

Honouring the Contract. By John E. Martin. Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2010. 296pp. NZ price: \$50.00. ISBN 978-0-864736-34-5.

THE WRITING OF NEW ZEALAND's welfare history has been a staple of our literature for some time now, and the centrality of the topic is demonstrated by the continued output from established scholars and postgraduate students. Indeed *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (2009) recognised this trend by devoting a whole chapter to it for the first time in a general, multi-authored history. Given the policy focus of the current government and its aim of through-going welfare state reform, it is more important than ever that well-researched, incisive and usable accounts are produced to contribute to the often shrill debates. John Martin is well placed to do this, having a long-standing interest in rural and labour history, and the history of state policy. As he notes in the preface to *Honouring the Contract*, he has been working on this book since the late 1990s.

The book's central argument is that the state, over time and in experimental fashion, has been concerned with honouring a contract or agreement between itself and the first migrants. This contract, Martin believes, has been a 'central idea' and 'motivating force for policy' from the beginning. So the government's wide range of activities has been 'based on the premise of improving or maintaining the standard of living of the New Zealand wage earner'. The contract shaped policy and expectations and emerged from the first contract between the New Zealand Company and the wage-earning migrants, which then 'became the seed for a much broader and symbolic contract between state and wage earner in New Zealand, founded in the migrant experience'.

Subsequent chapters traverse, in turn, the 'cultural fragment' and 'frontier', following an established — if tired — colonial historiography and the 'popular instrumental state', which promoted and honoured it. They discuss the landed laboratory; how the contract was enabled through co-operative organisation, trade unions, the franchise and politics; the employment and workplace legislation that enabled the contract; the social laboratory; and finally the welfare laboratory. There is no separate conclusion, although Martin finishes with a brief reference to the way that market relationships and the privileging of individual interests, as well as global migration and international economic realities in the past few decades, pose new problems for the concept of citizenship and any notion of a social contract between the citizen and state.

This is a narrative account, greatly enlivened by contemporary cartoons, photographs, newspaper clippings, song and verse. It would have been more effective to have these integrated into the text rather than standing rather disconnected as illustrative material. Martin also quotes generously from contemporaries, including the leading politicians, writers, poets and theorists of the time. Given the focus on wage-earning, the state (by which he means mostly the government), employment contracts and legislation, this is the story of men. Indeed, chapter two has some fascinating pen portraits of 'some emigrants', including chartists, the middle-class, printers and so forth. The leading gentry and politicians stare gloomily out of the pages in all their bearded and be-suited glory.

It is also a rather functional account, by implication if not explicit argument. Its overriding metaphor is about 'evolution' and how things almost seem to have naturally followed on from one another. There is little sense of contest of ideas, let alone of actual debate, argument or even physical opposition. Where is the blood, sweat and tears or the rough and tumble of colonial life? To take two examples: 'rebuilding' of the contract was 'required' towards the end of the nineteenth century in the wake of the depression of the 1880s, when relationships between labour and the state were 'recast' (p.23); and 'the one-man one-vote principle could now easily be extended to women' (p.97). While Martin is careful to explain how the vote for women got through despite Seddon, it is as if all these developments were expected and inevitable. There is little discussion of Māori — the silent 'other' that underpins this contract and who were, in fact, involved

in many formal and informal ‘contracts’ — and there is some mention of Chinese, but only in terms of legislation restricting immigration. This is a unitary account, without much deviation from norms or consideration of different groups within the community and different kinds of citizens.

The book is clearly a product of the time of its genesis, and is anchored in the concerns of scholars in the late 1990s. By my reading there are no references to material published after 2003 and the wave of New Zealand work in this area at this time and subsequently is barely acknowledged, apart from David Thomson’s *A World Without Welfare* (1998) in the final chapter. Curiously, much space is devoted in the early chapters to the Australian historiography from that earlier time, rather than, for example, the work of W.H. Oliver and, more importantly, Margaret Tennant. While Martin states, for example, that the mechanisms of social security have not been addressed, he does not refer to Margaret McClure’s standard text on its development nor Melanie Nolan’s detailed discussion of women and the state in *Breadwinning* (2000). It would have been interesting, too, to know what he thought of Michael Belgrave’s argument in *Past Judgement* (2004) that social policy was all about changes in family demography and that Labour’s social security was all about the family, not the citizen. Current scholarship has also deconstructed such generalities as ‘the state’ (and also ‘the citizen’) to show how different parts of government administration might have worked separately or against each other; and how policy and contracts may or may not have worked on the ground, in practice.

There is a lot of useful detail here and Martin is to be commended for attempting such a wide-ranging and overarching synthesis. Yet it still left me with the view that there is a lot more to be said and researched about this most central plank of New Zealand society and history.

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The Dress Circle: New Zealand Fashion Design Since 1940. By Lucy Hammonds, Douglas Lloyd Jenkins and Claire Regnault. Godwit, 2011. 422pp. NZ price: \$75. ISBN: 978-1-869621-81-0.

DRESS IS A NECESSARY PART of New Zealand history. This sumptuous book is about the dressiest and most fabulous garments that New Zealand’s professional designers have come up with since 1940. It chronicles the development of an industry from a tiny, elite and hidden presence to national and international media darling. It was the success of ‘the New Zealand Four’ (Karen Walker, WORLD, Zambesi and NOM*d) at the 1999 London Fashion Week that provided the key motivation to write this history. The authors seek to argue beyond reasonable doubt that New Zealand had a history of fashion design well before 1999.

The year 1940 is chosen as the starting date because that is when twentieth-century modernism was introduced into New Zealand design. Furthermore, it is a time period now nearing the extreme distance of living memory. A strength of this book is the use of first-hand accounts and insider knowledge as sources. Thanks to their passion for the subject, the authors have succeeded in comprehensively recovering a plethora of relevant primary sources. Surprisingly, however, related critical work, for example by Chris Brickell on Christian Dior’s ‘New Look’, and by Wendy Larner and Maureen Molloy on the New Zealand fashion industry, goes unmentioned.

Despite its grand air, this is really a very particular, focused examination of a small, edgy pocket of New Zealand’s past. As is explained in the introduction ‘Any number of popular labels are (and were) popular because they are dull, conformist and derivative’