

*The Quest for Security in New Zealand 1840 to 1966.* By W. B. Sutch, O.U.P., Wellington, 1966. 512 pp. N.Z. price: \$6.50.

WHEN Dr W. B. Sutch, a public servant, wrote *The Quest for Security in New Zealand* and then *Poverty and Progress in New Zealand* in 1939-40 the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, refused permission to publish them. A distinguished head of department suggested to the author that he lock them up for a long time. Had the Prime Minister seen Dr Sutch's new book in manuscript one hesitates to think what Siberia, what Index, what bonfires, war-time might have produced.

This is certainly the most controversial book written on our history. Written by a New Zealander who knows his country as well as anyone—at the age of twenty he was thinning turnips in the Rangitikei district. Written by one of the most influential people in modern New Zealand—before 1935 he was one of Coates's putatively socialist economic 'doctors'. He helped to found the Reserve Bank. He was economic adviser to Walter Nash, Labour's Minister of Finance after 1935. And, among many rôles, permanent head of the Department of Industries and Commerce from 1958. One of our few original and one of our best-known economists too; and a lively writer.

Naturally enough, Dr Sutch's experiences mould his writing. This is really two books. The first eight chapters are history. They were published by Penguins, under the same general title, in 1942, and will not be reviewed here. The remaining eleven chapters are a mixture of history and reminiscence. Indeed a future biographer might find the author's career, as well as his prejudices and opinions, mirrored in the narrative. Certainly I feel that most of the most fascinating passages are written about episodes which occurred when the author was close to the centre of politics and 'in the know'. When he goes abroad, to UNRRA or the UN; perhaps even when he is in the army in 1943; there seems to be a falling off of tension. If this is mere fancy, it is at least true that the most striking episodes are those related by Dr Sutch as eye-witness: Jordan and Eden in the League Council in 1937, for instance, or Walter Nash visiting the British bankers and politicians in 1936-7.

The first book and the second are tied together by a common concern for the life of the ordinary New Zealander, of the poor; for New Zealand educational and cultural life; and by the author's intense concern for his country.

But in the second book, written by an older Sutch, a new, insistent theme is nearly dominant. The need for industrial development becomes a central idea, placed alongside the focus of the first book, which was the growth of social security. In the original book, although information is given about the history of early industry, this industrial theme was of little account: neither 'industries' nor 'industrial development' appears in its index. In the index to the present edition these and similar topics form a major section.

Dr Sutch is a left-wing economic nationalist. Patriotism is the source of the passion which shows through the discussion of economic policy, of those men who have encouraged industrial development which will bring New Zealand to real independence; and of those who have hindered it and left New Zealand an 'economic colony', the puppet of foreign financiers and their governments.

It is clear to the reader that Dr Sutch favours government control of banking; centralised planning; and industrial growth. He favours a high

degree of local ownership of industries and, more important, local decision on the permitted degree of foreign ownership. Like an earlier left wing, nationalist historian—a politician, not a civil servant—W. P. Reeves, Dr Sutch opposes heavy overseas borrowing. Taxation, it seems, must largely replace foreign investment.

Whether these views are justified is not here at issue; they are reasonable, and widely shared, if rarely with such intensity. When they become one of the organising principles of a book, however, they produce a unique one and give a novel perspective view of New Zealand history; one not without its elements of melodrama.

The chief 'baddies' are Peter Fraser, Sir Walter Nash, F. P. Walsh of the Federation of Labour, and all who have opposed industrial development. Their crime is to have been 'at heart, fundamentalist free traders'. (Free traders are not free traders, but those who think some industries might, in New Zealand, be 'uneconomic'.) The need to industrialise comes close to being an obsession. The theme constantly recurs. The author can scarcely forbear to fire passing jibes at its enemies at every opportunity. Nash opposes exchange appreciation in 1948 'for it savoured of something too definite and sweeping'; about criticism during the war 'Fraser was almost pathological'. After the way the New Zealand Government, and Nash especially (Lord Norman 'found it difficult to agree with him in any particular'), were treated by the British authorities in 1936-7, it seems hard to criticise them for fear of bankers, for financial orthodoxy, for failing to reform the economic structure (e.g. pp. 227, 235, 473-5). Rarely does Dr Sutch concede them merit.

The National Party, of course, is as bad—it wished to 'return to the nineteen-twenties and free trade'. On Sir Sidney Holland, Dr Sutch is devastating: 'His real difficulty' (in the War Cabinet) 'was that he had no personal contribution to make.'

