

was embedded in a wider cultural climate saturated with ideas about gender. Nolan's book gives us an excellent outline of some key policies to do with the interface between women and the state. Others, no doubt, will flesh them out.

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1 Wellington Branch Society for Research on Women in New Zealand (Inc), *In Those Days. A Study of Older Women in Wellington*, Wellington, 1982, p.52.

His Way. A Biography of Robert Muldoon. By Barry Gustafson. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2000, 545 pp. NZ price: \$53.95. ISBN 1-8694-0236-7.

MANY OF THOSE who lived through the Muldoon years and who disliked or even hated him at the time have mellowed somewhat in their assessment of the man. Chatter at dinner parties for the middle-aged sometimes degenerates into nostalgia for simpler and kinder times of the 1960s and 1970s. Given the free marketeers who followed him, perhaps Muldoon wasn't really such a bad chap after all. In retrospect, he is commonly seen as a badly flawed man who nonetheless was the last of the pragmatic socialists, the last defender of New Zealand's full-employment welfare state, the last supporter of the 'common bloke'.

Yet for others the legacy of 'Muldoonism' still has an edge. The common use of this term as a derogatory statement refers less to his personal nastiness as to the notion of him as symbol and scapegoat for the allegedly failed pre-1984 regulated New Zealand economy and lifestyle.

Gustafson is particularly well suited as Muldoon's biographer. He has been in the political world himself, on several sides, and has written extensively on both National and Labour politics and politicians, including a biography of M.J. Savage. Moreover, Muldoon gave Gustafson his blessing and extensive interview time, and provided unlimited access to his personal files. The biography has been many years in the making and is the fruit of painstaking research and discussions with participants. Its appearance now is appropriate. The hate factor has died down. Moreover, Muldoon can be assessed in the broader context of what has followed him — many of the fundamental economic problems he faced have never gone away. Thus there is now opportunity for a more measured assessment that escaped some earlier and less temperate efforts by other writers.

Muldoon had two major flaws, Gustafson argues. There was his abrasive personality and belligerence toward those who did not agree with him, and there was his 'innate conservatism' which prevented him from restructuring the economy 'more gradually, more rationally and more humanely than Roger Douglas and the Fourth Labour Government were partly forced and partly chose to do after 1984'. Gustafson believes Muldoon's failure to 'manage evolutionary change' was far more fatal to his becoming a 'great prime minister' than his personality defects. His biography thus attempts to reveal Muldoon's underlying values and policies as explanation, rather than resort to an easier and presumably more superficial explanation based on his belligerence.

The thesis that Muldoon's 'conservatism' was based on his intolerance of poverty and his support for 'ordinary' folk is constantly stated throughout this biography. But this does not necessarily confirm it. The divide between personality and policy probably does not exist other than as a literary device. Muldoon's 'conservatism', as Gustafson argues, obviously did stem from his wish to make New Zealand a better place (or at least no worse a place) for its citizens, and these humane values can be traced back to his earlier experiences in life. He believed that the fundamental fairness of the existing socio-economic structure could be maintained by using the management and regulatory

tools at his disposal. There was thus no need for major structural change.

But Gustafson's material could also probably support an additional interpretation, that is, Muldoon's 'conservatism' ultimately derived from his use and abuse of power. His 'conservatism' also was very much a product of his personality, which could not abide criticism or suggested alternatives. Whatever his vision might theoretically have been, I suspect that his use of power would have been the same. The real measure of the man was his means, and his means revolved around an authority asserted essentially by bullying.

Gustafson does not pursue the psychology of Muldoon's power in any depth, other than the assertion that it was in the 'conservative' cause of a fair and stable society. Muldoon's failure to take on board creatively at least some of the alternative economic directions offered by Treasury, Reserve Bank and other officials, Gustafson suggests, was because of his fear that the 'social costs were too great, or because he believed he could still make the old system work, or because he thought the voters would punish his party too much, or perhaps for all three reasons'. But there is also that other possibility — Muldoon was so obsessed with maintaining his own authority and imposing his own solutions that any sign that others had workable alternatives might have suggested weakness.

The theme of power resonates loudly throughout this biography, but Gustafson is not always tuned to all its complex frequencies. He describes in great detail how Muldoon dominated and manipulated his political friends and foes, how he controlled cabinet and caucus and party and public service officials. There is considerable material on the gutlessness of almost all his caucus and cabinet, and on the fear and vacillation of those who contemplated coups. Very few individuals emerge with honour. Those tiny few who did rebel often paid a heavy price. There is a certain irony in the fact that he was finally brought down by a cheeky Marilyn Waring as she put her feet up on his table and chewed an apple. The rise, reign and fall of Muldoon is a riveting tale of fear, loathing, ambition — political Darwinism in all its infinite variation. But it tends to be narrated rather than analysed.

