

assumes that Connell and Irving know better than these working people what they really wanted. This may be the arrogance of the intellectual or it may arise out of a deep desire to have Australians different from the way they are—if the people are pure at heart the revolution will come sooner. Either way it is a pity that Connell and Irving did not think more critically about Gramsci; he may well turn out to be a blind guide to the antipodes.

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Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820-1920. By Roger C. Thompson. Melbourne University Press, 1980. xii, 289 pp., maps. Aust. price: \$25.

THIS BOOK goes some distance towards filling a void in Australian historiography. From the 1790s, when Tahiti became an important source of salted pork for the newly-established colony of New South Wales, there were always important interest-groups which looked outwards to the Pacific Islands rather than inwards to the then unexplored and untamed continent. These included merchants who traded in sandalwood, *bêche-de-mer* and coconut oil; the Victorian-based Presbyterian mission which represented the main Protestant presence in the New Hebrides; and a generation of 'opinion leaders'—editorialists and politicians as well as merchants and churchmen—who saw a 'manifest destiny' for Australia amongst its island neighbours.

After a background chapter, Dr Thompson traces Australian attitudes towards the Pacific Islands by focussing upon key events and issues: for example, the annexation of New Caledonia by France, Britain's annexation of Fiji, attempts to persuade Britain to act in New Guinea, the response to German expansion, France's proposed deportation of *récidivistes* to its Pacific possessions, condominium rule in the New Hebrides, the sharing of spoils from the First World War.

The author argues that the concern for Pacific Islands' affairs demonstrated by colonial governments in the nineteenth century and the Australian Commonwealth early in the twentieth, amount to foreign policies. This raises a number of issues, some semantic (can a colony have a foreign policy?), some of greater significance. Specifically, Dr Thomson maintains that both colonial and, later, commonwealth governments, had foreign policies at a time when they had no foreign representation and no dealings in the international arena except by association with Britain. It was admittedly, a time when a few leading politicians (for example, James Service of Victoria, William Morris Hughes of New South Wales, Sir Thomas McIlwraith of Queensland) had reasonably consistent attitudes towards Islands' affairs but their concern more often revealed in petulant comment than in constructive action. The author points out that Australian expansion was more properly 'sub-imperialism'—activity directed at the expansion of British rather than Australian sovereignty. Perhaps what he calls foreign policy might be called a sub-foreign policy, an attempt to influence the making of

British foreign policy decisions in line with Australian perceptions of Australian interests. This is a rather different proposition than the formulation and pursuit of distinctive and independent policy.

A great deal of Dr Thompson's discussion revolves around public reaction in Australia to various imperial issues and for this he relies heavily upon newspaper accounts of deputations, petitions, public meetings and the like, which is fair enough. Rather more controversially, he also presents an assessment of public opinion gauged from surveys and analysis of newspaper editorials. We are told, for example, that 'The New South Wales Government . . . gained support of only a minority of its *citizens* [reviewer's emphasis] on the New Guinea question. Of a sample of twenty-five newspapers consulted for December-January 1884-5, only eight approved of Dalley's policy or denounced the agitation against German annexation.' (pp.93-4). The editorial sample does not prove the assertion, and the subsequent discussion of newspaper coverage and public activity shows only that while there was an intense reaction on the part of the few, the many were not overly moved by the episode.

The approach to newspapers is often quantitative. For example: '. . . a survey of seventy Australian newspapers from April to July 1883 reveals fifty-five, or 79 per cent, expressing approval for the addition of New Guinea to the British Empire with only three against: a higher proportion than in 1875.' (p.59). Where it seems important, the general thrust of the politics and interests of each newspaper is given briefly, and in references the author identifies the papers in his samples, but sometimes there is little basis on which readers (especially those who are not familiar with Australian geography) might discriminate among them. There is very little information given on who the owners and editors were, what relationships they had with politicians, what their readership was (by numbers or by socio-economic status), what else there was (or was not) to write editorials about: the *Sydney Morning Herald* is listed alongside the *Burrangong Argus* and the *Shoalhaven Telegraph*; on the same page one finds quotations from the *Melbourne Age* and the *Deniliquin Pastoral Times* (p.60).

Australian Imperialism in the Pacific is more about Australian aspirations and the expansionist debate in Australia than the manifestation of Australian imperialism in the islands; more about the pursuit of territory than its government once acquired. Thus we are told a great deal about the attempts of J.G. Paton, the veteran Presbyterian missionary, to influence opinion, and about business interests operating in the New Hebrides, because those developments were crucial to the moulding of Australian attitudes, but there is little about the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's operations in Fiji, Australian involvement in the Nauru-Ocean Island phosphate industry, or Burns, Philp and Company's operations outside Melanesia; and there is only a solitary reference (on the last page) to Sir Hubert Murray and Australian policy in Papua. It is, then, more about expansionism than imperialism. In the author's words 'it is a study of Australian policy and opinion about annexation of Pacific Islands', (p.7). Within those limits it will be a most useful addition to the literature, but, as the author points out, while formal Australian colonialism has received considerable attention, the informal empire has yet to be explored in detail.

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