

Stout Centre Review

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Contents

TOM BROOKING	Why bother trying to write a slightly different political biography? <i>A portrait of Sir John McKenzie (1838-1901)</i>	3
ISIDOR SASLAV	Bernard Shaw's New Zealand progress March–April 1934 <i>An illustrated commentary</i>	7
BRAD PATTERSON	The grain mirage <i>Ideal and reality in early Wellington agriculture</i>	14
Stout Research Centre residents		27
Events		28

Editorial

The centrepiece of this issue is a visual impression of the impact made by Bernard Shaw when he visited New Zealand for a month in 1934, based on Isidor Saslav's recent Stout Centre seminar. Shaw dominated the news media during that period and became the centre of attention for cranks, extremists, politicians, Fabians, and even a novelist as the letter to him from J.A. Lee shows. Lee's novel, *Children of the Poor*, based on material from his own impoverished boyhood in the depression of the 1890s, spoke strongly to readers experiencing similar conditions in the great depression of the 1930s which was only just beginning to lift when Shaw made his appearance.

The Coalition Government of Coates was still in power but waiting in the wings were Savage, Fraser and the other leaders of the Labour party which unexpectedly was to gain an impressive majority in the elections of 1935. Peter Fraser travelled to Auckland (he was member for Wellington Central) to take part in Shaw's first press conference following his arrival. His comments included a defence of the Labour MP and a remark that he believed that New Zealand was 'more or less under a dictatorship at the present time'. Inevitably economic questions dominated such sessions for although prices for wool, meat and agricultural produce had substantially recovered by 1934, it was also the year in which those for dairy products reached their trough.

Shaw held the view throughout his visit that New Zealand was unwittingly far more communistic than it realised, a conclusion seemingly based on his readings of the Fabian William Pember Reeves and study of the Liberal regime of Seddon: 'New Zealand's eminence among Dominions is due solely to her communism. Only ignoramuses speak evil of communism...', he wrote. He castigated all those who spoke of England as 'Home' and advanced the opinion that whereas the characteristics of the British had changed greatly so that they no longer resembled the Englishmen of the 19th century, New Zealanders retained many 19th-century characteristics: 'I being an old Victorian, am much more at home here than in London. You are quite natural to me, but to an English visitor born after 1900 you probably appear quaint, foreign and incredible'.

Elsewhere in this issue, Brad Patterson continues his explorations and definitions of early Wellington agricultural and pastoral pursuits in an article entitled 'The grain mirage'. This clothes with facts and statistics the bare statements found in previous histories on the subject that Wellington proved unsuitable for agricultural pursuits and its attendant English vision of neat fields of grain interspersed with occasional pastures of vines and olives. How and why this occurred is the subject of a study which is to become part of a substantial forthcoming publication.

Tom Brooking has been working on his unconventional political biography of one of the outstanding figures in land reform in the 19th century, Sir John McKenzie, for some time. As it enters the home straits of publication it promises to be unusually lively and pertinent: 'The book will open with a Gaelic lament for the loss of the land and conclude with a similar Maori lament to underscore the central irony that a Highlander committed to preventing a repeat of the clearances in the new world should help to dispossess an indigenous people of most of their remaining cultivable land'.

J.M. Thomson

Cover: An enlargement of George Bernard Shaw's handwritten letter to John A. Lee, '3 days out from Wellington to London', on the Rangitane. The letter is reproduced in full on page 12.

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