

reasons and goals that people had for state action in the past but Bassett's own reasons against state action in the present. The book offers no new theory of the state, let alone fresh ideas nor an innovative and exciting research programme, about the history of New Zealand politics, culture and society. It does nothing to use cross-national comparisons to support its claim that there was something peculiar about the rise and role of the state in New Zealand. Old-fashioned and unsophisticated in its methodology, its dependence on examples and anecdotes for evidence begs questions about their typicality and weight, and makes it easy to refute through the citation of counter-examples. It fails to anticipate objections or to engage with opposing views, including Gary Hawke's argument that 'the available information all testifies against a long-term inexorable rise of government'.¹ In some of his earlier works, Bassett implicitly and explicitly approved of state intervention and of certain leading interventionists such as Gordon Coates and Norman Kirk. If Bassett had good reasons for his approval then, why are they not good reasons now?

MILES FAIRBURN

University of Canterbury

1 G. R. Hawke, *The Making of New Zealand: An Economic History*, Cambridge, 1985, p.300.

A World Without Welfare: New Zealand's Colonial Experiment. By David Thomson. Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books, Auckland, 1998. 180 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-199-9.

A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security in New Zealand 1898-1998. By Margaret McClure. Auckland University Press in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Auckland, 1998. 316 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-183-2.

A FRIEND OF MINE, returning from a funeral, remarked: 'We did not realise how little we knew about the deceased until we heard the eulogies.' Perhaps a parallel could be drawn to our knowledge of New Zealand's social policy history. Readers now have two new publications to cast light on this field: David Thomson's exploration of charitable aid and state provision in the nineteenth century, and Margaret McClure's general history of social security this century. Both fill gaps that have presented difficulties for the social historian.

Thomson earned something of a reputation as an iconoclast with his 1991 work, *Selfish Generations? The Ageing of New Zealand's Welfare State*. Drawing on his background in demography, he presented a strong case for the consistent favouring of what he called the 'welfare generation' — those born between 1920 and 1945 — who drew far more from the common pool than they contributed. His findings were met with silence from prominent welfare state researchers, not because his reasoning was found deficient, but rather through discomfort that his work fell outside the small range of familiar perspectives on welfare state development. He now offers an equally provocative thesis on public provision in nineteenth-century New Zealand. *A World Without Welfare* argues against the trend of the developmental view that the welfare state 'began' in the 1890s and was 'finished' in the 1970s; a 'progress from darkness to enlightenment', as he puts it. On the contrary, he finds that last century's colonists insisted that needy individuals and families fend for themselves: 'there would be no system of public relief such as had been in place in much of Western Europe for

several centuries'. This, he writes, was New Zealand's first social experiment — a 'world without welfare'.

Thomson's aims are to establish the broad historical context within which New Zealanders' ideas about welfare were formed last century, and to survey the varied means by which the colonists sought to meet their welfare needs. The three broad means he considers are thrift, government support, and work, family and charity. Determining outcomes is hampered by the lack of census manuscripts and other records, so that not much can be said with confidence about the period under consideration (1870 to 1900), but 'what is clear is that the colonial experiment, in pushing responsibility for the needy onto individuals and their families, was pursued with considerable and unusual vigour in late nineteenth and early twentieth century New Zealand'.

While much New Zealand law was based on English law, public provision for the poor and needy was not. The Destitute Persons Ordinance of 1846 placed this responsibility on 'near relatives' of the unfortunate. Until the Old Age Pensions Act of 1898, each amendment tightened family obligations. The definition of 'near relative' was gradually extended, the eagerness of the courts to issue compulsory support orders grew, and the provisions to arrest persons likely to flee to Australia to avoid being landed with the costs of maintaining an indigent relation testify to the determination to avoid state provision. Charitable aid and voluntary assistance were encouraged to address the shortfall in meeting need. The 1885 Charitable Aid Act provided for the establishment of charitable aid boards with a government subsidy on monies raised. Although the proportion of elderly increased fourfold in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a decreasing proportion of money came from the government — the discrepancy was made up by the recovery of funds from those assisted or their relatives. In fact, public spending on charitable aid per capita fell steadily from 1890.

