

colonial and provincial periods. We desperately need a new study of the provincial era to update William Morrell's *The Provincial System in New Zealand*, first published over 50 years ago. Brad Paterson's and Mary Watson's detailed investigation of the élite of Wellington province (whom they call 'magnates') is liable to tell us much more about who held power and how power was exercised than detailed biographies of single individuals.

None of this is meant to undervalue Graham's considerable achievement but rather to prompt others to do more work on the socio-economic and political context in which individuals like Weld operated. Establishing that context seems to me to be a much higher priority than heaping up details on a handful of prominent men. More comparisons are also needed between New Zealand figures and similar notables in other parts of the British Empire. Someone has to find the courage to make appropriate comparisons between the leaders of different provinces and different colonies. Men like Weld, after all, shared provincial, colonial, Empire, and class loyalties.

TOM BROOKING

University of Otago

The Family and Government Policy in New Zealand. By Peggy G. Koopman-Boyden and Claudia D. Scott. George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1984. 234 pp. N.Z. price: \$21.95.

IN A RECENT paper by Roy Shuker and Chris Wilkes, New Zealand historians (including this reviewer) have been taken to task for neglecting to incorporate the insights of sociologists into their work. It was with interest and a desire to remedy this deficiency that I took up this book, jointly authored by a sociologist and an economist. Unfortunately my interest soon flagged as I waded through definitions, boundaries, linkages, and responsibility-sharing. My difficulty may stem from the fact that, as the authors suggest on p.23, the disciplines of sociology and economics have developed their own languages. Historians, mercifully, seem to prefer plain English.

'Outcomes' and 'crisis situations' abound. One example of this new language in action will suffice: 'The aggregation of individual preferences and the use of voting rules to determine an appropriate group outcome were shown by Arrow (1963) to produce unstable solutions unless preference functions were well-behaved' (p.186). This type of prose serves to obscure arguments and may be the reason that I became confused rather than enlightened.

The book will be useful as a reference work illustrating different aspects of government policy that impinge on the family, and it provides a survey of literature on this theme. One problem with it results from the nebulousness of the concept of 'family policy'. Such a policy is a theoretical construct which has never been applied consistently in New Zealand. The authors contend it has 'masqueraded' under alternative policy labels. It is here that another difficulty arises. Koopman-Boyden and Scott seek to discover a 'family policy' by looking at the evolution of law and social policies, and they find implicit assumptions about the family in a number of instances. This is hardly a 'masquerade' since there was no intention to hide these assumptions in the first place. Giving a new label to old policies does not seem par-

ticularly helpful, especially as at the end of the book the whole concept of a 'family policy' is found wanting.

Any clear and consistent argument is lost amongst the disparate material presented in the book. It is not until the final pages that the authors put forward their own ideas on how the state could provide for dependants. They conclude that government should focus on a policy for dependent persons without undue emphasis on the family structure. For example, they argue on p.212 that the economic dependence of widows and solo parents should be seen to stem from the fact that they are not in paid employment rather than from their marital or their parental status. Yet this sits most uncomfortably with their assertion in the preceding paragraph, that 'in general, the state should not sustain able-bodied adults who are no longer responsible for the care of children'. If it is care of children that defines eligibility, then the designation 'solo-parent' makes a good deal of sense. The authors note that no overall trends emerge regarding the state's role in relation to the family and suggest it is inconsistent that government policies can, on the one hand, seek to enforce greater family responsibility while on the other hand they invade family privacy (p.166). This is surely because of the different functions the family has been required to fulfil. It has been regarded both as an economical support system and the site of love and affection. The latter role has often obscured the reality of the former. A thorough-going critique of these assumptions would be extremely useful and, although hinted at, it is not achieved here.

Nevertheless the book contains useful facts on current types of households and the various benefits that are available. These, surprisingly and awkwardly, come before an historical survey of government and family policy since 1840. Despite this exploration of the roots of present policies, the authors' approach to their subject often seems oddly naïve. Should we be surprised to learn that 'the invention and diffusion of social programmes is by no means random' (p.93)? that 'it cannot be concluded that the evolution of policies "escaped" the influences of current norms and values' (p.168)? or that 'family finances have become dependent on the exigencies of the labour market' (p.192)? Perhaps a greater acquaintance with history would put the authors' contention that the family is currently under pressure in perspective. The street kids and child abuse of today have to be seen against a background of child labour and infanticide in the nineteenth century.

The most important question, 'does the family have an identifiable set of rights?' is not asked until p.200 and never satisfactorily answered. A concentration on the family unit has certainly obscured the different interests of women, children, and men, often with negative implications for women.

The authors seem to advocate social policies which are 'neutral to family form and are based on adult independence and child dependence'. A blueprint for such a policy would prove interesting and it is disappointing that a clear one is not presented.

It may be that the 'multidisciplinary approach' taken in *The Family and Government Policy in New Zealand* is responsible for its unsatisfactory form. More care with analysis, less jargon, and greater attention to fewer themes would have produced a better book. A surprising and serious omission is Margaret Tennant's work on charitable aid. If her work was consulted, as the bibliography suggests, then it was certainly a cursory appraisal since her name appears attached to an article which was actually written by Miles Fairburn.

BARBARA BROOKES

University of Otago