

Reviews

The Sovereignty Game: Power and Knowledge and Reading the Treaty. By Peter Cleave. Institute of Policy Studies, Wellington, 1989. vii + 92pp. NZ Price: \$20.45.

DR CLEAVE is the author of an excellent article published in 1984 in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*: 'Tribal and State-like Political Formations in New Zealand Māori Society 1750–1900'. Now he has produced a short book on what he calls 'sovereignty issues' in Aotearoa. It discusses how the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) has been understood — and manipulated — by Māori and Pākehā political groupings in their arguments since the Treaty was signed. The idea is interesting. It promises a more complex consideration of the uses of the Treaty than we have had to date; more complex, for instance, than Dr Orange's recent and much-praised book on it, which concentrates on a narrow range of interpretations and which does not much appreciate the multiplication of meanings for political purposes. Presumably for that reason the Institute of Policy Studies has published Dr Cleave's *The Sovereignty Game* in handsome format. But the book does not do credit either to the author or the publisher. It is the embryo of what could have been a good — perhaps brilliant — book. But there is no finished product. Only experts in the field or obsessive puzzle-solvers could possibly be expected to follow it. And even they could not enjoy it. It is too badly written.

Dr Cleave's basic expository idea is promising enough. It is that, as Treasury sometimes attempts to model its understanding of social policy on the analogy of games, so could sovereignty issues between Māori and Pākehā (and also within each culture) be modelled in the same way. The rules of the game (or games) could be defined, the players' roles and names could be specified, the strategies of play and the purposes of the games could be outlined. Histories of games, roles, players, strategies, purposes, and outcomes could be provided, and projections as to future games and their outcomes and so on could be hazarded. Such an approach, in which social process is seen as gaming, promises to provide a way of clarifying our vision of what is not always very clear. But Dr Cleave, who writes throughout in a fuzzy and jargon-ridden prose, full of misplaced abstraction, fails entirely to capture the complexity of the real world within the confines of his chosen gameplan.

It is not that he does not know the real world pretty well; it is rather that he cannot construct models elegant enough to express it. Not lack of knowledge and insight but lack of intellectual and organizational rigour is his problem. One would have thought, for instance, that if one were to understand 'sovereignty' games, one would have to know what 'sovereignty' is. One would like to know what the range of referents of the world might be. And if 'sovereignty' means (as Dr Cleave seems to think) *almost anything in the world that is a power, an ability, a right, or an interest* one would like to know why

he chooses to use the one word to cover all those referents. Nothing of the kind is explained. Instead, one gets at various points — almost always unexplicated — ‘tribal sovereignty’, ‘Maori sovereignty’, ‘state sovereignty involved in the protection of a citizen’, ‘sovereignty of bureaucracies associated with the state’, ‘street-based sovereignty’, ‘social sovereignty’, ‘community sovereignty’, ‘sovereignty of the self’. One even gets ‘negative sovereignty’ of various kinds. So sovereignty is something that a very wide array of entities can have.

Worse — so far as the reader’s immediate understanding goes — the virtue of *aroha* is said to be a ‘form of sovereignty’ and interactions among powers, groups, and persons in 1840 are called a ‘sovereignty process’. We also get (in a discussion of a Frontline TV programme on whether Ngai Tahu ought to claim back property now privately owned) ‘various modes of sovereignty, tangible and intangible, metaphysical and otherwise’. More confusion via the explosion of meaning is created when the reader is told that, ‘when considering the sovereignty of work practices in Aotearoa, any commentator would be forced from the sometimes complacent cynicism of the political scientist into the regions of slow-burning anger’. (It turns out he is discussing the distressingly high rate of Māori unemployment.) The reader is also told (in a series of comments on the educational reforms proposed under *Tomorrow’s Schools*, 1988) that: ‘Until developments in primary and secondary schools crystallize into consistent wananga or knowledge sovereignties, it is difficult to assess the shape and extent of Maori control’. But perhaps his most ambitious (sovereign?) use of the idea of sovereignty occurs where he discusses cultural interaction in the arts: ‘There is also the idea that Aotearoa might throw up more than its fair share of fiction-breakers, writers like Janet Frame or painters like Colin McCahon who question reality without a strict political ideology but with awesome expressive power. With artists like these, waves may break any way on the sovereignty of the individual and collective soul.’

