886 than in the urban occupations of commerce and finance, industry, and the professions and public administration. The fact that this made little impact on the rural outlook of New Zealanders is demonstrated by their nebulous attitude towards education as an instrument of upward social mobility. Typical was John McKenzie’s statement in 1894 that he saw no point in educating children beyond the rudiments. Later, detached observers such as Reeves, Siegfried, and Rossignol and Stewart reflect this for together they hardly comment on education while pages are devoted to land policy.

In its second stage the serpent’s growth was more rapid and sustained. In 1911 slightly more than 50 per cent lived in urban areas and the proportion rose to slightly less than 60 per cent by 1936. Urban expansion was most pronounced in the larger centres; the New Zealand small town participated in the growth of the new urban frontier to a much smaller degree. Whereas in 1901 26 per cent of the total population lived in boroughs and town
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districts containing between 1,000 and 10,000 inhabitants and 17.9 per cent dwelt in boroughs and town districts of over 10,000 inhabitants, by 1936 the proportions were 17.1 per cent and 41.5 per cent respectively. All this was induced as we know by the revolution in farming, requiring the employment of disproportionately more people in the tertiary sector. It was ironic, therefore, that paralleling urban growth the proportion of persons engaged in primary production declined. Furthermore, not only were relatively fewer New Zealanders living on the land, but also it became comparatively harder to be a self-made man. By 1936 there were proportionately fewer employers and self-employed than in 1896, and proportionately far more working for wages and salaries. The functional basis of the family appears to have declined as well in that the proportion of relatives assisting without pay shrank rapidly between the census of 1896 and that of 1936. In addition, although a central part of the ethos was that access to land should be the key source of social opportunity, by comparing the growth of farm holdings with five of the basic designations in the census we find that three (transport and communication, professional and public administration, commerce and finance) grew substantially faster over the period 1891–1936.

A major facet of this social transformation, sadly unresearched and more important perhaps than the advent of the cow cocky, was the ballooning of the professions and white-collar occupations. From 1906 to 1926, the rate of growth in the numbers of persons occupied in dairy farming was slightly more than those in education; equalled by those in banking, insurance, and law; and exceeded by those in general government administration and most of all in local government administration. The impact of these developments on women’s job opportunities was most significant, especially in the office where, for example, the number of female typists rose from 18 in 1896 to over 6,000 in 1926.

Underpinning this revolution in white-collar and professional employment was a transformation in the social role of the school. After the late 1890s, from proficiency to matriculation, the function of the school in an increasingly urbanized bureaucratic society was to act as a social filter, determining the composition of a new middle class, deciding who could enter white-collar and professional occupations and who could not. From the late 1890s parents gradually recognized that these newly-created occupations were sources of material security and social prestige — their rational though phillistine response to which led them to push their children into the academic streams in expectation that meal tickets would be obtained from passing the Junior Civil Service examination or Matriculation. At the turn of the century parental pressures had forced Seddon to make post-primary schooling free for those who had achieved proficiency, and thereafter it rapidly expanded.

So it was as a consequence of these two spurts of urbanization that the New Zealander was confronted with a terrible dilemma: his ethos was rigidly rural while his social structure became urban. Although he believed
everything connected with the city was bad, it was there increasingly that he searched for security and opportunities. Urban employment fulfilled his material aspirations while rural life was the fulcrum of his values. His spiritual home was in the country whereas his physical nourishment came from the city. Under these stresses one would imagine that the New Zealander, like his American counterpart in a similar period, would have been forced to develop a city culture that fitted his urban social structure. The lesson of the American experience was that the power of the agrarian myth diminished under the pressure of urban realities. 25

What made the New Zealander unique, however, was that nothing like this happened. The myth remained intact because he forced urban realities to conform with his rural culture. In small measure this was facilitated by the spontaneous movement to suburbia by the élite in the late 19th century, and then by an increasing number of the new middle classes from the turn of the century. Here, as we have seen, an exclusive, aristocratic life style close to the soil could be maintained while creating a sanctuary for women and children in an atmosphere of tamed and anglicized nature. 26

