

*Buying the Land, Selling the Land: Governments and Maori Land in the North Island 1865–1921*. By Richard Boast. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2008. 485pp. NZ price: \$60.00. ISBN: 978-0-86473-561-4.

IF THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL'S INQUIRIES have produced a vast quantity of work stressing Māori grievances and vilifying the Crown, its agents and the Native Land Court, they have also spawned a number of publications seeking to counter the impact of those studies. As its blurb states, *Buying the Land, Selling the Land* is a 'reaction to the "the-Crown-has-been-very-naughty" school of New Zealand history'. It is also a counter to David Williams's *Te Kooti Tango Whenua*, which refers to the Native Land Court quite explicitly as the 'land taking court'. By contrast, Richard Boast sets out to show that, despite their devastating effects, the work of the court and the practices of government land purchase were not designed to be damaging to Māori but rather an unfortunate consequence of misguided good intentions.

Drawing on a vast array of Māori Land Court minute books and reports compiled for the Waitangi Tribunal as well as secondary sources, Boast has produced a work that will be of great service to New Zealand historians. The book is thematically arranged. Chapters consider the legal framework, native land policy in its political contexts, economic and environmental factors and the process of land purchasing, as well as case studies. One of the case study chapters concerns two specific blocks (Ruapehu–Tongariro and Tūtira), while the other looks at the Tūranga (Poverty Bay) region. These detailed studies are, in many ways, the most revealing as they demonstrate step by step how multi-layered forces led to the inexorable alienation of Māori land in a diverse range of circumstances.

Some of the points raised are not new; for example, that the settler demand for freehold land had an ideological basis; that, for Māori, the possession of land did not equate to wealth; that the comparative virtue of land sellers versus land holders was unclear; that the cost of surveys was crippling; and that Māori were disadvantaged by not having the same access to land development finance as Pākehā settlers. But Boast has taken some of these further by explaining why surveys were so expensive and why Māori needed more cash on hand as capital to develop their land than did Pākehā to achieve the same ends. The point is clearly made that poverty frequently drove Māori to sell and that poverty was often a result of court processes. The coercive nature of the systems is emphasized.

Boast admits there is a very important difference between intention and reality — the reality being that the court was very damaging indeed to Māori — and acknowledges that much of the legislation was unfair and unreasonable. Consequently, the evidence for benign intent is often hard to discern. As he points out, Māori were not involved in discussions concerning the Native Land Acts of 1862 and 1865. This may be significant given that deliberations began in 1856 (p.61) when the previously flourishing North Island Māori economy went into serious decline, the Pākehā population had almost equalled that of Māori, settlers had control of the new parliament, and the King Movement was on the rise. It is also significant in light of Donald McLean's invitation to the rangatira at the 1860 Kohimarama conference to work with government in devising laws to better protect their lands and Te Keene's response that: 'These laws are given for me to look at only, not to participate in.'<sup>1</sup>

Boast urges readers to 'recognise that the Government purchasing of Maori land was in its own way driven by genuine, if blinkered, idealism' but government policies that increasingly favoured settlers over Māori and proposals to isolate 'Maori autonomous zones ... by a programme of strategic roads through the North Island interior' were the product of that same idealism (p.131). As the book notes, John Locke's theory that property in land could only arise from the expenditure of labour and capital was highly convenient for settlers and other interested parties (p.24). So, too, were the oft-expressed

opinions of the likes of William Fox, who argued that land ownership was harmful, even fatal, for Māori, which helped to shape policies and legislation.

Insights into the development of political thinking, protective measures destined to be overridden, and the more nuanced pictures of key players are informative. However as Ray Fargher has shown in his recent biography of McLean, good intentions very often came to nought when faced with settler opposition.<sup>2</sup> Boast suggests that '[n]ineteenth-century immigrants can hardly be blamed for wanting to see Māori title extinguished and land made available for settlement' (p.121). But while it is helpful to understand the theological and ideological impulses behind the pressure they exerted on policymakers, which goes a long way towards explaining the blinkers, they also reveal why 'good intentions' could not survive. Given overtly hostile attitudes, references to Māori as unwanted competition (p.63), and the 1890s rhetoric of landlordism, it might be asked to what extent humans apply their own blinkers to justify policies that work to their advantage? And, as Boast points out, settler land hunger could be mediated and restrained by legal protections, but so, too, could greed subvert legal protections (p.3).

Policymakers and legislators certainly had their critics. It is important to note, therefore, that the remark on p.388 to the effect that *Te Wananga* was government-subsidized is incorrect as that paper was established by Māori and others involved in the Repudiation Movement — including John Sheehan who was involved prior to becoming Minister of Native Affairs. Established specifically to counter the government's *Te Waka Māori o Niu Tirani*, which supported McLean's policies, and as a mouthpiece for Māori, *Te Wananga* strongly opposed the Native Land Court.

Because the focus is on the Crown's Māori land policies and practices, *Buying the Land, Selling the Land* goes only some way towards setting these into the wider contemporary social and economic context. It is to be hoped that further research by social and economic historians may eventually deepen our understanding of the handicaps faced by Māori during this period, the ways they engaged with government policies, as well as the strategies they employed to cope with them.

The history of Māori land policy and practice is important but not inherently riveting, so Boast is to be congratulated for producing a very readable narrative set off by an eye-catching and imaginative cover design. Tighter editing might have reduced the weight of the volume, eliminating unnecessary repetition as well as the occasional typographical error. But, all in all, *Buying the Land, Selling the Land* is a very welcome guide through what is for many a complex and confusing mire of policy and legislation, and it is assured of a wide and grateful readership.

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*Ngāi Tahu: A Migration History.* By Rawiri Te Maire Tau & Atholl Anderson. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2008. 272pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 978-1-877242-39-7.

TAU AND ANDERSON HAVE CRAFTED THEIR BOOK like an attractive cloak around Carrington's original typescript, yet in weaving it they have created some decorations that detract somewhat from the original. Some might say that a cloak makes up for any unsightliness in the wearer but, equally, it may also take focus away from some of the wearer's positive qualities.

The editing provides an additional focus on Ngāi Tūhaitara (Tau's clan<sup>1</sup>) beyond that which is present in Carrington's text before Chapter 12, and was almost certainly not intended by the main informants for the early chapters: Hariata Whakatau of Kāti Kurī and, to a lesser extent, Peter MacDonald of Rangitāne — for example, the inference