In brief, Dr Cleave uses the word ‘sovereignty’ as much as he can and with an Elizabethan fecundity of which Shakespeare might be proud. Presumably he does so to make it appear that there is a ‘sovereignty game’. But his indulgence in such poetic licence obliterates and conflates the many concepts he insists on calling ‘sovereignty’. And in general, where he can be verbally obscure in the service of what he seems to think is a scientific model of gaming interaction, he is. Where he could have clarified what he meant, he does not. Where a piece of plain prose would do, he chooses the jargons mainly of sociologese and socialanthropogese.

It is the same with his visual models presented in diagrammatic form. Crude charts of legal, constitutional, social, and cultural relationships between persons, offices, and groups do nothing but obscure, obliterate, and conflate the subtlety of the realities he sets out to express.

Dr Cleave has many interesting things to say and it is sad he did not say them as clearly as he should have. He is developing a fascinating and important area of study on Māori-Pākehā relations, and he is obviously well-equipped as a scholar to succeed in it. He studies the ways in which Māori and Pākehā talk to each other in word, ceremony, legal argument, gesture, and so on. Some of his passages of detailed analysis could not have been done much better (pp.9–22, pp.25–28 and pp.40–48), and were he to have organized his themes more clearly and written much better prose, we could well have had a major work. It would have been a subtle analysis of the ways in which words are used as counters in the game of power, and it would have covered (as it sometimes — obscurely — does) the widest possible range of uses of the Treaty by the full complement of its users. He should have taken his time and written out what he had to say more clearly. He should have trusted his genius for lengthy analysis of particular phases of argument and expression and

not thrust himself into the strait-jacket that he did. As it is, his book is too little, too soon.

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Punishment and Politics. The Maximum Security Prison in New Zealand. By Greg Newbold. Oxford University Press, Auckland. 1989. x, 310pp. NZ price: \$35.80.

GREG NEWBOLD, a sociologist, has three objectives: to chronicle the events within New Zealand's security prisons; to place these events within the wider context of change in the penal system; and to comment on New Zealand developments in relation to those overseas. Since some of the ground has been covered by others, including Newbold himself, the account is partly one of synthesis. But it is also much more than this. Newspapers have been mined and Justice Department records used, though no archival references are given. Above all, considerable use is made of recollections of inmates and prison staff in the study of what Michel Foucault would call the micro-physics of power within a prison. The result is a wide-ranging and sometimes discursive narrative, wherein the social dynamics of Mount Eden and Paremoremo prisons are seen (mostly between the 1950s and 1970s) to be shaped and reshaped by wider changes in social climate, penal policies, and styles of prison administration. Essentially, New Zealand's experience is not perceived as unique.

The focus on the narrative is on the period since 1949. One chapter (out of 20) covers the preceding 70 years. Here the origins and development of Mount Eden (the country's only maximum security prison between 1888 and 1969) are lightly sketched within a broad account of developments in penal policy. Penal reform barely touched the stark, highly restrictive regimen of Mount Eden before the 1950s.

The advent of S.T. Barnett as Secretary for Justice in 1949 marks a major turning-point in New Zealand's penal history. Six chapters discuss the more liberal and humane 'new penal policy' of the 1950s and its effects on the administration of Mount Eden and life within it. With some fascinating detail Newbold dissects the interplay between administrative idealism, managerial weaknesses, inmate-staff relationships, and ministerial indifference (except where there was adverse publicity). Individuals and chance events bulk large as agents for change in the system.

A dominant theme in the study is the evolution of inmate society. By the 1950s, Newbold argues, the regimen of Mount Eden had inhibited a strong sense of cohesive identity and the development of any firm social structure. H.V. Haywood (Superintendent of Mount Eden 1951-1963) relaxed routines and improved conditions. At the same time he fostered an informal system of control through an inmate hierarchy. However, as Newbold puts it, the 'era of conciliation in the fifties was transposed in the early 1960s to one of unrest and anarchy'. It seems that Haywood's regime could not last. Growing prison musters increased tensions at Mount Eden. Escapes, especially those of the bandmen in 1958, led to the breakdown of the inmate élite system — signalled by the growth of assaults on staff in 1959 and 1960. Discipline was tightened, privileges removed, and the 'co-operation of the powerful disappeared'.

From about 1960 a new phase began in inmate social relationships, seen in increasing solidarity and readiness to rebel. This tendency was reinforced by a more restrictive style in the administration of Mt Eden from 1963. Newbold sees this reversal of policy as fuelling inmate discontent, expressed in violence reciprocated by staff, and culminating