But the spontaneous suburban movement in New Zealand showed no sign of rolling back the city and its vicious influences. As a repudiation of the city it affected too few too slowly, unable to bring the urban wage worker his salvation. It is possible that many of the Dickensian humanitarians responded to this problem through the informal organization of the temperance and bible-in-schools movements. Of greatest influence and popularity when urban growth was at its most rapid from the 1890s to the 1920s, these movements might be interpreted as endeavours to impose on the underprivileged in the city a spiritual and moral uplift that would obviate the need for fundamental changes in the status quo. By themselves, they were doomed to failure, perhaps because the city wage earner sought the physical realities of life in the garden, not entry into a heavenly paradise.

In the late 1870s a growing number in the established order had already recognized that workers were being excluded from familial arcadia when with the occurrence of the Long Depression, large-scale unemployment in the towns had first given rise to the fear that restricted access to land was creating urban congestion. 27 It was from this period that concerted action was taken to organize the authority and resources of the state to do battle against the city. From the 1880s to the 1930s, state promotion of closer land settlement was selected as the principal instrument in the attainment of a country of small family farms. It was an instrument determined by the merging of two of the arcadian visions: that of the lower-class rural immigrant for a yeomanly arcadia, from which he had been excluded by unemployment and falling wages in the towns, the very largeness of his numbers, land aggregation and inflated land values; and that of Rolleston, Ballance, McKenzie and the other middleclass heirs of the Dickensian vision of land settlement in the antipodes for the under-privileged.

Consequently after the 1880s land and related legislation practically
monopolized the political stage. Men from Rolleston onwards taxed their ingenuity and provoked fierce passions in the devising of a multiplicity of tenures with safeguards endeavouring to prevent the land monopolist from forcing men to stay in the city; compulsory purchase of estates, state advances and public works in the backblocks were intended to convert city-dwellers into farm holders; producer boards, Mortgage Adjustment Acts, and guaranteed prices all tried to keep failed farmers or farmers threatened with failure from going back to the city.

It might be argued that the raising of the tariff and legislation against sweating like the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act were recognition of the wage worker — skilled or unskilled — as a permanent town fixture. But the anathema of the sweatshop in the Dickensian middleclass tradition was that it tore women and children out of the sanctuary of the family bosom. In this context the elimination of sweating could be viewed as an endeavour to raise the male breadwinner's wages to provide him greater opportunity to save up for farming. What tends to confirm this impression is that craft workers themselves perceived their careers as future farmers — for example, many of the Knights of Labour took up land under the Liberals; one of the 'three cries' in the 1893 election was 'land for the artisan'; and the 1891 Land Bill made residential requirements flexible so that town could acquire land from the Crown well in advance of its occupation.

It might be argued in addition that the pursuit of closer land settlement after the 1880s was not the manifestation of a conviction that the city was bad but the product of small-farmers' political power. Land and farm legislation, however, had created the farmer constituency in the first place; and, furthermore, city people had themselves desired or acquiesced to it. One only has to be reminded here of the original Liberal consensus and that the Reform Party had a base in the suburb as well as in the country. Of course the Liberal consensus eventually fragmented, not over the principle to create a country of small family farms, but rather the means to achieve it and ironically, as shall be seen, over the frustrated desire of urban workers to join the farmers in arcadia.

