

the inside, concerned with transmitting equipment; with policy decisions about the proper (or the most expedient) relation between politicians, administrators and private companies; about balancing national, regional and local control; about the viability of a dual mandate to inform while entertaining. Even when discussing these matters, the book's strong narrative cast thrusts analysis to the margin.

That does not mean that there is no analysis, of course. Rather, judgements slide in among the detail. Once again, the judgements are conventional. It is not altogether easy to appreciate as the detail unrolls inexorably, but the climax of Day's argument is the long battle between Colin Scrimgeour, director of the National Commercial Broadcasting Service, and the director of the National Broadcasting Service, James Shelley. Resting on Long Pink Cloud historiography and an attachment to popular culture, our author's heart is with the doomed Scrim. No problem with that, except that Shelley then is constructed as the antithesis of Scrim. Scrim is a simple populist so Shelley becomes 'Reithian', code for a simple elitist. Scrim is on the left, so Shelley must be some kind of Tory. This is a travesty of the truth about that extraordinary, complicated, contradictory man; but it points to a more significant matter. As a glance at the pages of *Tomorrow* would have told him, cultural politics in the 1930s (and, of course, in other decades also) were much more subtle and complicated than Day's account suggests. A leftist political project could seek to appropriate high culture and turn it to 'the people's' use, as the history of the WEA demonstrates. Day's conflation between leftist politics and popular culture needs a justification that it does not get.

Analysing these matters — and there are others equally meriting our attention — needs sharper tools than those employed here. Perhaps we will find them used as Day strides onwards and upwards toward the television years. Perhaps that will not happen, and other scholars will have to tell us what the history of New Zealand radio means; but even they will be forced to build their explanations from bricks manufactured in this magisterial summary of the evidence.

IAN CARTER

The University of Auckland

Wire and Wireless: A History of Telecommunications in New Zealand, 1860-1987. By A.C. Wilson. Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1994, 236 pp. NZ price: \$39.95, ISBN 0-86469-210-2.

THE FOCUS of this work is at once narrower and wider than its title suggests. It does not cover the whole field of telecommunications, referring only briefly to the development of radio and television broadcasting. Nor does it say much about the systems of communication operated by government departments other than the Post Office, including railways, marine, defence and civil aviation, or the numerous private telephone systems that operated for a time. Conversely, about a third of *Wire and Wireless* goes back well beyond its declared starting point of 1890 to deal with the beginnings of telegraphy and telephony in New Zealand. This is fortunate, as 1890 does not constitute a logical break in the story, and a survey of the forces promoting and delaying the early spread of these technologies is welcome.

Wilson presents the development of telecommunications in New Zealand as the

product of both technological advances — almost entirely from overseas — and local demand. The changing technology is described in a refreshingly simple and succinct way. Given that they were largely a state monopoly, demand for new telecommunications facilities was mostly channelled through bureaucrats and politicians. Despite some intriguing discoveries, for instance that such facilities were less likely to be opened during election years, this aspect could have been explored further. How strongly, and in what ways did people go about securing local services? The impact on telecommunications of major events, particularly the world wars, is well described.

There are some interesting observations on developments during the 1980s, before corporatisation. The oft-cited problems of occasional overloading of lines in Auckland and Wellington during the early years of the decade are explained, along with the actions being taken then to overcome them. More generally, readers are made aware of the vast amount of planning and investment being done to keep New Zealand, a primary-producing nation with declining terms of trade, up with the extremely rapid pace of technological change. In this area, as in so many others, corporatisation and privatisation have clearly built on, indeed fed on, the public expenditure of previous years.

There are the almost inevitable slip-ups. Samuel Morse died in 1872, not 1832, hence the adjacent photograph of him 'in old age'. It is Jim Gardner, not Gardiner, who writes in the *Oxford History of New Zealand*. In 1868 New Zealand Mean Time was established at 11 and a half hours (not 11 hours) ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. The book is presented quite well, but the standard of reproduction of the photographs, all from the Telecom Archives, is sometimes disappointing.

This is an official history and draws sparingly on the reminiscences of former employees or users of the system. Given more time and space the author might have considered providing more of this dimension, to give readers a feel of what it was like to work in the industry, and the difference that changing telecommunications made to people's lives. However, aside from the comparatively rare occasions when he feels compelled to speculate on some economic aspects, the story flows along smoothly. Moreover, there has been no previous official history of this area, aside from Howard Robinson's *History of the Post Office in New Zealand*, a more general work published in 1964, a very long time ago in terms of modern telecommunications. There was clearly a need for a more focused and updated account, and Tony Wilson has done the job very capably.

JAMES WATSON

Massey University

Robert S. Ellwood, *Islands of the Dawn: The Story of Alternative Spirituality in New Zealand*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1993, ix, 285 pp. US price: \$32.00. ISBN 0-8248-1487-8.

John Garrett, *Footsteps in the Sea: Christianity in Oceania to World War II*, University of the South Pacific and World Council of Churches, Suva and Geneva, 1992, xvi, 514 pp. NZ price: \$40.95. ISBN 982-02-0068-7.

MANY NEW ZEALANDERS will feel that the historic Christian denominations are in heavy retreat in this country and many commentators have observed the apparently