

Qualities that made Luxford notable, and the book more interesting than I expected it to be, were her indomitable nature and her willingness to leap into the unknown. She was an adventurer, who vigorously exploited every connection she could in her journey from nowhere to somewhere. What else could a girl from Hastings with style and beauty (not, alas, the most fashionable and marketable kind for her day, Van Grondelle tells us) and lots of organizing ability do? Two of Luxford's three marriages were disastrous, the second, which should have made her fortune, was positively macabre in its course. Yet she invites only a small amount of sympathy. What we are invited to feel is admiration at her ability to rebound. And I did. Admiration and respect for a woman who indefatigably pursued modernity, who was up with the play, who never hesitated to pick up a phone on behalf of a friend or even a chance-met acquaintance, who must often have seemed outrageous but was extraordinarily kind.

Why is a university press publishing such a biography? Luxford's claim to fame is modest in the grand scheme of human enterprises. She was the subject of a popular *This is Your Life* programme in 1986 and that, one would think, is where she best fits. There is a current fashion for telling at length the tales of the lives of fairly ordinary people to redress the 'Dead White Male' imbalance on the biographical shelves. Luxford deserves more than most to act as such a counterweight. Van Grondelle writes competently, if somewhat soupy at times. She has thoroughly researched the book, spent many hours with Luxford and read a voluminous archive of personal papers and diaries. The tiresome side of Luxford is not ignored. Her friends must sometimes have dreaded the sound of the phone. On the evidence her judgement of men was appalling (although we are told she was 'a good judge of character'). Van Grondelle conveys the context of Luxford's varied life extremely well, especially the traumatic effect of her parents' divorce in Hastings in 1919, which stripped the family of its social standing at a stroke, and Luxford's battle to survive in Hollywood in the twenties and thirties. This makes the book valuable as social history as much as biography. Luxford lived through most of the twentieth century in territory which many women dreamed about: California, Hollywood, New York, movies, radio. She was a minor star and her biography thickens our perceptions of modern experience.

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Left Turn: The New Zealand General Election of 1999. Edited by Jonathan Boston, Stephen Church, Stephen Levine, Elizabeth McLeay, Nigel Roberts. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2000. 312 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-404-2.

ORDINARILY, academic publications appear years after the events they describe and examine. Thankfully for political practitioners and general readers, however, Victoria University Press has once again promptly delivered another excellent post-election publication: *Left Turn: The New Zealand General Election of 1999*. The fruits of the most recent gathering at Victoria of political party members, news representatives and academics are neatly divided into five parts in the text: the obligatory introduction; political party perspectives; the media; voting trends; and electoral behaviour and results.

From Labour's Mike Williams to United's Mark Stonyer, insiders reveal all (well, mercifully not all) from their respective 'War Rooms' on their 1999 election strategizing and campaigning. That the conference took place in the backwash of the election is evident in some of the more colourful and flavoursome prose here. For example, Rod Donald could not help delivering some hustings rhetoric when he noted that, 'While National's dirty tricks campaign probably cost us crucial support and Coromandel itself,

and may have also had some negative impact nationally, on balance it backfired badly.' Also fresh from the frontlines, martial themes flavoured Annabel Young's contribution for the National Party when she noted that 'MMP has turned elections into battles of strategy', and concluded by referring somewhat scarily to Bismarck's claim that 'sharp bullets are preferable to sharp speeches'. Jason Thomas and Todd Stevenson's input provides an alarming insight into the workings of the ACT Party's strategists with a chapter made up almost entirely of bullet points — nearly 50 in all. Nevertheless, the general tenor of campaigns waged by the respective parties is well captured here by those who occupied the trenches.

In the media section, veteran journalist Colin James draws the short straw with the unenviable task of cutting through the morass of media messages to bring us the election's key issues, while other contributors examine party coverage in the newspapers and on television, and Margaret Cousins and Elizabeth McLeay discuss the use of electioneering leaflets. Reading Stephen Harris's chapter 'Following the Leaders', one is struck by the prominent role women played in the election. As Harris points out, not only did Helen Clark and Jenny Shipley lead the charge for Labour and National in Western democracy's first all-woman contest for Prime Minister, but other women played prominent parts in the fortunes of three minor parties.

For example, a number of own-goals by New Zealand First, such as the demotion of its only two female MPs, Robyn McDonald and Jenny Bloxham, to unelectable positions on the party list (20th and 22nd respectively), and, only days out from the election, the revelation that one of the party's candidates (another woman) was under investigation relating to GST charges, threatened to banish the party from the House. In the end Winston Peters hung on to his Tauranga seat with a wafer-thin 63-vote lead over National's Katherine O'Regan. Elsewhere, Jeanette Fitzsimons piloted the Greens to their first parliamentary victory, while Labour's Marion Hobbs grasped the key Wellington Central seat from ACT leader Richard Prebble.

The academics do the arcane number-crunching on voting trends and electoral behaviour in the book's fourth section. The result is enough graphs, tables and charts to illuminate any number of lectures or articles on the election. We learn not only that National's attacks on the Greens in the Coromandel were perfectly weighted (albeit unintentionally) to see the Greens into the House, and thereby prevent Labour and the Alliance achieving a governing majority, but also that New Zealand's split-ticket voting is double that of Germany's (35% compared to 15%), and that ACT has an extraordinary gender imbalance among its voters, of whom 84% are males.

Finally, hope for the continuing credibility, and therefore the success of the MMP electoral system, is offered by comparing the coverage of the coalition agreements of this most recent edition with the 1996 volume *From Campaign to Coalition*. In the latter, discussions of the Byzantine agreement thrashed out by National and New Zealand First consumed nearly a quarter of the publication. In *Left Turn* the greater trust between Labour and the Alliance and the growing political maturity in the MMP environment made for a more palatable two-page Coalition Agreement (in the appendix) and a mere two chapters examining pre-election wheeling and dealing, and the subsequent formation of the Labour–Alliance coalition government.

Given the wealth of information condensed here, this current volume will be an invaluable resource for historians, political scientists and students looking back on the arrival of Helen Clark's Fifth Labour Government. Of course how left-turning the new government is remains to be seen and Labour has a great deal of work ahead to demonstrate that its new persona is more than the New Right with a guilt complex.

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