Many have also claimed, following Siegfried, that the promotion of closer settlement was a function of the pragmatic and empirical outlook of New Zealanders. However, if the family-sized farm had been shaped by practical experience, the product of closely observed trial and error, then it plainly should have been economic and profitable. Yet the fact is that until the mid-1890s small-scale farming generally tended to be uneconomic. True, the family-sized farm became the heart of an expanding economy after the mid-1890s. But if the family farms created from that point had been the deliberate product of economic pragmatism then it is difficult to explain why the putative empirical mind acted so irrationally in its own terms. For example, the largesse of Advances to Settlers contributed to the financing of over-inflated land values and a farmer crushed with debt in the early 1930s. Moreover, of the 4,000 odd soldiers put on the land from 1915
to 1933 about one-third had for a variety of reasons failed or disappeared by 1933. Finally, just under one quarter of dairy farms in the 1930s were considered to provide an inadequate standard of living because they were uneconomic units. From these examples of economic irrationality that characterize the state's promotion of closer settlement it can only be concluded that the family-sized farm was intended less to serve an economic function than to fulfil a social ideal, the creation of an arcadia of small family farms.

As the first line of attack against the city the arcadian dream of small family farms was a dismal failure. The number of farmers — and family-sized farms — increased greatly after the 1880s, but, as previously indicated, in relation to the urban occupations the proportion of farmers was smaller by the 1930s than in the 1880s. The vision founded on its own internal contradictions mainly because with a limited land endowment, a growing population could not be squeezed into the yeoman's arcadia. There was an irony, furthermore, in the fact that the innovations in technology from the 1890s which seemed to make the yeoman arcadia economically feasible, by raising productivity, effectively released rural labour for urban employment. A further irony was that the Education Department from 1899 and the Department of Agriculture from the early 1890s, the chief agencies in the fight against the city challenge, played their parts in urban expansion as the vigour of their policies necessitated that they employ a growing city-centred administration. State intervention on land settlement, the struggle for the yeoman's arcadia, unwittingly ensured that the serpent in the garden grew even faster.

Under the weight of these internal contradictions why did the conception of small-farmer arcadia not break down? The stresses it produced proved quite alarming: from about 1900 the wage workers became estranged from the Liberals, the official architects of the design. So strong was the hold of the rural myth, that they, the workers, could not question the goal itself, and blamed instead its mode of implementation. Excluded from the promised land, the urban worker tended to support more radical measures and solutions — like strike action and nationalization — to break what he perceived as the city capitalist's stranglehold over his rural ambition. The officiating architects of the yeomanry construction — the Liberals and then their successors, Reform — responded to the growing serpent, which their vision unwittingly was feeding, with desperation. Trapped in their own myth of small family farms arcadia, their response to its failures was to do much more of the same. Hence the irrationalities of excessive loans from State Advances (which by inflating land prices made the vision harder to attain for the individual); hence the borrowing of money overseas for public works development in the backblocks (which crushed the small family farm economy with debt); hence, too, the disasters of the soldier settler scheme. Simultaneously, the cruder supporters of the yeomanry vision increasingly blamed the deficiency of their own vision on the personal failings of the city worker — a loafing, good-for-nothing.
spend-all, save-none scrounger, he did not leave the city when there were so many abundant opportunities to go farming, because of his moral deficiencies. Yet all these things missed the point of the problem.

The more progressive and imaginative amongst the technicians of the yeomanry schema, however, really thought they had diagnosed the problem in the urban-biased school. Their intellectual leader was George Hogben, head of the Education Department, 1898–1915. As an enthusiastic proponent of the ‘New Education’ he sought to eliminate from the primary and post-primary systems the emphasis on ‘drilling’ as a teaching method and the severely ‘bookish’ character of the curricula. Instead he believed that learning should be through doing, and that the child learnt best in a curriculum focussed on relating the object learned to the child’s life experience, to ‘the life around’. The average child’s environment Hogben knew to be rural: consequently he instituted changes in the primary curriculum which, along with a greater emphasis on manual and non-academic subjects, introduced a strong dose of nature study at the lower school, leading to gardening and practical agriculture in the standards. At the post-primary level his reforming zeal was concentrated upon the district high schools, into which rural courses were introduced. Eventually he hoped to transform them into rural schools where ‘the rural course would be the course for all’. Undoubtedly, Hogben’s reforms were derived from developments in education innovated overseas — yet it seems clear that he interpreted these almost entirely in terms of the assumptions of the yeomanry vision. He believed, after all, that the farmer was the economic backbone, for which reason he considered the rural bias in schools was essential for scientific farming. He adhered in addition to the romantic sentiment that life in the country was more wholesome than the temptations and vicissitudes of the towns.30

