

*Out in the Cold; Pacifists and Conscientious Objectors in New Zealand during World War Two.* By David Grant. Reed Methuen Ltd., Auckland, 1986. 270 pp. N.Z. price: \$32.95.

ON THE DAY New Zealand joined World War Two, Ormond Burton made a pacifist speech and was arrested for it. Subsequent opposition to the war, and, from 1940, to conscription, was also swiftly suppressed. One speech got no further than 'Ladies and Gentlemen. . . ' before a policeman swooped; another was stopped after 'Now Jesus Christ. . . ' Pacifist agitators were imprisoned, dismissed from government service, in a few cases deported, and, within a few years, totally silenced.

New Zealand's wartime government was determined to run a tight ship. Division — diversity, even — was regarded as weakness. Exemption from military service was initially made available to a mere handful of conscientious objectors, those who belonged to specifically pacifist churches. The rest had to choose between service and prison. The perpetrators of these tyrannies, Prime Minister Fraser and Minister of National Service Robert Semple, were of course the fearless anti-conscriptionists of World War One. But they now had no qualms about empowering the government to conscript its citizenry, because they now were the government. Fraser, who had opposed the earlier war, regarded this one as a necessary and righteous defence of the working man's achievements. He had little time for men who would not defend their country, and a shrewd realization that neither did most other New Zealanders.

The Public Service strongly supported this stringent exemption policy, and the cautious liberals in the Labour Cabinet, notably Deputy Prime Minister Walter Nash and the Minister of National Service from 1941, Rex Mason, found reform difficult. In 1941 Semple was persuaded to extend exemption to all religious and even some non-religious objectors, as in Britain. But the appeal boards which granted exemptions, independent of government control, were incurably hostile towards objectors and thereafter exempted fewer rather than more. Many genuine objectors ended up in prison. Walter Nash came up with a more humane destination, special work camps, to which most objectors were soon sent. The camps began well, but became tormented institutions. The non-co-operative tactics of absolutist objectors eroded the initial goodwill of camp administrators, and then, as one year dragged into another, even moderate inmates found the hitherto tolerable — spartan conditions, arbitrary authority, futile work — slowly became intolerable. They responded in many ways: escapes, rebellion, suicides (four), well-publicized hunger strikes, and a growing negativity and resentment. Punishment became common, often solitary confinement in huts with reduced rations and excessive heat or cold, although outright brutality seems to have been avoided.

*Out in the Cold* is rich in events, personalities and issues. The politicians seem rather remote, their actions not always fully explained (or, perhaps, explicable). When Grant cuts to them it is with, one senses, a feeling of obligation. The personalities which he brings to life are the objectors. Grant interviewed over 50 of them, and the sections of the book on their experiences are easily the most effective. Wherever possible he preserves their words, acting, as he sees it, more as 'facilitator' than author, helping the objectors to tell their own story. It is a valid approach, though not without its problems. Some readers may find the narrative excessively detailed, cluttered with names (over 300) and facts of little significance to anyone but the participants. Indeed, Grant writes as if they are not only the subject but also the intended readership of the book.

Some readers may also wish for more analysis. For example Grant states that of 1200 objectors whose appeals were denied, 400 subsequently joined the army. What does this suggest about the integrity of their beliefs? Or what is the significance of the 2156 votes received by an imprisoned pacifist in the 1941 Wellington City Council elections? Were all voters aware of his pacifism and imprisonment? Grant rarely asks such questions, especially if he cannot answer them. Also worrying is the paucity of references. Much important and original information is not sourced. Grant's interpretation of Fraser's motivation is advanced confidently but almost completely without reference to documentary evidence. These weaknesses, I suspect, derive not from any limitations of the author but rather from the constraints of writing, simultaneously, for a specialist, popular and academic market. In this case, the specialist market — the old conchies themselves — is most likely to be satisfied, which is only proper. The launching of the book was virtually an 'old conchies' reunion.

One worthwhile and well-substantiated argument does run through the book. New Zealand's treatment of dissent during World War Two was notably less tolerant than that of Britain, Canada, the U.S.A., or Australia. Britain, says Grant, took 'exceptional' care to protect minority interests. Specially appointed appeal boards granted almost two-thirds of appeals (compared with 19% in New Zealand). Few anti-war agitators were imprisoned. Posters, books and speeches that were banned in New Zealand were all legal in Britain. New Zealand, by contrast, was 'compliant, homogeneous', 'egalitarian, insular and suspicious'. For this by now conventional assessment of our past, Grant has provided some fascinating and convincing new evidence.

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*The Story of New Zealand.* By Judith Bassett, Keith Sinclair and Marcia Stenson. Reed Methuen Ltd, Auckland, 1985. 216 pp. N.Z. price: \$19.95.

THIS IS a very good book indeed, and fills a long-felt need for a readable and attractive general history of New Zealand. It is well printed, with a good print size in a single column of manageable width, and the pages are visually pleasing. The photographs are excellent, often unfamiliar, and have helpful explanations. Line drawings and extracts of songs and poems accompany and humanize the text. Brief paragraphs in the margins explain words like 'speculator' and 'annex'. In 19 chapters, none longer than 15 pages, the authors relate what happened from GONDWANALAND to WITI IHIMAERA. The chapters themselves are a clever and successful blend of theme and chronology, with headings like 'The Early Governors and the Maoris', 'Earning a Living' and 'Wars and the Fear of War since 1945'.

A smooth and consistent style, good layout and short sentences make for relatively easy reading. Unfortunately, the 'relatively' is crucial. It is far easier to read than most history books, including many purposely written for secondary school students, but selections still tested out at reading ages from 15 to well above (using the FRY IIB Readability Test). Thus *The Story* marks a major improvement, and is certainly nowhere incomprehensible, but many children will still find it less enjoyable than they should.