

The Politics of Post-War Consumer Culture



THE 1940s ARE INTERESTING YEARS in the story of New Zealand's consumer culture. The realities of working and spending, and the promulgation of ideals and moralities around consumer behaviour, were closely related to the political process. Labour had come to power in 1935 promising to alleviate the hardship of the depression years and improve the standard of living of all New Zealanders. World War II intervened, replacing the image of increasing prosperity with one of sacrifice. In the shadow of the war the economy grew strongly, but there remained a legacy of shortages at a time when many sought material advancement.

Historical writing on consumer culture is burgeoning internationally, and starting to emerge in New Zealand. There is already some local discussion of consumption in the post-war period, particularly with respect to clothing, embodiment and housing.¹ This is an important area for study because, as Peter Gibbons points out, the consumption of goods — along with the needs they express and the desires they engender — deeply affects individual lives and social relationships.² A number of aspects of consumption lend themselves to historical analysis, including the economic, the symbolic, the moral and the political. By exploring the political aspects of consumption and their relationships to these other strands, we can see how intense contestation over the symbolic meaning of consumption and its relationship to production played a pivotal role in defining the differences between the Labour government and the National opposition in the 1940s. More broadly, we can begin to investigate how this decade represented a particular moment in the development of modern consumer culture in New Zealand.

Labour, led by Michael Joseph Savage, won the 1935 election on a promise to end depression austerity and usher in a more prosperous nation. New approaches to housing, education and social security would lift New Zealanders' standard of living, ensuring 'security' and protection from 'want and the fear of want'.³ New pleasures, too, would become available to the citizenry. Savage was enthusiastic about music and the possibilities offered by the radio: not only would the public be entertained, but also kept informed about the good work underway in parliament, the 'workshop for the enactment of the will of the people'.⁴ Peter Fraser, who took over as prime minister after Savage's death in 1940, loved movies and the 'newfangled gramophone'. Fraser lent his support to the establishment of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, which he argued would bring culture to the masses.⁵

While the new Labour government promised a more fulfilling life for all, its economic management made an impact upon the possibilities for consumption. From 1938 imports were restricted in order to preserve foreign exchange, a

stance explained to New Zealanders in terms of fostering local industry.⁶ Walter Nash, the minister in charge of finance and the Internal Marketing Department, oversaw decisions about what and how much could be imported. Savage, Nash and Fraser all insisted that import levels must be matched by a corresponding rise in domestic productivity, and Fraser contended that New Zealand's standard of living would not increase 'unless the whole economic resources of the country are organised and utilised in the production of more commodities'.⁷ Prices, too, were controlled, in an attempt to hold down inflation and dampen wage demands. The Price Tribunal oversaw a very detailed schedule listing maximum prices for most of the goods available.⁸

The outbreak of war added further constraints, which women often bore the brunt of. Some supplies were directed from the domestic market to assist the war effort at home and in Britain. Shortages affected the availability of food, clothing fabrics, steel, cement, petrol and motor vehicles. Customers went shopping with books of ration coupons, which limited the purchase of such staple goods as sugar, butter, tea, meat and eggs (Figure 1).⁹ At times eggs were issued only to expectant mothers, and determining a woman's eligibility could prove embarrassing for customers and shopkeepers alike.¹⁰ The government's publicity machine reassured shoppers that the shortages were not as severe as those in Britain,¹¹ but with their shopping baskets depleted, women improvised at home. Dresses could be made from upholstery fabric, and aprons, cotton sheets and tea towels might be refashioned from flour bags. In her *Listener* column the well-known household adviser Aunt Daisy suggested ways that cooks might 'eke out the sugar'.¹²



Figure 1: Shoppers queuing outside Salisbury's in Dixon Street, Wellington, during the war. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, G 41095 1/4.

A bright note was introduced with the arrival of an American Marine Corps division in 1942.¹³ The marines brought with them lipstick, chocolate and stockings — all in short supply — as well as more novel innovations such as chewing gum. To their new-found local friends they gave cigarettes purchased from their own supply depots. New Zealanders could use these as unofficial currency, exchanging them for the extra rations shopkeepers kept under their counters.¹⁴ An air of glamour, romance and entertainment provided light relief for many local women in particular.¹⁵ Importantly, the troops' presence provided one way American consumer culture could be introduced to the South Pacific. New Zealanders were already familiar with American movies, but now they discovered milk bars, swing bands, coffee and hot dogs.¹⁶ America's influence increased markedly after the war. During the late 1940s the popular press took to describing the geography and social life of this newly important nation to curious readers. One article in a five-part *Listener* series published under the banner 'The American Way of Life' described the household gadgets and appliances available to householders in the US.¹⁷ At the same time, many young people became avid followers of American popular culture.¹⁸

The marines departed in 1944, and although the New Zealand economy grew rapidly once the war ended a year later, domestic consumption remained constrained.¹⁹ As a result, the make-do-and-mend approach that many had adopted during the depression years continued. Some seamstresses made women's underwear from silk parachutes, while the *Woman's Weekly* offered patterns for creating 'new' fashions out of old clothes and recipes for eggless cakes.²⁰ Rationing was lifted but slowly, as supplies were diverted to the reconstruction effort in Britain.²¹ Butter, cream and petrol were still rationed when Labour lost the 1949 election. In some quarters this was lauded as a form of worthy national sacrifice (the *Listener* editorialized that 'the problem is moral from beginning to end: we have a great deal to spare if we are willing to surrender it'),²² but as the years wore on many found it increasingly frustrating.²³ Customers continued to experience periodic shortages of fruit and vegetables, including such basic items as potatoes,²⁴ while home deliveries were curtailed for want of petrol to run the grocers' vans. The complaint that women carried home heavy loads and had become 'pack horses' and 'beasts of burden' was common, and the government was sometimes held directly responsible — especially by the National Party. For example, the National candidate for Brooklyn offered the image of the housewife as a 'human camel', weighed down by packages labelled 'shortages' and 'lack of deliveries'.²⁵

The shortages of wartime and the early post-war years had an interesting impact on the shape of consumer culture in New Zealand. A relative lack of items to buy did not mean that purchasing was insignificant in the lives of citizens. Quite the opposite in fact: it took centre stage. Lizabeth Cohen has argued that in the US the depression years witnessed a rise both in consumer advocacy and the extent to which Americans considered themselves mass consumers.²⁶ Not dissimilarly, in New Zealand during the 1940s consumption became a key site at which social aspirations and political differences were forcefully constructed. The Labour government and the National opposition vied for the power to control the supply and distribution of goods. Each party's illustrated

election pamphlets and their MPs' notes and speeches reveal the philosophies behind their policy prescriptions, and — perhaps more interestingly — tell us something about the development of post-war consumer culture in New Zealand more generally.

Consumption was an important arena in which political philosophies were expressed and contested. Much of Labour's rhetoric emphasized the conditions of production, and the need for fairness and 'security' in order that workers might find satisfaction in their lives. Much was made of 'stability, security and prosperity under Labour', and copywriters offered chilling reminders of the depression-era penury overseen by the Reform Party, National's political predecessor.²⁷ The availability of food, cars, telephones and other household items formed one aspect of Labour's general 'prosperity',²⁸ a desirable outcome of a fair and efficient productive process.²⁹ Before his death in 1940, Savage noted that 'under-consumption' and social misery resulted when workers were unable to afford the goods available.³⁰ In the following decade voters were frequently reminded that average incomes had increased under Labour, and the government asserted that National saw wages primarily as costs to be cut. 'We have some shortages and supply difficulties', Labour conceded at the end of the war, 'but on the whole we live fairly comfortably. We have social and economic security.'³¹ This offer of 'security' included the promise to protect citizens from the 'exploiters and profiteers' of free-market capitalism that National would surely unleash if re-elected.³²

Labour was interested not only in workers' employment conditions and their ability to afford a 'decent' standard of living, but also the use of leisure time.³³ Opportunities for weekend relaxation and holidays away from home were portrayed as a logical outcome of the 40-hour week the government had so assiduously promoted.³⁴ Labour cast itself as the party of 'more leisure time and paid holidays', which they defended from the Opposition's scepticism and accusations that the 'workers' leisure had not been properly employed'.³⁵ Images in *An Era of Plenty*, Labour's 1949 election pamphlet, showed citizens involved in a range of leisure pursuits: gardening, camping and on a boat cruise. Labour MPs argued that leisure might bolster the wider social good.³⁶ For instance, H.G.R. Mason supported the development of a National Library Service, which he felt would encourage 'fruitful use of leisure time' and thus enhance family life. Library borrowers would be able to choose from books on a range of topics: the domestic arts, sewing, cooking, interior decoration, gardening, joinery, sports and the 'building of motor caravans'.³⁷

While for the most part the Labour government was happy to support private retailers, provided they abided by state controls, key personnel such as Savage and Nash had long been interested in the idea of producer and consumer co-operatives.³⁸ In earlier years they argued for the socialization of production and exchange as an important aim of the labour movement. Consumers' co-operative grocery stores were established in the Lower Hutt state housing suburbs of Naenae, Taita and Epuni at the instigation of William Robertson, a Canadian immigrant and follower of the international co-operative movement. Fraser and Nash were supportive, and by 1947 30 co-ops were trading across the country under the overview of the New Zealand Federation of Co-operatives.