Hogben’s progressive efforts provided a lead for the 1912 Royal Commission on Education, and to J. A. Hanan, Minister of Education 1915–1919, as they also attempted to take the urban mind out of the rural school. In the 1920s the battle against the urban bias was extended: now it became a drive to rusticate the urban school. This was followed by the Department of Education; approved by the 1928 National Industrial Conference; extended by Harry Atmore, Minister of Education in the United Government; and ratified by the parliamentary Select Committee on Education of 1930. In the late 1920s the Labour Party, too, was speaking the same language.31

From Hogben to the 1930s the efforts to knock boys’ education into some sort of agricultural shape went hand in hand with endeavours to eliminate that other facet of the modern urban pattern, the movement of women into the office and the professions. The entry of women into the new city occupations was frowned upon by the same ‘progressives’ who blamed it for undermining the family; and predictably, to reverse the trend, repeated moves were made to redirect girls from academic and commercial courses to homecraft and homemaking. The ultimate logic of Hogben’s
influential concept of making education relevant to the life around, was the policy of the reformed civil service from 1912 to employ women only as temporaries. As Hanan had said in 1916, 'Let us give our girls a good education, even a temporary occupation in the business or industrial world, but let us act so that we and they may realize that not even the lawyer, doctor, statesman, or merchant has a calling so richly fruitful of all that is highest and noblest in national life as the mother of a good home.'

Fortunately for New Zealand mythology, in the desperation to resolve the paradox of a small-holder's arcadia — that retreated with every measure striving for its attainment — the architects gradually defined a possible solution. The intellectual conversion necessary to perceive the urban wage worker as a suburban dweller sharing in the middleclass life style evolved as a piecemeal process. The groundwork for the ultimate conception of the suburb as the city worker's family refuge was prepared by the village settlement schemes. Their basic principles were initially established by Rolleston in Canterbury during the mid-1870s as an experiment to provide temporary support for immigrants. They were endowed with small allotments in agricultural areas where work was likely to be found, and advanced small cash loans to build their own cottages. Subsequently, Ballance from 1884 to 1887 and later McKenzie from 1891, directed these principles towards the resolution of the more general problem of growing unemployment and poverty in congested town centres. Allotments were still provided in country areas where part-time wage labour could be found, as were small loans for improvements and the construction of cottages. As an integral facet of closer land settlement policy, the emphasis now in village settlement, constrained by a situation of land scarcity, was to turn urban workers into part-time peasants. By the late 1890s, however, this attack on city over-crowding was breaking down. With the rise of the new dairy and fat lamb farmers workers sought not an arduous peasant life but occupation of larger areas of land to engage in profitable farming. The village settlement mode of closer land settlement, furthermore, was of less appeal to city labourers because of improving employment conditions in the towns. A further adaptation of the concept of the worker as a yeoman thus proved necessary. Rather unconsciously the Liberals made a seminal move in this direction when they brought down amendments in 1896, 1897 and 1899 to the 1894 Land for Settlements Act. Specific provisions in this legislation enabled the state to purchase land close to the larger centres. This it could subdivide into plots of a few acres each that a town wage earner might acquire on which, with the assistance of a small state loan, he could build his own cottage. By implication the wage worker could then live in spirit as a yeoman while in substance retain the capacity to pursue urban wage employment by being within commuting distance of the town. In effect the earlier image of the worker seeking salvation in a village settlement had been mutated into a vision of the proletariat's redemption as a city-commuting peasantry dwelling in suburbia. Whether or not they fully realized it the Liberals in
fact gave birth to a progeny of importance. The cross-breeding of urban labourer with the small holder stimulated a growing public demand that the state itself should build the cottages to encourage more urban workers to take root in this quasi-rural setting. From about 1898 through to the Workers Dwelling Act of 1905 and 1910, and Advances to Workers in 1906, the rhetoric in public discussion went something like this: the Government should provide workers’ homes at a reasonable distance out in the country, whence the worker could commute to his city job by train, tram or bicycle. On the land of his dwelling (the size suggested usually varied from one to three acres, others thought more was necessary, others less) he could keep a cow or a goat, a few fowls, have the proverbial pig in the sty, produce his own potatoes, and have his own orchard. All these things would assist him to maintain his family, secure them from the fear of want and privation. Giving government assistance to acquire his own home on his own piece of land would nourish a spirit of self-reliance and thrift, make people more moral and self-denying, lead them to manifest more self-restraint, invulnerable to discontent and disloyalty. It would be ideal for bringing up children as well. The rural cottage in its ample setting, provided plenty of fresh air and open space to nurture healthy children, who could be educated in the virtues of the soil.