What makes the battle implausible, makes the spectators cease to suspend disbelief (as in many a 'western') is the appearance, through smoke and shot, of the 'goodies'. Their leaders are at first John A. Lee and then A. H. Nordmeyer. But who make up the posse? H. T. Armstrong and D. G. McMillan (who both have rôles of exceptional virtue), Barnard, Ormond Wilson, Herring, Williams, Carr, Howard, Lyon, Langstone . . . . History is a success story; the names of the losers are often forgotten, if ever known. But the threepenny (depression-time, matinee price) seats wonder: 'Can the "goodies" possibly win?' The villains look so much larger than most of them.

That Dr Sutch's view of recent history differs from many (most?) of his countrymen's is clear when we reach the years 1958-60. Though with Nash as leader, the surviving 'goodies' come to power. Taxation in the fifties had been 'too light', but Nordmeyer's 1958 budget brings 'the best example of monetary management New Zealand has ever seen'. Taking up ideas 'developed in the Industries and Commerce Department', Nordmeyer and Holloway begin a drive to industrialise. But, just as the country is 'ready to take a big step' (forwards), the government is defeated.

Though not common, Dr Sutch's view of these events is in itself reasonable. But it is expressed with a powerful repetitiveness that does not stop short of polemics. Elsewhere, too, his strong opinions lead to distortion. It is disingenuous to say that 45% of the electorate favoured conscription in 1949. Only 45% felt sufficiently in favour to bother to vote. How many of the abstentions (43% of the electorate) favoured it we do not know.

Nearly 80% of those who voted favoured it.

Nor am I convinced by assertion that the U.S.A. was alone responsible for starting the Cold War, especially when it is backed up by a reference to a *New Statesman* article by A. J. P. Taylor.

The reader is given many doses of the author's personal opinions—on education, for instance. He wishes to eliminate 'vocational' or trade subjects from high schools and teach 'educational' subjects to all. The former he sees as a form of class discrimination, not as subjects attractive to less intelligent or 'non-academic' children. Accrediting for the university entrance examination was wise and liberal: the School Certificate examination should now be abolished. The universities are conservative bodies; 'spiritually', they are 'glorified night schools'. With the latter remark the *New Zealand Herald* has at times agreed. A surprising number of teachers might be found not to agree with the other observations.

Much of Dr Sutch's *Quest* is that of an author in search of his autobiography. Yet his book will outlive most more scholarly histories. There is nothing comparable for anyone who wants to know something of the 'feel' of recent New Zealand history—and this despite the fact that Dr Sutch's eye-witness accounts from the fighting zone do not agree with most of the others. His book is a mine of gossip about famous battles of not-so-long-ago: the satchel-snatching incident, for instance. Sometimes there is brilliant detail to engage our sympathies to the full—the struggle to rebuild the Social Security building after a fire and in time for the introduction of the 1939 Act to mark 'the defeat of poverty'. His record of New Zealand achievements in creating full employment—a feat elsewhere unmatched; in winning social security; the achievements of economic planning during World War II; is all the more convincing for the hard-hitting criticism on other pages.

He has succeeded, with sweeping flair, often careless of detail, in putting a generation's history in a perspective with chiaroscuro. Whether the 1958 'black' budget will become white I cannot say. Certainly it already looks grey, when one looks back from the 1967 economic 'squeeze'. But agree or not, future historians will be as much in his debt as present citizens are for more than they know.

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*Race Conflict in New Zealand, 1814-1865.* By Harold Miller. Blackwood and Janet Paul, Auckland, 1966. 238 pp. N.Z. price: \$4.20.

IT is rare today to find a disciple of von Ranke, whose aphorism *wie es eigentlich gewesen*—simply to show how it really was—inspired three generations of German, French and British historians into a passion of fact-collecting. Harold Miller is one such disciple; like von Ranke he believes (according to the dust-jacket of *Race Conflict in New Zealand*) that 'the business of the historian is simply to describe what happened'. Thus he presents us with a concise narrative of the events leading to the Taranaki and Waikato wars of the eighteen-sixties. Then, so that the documents can speak for themselves, he follows von Ranke's device (used in the *History of the Popes*, Vol. III) of adding a collection of Supporting Material. We are told that Dr Miller believes the historian must keep fact and comment separate, must prevent his theories from influencing his