Thomson attempts to discover how those in need survived in a society where public provision was minimal. Under 'thrift' he looks at Friendly Societies, private pension schemes, life insurance, cash savings and private property. The Friendly Societies proliferated, but were generally very small, and their benefit and contribution make-up was actuarially unsound. From the 1870s, their high level of failure fuelled a demand for old age pensions and national insurance. Of the other forms of thrift, cash savings were minimal. Those who could chose flexible over committed savings, preferred cash or property, sought immediate benefits, liked land or houses, and shunned annuities. Charity was praised by the late Victorians, but also feared as dangerous. If anything, the poor, rather than the rich, gave to the poor. Philanthropic associations lost most of their takings through extravagant entertaining, administration costs and downright fraud: little reached the poor. The sums distributed 'always prove small', and the group most in need — the aged — were not popular recipients. Although there was some assistance within families, there was little between unrelated households.

Thomson's conclusions on how the worse-off survived are interesting. The social support network, the institutions of thrift and voluntary provision, the relatives and neighbours, did not provide more than a fraction of the resources necessary to maintain the needy, in spite of the rhetoric of the times. Surprisingly, it was the ownership of real estate that became 'the primary colonial way of securing one's own future'. Governments fostered the drive to own land, at the expense of Maori; land was cheap and plentiful, and capital gains were good. In 1882, half the men in the colony were landowners, including a third to a half of working-class males. The average holding was equivalent to one and a half years' income. However, as underemployment was endemic to nineteenth-century colonial life, such a property probably represented three or four years' earnings. Land could be farmed parttime, or leased, or modest houses built on it could be let for added income. The elderly tended to own their own homes,

and had some land and other assets. They did not save for their old age, but were generally self-reliant.

By the end of last century, one might conclude that the welfare experiment was working. There were no rights to public relief, and minimal charitable aid. However, New Zealand chose to go in a new direction, beginning with old age pensions. The reasons for this were complex, according to Thomson, and include the falling level of land ownership. 'The experiment had belonged to a particular time and peculiar circumstances, and proved ill-suited to new ones.' However, current debate is reviving terms from the nineteenth century. Is individual responsibility and family assistance to become the basis of our support for the needy amongst us? The Code of Social and Family Responsibility was based on that premise. One conclusion that could be drawn from *A World Without Welfare* is that such a regime functioned poorly last century, and is even less likely to work today.

Margaret McClure's *A Civilised Community: A History of Social Security 1898–1998* fills a significant gap in the history of New Zealand social policy. Since Condliffe and Sutch, with the partial exception of my own 1989 work, no general history seems to have been published. Although she calls it 'an overview — not an all-encompassing account — of New Zealand's social security development', it is comprehensive and detailed, illustrated with a number of well-chosen photographs. This book begins where Thomson's left off — the end of the nineteenth century, with the Old Age Pensions Act signifying the formative moment for New Zealand's social security development. However, Thomson would not agree with McClure that the Old Age Pension 'released families from their economic responsibility for the aged', although she does note that it subsequently became less accessible, and more rigorous interpretations militated against Maori and Asian applicants.

The reluctant provision of pensions for other needy groups began with widows with children and was spurred by the First World War, reinforcing New Zealand's unusual opposition to contributory insurance-type funding. As she observes, 'the class that is most needful of this help from the State is the very class who are least able to make a contribution'. This was the basis of New Zealand social security provision — aberrations like Douglas's 1974 New Zealand Superannuation scheme proved short-lived. McClure finds that the New Zealand concept of pooling a social security tax from all earners and supplementing this from the consolidated fund was unique amongst developed countries, with benefits not being related to contributions. However, targeting from the 1980s made the separation between givers and takers 'more visible and more resented', thus easing the task of those politicians who saw it as their duty to pare back the welfare state.