Many commentators on state housing have argued that the move towards it was actuated by the self-evident need to deal with a practical problem of bad housing and shortage of housing. What the argument ignores is that most contemporaries implicitly and explicitly rejected out of hand the idea of the Government re-housing working-class families in flats, tenements or multi-unit dwellings of any kind whether within the city or outside it in the suburbs. Further, never deeply considered nor supported except by a handful, was the possibility that tenement housing nearer the city centre — close to a park, with access to allotments — might be cheaper to build, and just as sanitary, comfortable, private, closer to work, and equally capable of providing space for children to play in. That single unit dwellings scattered over the country might be injurious to community was completely overlooked — naturally because the assumption was that the family was a self-contained soil-rooted institution. One legislative councillor in 1905 who supported tenement housing indeed recognized that he would be received with very little sympathy. Like the family farm, the state house was, in its initial conception, an affirmation of the New Zealand moral vision. It was not an accommodation with the city because it was expressly intended to starve the serpent of its ‘overcrowded back street’ denizens. Rather it was an enforced compromise with the in-built failings of closer land settlement policy to satisfy the mass demand for profitable small farms. Rejecting city culture, it strove to create a family centred Garden of Eden for the city worker. He was still perceived as a prospective yeoman, not full-time like the rising dairy farmer, but part-time like his peasant village settlement precursor.

In practice the subsequent operation of Advances to Workers of 1906 led
not to this yeomanry facet of the vision, but to the genteel middleclass concept of suburban arcadia: of shrubs, lawns and do-it-yourself, not pigs and cabbages. Indeed it was remarkably successful in removing a multitude of lower paid white-collar workers and many skilled wage earners from the vicious habits of overcrowding in the towns to a more shabby version of the social success implied by the well-established middleclass vision of suburban arcadia.

The state housing schemes from 1905 to the early 1930s by contrast failed to elevate the less fortunate into any sort of arcadia. Too few homes were built to ease the city's congestion (despite the glaring housing problem exposed by the 1919 influenza epidemic). Even though the houses were predominantly single-unit dwellings with individual sections they possessed little appeal. The shrinking land frontier and consequent rising land prices (especially around the main centres) compelled the state to build some homes in inaccessible areas. Besides, it is likely that with the example of expanding middleclass suburban arcadia, the state house with its village settlement tradition reeked of the peasant, an odour conspicuously different from the aristocratic perfume of the middleclass garden.