The Hutt Valley group even had a newsletter — the *Hutt Valley Co-operator* — whose editors argued that co-ops offered customers a chance to counter the monopolistic power of private businesses and to ensure that profits benefited the entire community.³⁹ Photographs of the Naenae co-op store appeared in Labour's election publicity, in conjunction with exhortations about the benefits of modern town planning.⁴⁰

'Planning' became something of a double-edged sword for Labour, however. On the one hand, many of the party's MPs forcefully argued that centralized social and economic planning 'on a scale not undertaken before' was necessary in order to meet demand in such areas as roading, education, post-war rehabilitation, housing and land settlement.⁴¹ Ormond Wilson told voters in his electorate that centralized planning was necessary if New Zealanders' standards of living were to be maintained, while Nash spoke of a 'planned and prosperous Dominion'.⁴² In short, planning was a prerequisite for modernity. On the other hand, Labour's enthusiasm for planning opened up the party to National's insistence that 'planning' was really a euphemism for regulation. National leader Sid Holland and his supporters worked hard to suggest that state planning was less a matter of necessity than an expression of the desire for 'ultimate socialism': 'the control and direction of our daily lives, by a little group of planners resident in Wellington'.⁴³ The title of one election pamphlet neatly encapsulated National's view: 'They Plan, You Pay' (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Labour's 'planning', argued National Party politicians, pushed up prices and restricted the supply of goods. This is the cover from *They Plan, You Pay*, National Party pamphlet, 1949.

Ever since its establishment in 1936, the National Party had campaigned against Labour's 'socialism'.⁴⁴ Initially, National portrayed socialism either as a threatening black cloud looming over the New Zealand countryside and

its inhabitants, or a grasping red hand reaching out for families' homes.⁴⁵ This symbolism shifted during the 1940s, and 'socialism' came primarily to signify a philosophical threat to the factory and the market.⁴⁶ In this vein, National suggested that 'Labour's attack is against all private enterprise. It is in their policy. They want to grab the lot. The "socialisation of the means of production, distribution, and exchange" means exactly what it says.'⁴⁷ Accordingly, shoppers were warned that 'Socialism attacks the customer — which means you'.⁴⁸ A rejection of 'socialism' was the only way the customer would ensure the availability of a wide range of goods at reasonable prices. This view was adopted, too, by editorial writers for major newspapers including the *Dominion*, *New Zealand Herald* and *Truth*.⁴⁹ Some on the Left responded archly to National's proclamations on socialism: Independent Labour candidate Frank Langstone suggested that Holland knew as much about socialism ('a movement of the highest ideals') as 'a hen does about arithmetic'.⁵⁰

National's rhetoric translated into the suggestion that the Labour government was attempting to make decisions for consumers by stealth. Import and price controls, it was argued, 'dictated' what people would buy and hence what they would wear, how they might engage in business, and how they would spend their time.⁵¹ 'Competition' was the only antidote, and by fostering competitive pressures and freedom of imports National promised to 'allow the people, not the State, to decide what they shall buy, and how they shall spend their money'.⁵² By promoting such consumer freedom National offered itself as the party of the new consumer age. Some amusing attacks on the government resulted, as National's supporters hammed up the notion that Labour threatened to control the most intimate aspects of private life. On one occasion, National's party newspaper, *Freedom*, reported the views of an overseas fashion 'expert' who pronounced New Zealand women's clothing 'dowdy and drab', and the editor mocked Nash's defence of local women's wardrobes. 'Naturally', *Freedom* editorialized, 'the women of the Dominion were pleased to know that a fashion expert of the calibre of Mr. Walter Nash gave them full marks for the effect they achieve with the clothes he selects for them'.⁵³ One of the newspaper's correspondents chimed in:

New Zealand women, who have been somewhat concerned at suggestions that there is a drab monotony about their clothes, will be relieved to find that this verdict of the critics has been reviewed and finally overruled by the eminent authority on feminine fashions, Mr. Walter Nash. After telling the New Zealand women for 10 years what they may and may not (and particularly may not) wear, he has now taken time off from his task of regulating every other detail of our existence from the cradle to the grave, to survey the results and to pass judgement upon 'The Nash Look'.⁵⁴

'The Nash Look' was a parody of Christian Dior's 'New Look', a style featuring long, narrow-waisted dresses that made ample use of fabrics still in short supply in the post-war years.⁵⁵ The parody continued in the lead-up to the 1949 election. When a shortage of records for the nation's 'radiograms' became apparent, *Freedom* suggested that 'It may suit the Minister of Finance, Mr. Nash, to have only two — "I'm running round in circles getting nowhere", and "Money is the root of all evil"' — and asserted that consumers were

unimpressed.⁵⁶ Allusions to popular music were not limited to National's press. Labour's *Southern Cross* newspaper proffered a cartoon of Sid Holland dressed as a torch singer wooing voters with a rendition of 'Lover come back to me', a rolling pin labelled 'capitalism' held in one hand behind his back.⁵⁷

National frequently suggested that as the minister responsible for import controls Nash held 'dictatorial powers'.⁵⁸ This was clearly illustrated in the cartoons published in their election pamphlets: in one he sat high on a pedestal, doling out stockings one by one to the crowd of women thronged below. (In his defence, Nash argued that the problem was not so much a lack of import licences as shortages among overseas suppliers.⁵⁹) The description of Nash as a 'dictator' was repeated over and over, and would be remembered years later.⁶⁰ The 'dictator' image melded with another: that of the wowser. Along with Prime Minister Fraser and Arnold Nordmeyer (who played an important role as minister of commerce and industry), Nash abstained from alcohol and tobacco.⁶¹ On one occasion he suggested that smokers concerned with increasing cigarette prices might take to sucking acid drops instead, an idea derided by his opponents who were keen to demonstrate his abstemiousness and its effects on the rest of the populace.⁶²

So, what images of the 'good life' did Labour offer during the late 1940s, when National and its allies in the press were complaining that consumption was limited by the government's 'socialist' controls? Labour's vision trod a careful path between opportunities for the enhancement of individual and family life on the one hand and order and simplicity on the other. 'Security' would protect the populace from poverty and want, while delivering a society of 'plenty'. Labour embraced the idea that modernity could be mobilized in the service of the public good, by making the most of new technologies. Public works projects employed the latest earthmoving machinery, domestic and trans-Tasman air travel was steadily developed with the introduction of flying boats and other new aircraft, and the railway system was enhanced by the addition of new lines, electrification and stylish new railcars for passenger traffic.⁶³ Some of Labour's mass housing schemes adopted modernist idioms in the search for a new order: 'light, and sun, and space and design and convenience . . . homes and buildings that are not sacrificed to convention'.⁶⁴ Those driving the government's public works projects were keen to embrace modernity. As others have argued, science emerged strongly in the 1940s as a means and a metaphor for the improvement of individuals and society.⁶⁵ Images of aeroplanes and space travel were increasingly employed in advertisements for clothing and household appliances, and articles on 'scientific housework' were common.⁶⁶

While Labour enthusiastically took up a scientific modernity in matters of the public good, the government fused it with appeals to a simple, orderly style of life. Sometimes this juxtaposition created interesting symbolic tensions. For instance, while Labour built a few high-rise apartment blocks in Auckland and Wellington and deployed these in its publicity as symbols of modernity,⁶⁷ Nash and Fraser were reputedly more comfortable with the individual state house based on the English rural cottage and set in lawns and gardens.⁶⁸ Perhaps this is why the English cottage look came to typify representations of the state house during the period.⁶⁹ Such rustic ideals are amply demonstrated by the

cover of Labour's election pamphlet *An Era of Plenty* (Figure 3). It featured a fictional community that was part city, part rural suburb, the housing located in a liminal zone between town and country with plenty of fresh air and open space.⁷⁰ The urban area was neat, lightly trafficked and orderly, every citizen purposefully going about his or her daily business.

