

Correspondence

Sir,

Miles Fairburn's article 'New Zealand and Australasian Federation, 1883-1901' (*New Zealand Journal of History*, IV, 2 (October 1970)) calls for a brief comment. For reasons which I fail to fathom, Mr Fairburn states (p. 143) that in my thesis 'New Zealand in Australasia 1890-1914' I have jumped to a wrong conclusion in that I infer 'that Stout was using the federal issue to plead for the return in New Zealand to the provincial system of government'. On the contrary, I quote Stout (p. 185 of my thesis) as an example of a lack of clear commitment to any one clear definition of New Zealand's future. I nowhere suggest that he was an advocate of provincialism.

On the larger issues I will comment only briefly, as Mr Fairburn's main argument is not with me. In any case he agrees with my conclusion that 'it would be absurd to maintain that federation with Australia was ever a possibility of practical politics' (my thesis, p. 184). Yet such a bare assertion, unless explained and qualified, is almost false, such is the complexity and subtlety of history. It is on this feeling for subtleties that I would fault Mr Fairburn's useful and interesting article.

Yours etc.,

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Sir,

Messrs Chan and Fairburn have added significantly to our knowledge of the situation in which New Zealand stood aside from Australian federation (*New Zealand Journal of History*, III, 2 (October 1969) and IV, 2 (October 1970)). May I plead, however, that in so far as they attribute opinions to me, your readers will consult my own article (*ibid.*, II, 2 (October 1968)), not their versions of it? Mr Chan, for example, argues that the historian should be interested in the existence, in particular historical circumstances, of certain beliefs, and in the influence of such beliefs, whether 'valid' or not. Views which to some men in a later age seem 'nonsense' may have been profoundly important in some other time and place. He presents this argument, however, as a correction to my views: my reading is rather that it spells out in detail one of the plain implications of what I had to say. Again Mr Fairburn writes that I suggest 'that the only major force which could have prevented this country from becoming the seventh state in a federal union was Seddon'. His article proceeds, naturally with success, to demolish this judgement, and after some snide side-swipes reaches conclusions with which I would broadly agree

though I might phrase them somewhat differently. Widespread ignorance and apathy, yes; and a variety of conflicting economic and other interests; Mr Fairburn spells some things out most usefully. But surely this does not dispose of the thought that Seddon was aware of all this, though lacking Mr Fairburn's hindsight, clarity and statistical information? It is conceivable that in this situation a Deakin or a Barton might have launched a crusade for Federation. Seddon, I argued, was not such a man, and his power in New Zealand rested on qualities that were in dramatic contrast to theirs. It, therefore, does not surprise me, despite Mr Fairburn's correct remark that Seddon was an imperialist of long standing, that he should have made a particular to-do about imperial issues while simultaneously playing down the problem of Australian federation. I like Mr Fairburn's phrase about 'intuitively conceived national self interest', and would have been interested had he had much to say about intelligently conceived national interest or about the development of a genuine national consciousness.

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