Hence the role of the first Labour Government: it democratised the middleclass suburban life-style. Labour's commitment to the rural myth goes back at least to its immediate antecedent, the Social Democratic Party of 1913. A compromise between the divergent tendencies within the labour movement, the S.D.P.'s platform is a good reflection of frustrated aspirations amongst wage workers at this time. It is noteworthy that in a period of intense industrial unrest and talk of inevitable class conflict, the S.D.P. could state in point seven of its programme: '... the establishment of homes and of improved farms as going concerns to be within the reach of all workers.' This indicates that in a diminishing land frontier the goal of a small family farm was outside the worker's grasp. Also revealing is that access to the suburban home, a goal of the same importance as the farm, was not adequate under Advances to Workers and state housing. It was thus in the inner city constituencies, beyond the reach of beneficent nature, that Labour's political base lay. Admittedly during the 1920s Labour became preoccupied with the desperate, politically impeding, search for methods to transform city wage workers into small farmers. But Labour was saved from the bankruptcy of their futile quest by, possibly, the class conscious Harry Holland. Within the party during the 1920s Holland seems to have disseminated the idea that the inner city under-privileged would be regenerated in the environment of the garden city or garden suburb. These evocative terms were derived from two English town planners, Ebenezer Howard and Raymond Unwin. Their visionary writings at the turn of the century strongly influenced the language and thinking on urban design and architecture the world over, including New Zealand from at least 1910. Except for a common middleclass romantic attachment to nature, their ideas were dissimilar. Unwin was an espouser of garden suburbs, planned to maximize space for
parkland and internal gardens. Howard was the apostle of recolonizing the inhabitants of the shapeless and squalid metropolis into coherently planned, high density garden cities, each of which was carefully balanced in economic function and social composition, and surrounded by green belt. The followers of both theorists selectively modified and mixed these ideas. Consequently their terms became practically interchangeable when deployed by others, who tended to use them to articulate any form of planned suburban or low density urban development that incorporated a high degree of green and open spaces. Nonetheless, responsive as always to overseas creeds expressing a rural notion, many New Zealanders found this hotchpotch of ideas appealing, so closely allied were they to the country’s own imported middleclass suburban tradition. Extending the middleclass suburban life style to the worker fitted the New Zealand intellectual tradition since the worker had already been mentally projected into suburbia. The garden suburb modified this perspective as it conjured up the worker as less rustic than middleclass, more genteel than yokel — differences of degree not kind. Why Holland in particular was receptive to these conceptions was perhaps that they were suggestive of the socialist idiom. They involved planning — implying scope for strong state action; and Howard himself emphasized that the land of the garden city should be corporately or municipally owned — which again had socialist implications. Most of all there was the visionary dimension. The title of Howard’s work, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, was resonant of the socialist utopia of the future (with a hint of Henry George, as the first edition itself suggested with its title, *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Land Reform*). For these reasons it was logical, though ironic, that Holland proclaimed the necessity for the state to re-settle inner city workers in gracious suburban environs — the traditional New Zealand middleclass arcadia where tamed nature created a sentimental sanctuary for the family. 

Discussing the Town Planning Bill of 1926 Holland described in glowing terms some garden suburbs which had been established in Australia. It was an idyllic picture of flower gardens, curved streets, and single-unit dwellings — a blending of natural beauty, open spaces, generous comfort, and family privacy — which he painted. Then he said, ‘One could easily understand its effect, not only upon the physical conditions but also upon the minds of the children for whom a new psychology was being created. When we actively enter upon town-planning not only do we make for materially improving men, women and children in a physical sense, but we also improve them in a moral sense; for improved material conditions always mean enlarged possibilities for moral improvement.’ What Holland meant by the morally uplifting effect of the single-unit garden-suburbs home, was made explicit in 1936 by Mark Fagan, Labour’s leader in the Legislative Council. Speaking on housing policy he stated that the Government ‘believes that it is contrary to the best interests of family life that three and four families should live in one house, because living under
such circumstances there cannot be that parental control that is desirable and possible when a family occupies its own home'.

