

still be applicable. But his argument could only be advanced with data which does exist — in the party offices, but not in the public domain.

Nine months before the election, Vowles suggests that Labour's new electoral support is vulnerable and Roberts opines that the electorate may still discern a more left (less right?) and more right distinction. Both are accurate observations; neither gets us much further forward.

Geoff Skene tells us about parliamentary reform and suggests it is all for the good, but not enough without other measures. Such measures may, or may not be, forthcoming. He ends where a debate might begin if informed opinion were accompanied by some solid research. 'The current influence of party and Caucus on Parliament' is not, after all, a matter on which much is known above the level of gossip. Jerome Elkind faces a similar problem. He writes on a Bill of Rights which was then, as now, holed up somewhere in the machinery.

The absence of any measurable outcomes after so short a period of vauntedly radical government activity does help to produce a certain air of academic distance. So does the fact that few of the contributors appear to have actually spoken to any of the actors in the drama they purport to analyse. There is a distinct feeling in the collection that the contributors believe that the statute and the organization chart are the reality.

Changes in the structure of cabinet committees and the reorganization of the public sector may have altered the constitutional relativities. But it is almost certainly not in the direction that John Roberts suggests. He lauds the exclusion of officials from cabinet committees which he assumes to be the policy-determining bodies. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that there is at least a question about whether it is officials or Cabinet Ministers who have been excluded from the policy process. The Cabinet Policy Committee may indeed have 'clarity, coherence and integration' as its objective; but it has operated less in the area of policy than in the co-ordination of government propaganda.

The key to decoding the political history of this period may be the story of how the government seized the definitions and how the party kept sufficient control to win the election. The legacy of that first term remains for historians to evaluate. Meanwhile, it is perhaps most effectively encapsulated in the closing paragraph of Bob Gregory's chapter on public sector reorganization. In quite the best and most substantial essay in the collection, Gregory takes an enlightening tour through the critical literature of earlier periods, when efficiency and objectives were also in vogue. 'In these times', he writes, 'when virtually all politicians are scurrying to carry the banner of market-led efficiency. . . where can a people turn when, sooner or later, it becomes apparent that much more is at stake than a narrow economic logic might suggest?'

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The Life and Death of Official Social Research in New Zealand 1936-1940. By J. H. Robb. VUW Occasional Papers in Sociology and Social Work No.7, Wellington, 1987. 96pp. NZ price \$6.00.

WITH SUCH a title, how can one help but be intrigued? After all, don't we still have a few social science graduates beavering away in government departments doing 'official' research? This leads to one of the disappointments of this little volume. Professor Robb fails to develop what seems a striking contrast between research in government then and

now: before the war, social science not only seems to have had the imprimatur but also the active participation of senior cabinet members and departmental secretaries. Perhaps herein lies the real significance of Robb's choice of the term 'official': it was administered and supported by senior officials.

This paper deals with the rise and fall of the Bureau of Social Science Research in the DSIR. Robb interviewed some of the principal actors of this period (no mean feat since some were difficult to trace) and fossicked through archives to give us a detailed, if occasionally tedious and musty, account of the brief life of the Bureau. After thumbing through this booklet, one is likely to ask, 'what's all the fuss?' What has this seemingly minor event got to do with developments in New Zealand social science? Robb is not very encouraging when he states (p.3) that he will forego interpretation and analysis in favour of delivering a 'round unvarnished tale'. A jolly good read this is not, unless one has been a staunch member of the public service for decades. Then, who sat on what committee and who pencilled what comment on which memorandum can be nail-biting stuff indeed.

Robb is, however, more astute than to leave us floundering in minutiae. His hypothesis is that the reluctance of government and State Services to finance social research in the 1960s (and by implication today) was not just an instance of the usual government lack of appreciation for social science. Instead, it stemmed from the specific experiences surrounding the establishment and abolition of the Bureau of Social Science Research, which continued to shape the thinking of senior public servants well after the war. A corollary for Robb is that the 'received wisdom' about the abolition of the Bureau (i.e. that it engaged in politically sensitive research on living standards) is wrong. Other factors were involved which when known, he hints, might help arm us in the contemporary struggle for adequate government support for social research.

Unfortunately, having made these claims, Robb fails fully to deliver on both counts. He does not seem to have spent enough time investigating the 1960s to be able to demonstrate conclusively that 'official' thinking was shaped by the Bureau episode. And having insisted that W. T. Doig was not given the boot, nor the Bureau's research terminated, simply as a result of Fraser's machinations, Robb seems at a loss to explain what really did bring this 'official' research venture to a grinding halt. The reader expecting profound revelations is likely to be disappointed. We are left with snippets and hints of the possible meaning of these events. In the process Robb seems to overlook some questions worth investigating further. How, for instance, did a few senior public servants and parliamentarians like Nash come to be so knowledgeable about, and active in, promoting social science, both here and at international meetings? How does this compare with today, when a number of parliamentarians and bureaucrats have stronger social science and humanities backgrounds, but social research is marginalized?

This relates to a point which Robb alludes to but fails to develop, the changed understanding of 'social science'. For Doig, Nash, Williams, Sullivan, and others, social science not only included economics; it was primarily economics. Robb mentions that seven of the first ten research topics listed by the founding Committee were economic studies. Perhaps one should look to NZIER as an analogy for the Bureau today, and ask how Treasury have been able to become so dominant in 'official' social (i.e. economic) science. It would be interesting to know the events and thinking by which 'social' came to be separated from 'economic' science, in government policy as well as in academia and consultancies, and as a result, 'social' science came to be identified more as a soft science dealing with societal and welfare problems. One might then surmise that the attachment of the Social Sciences Research Fund Committee to the Department of Social Welfare in 1979 was both a consequence and further legitimation of the marginalizing of non-economic social science.

If these suppositions are at all congruent with historical fact then one wonders about

the prospects for an 'official' social science council or foundation like that proposed by the Beattie Working Party on Science and Technology and the Science and Technology Advisory Committee, unless the false division between economic and 'social' science in our practice and in the thinking of government representatives is abandoned. The British Social Sciences Research Council saw the writing on the wall not long ago, and changed its name to the Economic and Social Research Council. Perhaps there are lessons here after all.

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