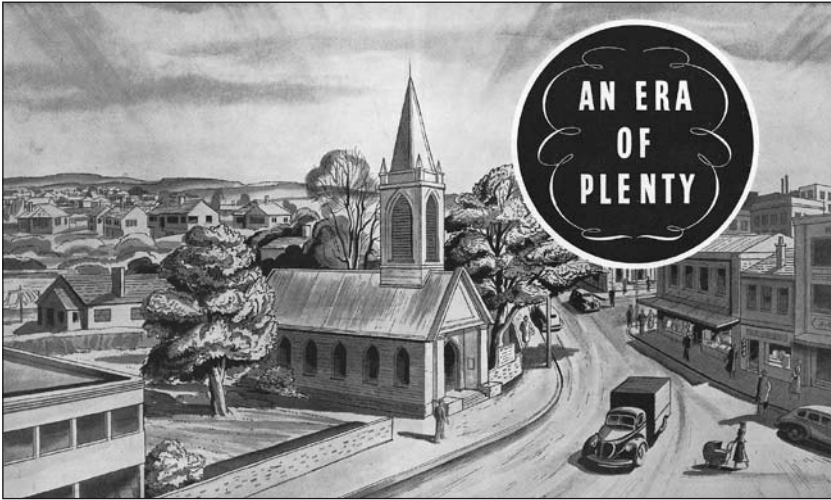


Figure 3: The somewhat bucolic cover from *An Era of Plenty*, Labour Party pamphlet, 1949.

The pamphlet's text opened with a description of New Zealand as a 'green land . . . truly blessed', with 'rich fertility', 'lush pasture', the 'hum of factory wheels' and 'more homes — and better ones — than ever before'. Such allusions to arcadia, rooted in nineteenth-century colonial ideals and drawing upon the theme of wholesome natural abundance,⁷¹ were offered in other pamphlets, too. *The 10 Good Years* included an illustration of an overflowing horn of plenty, a compass and set squares to accompany its discussion of the 40-hour week, paid holidays and workers' high standard of living (Figure 4). The notion of scientific progress signified by instruments of precision was juxtaposed with a bucolic representation of plenty.

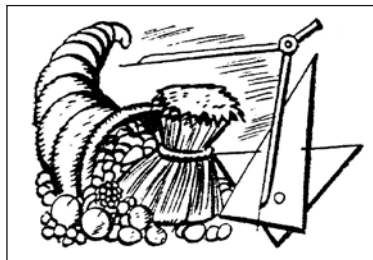


Figure 4: Modernity meets Arcadia in this juxtaposition of technical drawing instruments and a horn of plenty. *The 10 Good Years*, Labour Party pamphlet, 1946, p.11.

That the cover of *An Era of Plenty* offered a church as the boundary between domestic life and the commercial activities of the town centre was probably no accident. By the late 1940s Nash, a Christian socialist, was becoming increasingly concerned that growing consumer desires threatened ‘the soul [and] spiritual development’. In his speeches he argued that ‘material things are not everything: spiritual happiness, contentment, understanding and humility are the things that matter’.⁷² Nash was not the only one thinking this way: the Presbyterian General Assembly expressed its anxiety that ‘materialism’ posed the newest threat to Christianity, subsuming the crucial emphasis on life’s ‘spiritual necessities’.⁷³ Religious values were meant to provide a buffer between family life and crass commercialism. A high standard of living and the embrace of modernity in the service of collective wellbeing were not to be confused with extravagance, a misguided materialism or the careless abandonment of the arcadian tradition.

National politicians were antagonistic towards this ‘New Order’ of Labour’s, suggesting instead its ‘disorder’: the continued shortages of clothing, cars and construction materials allegedly caused by the government’s ‘socialism’. Labour was dubbed ‘the shortage government’.⁷⁴ National’s election pamphlets were typically more lavishly illustrated than Labour’s, and sketches and cartoons illustrated the shortages of the time and the new consumer world of the future.

Motorcars and household appliances most represented the consumer era that would dawn if only voters were willing to usher it in at the ballot box. In Figure 5, from National’s *A Family Affair* pamphlet, family members fantasized wistfully of having a motorcar to whisk them around the city and countryside.⁷⁵ This image represented not contentment with Labour’s post-war economy, but frustration at having one’s hopes of the good life dashed. The car was symbolically important during this period because it represented

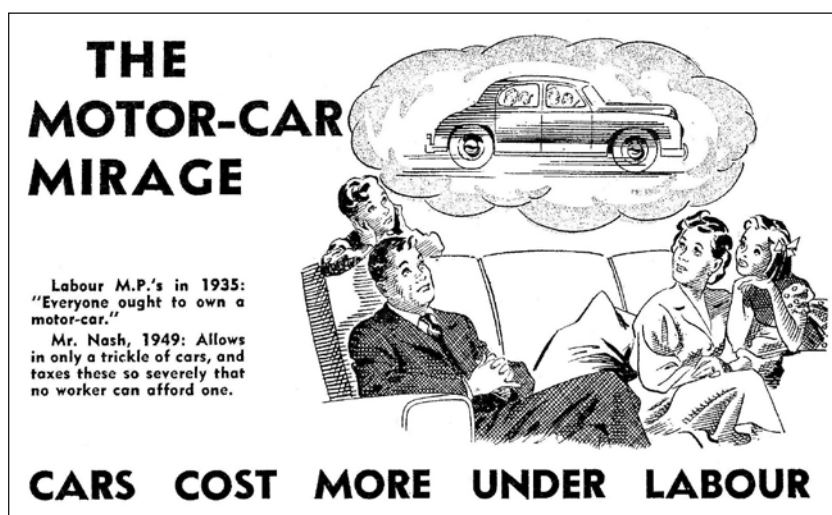


Figure 5: Unrealized family dreams. As it turned out, cars remained out of reach of most for another two decades. *A Family Affair*, National Party pamphlet, 1949, p.12.

the possibility of individually designed travel itineraries, and therefore a movement toward a less encumbered future.⁷⁶ The text that accompanied this image is also interesting. First, Nash's sales taxes on cars were said to prevent the realization of workers' dreams, thus disappointing key Labour constituents. Second, National suggested that cabinet ministers 'cruise around in chauffeur-driven de luxe cars' while young families seeking healthy outdoor recreation found their 'dream of having a car' thwarted. In an interesting twist, National politicians sought to ally themselves with 'Mr. and Mrs. John Citizen' against the 'privilege' enjoyed by Labour's ministers. It was clever politics to suggest, as National did, that Labour's ministers were misappropriating modernity by whizzing around the globe in planes and being driven in limousines while 'the people' missed out.⁷⁷

Sometimes National's election candidates mentioned cars, household appliances and ministerial 'privilege' all in the same breath. For instance, one asked 'how many vacuum cleaners and refrigerators could be bought with the dollars spent by Mr. Nash on ministerial cars?'⁷⁸ The text and images in *Women and the Future* (1949) also positioned National as the saviour of everyday families beset by shortages of consumer durables. In some cases the fantasies created were excessive for the time. The model kitchen portrayed in this pamphlet (Figure 6) offered not only a double-sized electric stove, a refrigerator and large cupboards, some pantry-sized — all of which were relatively rare — but also a dishwasher, an item that would not become common for several more decades.