These family-centred rural preconceptions were subsequently visualized in a set of architectural designs for the Department of Housing Construction in 1938. Each depicted a charming, spacious single-unit home in the Georgian style, surrounded by a vast sweep of lawn that was artfully graced with shrubs, hedges, and beautiful tall trees. In practice the department did in fact attempt to create an environment of middleclass nature for the transplanted wage-earner’s family. A tool shed came with each single-unit dwelling on its quarter acre section. A landscape gardener was appointed to plant out hedges and trees on occupied sections; power poles were eliminated and tenants were encouraged to provide lawns and improve their gardens. By 1940 the department could congratulate itself that ‘in the general beautification and improvements that have been effected, many of the department’s housing schemes throughout the Dominion have been transformed into veritable garden suburbs.’ The perjorative association of multi-unit housing with overcrowding remained. Sir Arthur Tyndall, former director of the department, subsequently recorded that ‘I remember showing the then Prime Minister Mr. Peter Fraser over a multi-unit block in Lower Hutt which was the first one of its kind to be completed. When I told him it was the first he muttered rather acidly “and I hope it will be the last!”’

Not that Labour ignored other aspects of the rural myth. Guaranteed prices provided a more stable economic basis for the family farm — while social security under-wrote the material foundations of the formerly functional family. In post-primary education after 1944 a core course for girls was introduced with a strong component of homemaking; and Labour worried considerably over the role of the agricultural courses in boys’ education.

In conclusion the formation of the new urban frontier left the basic social assumptions of New Zealanders largely intact and unchanged. The threatening forces associated with the city crystallized a highly durable and conservative structure of beliefs. Its elements were distilled from three inherently compatible, imported, moral visions. Its spirit, a common myth of familial arcadia, New Zealanders preserved within the protective shell of the modern state. Its physical embodiment was the small family farm and the suburban home. As a consequence, failing to discard the essence of their British heritage, New Zealanders evolved neither a strong nor a distinctive sense of national identity. As Reeves proudly asserted in A Colonist in His Garden,

Yet that my heart to England cleaves
This garden tells with blooms and leaves
In old familiar throng,
And smells, sweet English, every one,
And English turf to tread upon,
And English blackbird’s song. . . .
And with my flowers about her spread
(None brighter than her shining head),
The lady of my close,
My daughter, walks in girlhood fair.
Friend, could I rear in England's air
A sweeter English rose?

