

Palmer: The Parliamentary Years. By Raymond Richards. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2010. 472pp. NZ price: \$45. ISBN: 978-1-877257-92-6.

THIS AUTHORISED, YET INDEPENDENT, BIOGRAPHY of Sir Geoffrey Palmer aims to recognise Palmer's political role in law reform. From his early work on New Zealand's no-fault accident compensation scheme in the 1970s, to a stream of statutes while he was Deputy Prime Minister and 'chief legislator' in the fourth Labour government (1984–1990), Palmer made a prodigious contribution to reshaping — and tidying — the laws of this country. Famously, Palmer wrote the Constitution Act 1986 and the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986, and was responsible for a royal commission on the electoral system. He also spearheaded the 1990 Bill of Rights and the draft legislation that led to the Resource Management Act. As Richards points out, less well known is that Palmer 'shaped the legislation that applied Rogernomics' (p.398).

Through the parameters of Palmer, Richards seeks to claim a role for Palmer in the 1980s reforms, alongside Lange and Douglas. The book opens not with his subject's upbringing, but with one of the defining moments in the making of a nuclear-free policy and identity — the USS *Buchanan* incident in January 1985 — and ends in 1990, when Palmer stepped down after 13 months as Prime Minister. Indeed, Richards maintains that Palmer, not Lange, made New Zealand nuclear-free: 'Palmer effectively decided the matter' (p.29). As Acting Prime Minister at the time that the request for a ship visit arrived from the United States, Palmer made his decision on legal grounds, as he always did. He decided that the government could not conclude on the balance of proof that the USS *Buchanan* did not carry nuclear weapons; and Lange, recalled in haste from the Pacific, 'accepted Palmer's judgement' (p.30). Here, as elsewhere in the book, Richards unearths rich evidence that extends knowledge about the fourth Labour government; in this case, by filling gaps in the puzzle of claims and counter-claims surrounding the break-up of the Anzus alliance and the development of the nuclear-free policy. From his extensive research in Palmer's personal papers, Richards presents a valuable alternative view that balances insider accounts by Lange and Michael Bassett, as well as a rich source of material that will assist students of history to reach their own conclusions.

Written as a traditional political biography, *Palmer* is an analytical narrative history based on a close reading of archives. This approach bestows both advantages and shortcomings. One of the book's strengths is the context provided on New Zealand politics in the late twentieth century, particularly the Muldoon era. Richards shows how Palmer built his political career by challenging Robert Muldoon's misuse of executive power. Two examples are Muldoon's ending of the Kirk Labour government's superannuation scheme by press statement in December 1975, when only Parliament could make or unmake law; and the proposal to build a high dam at Clyde, one of the 'Think Big' projects, for which the Muldoon government introduced special legislation to over-rule a High Court judgement. The reader is also reminded that, under Muldoon, Parliament did not sit all year (in 1984, Parliament did not meet until 1 June). Palmer's Constitution Act 1986 had its origins in the 1984 constitutional crisis.

Richards makes a convincing case that Palmer's set of law reforms is as significant as Douglas's economic reforms of the 1980s. While the author considers Palmer's reforms were less visible than the ones that accompanied Rogernomics, in the long run it may be that Palmer's input is more recognised because his legacy is a raft of statutes. This legacy includes constitutional changes to contain executive power, including the shift in the voting system to MMP. The State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986 is another creation that had consequences not merely for state asset sales but for the status of the Treaty of Waitangi. Richards recounts how Palmer was responsible for the original bill and for the landmark section 9, which was inserted at the last minute in response to a report from the Waitangi Tribunal. This triggered the New Zealand Maori Council case against the

Crown, which led to the defining of Treaty principles, and stopped the transfer of land and other assets to the new government corporations until the case was heard by the Court of Appeal.

Strict adherence to chronology, on the other hand, creates problems for the book's logical flow. The narrative approach conveys a sense of Palmer's diary and punishing schedule. But key themes receive disjointed coverage because the text jumps between pieces of legislation, Palmer's diverse activities and political developments. Likewise some judicious editing of detail might have been kinder to readers. Nor is the concluding assessment entirely consistent with claims made in the book's opening pages. By the end, Palmer 'led the decision' to deny port access to the USS *Buchanan* (p.398), which is not as strong as the opening endorsement of Richard Prebble's claim that Palmer 'made' New Zealand nuclear-free (p.30).

That said, this is an important contribution to the field of contemporary political history in this small country. Until now political scientists and economists have dominated writings on the political and economic ruptures in late twentieth-century New Zealand. This is a welcome, scholarly intervention by a historian that opens fresh lines of inquiry for the future.

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For Gallant Service Rendered. The Life & Times of Samuel Austin, NZ Cross, 1831–1903. By Barbara Mabbett. Steele Roberts Aotearoa, Wellington, 2012. 229pp. NZ price: \$34.99. ISBN: 978-1-877577-71-0.

IN JANUARY 1903 the town of Wanganui turned out in force to farewell Samuel Austin, a respected citizen for more than half a century. His coffin, borne on a gun carriage, was escorted through the streets by the Wanganui Rifles, who also supplied a firing party as he was laid to rest. Born in Tandragee, County Armagh, Austin had seen service in New Zealand with both the imperial forces and local contingents. A sometime settler recalled to the ranks in the 1860s, he had been the recipient of a New Zealand Cross, one of only 23 awarded, a decoration deemed second only to the Victoria Cross. Yet, if widely respected in his time, Austin soon faded from general historical consciousness.

Studies of nineteenth-century immigration to New Zealand have to date paid comparatively little attention to the role of the imperial regiments as vehicles for the transfer of potential migrants. Over the three decades from 1840, 14 imperial foot regiments were at various times posted to the colony. While understandably the numbers fluctuated, by the mid 1860s around 10,000 professional soldiers were in the field. Yet their names do not appear as arrivals on shipping lists, nor, officers apart, do they feature in contemporary newspaper columns. As individuals, they were near invisible. Over the same 30 years, however, more than 3600 took their discharges in the colony, Samuel Austin being one of them.

Austin, aged 13, enlisted in the 65th (2nd North Yorkshire Riding) Regiment of Foot at Banbridge in August 1844. There was nothing incongruous in this. Regardless of nominal county affiliations, in most regiments Irish were heavily over-represented, being regarded as a handy augmentation pool for maintaining corps strength. Quite what impelled Austin to take the shilling is unclear, but a family record of army service and a youthful taste for adventure may have played a part. From training at the 65th's principal Irish depot at Mullingar, the regiment was ordered to Chatham 12 months later, thence to New South Wales as escorts on convict ships. Austin was in a detachment of 35 who embarked for Norfolk Island in December 1845. Travelling on to Sydney, they joined a