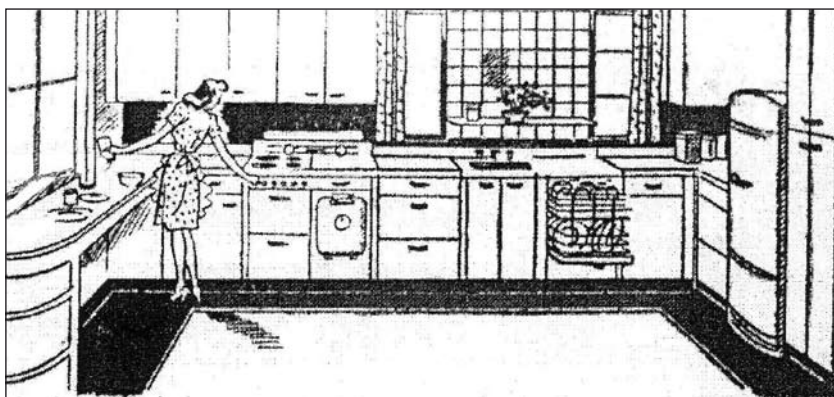


Figure 6: The ultra-modern kitchen, packed with the appliances National promised to make more widely available by loosening import controls. *Women and the Future*, National Party pamphlet, 1949, n.p.

Under the slogan 'End the Era of Unnecessary Shortages', readers were offered images of women making use of a wringer washing machine, a refrigerator and a bench press ironing machine. The first two items became increasingly popular during the 1940s, but local production volumes were restricted during and after the war by a shortage of steel.⁷⁹ Such representations dovetailed with the keen interest taken by the press in the scientific, mechanized

kitchen 'where miracles are achieved by the touch of a finger' and 'cooking is no longer hard work, but a pleasure'.⁸⁰

National's copywriters made a concerted attempt to engender consumer desires that Labour's ministers dared not encourage, committed as they were to tight economic management.⁸¹ Even during the 1943 election campaign, while the war still raged, Holland incited ownership of assets: 'The aim of the National Party is that everyone, no matter how humble his station in life, should be able to OWN something — a home, a shop, a piece of land, a factory or a share in one, a farm, household furniture, and so on When we become the Government, every opportunity will be given for people to **own things**.'⁸²

By 1949 Labour MPs fully realized that the growing post-war economy had led to increasing consumer demand. Nash promised more cigarettes and nylons by Christmas — just after the election that Labour would lose — and conceded that 'more people want the carpet life today than want the linoleum life'.⁸³ His colleague Clyde Carr articulated the new desires even more clearly: 'In the old days mum and dad were content to start off in a two-room lean-to on the back section. Today the young people have the money to spend and they want new bungalows with wall-to-wall carpets.'⁸⁴

While Labour politicians were inclined to worry about these changes, they insisted that they had occurred only because Labour's wealth distribution policies had made the fulfilment of consumer desires possible in the first place. Nash insisted that people 'had not a ghost of a chance of buying carpets before we came in'.⁸⁵ Again, Labour emphasized workers' ability to afford consumer goods, rather than their ability to find sufficient goods on which to spend their incomes. In a rather curious twist to Labour's social democratic approach to consumption, MP Fred Hackett suggested that refrigerators and washing machines might be mass-produced in the railway workshops and sold at a low price to state house tenants.⁸⁶

Labour's ambivalence over materialistic excess is interesting, for it opens up the question of how both political parties dealt with what Zygmunt Bauman refers to as the shift from a 'producer society' to a 'consumer society', and the state's role in such a shift.⁸⁷ When we move our focus from the parties' positions on the availability of consumer *items* to their assessment of the impact of a consumer *society*, we observe a reasonably complicated set of tensions. For example, National was not always sympathetic to the youthfulness of consumer culture, nor was Labour necessarily antagonistic to it. Each party's arguments were closely related to complex moralities surrounding notions of 'work' and 'reward'. The following discussion explores these ideas, in order that we might consider the broader ideological shifts that accompanied post-war consumer culture in New Zealand.

Bauman argues that industrial societies engaged their members primarily as producers, and that individuals' involvement in the productive process constituted their primary social roles. In contrast, he suggests, social roles in late modern or post-modern society are defined much more in terms of people's relationships to consumption. This is a matter of emphasis; it is not to say that consumption was unimportant in earlier times, or that the work we do is of little consequence to us nowadays.⁸⁸ Rather, it is to propose that during the

mid-twentieth century individuals' identities came to be defined much more by their relationships to consumption than to production.⁸⁹ Other authors have put forward similar arguments. Richard Fox and Jackson Lears argue that a nineteenth-century 'producer ethic', a value system based on work, sacrifice and saving, evolved into a dominant twentieth-century 'consumer ethic'.⁹⁰ At the same time, the 'Protestant work ethic' started to weaken. This was originally based in Calvinist teachings that hard work and an ascetic avoidance of earthly pleasures would create the greatest likelihood of individual salvation.⁹¹ In turn, the dilution of the Protestant work ethic and the rise of consumer society was accompanied by the 'aestheticisation of everyday life'. Consumption came to represent a new form of therapy leading to self-fulfilment.⁹² No longer did individuals develop themselves primarily through their hard work, creativeness and self-sacrifice, instead they might seek self-expression by engaging in the pleasures offered by consumer culture.⁹³ In other words, the transition from producer to consumer society replaced hard work with pleasure as the primary virtue.

Both political parties needed to negotiate this cultural shift, but in so doing neither abandoned their focus on production. Labour and National shared the view that goods ought best to be understood as the reward for an honest day's work. The government argued that it had provided 'more goods for reward of effort',⁹⁴ but had long reminded citizens that a higher standard of living depended upon higher levels of production.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, National was more specific about the opportunities that ought to constitute this reward. Sid Holland considered the New Zealand worker 'a quiet, industrious, hard-working fellow, anxious to be successful and to get on in the world, willing to work hard in order to make a little extra money with which to provide a few extras for his family and with which to enjoy life; whether it be in holidays, gardening, motoring or perhaps horse-racing'.⁹⁶

Self-denial remained important as the means of ensuring the nation's 'development and expansion', but National insisted that 'self-denial will not be practised unless there is a reward'.⁹⁷ This said, Holland and his colleagues thought it necessary to balance work on the one hand against its fruits on the other. As one National candidate put the point, 'what has been earned by sweat, toil and skill, or saved by self-denial, shall command the power to buy goods at an equal value of sweat, toil and skill'.⁹⁸ National politicians argued not that workers toiled too hard or earned too little, but that they could not purchase sufficient to adequately compensate for their labours.

Beyond this agreement on the importance of hard work and reward, the two parties started to diverge. Labour denied there was a shortage of adequate rewards: Nash, for instance, argued that New Zealanders 'may not have the refrigerators or washing machines, but radios, electric irons, even jugs and heaters have become necessities and are in reach of all . . . women's work, though still hard, is easier than ever before'.⁹⁹ In addition, the government considered that access to goods should be based on egalitarian principles, and worried that 'no man should have more luxuries until all the people have the necessities of life'.¹⁰⁰ 'Luxury' was a concern for symbolic reasons as well as material ones. As Arjun Appadurai has argued, luxury is a relative concept

but one that positions consumers politically, rhetorically and socially.¹⁰¹ While Nash realized that items previously thought of as luxuries were becoming necessities, he was wary that embracing luxury allowed some people access to a level of comfort denied others.¹⁰² In one speech, for instance, he argued that National's priority was 'enabling luxury homes to be built for their rich friends'.¹⁰³ Holland, in contrast, was content to prescribe 'some of those things we sometimes call luxuries that can make life so pleasant' as a reward for hard work.¹⁰⁴ That neither leader precisely defined what he meant by 'luxury' illustrates both the slipperiness and symbolic importance of the concept.

If Labour was suspicious of the rejection of egalitarianism implicit in the concept of luxury, National was greatly concerned that Labour's welfare state had made the population work-shy. While Labour MPs agreed that work was important, National politicians regarded consumption as morally unacceptable unless it followed concerted effort in the workplace and strengthened family life.¹⁰⁵ During the 1949 election campaign, one opposition candidate expressed his exasperation that the government's 'policy of more pay for less work can only lead to New Zealand's physical and moral collapse, and from that God preserve us!'¹⁰⁶ This theme appeared over and over again, although not always in such florid prose. On the campaign trail National candidates stressed that people must not learn to depend on the state for assistance, and worried that 'we are building up a nation of leaners'.¹⁰⁷ Wellington's *Dominion* newspaper, a consistent supporter of the National Party, underlined the importance of 'those three plain earthly teachers — reason, work, and discipline'.¹⁰⁸ According to this view, to look to the state for sustenance was to abrogate one's responsibility for application and self-control. The vehemence of these complaints did not escape Labour's attention. Nash lampooned National's apparent concern that New Zealanders had become 'soft and dependent on a Father Christmas Government'.¹⁰⁹

None were allegedly more prone to laxity than those at the cutting edge of post-war consumerism: the young. Internationally the post-war years saw the birth of the 'teen-ager', and the new label circulated widely among American advertising agencies to denote the members of an increasingly valuable market niche.¹¹⁰ For the National Party and its business supporters, however, the teenager represented something of a social problem. Mollycoddled by Labour's welfare state and led astray by the temptations of consumer culture, young adults were said to spurn good, honest toil.¹¹¹ One small business owner bemoaned their 'South Sea Island attitude', suggesting that 'unless you approach good solid work as if it were a game, some of our youngsters simply won't play'. She added that although New Zealand was a fine nation, 'we have to WORK to keep it!'.¹¹² The Chairman of the Wellington Stock Exchange was concerned that young people had come to believe that 'the stream of luxuries and high wages would be kept permanently flowing by a beneficent government'.¹¹³ This was not without its irony, given the claims that Labour blocked the availability of 'luxury' goods.