If the authoritarian personality is not scrutinized, nor is the wider authoritarian context of New Zealand society. Gustafson briefly lists the populists and dictators Muldoon is commonly likened to, and chooses Nixon as the nearest — both short, both from humble origins, insecure, not well educated, battlers, largely friendless, never quite accepted by their own party's élites, determined to destroy their opponents, and so on. But Gustafson might have done more to examine the nature of Muldoon's appeal. The macro story he unfolds is of Muldoon's ultimate failure. Yet he was electorally highly successful for a very long time. Disaffection with him probably began among some of his own party members long before it took hold in the wider electorate. Is there an inherent predilection among New Zealand voters to be bullied or to see others bullied?

But what Gustafson does brilliantly portray is the man's complexity. He was a workaholic and control freak. He was everywhere and into everything, from dealing with electorate problems, to running the country, to trying to reform the international monetary system. We see his shyness and insecurity, his brashness and confidence. He was reticent yet wrote autobiographies. He is revelled in as a bizarre mix of the utterly decent and the appallingly rude. He never made money out of politics and gave any court-case windfalls to charity. In private dealings with officials and members of the public he was invariably polite, well mannered, caring and respectful. He never failed to work hard for ordinary individuals, yet so often in public he acted like a monster. He could be supremely arrogant yet wittily self-deprecating. He could be an absolute tyrant but smitten by the beauty of a lily.

Above all, this biography succeeds admirably in narrating the events and moods of the times. In one sense, the real appeal of the book lies in its rollicking good tale. The writing

is not always scintillating, but the story is always fascinating thanks to the force of Muldoon's personality and the events of a particularly dramatic period in New Zealand history.

Some of the most interesting material is unexpectedly found in the foreign policy sections. Muldoon was a compulsive traveller and loved associating with world leaders. There are numerous delightful moments of high farce, such as when he had no dinner suit trousers minutes before a function in Paris, and when he delivered a speech in French and the assembled French dignitaries did not know what language he was speaking, or when he got himself jammed in a collapsed toilet in China. His wife Thea had to get Bernie Galvin to haul him out. Muldoon made a quip about 'the seat of government'.

There is much new detail, for example with the Moyle affair, the colonials' coup of 1980 that never happened, and the so-called constitutional crisis after the 1984 election. Gustafson reveals a surprisingly high level of smouldering opposition to Muldoon from his colleagues, and from quite early on, but one wonders how much of this is their talking brave after the danger?

Of Muldoon's more private life, we learn about his boozing. But Gustafson is far more reticent about Muldoon's alleged sexual promiscuity. He simply reels off a list of allegations and rumours in a paragraph. To suggest that probing further would be 'peripheral to political biography' is a bit of a cop-out. It was probably a courtesy to protect Thea and other family members who gave the biographer considerable support. Similarly Muldoon's painful, and at the time very public, difficulties with his son Gavin are not mentioned.

Overall, this biography is an extremely valuable account of the man and his times. It has some gaps as biographical explanation. Gustafson has tried to get behind and beyond Muldoon's personal nastiness, and see him instead as a failed conservative. I personally remain unconvinced and still regard him foremost as a failed personality. If you didn't like Muldoon then, and if you've mellowed a little since, reading this biography may revive old antipathies and bring back a few unpleasant memories. The Springbok tour remains a particularly tender spot. Certainly it is an evocative trip down memory lane for aging baby-boomers. For younger readers, the New Zealand social, economic and political landscape of the Muldoon era must now seem like very foreign territory indeed.

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Angel of the Anzacs: The Life of Nola Luxford. By Carole Van Grondelle. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2000. 232 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-397-6.

NOLA LUXFORD lived an exemplary life, in the sense that she fulfilled some of the dreams of her contemporaries and lived the twentieth century more thoroughly than most. Her greatest achievement was managing to move from small-town New Zealand to gain a footing in Hollywood and New York, making her own opportunities, and living much of the time by her wits. For the New Zealanders, mostly women, who devoured her regular columns in the *Free Lance*, Luxford was a glamorous figure who mediated between them and Hollywood. Yet she laid siege to the studios with only minor success. It was the lesser but equally new medium of radio that conferred more lasting celebrity upon her. During the Second World War Luxford made regular broadcasts which gave New Zealanders news of the war tailored to them. When these newscasts were discontinued, she found herself at something of a loose end in New York, where kindness to Kiwi servicemen on leave in the city led to her most notable enterprise, the organizing and running of the Anzac Club. Thousands of Australasian servicemen and their families had good reason for gratitude to Luxford for this item of outstanding war service.