Savage's first Labour government, driven by liberal idealism rather than socialism, introduced the integrated system of social security as a right of citizenship that was to endure for half a century. However, she qualifies this by pointing out that it was hastily contrived, and spawned a host of problems. The desire to uphold the traditional family structure meant that women were not well provided for. Social security was marked by tensions between old and young, Pakeha and Maori, means-tested and universal beneficiaries

The 'golden age' of the 1950s and 1960s saw an erosion: social security fell steadily as a proportion of national income. Special assistance raised problems of discretionary aid rather than rights. The family benefit dwindled, not being linked to the cost of living or wage rises. During the 1960s, support of the middle class dominated social security, and 'notions of reward and contribution replaced an ethos of redistribution'. National governments concentrated on targeted supplementary assistance.

McClure covers the superannuation battles of the 1970s well. The decade began with tolerance and acceptance of the no-fault system, but ended with no logical method for balancing the needs of different groups and rivalry between them for state

support. The rapid increase in the number of beneficiaries caused widespread alarm — the cost of the Domestic Purposes Benefit doubled between 1980 and 1984. Unemployment, which had been near zero at the beginning of the decade, reached 100,000 at its end. The economy was in long-term decline, and the country had become a diverse society rather than a single community. Traditional lifetime marriage and the nuclear family, on which so much of past policy had been based, had collapsed. The aged were the only winners: half of social security expenditure went to this 15% of the population.

In 1984, Labour turned from the interventionist state and sheltered economy, and introduced 'a range of strategies to lighten what came to be called the welfare "burden"'. Universalist policies were now considered extravagant, and there was further targeting, a process extended by National. Social security was seen as unsustainable, and the economic and welfare arrangements of the past were regarded as failures. In 1990, National inherited a stagnant economy and growing expenditure. It saw the welfare state, with its 'culture of dependence', as the cause of the problems, and invoked a return to an idealized vision of New Zealand before the welfare state through a renewal of the work ethic. Contrary to its election promises, National tackled superannuation. It claimed that old age income 'is properly the responsibility of individuals and families, not the state'. There was a return to the earlier aim of the relief of poverty rather than social citizenship. McClure considers that the disappearance of the family benefit after 50 years marked the end of the social security ethos. However, 'both Labour and National governments found it difficult to reverse the spending on social security, difficult to edge the middle class "with their sharp elbows" out of social security entitlement, and difficult to oppose the electoral power of the old and reverse their dominance of the social security system'. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen, and future directions are uncertain.

McClure concludes that 'while social security did not alter the wide disparity in people's chances in life, it provided protection against the worst that could happen, and did so with more dignity, regularity and accountability than private charity could ever offer'. Her study gives a balanced summary of the past century of New Zealand social policy. Unlike previous authors, she examines the effects on women and the Maori segment of the population in some detail. The social and economic context, though somewhat restricted, is adequate to a book of this length. *A Civilised Community* is not a eulogy for the welfare state, but its underlying tone reveals the author's concern with meeting need and ensuring a decent life for all.

ALEXANDER DAVIDSON

UNITEC Institute of Technology
Auckland

Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth-Century New Zealand. By Bronwyn Dalley. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1998. 447 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-190-5.

FAMILY MATTERS is the latest in a series of official histories from the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, and one of a crop of welfare histories to be published in 1998, the centenary of the Old Age Pensions Act in New Zealand. But as Bronwyn Dalley shows, there is more to 'welfare' than benefits and pensions. A major theme of this book is that 'child welfare' in the welfare state is overlooked in New Zealand history, and government initiatives in child welfare predated most state welfare schemes. Dalley's is a commissioned history, focusing on the work of the old Child Welfare Branch/Division in the areas of juvenile delinquency and offending,