But what could be done? Young people now had more economic independence, having benefited from generous legal wage minimums and the high demand for workers after the war.¹¹⁴ Discipline and the reinforcement of a

work ethic were the solutions offered by National. The party sought to educate youth in 'moral and spiritual values' as well as 'citizenship, personal relations, and parenthood'. A 'high moral code' could be built up through a 'high standard of moral and spiritual education [for] every young person in the community'.¹¹⁵ The answer to laxity, it seemed, was a comprehensive programme of sport, military training and advanced courses in personal relations. The Labour government agreed that the young should be encouraged to develop 'healthy bodies and well-developed minds',¹¹⁶ but its MPs balked at suggestions that teenagers ought to be regarded as the harbingers of post-war disorder.¹¹⁷ Nash defended them from the charges of those 'pessimists and carping critics' who could 'see no good in the younger generation',¹¹⁸ while Health Minister Mabel Howard was even more forthright. In her public speeches she insisted that 'the talk about thriftless and lazy young people is insulting'. Howard took National MPs to task for suggesting that shorter work hours and higher wages had taken away young people's sense of the 'real meaning of the value of money'.¹¹⁹ During the 1950s she scandalized the conservatives with her active support of youth culture, and on one infamous occasion jived with local rock'n'roll star Johnny Devlin.¹²⁰ Howard and Nash did not reject the moral virtues of hard work, but they would not accept that young men and women lacked application.

The association between youth, moral turpitude and consumer culture outlived the first Labour government. It reached a high point several years later, when the 'Mazengarb' committee set up to investigate illicit adolescent sexual activity in the Hutt Valley published its report.¹²¹ This was circulated to all households receiving the family benefit shortly before the 1954 election. The committee members, led by former National election candidate Oswald Mazengarb, did not concern themselves with sexual behaviour alone. Alleged sexual depravity among teenagers was joined by other social problems, including the growth in 'materialistic' values that accompanied ready access to money. The report stated that the young were cosseted by the post-war welfare state and thus turned to the government 'for the supply of all material needs'. At the same time, imported forms of consumer culture ('pulp comics' and other 'indecent' literature) added to the nation's sexual problems.¹²² The Presbyterian Church, having argued in 1949 that materialism posed a grave threat to spiritual values, self-sacrifice and self-control, submitted that young people's incomes resulted in self-gratification and a 'desire to self-display'. Teenagers, the church hierarchy argued, were inclined to slip from 'the belief that *things* are important to the conclusion that *people too* exist merely as means to self-gratification'.¹²³

The 1940s was a decade of transition in New Zealand culture. The sense of virtue attributed to hard work was slowly supplanted by the idea that consumption might provide self-fulfilment, but the older morality was not displaced entirely. Instead, they coexisted in an uneasy tension. Neither political party, nor the supporters of either party, wholeheartedly embraced the emerging consumer society, but neither did they reject it. Instead, their ambivalent positions represented complex interests. Most obviously, perhaps, National strove to gain the Treasury benches while Labour sought to retain

them, and each party crafted its rhetoric accordingly. At the same time, members of each party held particular beliefs that underpinned their approach to consumption. Labour appealed to the collective provision of social services and a generalized Arcadian 'plenty' that sometimes included consumer goods for everyone. Nash, in some ways the most influential figure, worried about the implications of the latter and attempted to put his closely held Christian socialism into practice.

In contrast, National voiced a preference for 'free enterprise', promising an end to 'Ultimate Socialism' with its commitment to planning and restricted supplies of new consumer items. On the campaign trail in 1949 Holland and his MPs insisted that New Zealanders need only look to Australia, where Liberal Prime Minister Robert Menzies had been elected earlier that year, if they wanted to see shelves overflowing with labour-saving devices and other consumer goods.¹²⁴ In this way, consumption would deliver upon dreams of independence, comfort and reward, in a way that ensured respite from Labour's closely controlled version of modernity.¹²⁵ National MPs thought their vision ultimately more democratic, arguing vehemently that 'we will allow the people, not the State, to decide what they shall buy, and how they shall spend their money'.¹²⁶

Although National politicians wanted to offer the latest consumer goods in the name of free enterprise, they were rather less *laissez-faire* when it came to teenagers. Their concerns over young adults' alleged laxity revealed another set of ideological commitments, this time to thrift, hard work and self-control. The National Party and its business supporters were concerned that a new generation of workers might slacken off amid post-war affluence. In contrast, Labour MPs were much less worried about the young and even went so far as to defend them from opposition criticism. Clearly the relationships between the political and the moral aspects of consumer culture were not straightforward.

In the wider society, too, expectations about the moral superiority of hard work were sometimes slow to shift, even in those realms marketers most sought to enter. For example, some housewives retained a pride in the skill with which they carried out physical work unaided by mechanical assistance, and actively resisted the washing machine and the vacuum cleaner. The make-do-and-mend approach from the depression years lived on through a generation or two, and some braved post-war rationing with a pride in their ability to get by.¹²⁷ A few commentators deplored the materialism, 'selfishness' and 'extravagance' they saw develop in others during the years Labour had been in power.¹²⁸ Mabel Howard would not have been alone in her conviction that small public hospitals should be declined permission to replace brooms with vacuum cleaners because a little physical effort never hurt anybody.¹²⁹

The political process played an important role in the development of consumer culture in the post-war period. Both main political parties formulated the policies that influenced much of what was possible for the rest of New Zealand's populace, while their campaign materials created new images and fantasies. At the same time, MPs and copywriters reflected more widely held ideals and expectations. For instance, each party sought to persuade the public that its members stood for the 'new and progressive',¹³⁰ and best knew how

to invoke a better future. On the general principle of ‘progress’ there was agreement, although the details about what this might look like and how it might be achieved differed. Labour politicians thought society and economy would best be centrally planned and founded upon the modern welfare state, egalitarian ideals and a clear concept of the collective good. Modernity offered to expedite this process, but arcadian ideals and notions of self-improvement remained important and were to be protected from materialism and the threat of unbridled capitalism. National believed in modern technology, too, but thought it most efficiently delivered to the populace by competitive private enterprise. At the same time, modernity was only morally justifiable when underpinned by citizens’ effort rather than government mollicoddling.

The growth in the consumer society affected the very terrain of citizenship. No longer were individuals defined predominantly in terms of their relationships to production and the state, as workers and citizens. They were increasingly hailed as ‘consumers’. In North America the citizen was often portrayed as the self-gratifying consumer, and consumption became more and more the key site of individual agency.¹³¹ In New Zealand, the National Party had started to address voters as ‘consumers’ whose ‘rights’ to fulfil their dreams were threatened by shortages, controls and bureaucracy. Labour, in contrast, was hesitant to redefine citizenship in such ways. As H.G.R. Mason suggested, consumption was not always incompatible with citizens’ self-development, especially if it facilitated leisure and family life, but for the most part government MPs preferred to define citizenship in relation to the state and not consumption. By the mid-1950s National and its supporters voiced anxieties about the wider effects of consumer society — particularly insofar as it had created new, unruly youth cultures and the phenomenon of the working mother — but the cat was now out of the bag.



Figure 7: ‘Buttering the cat’s paws’, in which Bob Semple (Minister of Works), Fraser, Nash (Minister of Finance) and Nordmeyer (Minister of Industries and Commerce) tempt the hostile vote with an increased ration and Sid Holland prepares to pounce. Cartoon by Gordon Minhinnick, *Weekly News*, 19 October 1949, p.6.