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NOTES

1 This article is based on a paper read at the New Zealand University Historian's Conference, Palmerston North, August 1974.
3 ibid., p. 30. The human indignity of urban life is variously portrayed in other areas of New Zealand fiction, e.g. in Frank Sargeson’s story That Summer (‘Town’s no good, I told myself, a man doesn’t have any say, he just gets pushed about’), and John Mulgan’s Man Alone.
5 Americans, apparently, have displayed a similar ambivalence, albeit a more conscious one. See Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden, Oxford, 1967; Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness, New York, 1964, ch. IX.
7 Even the normally detached census taker in 1926 was disturbed by it, 1926 Census, I, 4. There was also an official smugness over the capacity of New Zealand to avoid the urban concentration of Australia, see e.g. New Zealand Official Year-Book, 1900, p. 95.
8 See also the connection between the town, V.D., sexual promiscuity amongst the young, and the breakdown of parental authority drawn by the Board of Health Committee Report on Venereal Diseases in New Zealand, AJHR, 1922, II, H — 31A.
9 For some views of the expert civil servant connecting the vicissitudes and temptations of the town with crime and juvenile delinquency, see ibid., 1900, II, E — 3; 1917, I, E — 1A; 1934–5, III, H — 20, p. 1.
15 Desire to avoid replicating the agrarian tumult of Ireland was also of influence here. It is significant that Ballance explicitly drew parallels between the dangers of a growing town population in New Zealand and rural unrest in the U.K., both of which he said would not have occurred had land settlement been easier, NZPD, LXII (1888), 252.
16 NZPD, CXXXVIII (1906), 327.
20 See also A. E. Campbell, Educating New Zealand, Wellington, 1941, pp. 89–90, 172–3.
21 See the table in 1936 Census, I, 10.
22 On occupational status the calculations were based on the data for non-dependents in the tables in 1896 Census, Table XI, 31; and 1936 Census, X, 4.
23 1926 Census, IX, 8.
26 In New Zealand fiction the role of the suburb in the life style of the new middle classes during the early 20th century is sensitively portrayed in Robin Hyde's The Godwits Fly (1938). For the desperately respectable Mrs. Augusta Hannay, creating a pathetic flower garden in the clay of an outer Wellington suburb evokes the life of an English country lady she dreams of leading, while her home provides protection for the children from 'black and slatternly' Thorndon, and the slums of Newtown and 'Oddipore', where drunks lurch, Asians with their unmentionable vices dwell, and the filthy children of the poor lick their snot from tram windows.
27 Closer land settlement in the early 1880s was also seen as a way of encouraging immigration. Even so Rolleston in 1879 argued that 'under the present system of immigration, that which prevented the rise of working-men and prevented them from realizing their hopes was the payment of high rents through being obliged to stick about the towns, where they were not able to obtain a roof over their heads for themselves and their families without paying an extravagant rent. . . . If they simply carried on immigration and public works they would merely have a floating population, wandering about the country, having no interest in the colony, and never becoming good citizens. It was said, four hundred years before the Christian era, that the greatest teacher of morality was the possession of land. Nobody believed in that more strongly than he did . . .', NZPD, XXXII, 580–1.
33 Downes, pp. 281ff.
34 ibid., p. 245, 250–1, 253–4. As early as 1885 Ballance had said 'that the true outlet for the labouring-classes is to have small holdings in the neighbourhood of large towns on liberal conditions', NZPD, LIII (1885), 45. The origins of the concept of the urban worker as suburban dweller needs further research.
35 See e.g. the statements by the Member for Eden, John Bollard, the chief advocate of state provided workers' dwellings, ibid., CII (1898), 499–500; CVI (1899), 423, 453–5; CXIII (1900), 632–3; CXXI (1902), 374–5; CXXIII (1903), 415; CXXVII (1903), 704. See also CXXXV (1905), 83ff.; 857ff.; CXXXVIII (1906), 266ff.; CLIII (1910), 683ff.
37 NZPD, CXXXV (1905), 899 (Bolt). My critics have rightly indicated that suburban land was cheaper than that closer to city centres — but if economic considerations were paramount and cultural influences irrelevant for the development of suburbia they must
explain why single-unit dwellings prevailed when multi-unit housing provided higher returns in relation to the costs of land and construction.

38 Metge, pp. 2–3. Significantly, in some of the state housing projects of the 1920s dwellings were grouped together in the manner of an English rural village.

39 See Mumford, *The City*, pp. 566–7, 586ff.; and his *Culture*, pp. 392ff. These ideas were at the centre of the town planning conference in Wellington, 1919.

40 NZPD, CCX (1926), 727. He was familiar with these ideas at least as early as 1919, ibid., CLXXXV (1919), 366. Also significant was the fact that Holland had a passionate interest personally in flowers and gardens, see P. J. O’Farrell, *Harry Holland Militant Socialist*, Canberra, 1964, p. 205. Perhaps Nash’s influence was important too. The first minister in charge of state housing, he came from Selby Oak, which adjoins Bourneville, one of the first garden cities. The earliest reference to garden cities I have found in New Zealand is NZPD, CLIII (1910), 691.

41 ibid., CCVL (1936), 620.

42 AJHR, 1938, B — 13A, pt. II.

43 ibid., 1940, B — 13, pt. II; see also ibid., 1939, B — 13, pt. II; 1938, B — 13A, pt. II.

44 ‘Memoirs of Sir Arthur Tyndall’, MS in possession of Sir Arthur, kindly lent to me by him. Multi-unit dwellings were built by Labour mainly for pensioners and childless couples.

45 See W. B. Sutch, *The Quest for Security in New Zealand*, Oxford, 1966, pp. 266ff.; Thom, pp. 38–9. The myth was still strong enough in 1944 for the consultative committee on the Post-Primary Curriculum to state that horticulture was a great craft, one of the oldest and most honoured in man’s history, quoted ibid., p. 80.