The general election in November 1949 spelled the end of the first Labour government. Commentators at the time suggested that the last-minute easing of rationing and controls was not enough to save the party from defeat (Figure 7), a view that has been repeated in the years since.¹³² During the late 1940s, questions over the availability of consumer *items* were accompanied by something more momentous: a shift toward a consumer *society*, with all that it entailed. As this movement took place, both political parties juggled complex moralities surrounding hard work, reward, spiritual self-enhancement and the emergent 'teen-ager'. Political debate was an important arena in which the relationships between consumer culture, modernity and civic morality developed and were reworked. Even though much of the history of consumer culture in New Zealand during this period remains to be written, an exploration of the politics, economy, morality and symbolism of consumption during the 1940s demonstrates just how important consumption had become to New Zealanders during and after World War II.

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NOTES

1 On clothing and embodiment see: Frazer Andrewes, 'The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit', in Caroline Daley and Deborah Montgomerie, eds, *The Gendered Kiwi*, Auckland, 1999, pp.191–212; Chris Brickell, 'Through the (New) Looking Glass: Gendered Bodies, Fashion and Resistance in Post-war New Zealand', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 2, 2 (2002), pp.241–69; Caroline Daley, *Leisure and Pleasure: Reshaping and Revealing the New Zealand Body 1900–1960*, Auckland, 2003; Fiona McKergow, 'Opening the Wardrobe of History', in Bronwyn Dalley and Bronwyn Labrum, eds, *Fragments: New Zealand Social and Cultural History*, Auckland, 2000, pp.163–87; Megan Woods, 'Integrating the Nation: Gendering Maori Urbanisation and Integration', PhD thesis, Canterbury University, 2002. On housing see: Chris Brickell, 'Iconographies of "The House" and the Political Imagination in 1940s New Zealand', *Journal of Design History*, 16, 4 (2003), pp.291–306; Barbara Brookes and Louise Shaw, 'Constructing Homes: Gender and Advertising in *Home and Building*', *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 33, 2 (1999), pp.200–20; Barbara Brookes, ed., *At Home in New Zealand: Houses, History, People*, Wellington, 2000; Gail Ferguson, *Building the New Zealand Dream*, Palmerston North, 1994; Douglas Lloyd-Jenkins, *At Home: A Century of New Zealand Design*, Auckland, 2004; Ben Schrader, *We Call it Home: A History of State Housing in New Zealand*, Auckland, 2005; Ben Schrader, 'A Brave New World? Ideal Versus Reality in Postwar Naenae', *NZJH*, 30, 1 (1996), pp.61–79. There is some mention of consumption and the state in Melanie Nolan's *Breadwinning: New Zealand Women and the State*, Christchurch, 2000, ch.7, while Redmer Yska discusses teenagers and consumer culture during the 1950s in his *All Shook Up: The Flash Bodge and the Rise of the New Zealand Teenager in the Fifties*, Auckland, 1993.

2 Peter Gibbons, 'The Far Side of the Search for Identity: Reconsidering New Zealand History', *NZJH*, 37, 1 (2003), pp.38–49, especially p.43.

3 Labour Party, *Continued Prosperity — With Labour*, election pamphlet, 1949.

4 Labour Party, *Constitutional Democracy*, pamphlet, 1937; Barry Gustafson, *From the Cradle to the Grave: A Biography of Michael Joseph Savage*, Auckland, 1986, pp.157, 194–5. Some years later Labour trumpeted the increase in the number of households with radios (from 152,808 in 1935 to 366,614 in 1943): *Labour's March to Social and Economic Security*, election pamphlet, 1943.

5 Erik Olssen, 'Fraser and Lee', in Margaret Clark, ed., *Peter Fraser: Master Politician*, Palmerston North, 1998, pp.27–44, especially p.27; William Renwick, 'Fraser on Education', in Clark, ed., *Peter Fraser*, pp.67–90, esp. p.77.

6 G.R. Hawke, *The Making of New Zealand: An Economic History*, Cambridge, 1985, pp.163–6; Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, Auckland, 1976, ch.14; Nash 173 0024, Import licensing, Archives New Zealand, Wellington (ANZ); Labour Party, *Plain Facts About Controls*, election pamphlet, 1948, p.2.

7 Brian Easton, 'Fraser and the Development of the Nation-Building State', in Clark, ed., *Peter Fraser*, p.123; see also Gustafson, *From the Cradle to the Grave*, p.244.

8 Hawke, p.171.

9 A detailed discussion of rationing can be found in Nancy Taylor, *The Home Front: The People of New Zealand at War*, Wellington, 1986, II, ch.16.

10 Joseph Bolton, *The Industry Behind the Shop Counter: A Company History of Foodstuffs (Wellington) Co-operative Society*, Wellington, 1997, p.110.

11 For example, *Consumer News*, November 1944, n.p. This newsletter's editors also argued that sailors visiting New Zealand stocked up on luxury foodstuffs that were unavailable to them in Britain: *Consumer News*, December 1945, n.p.

12 Elsie Locke, interview with author, 1 July 2000; Ngaire S. and Dulcie L., interview with Kerry Brickell, 1 April 2003; 'Ask Aunt Daisy: Eking Out the Sugar', *New Zealand Listener* (NZL), 22 May 1942, p.22.

13 American President Franklin Roosevelt sent a Marine Corps division to New Zealand in exchange for Fraser's government leaving its troops in the Middle East whilst the Japanese advanced on the South Pacific. The troops were stationed at various locations around New Zealand, particularly in Auckland and Wellington. For a background discussion, see Henry Bioletti, *The Yanks Are Coming: The American Invasion of New Zealand 1942–1944*, Auckland, 1989, ch.2.

14 Bioletti, p.47.

- 15 Bioletti, ch.3.
- 16 Dianne Haworth and Diane Miller, *Freda Stark: Her Extraordinary Life*, Auckland, 2000, ch.5; Jock Phillips with Ellen Ellis, *Brief Encounter: American Forces and the New Zealand People, 1942–1945*, Wellington, 1992, p.68.
- 17 See especially ‘Homes and Gadgets’, NZL, 10 October 1947, pp.7–8; ‘What is an American?’, NZL, 31 October 1947, p.15; ‘The Great Middle Class’, NZL, 24 October 1947, pp.10–11; Marjorie Hackett, ‘Impressions of America: Any Time is the Right Time for Miami’, *Mirror*, June 1949, pp.6–7, 35–37.
- 18 Yska, p.56.
- 19 Easton, p.123.
- 20 Ngaire S. and Dulcie L., interview; ‘The New Look for Your Old Clothes’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* (NZWW), 13 May 1948, p.42.
- 21 Sinclair, p.273; Bruce Brown, ‘Nordmeyer 1901–1989’, in Margaret Clark, ed., *Three Labour Leaders: Nordmeyer, Kirk, Rowling*, Palmerston North, 2001, pp.24–49, especially p.32.
- 22 ‘The Bread Line’, editorial, NZL, 29 March 1946, p.6.
- 23 For example, Margaret Thorn, *Stick Out, Keep Left*, edited by Elsie Locke and Jacque Matthews, Auckland, 1997, p.100. The letters pages of *New Zealand Truth* (NZT) during the 1940s contain much discussion of food shortages.
- 24 ‘Shortages Incurable Under Socialism’, editorial, *Dominion*, 30 November 1949, p.6; ‘Potatoes Scarce in City’, *New Zealand Herald* (NZH), 5 November 1949, p.8.
- 25 *Dominion*, 29 November 1949, p.5. The Housewives’ Associations actively lobbied MPs on the matter of shortages: see, for example, the minute books of the Wellington Housewives’ Association, 80-385, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington (ATL); for some background on these organizations see Nolan, p.196.
- 26 Elizabeth Cohen, *Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, New York, 2003, ch.1.
- 27 Labour Party, *The Labour Government and the Farmer*, election pamphlet, 1943, p.2; Labour Party, *An Era of Plenty*, election pamphlet, 1949; R. Semple, preface, Labour Party, *Blue Print for Prosperity*, election pamphlet, 1949.
- 28 Labour Party, *What New Zealand Labour Means to You*, election pamphlet, 1938.
- 29 Walter Nash, for example, stressed that ‘the clothes we wear, the food we eat, our home and all that’s in it are the products of our labours’: see Nash 2095 0288, Misc. material, ANZ.
- 30 Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, pp.95, 98, 155.
- 31 Labour Party, *This — In Your Hands*, election pamphlet, 1946, p.7.
- 32 *ibid.*, p.11.
- 33 On the importance of leisure to the study of consumer culture, see Richard Butsch, *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, Philadelphia, 1990.
- 34 ‘Labour Party’s Election Manifesto’, NZH, 2 November 1949, p.8.
- 35 Labour Party, *An Era of Plenty*, election pamphlet, 1949; ‘From the Hustings’, *Southern Cross*, 19 November 1949, p.2. Nash insisted that leisure was an individual matter best left up to one’s own personal preference: Nash 2095 0291, Misc. material, ANZ.
- 36 For an interesting discussion of the development of the relationships between work time, leisure and definitions of social citizenship in 1930s Europe, see Gary Cross, *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture*, London, 1993, especially p.100.
- 37 H.G.R. Mason, speech notes, Papers of H.G.R. Mason, MS-Papers-1751-4/2, ATL. Nash saw the contribution made by the Workers’ Education Association (WEA) in creating the ‘intelligent and informed citizens’ he thought critical for New Zealand’s democracy: Nash 186 Speech Notes 1946, ANZ.
- 38 Gustafson, *Cradle to Grave*, p.98; Sinclair, p.43.
- 39 Ben Schrader, ‘A Brave New World?’, pp.71–73; Ben Schrader, ‘Planning Happy Families: A History of the Naenae Idea’, MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1993, pp.101–104.
- 40 For example, Labour Party, *Blue Print for Prosperity*, n.d.
- 41 Labour Party, *This — In Your Hands*, p.14; also Labour Party, *An Era of Plenty*, n.d.; Labour Party, *Blue Print for Prosperity*.
- 42 Ormond Wilson, *To the Electors of Palmerston North*, election pamphlet, 1946; Nash 186 Speech Notes 1946, ANZ.
- 43 R.M. Algie, ‘Liberty, Law and Justice: Tampering with One Destroys All’, *Freedom*, 12 January 1949, p.3; also ‘Planning as a Personal Right’, *Dominion*, 25 November 1949, p.9.

44 The question of the degree to which Labour politicians identified with the term 'socialism' is a vexed one. Nash and Fraser certainly did early on, while Frank Langstone, Mabel Howard, Clyde Carr and some others continued to do so throughout the 1940s. Unsurprisingly, Labour MPs' understandings of the term differed from those of National MPs, for whom 'socialism' was akin to state totalitarianism.

45 For example, National Party, *Your Future in Your Hand*, election pamphlet, 1938, passim. There is some discussion of this in Barry Gustafson, *The First 50 Years: A History of the New Zealand National Party*, Auckland, 1986, pp.31–33.

46 For example, National Party, *A Fighting Fund Against Socialism*, election pamphlet, 1949.

47 National Party, *Private Enterprise Means More for Your Money*, election pamphlet, 1949, p.3.

48 *ibid.*, p.4.

49 For example, see 'Socialism, Permits and All That', editorial, NZH, 12 November 1949, p.6; 'The Men Who Call the Tune', editorial, NZH, 24 November 1949, p.7; 'Why the People Changed the Government', NZT, 7 December 1949, p.15. In 1949 the *Dominion* warned that re-election of the Labour government would allow the 'more extreme elements in the Labour-Socialist party' to gain the upper hand, speeding up 'the goal of absolute State domination of the individual': 'Women Voters and the Future', editorial, *Dominion*, 26 November 1949, p.6.

50 F. Langstone, 'Election Notes and Comments', *Dominion*, 22 November 1949, p.8.

51 Although, as Nash and other Labour MPs pointed out, there was an interesting inconsistency in National's support for both a reduced cost of living *and* the abolition of price controls that restrained inflation: Nash 186 Speech Notes 1946, ANZ; Mabel Howard, report of broadcast address, 19 November 1949, in Nash 1739 0436 Speech Notes 1949, ANZ.

52 National Party, *Real Prosperity the National Way*, election pamphlet, 1949; National Party, Manifesto, 1943.

53 'Mr Nash's Little Joke', editorial, *Freedom*, 13 July 1949, p.2.

54 H. Cunningham, 'The Nash Look', letter to the editor, *Freedom*, 28 June 1949, p.2.

55 Brickell, 'Through the (New) Looking Glass', passim.

56 'Music-hungry Country is Denied New Records', *Freedom*, 7 September 1949, p.1.

57 *Southern Cross*, 22 October 1946, p.6.

58 National Party, *What of Tomorrow?*, election pamphlet, 1943; Sid Holland, *Talking Things Over*, election pamphlet, 1946, p.16.

59 Nash 173 0027, ANZ; see also Bob Semple, report of election address, 1 November 1949, in Nash 1739 0326 Speech Notes 1949, ANZ.

60 In one case, the description of Nash as a 'dictator' was freely recalled 50 years later: Ruth Taylor, interview with Chris Brickell, 8 October 2000.

61 Brown, 'Nordmeyer', p.32.

62 For example, 'Mr Nash's Little Joke', *Freedom*, 13 July 1949, p.2.

63 Neil Rennie, *Conquering Isolation: The First 50 Years of Air New Zealand*, Auckland, 1990, ch.4; Geoffrey Churchman and Tony Hurst, *The Railways of New Zealand: A Journey Through History*, Auckland, 1991, pp.30–32; Bob Semple, report of election address, 1 November 1949, in Nash 1739 0328, Speech Notes 1949, ANZ. Press reporters were particularly interested in the new flying boats for trans-Tasman services: *Weekly News*, 5 October 1949, p.23; 'Never an Accident', NZWW, 12 August 1948, p.8.

64 Nash, 207-001-0595, Speech Notes, ANZ.

65 McKergow, p.183.

66 For example, in a number of advertisements models wearing Ross and Glendining's 'Glenar' range of women's clothes were set against backdrops of ocean liners and aeroplanes, while the advertising for 'Speedee' jugs and toasters featured global air travel and use of outer-space imagery. On the impact of science on the home see, for example, 'Science and You', editorial, NZWW, 10 February 1949, p.1.

67 See, for instance, the National Film Unit's 1946 *Housing in New Zealand*.

68 Julia Gatley, 'Going Up Rather Than Out: State Rental Flats in New Zealand 1935–1949', in Brookes, ed., *At Home in New Zealand*, pp.140–54.

69 Brickell, 'Iconographies of "The House" and the Political Imagination in 1940s New Zealand', pp.291–306.

70 An interesting discussion of romantic notions of the suburb as a space outside the moral and literal pollutions of the city can be found in Schrader, 'Planning Happy Families', pp.5–8.

71 Miles Fairburn, *The Ideal Society and its Enemies: The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850–1900*, Auckland, 1989.

72 Nash 207-001-0595, ANZ. Here we can see the influence of socialist economic historian R.H. Tawney, whom Sinclair (p.12) suggests was an important influence on Nash's thinking. Tawney was dismissive of what he called the 'acquisitive society', characterized by its satisfaction of egotistic desires for wealth rather than social cohesion and religious or artistic self-improvement: R.H. Tawney, *The Acquisitive Society*, London, 1966 [1921], ch.3. Fraser, too, was said to have accused National's supporters of clamouring for material possessions: H.R. Lake, 'Election Notes and Comments', *Dominion*, 16 November 1949, p.8.

73 'Materialism in Present Election Regretted by Presbyterian Assembly', *Dominion*, 12 November 1949, p.8.

74 National Party, *A Family Affair*, election pamphlet, 1949, p.13.

75 *ibid.*, p.12.

76 Lynn Spigel, 'From Theatre to Space Ship: Metaphors of Suburban Domesticity in Postwar America', in Roger Silverstone, ed., *Visions of Suburbia*, London, 1997, p.227.

77 *New Zealand Truth* joined in the accusation that Labour ministers were privileged, suggesting they had 'been too busy tripping around all over the place instead of staying on the job and seeing that the country is run in a democratic and businesslike fashion': 'Irritating Growth of Petty Dictatorship', NZT, 7 July 1949, p.10; see also 'Junketings [sic] in Govt. Cars Infuriates Housewives', NZT, 7 April 1948, p.15.

78 G. Smith, 'Election Notes and Comments', *Dominion*, 11 November 1949, p.8.

79 A good discussion of the adoption of household appliances in New Zealand during the twentieth century is provided by Jean-Marie O'Donnell, 'The Introduction and Impact of Electric Household Appliances in New Zealand 1935–1956', BA (Hons) long essay, University of Otago, 1988. A condensed version is available as "'Electric Servants" and the Science of Housework', in Barbara Brookes, Charlotte Macdonald and Margaret Tennant, eds, *Women in History II*, Wellington, 1992, pp.168–83. By the late 1940s more and more new houses — in the cities at least — made provision for a washing machine instead of an electric or gas copper, and provided more than one electric hot point per room, foreshadowing the increased use of household appliances: Wellington City Archives permit numbers B16482; B32293; B37924; B28595; B37262; B27343; B31415; B25128; J49; B25128; B36577; B23130; B22944; B21849; B20305; B19002.

80 'Housewives' Dream Kitchen: Many Mechanical Marvels', NZT, 2 November 1949, p.17. Rural as well as urban dwellers were introduced to the benefits of the new technologies. For instance, *New Zealand Journal of Agriculture* featured articles on scientific housework and washing machines: 78 (1) 1949, pp.111–12; 78 (3) 1949, pp.307–309.

81 As it turned out, National's attempt to loosen import controls following its victory in 1949 was partially reversed when a balance of payments crisis loomed. Ironically, some of the controls that the party had railed against during the 1940s remained until the early 1980s. On import controls see Hawke. *passim*.

82 Sid Holland, *Passwords to Progress*, pamphlet, 1943, p.4. Emphasis in original.

83 Walter Nash, 'Election Notes and Comments', *Dominion*, 16 November 1949, p.8; 23 November 1949, p.8.

84 C.L. Carr, 'Election Notes and Comments', *Dominion*, 10 November 1949, p.8.

85 Nash, 'Election Notes and Comments', *Dominion*, 23 November 1949, p.8.

86 'Washing Machines for State Houses: Mr Hackett's Views', NZH, 25 November 1949, p.8.

87 Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, Buckingham, 1998, ch.2.

88 For example, a very useful discussion on the development of consumer culture in Europe since the eighteenth century is offered by Paul Glennie and Nigel Thrift, 'Modernity, Urbanism, and Modern Consumption', *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space*, 10 (1992), pp.423–43.

89 Bauman, especially p.24.

90 Richard Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, 'Introduction', in Richard Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds, *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History 1880–1980*, New York, 1983, p.x.

91 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, London, 1985 [1930].

92 Fox and Lears, p.xiii.

93 Ralph Turner, 'The Real Self: From Institution to Impulse', *American Journal of Sociology*,

81, 5 (1976), pp.989–1016. A classic account of desire and longing framed in terms of consumption is offered by Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, London, 1986, pp.28–30.

94 Labour Party, *This — In Your Hands*, p.7.

95 ‘Labour Manifesto States Party Will Continue With Its Economic Policy’, *Dominion*, 2 November 1949, p.8; ‘Importance of Production to Living Standard’, *Dominion*, 2 November 1949, p.8.

96 Sid Holland, *Talking Things Over*, election pamphlet, 1946, p.21.

97 National Party, *Private Enterprise Means More for Your Money*, election pamphlet, 1949, p.7.

98 C.G. Stephens, ‘Election Notes and Comments’, *Dominion*, 9 November 1949, p.8.

99 Nash 2095 0290, Misc. material, ANZ.

100 ‘Necessities Before Luxuries’, NZH, 11 November 1949, p.8.

101 Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, New York, 1986, p.38.

102 Nash 2095 0286, Misc. material, ANZ.

103 Nash 2073 1949 Speech Notes, ANZ.

104 Holland, *Talking Things Over*, p.3.

105 On the application of these ideas more generally see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, New York, 1988, pp.166, 175.

106 C.G.E. Harker, ‘Election Notes and Comments’, *Dominion*, 9 November 1949, p.8.

107 W.A. Sheat, ‘Election Notes and Comments’, *Dominion*, 12 November 1949, p.8.

108 ‘The Welfare State’, editorial, *Dominion*, 12 November 1949, p.6.

109 Nash 186, Speech Notes 1946, ANZ.

110 Yska, p.57; Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, New York, 1999, ch.12.

111 Some young people were also assumed to be partial to communist ideas. For instance, one article in *Freedom* was titled ‘Communism in New Zealand’s Universities’, and bore the subtitle ‘Teen-agers and Bobby-Soxers Kowtow to Ikons [sic] of Czar Stalin the First’: *Freedom*, 12 January 1949, p.4.

112 ‘Marianna’, ‘Education for Work?’, NZWW, 28 April 1949, pp.11, 29. Emphasis in original.

113 ‘Can Stream of Luxuries be Kept on Forever?’, *Freedom*, 22 December 1948, p.1.

114 W.B. Sutch, *The Quest for Security in New Zealand, 1890 to 1966*, London, 1966, p.455.

115 National Party, *Passwords to Progress*, election pamphlet, 1943, p.6; National Party, *Whose Future is it Anyway?*, election pamphlet, 1946, p.5; National Party, *Election Manifesto, 1943*. While the Labour government introduced compulsory military training in 1949, it was justified primarily as a contribution to Commonwealth defence rather than a means of disciplining young men: Yska, p.16.

116 Labour Party, *Labour Plans for the Future*, Committee report to the Labour Party conference 1946; Labour Party, *An Era of Plenty*, election pamphlet, 1949; Labour Party, *Labour’s Progressive Policy*, election pamphlet, 1943.

117 A useful international and historical analysis of the connections between youth, leisure and notions of national wellbeing is provided by Cross, pp.102–104, 137. David Ausubel suggested that in New Zealand during the 1950s many adults saw most adolescents as delinquent, hedonistic and amoral: *The Fern and the Tiki: An American View of New Zealand National Character, Social Attitudes and Race Relations*, Sydney, 1960, pp.114, 131–6.

118 Nash 2095 0288, Misc. material, ANZ.

119 Mabel Howard, report of broadcast address, 19 November 1949, in Nash 1739 0434 Speech Notes 1949, ANZ.

120 David Gee, *Our Mabel*, Wellington, 1977, pp.181–4; Yska, pp.200–203.

121 Report of the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents [‘Mazengarb Report’], *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1954, H-47.

122 ‘Mazengarb Report’, pp.21, 40, 43, 49. Perhaps the most internationally well-known tirade against young people’s comics and their supposed influence on adolescent sexual immorality was Frederic Wertham, *Seduction of the Innocent*, New York, 1954. For a discussion of Mazengarb and young people’s sexuality see Maureen Molloy, ‘Science, Myth and the Adolescent Female: The Mazengarb Report, the Parker-Hulme Trial and the Adoption Act of 1955’, *Women’s Studies Journal*, 9, 1 (1993), pp.1–25. Molloy also discusses another, related concern: increasing numbers

of working mothers who allegedly could not or would not exercise sufficient discipline over their children.

123 Presbyterian Church, 1954, Submissions to the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents, p.5, MS-Papers-2384-06, ATL. Emphasis in original.

124 J.T. Watts and H. Ross, 'Election Notes and Comments', *Dominion*, 15 November 1949, p.8.

125 Brickell, 'Iconographies'.

126 National Party, *Real Prosperity the National Way*, election pamphlet, 1949.

127 See the analysis in Chris Brickell, 'Politics, Consumption and the Sale of Ideology in 1940s New Zealand', in Sociological Association of Aotearoa New Zealand, ed., *Reinvigorating New Zealand Sociology: Practices, Projects, Politics and Protests*, Hamilton, 2001, pp.30–35; E. Carpenter, 'Is the N.Z. Housewife Inefficient?', *NZL*, 10 July 1953, pp.8–9.

128 'Thinker', *Dominion*, 24 November 1949, p.8.

129 Gee, p.109.

130 For example, Labour's 'Campaign Plan', Papers of H.G.R. Mason, Folders-111-18, MS-Papers-1751-3/18, ATL.

131 Richard Fox, 'Epitaph for Middletown: Robert S. Lynde and the Analysis of Consumer Culture', in Fox and Lears, eds, pp.101–42, esp. pp.104, 126; Cohen, p.8.

132 For example, see Hawke, p.173.