AFTER THE REVOLUTION?

SOMEONE ELSE’S COUNTRY, Alister Barry’s documentary film which was included in the seminar series ‘After the Revolution?’, notes that the New Right changes imposed in Chile – sale of assets and environment, privatisation of hospitals, cutbacks in welfare and education – were brutally imposed by military force. Many of these same ‘reforms’ undertaken a decade later in New Zealand were efficiently put in place with little effective opposition. A central question underlying the changes in New Zealand, and these papers (and important in all Stout Centre work) is, what kind of a country is New Zealand? In observing the changes of the past decade can we still claim to be an established democracy with an egalitarian tradition and a commitment to fair play? The changes of the past decade not only alter the political and social landscape they alter our perceptions of ourselves and of New Zealand.

We were of course distracted by other issues, notably the Nuclear Free issue, seduced by the new technology (‘computers can do it better’), and blinded by the haste and certainty of the New Right ideologues. Not an argumentative people or given much to intellectual debate we were at a disadvantage when faced with the born-again crusaders. The economic and social changes of the decade were commonly promoted as cost-saving changes for efficiency but it became clear that they were ideologically driven and their consequences far greater than those at first specified.

This short seminar series occurred in March-April 1997 after the establishment of the National/NZ First Coalition Government, in a period of uncertainty: Would structural reform and asset sales continue? Would the mistakes of the past be admitted and revisited? Had we reached the end of the revolution or was this just a lull, a tea-break? At this time the ideology seemed more defensive, the ‘reforms’ slower, perhaps an element of uncertainty was creeping in. The opportunity for reflection and analysis was accepted by these writers. The Stout Centre is grateful for their contribution.

A consistent critique of the changes has been supplied by our cartoonists. We are pleased to be able to include some of their work here, both to lighten an otherwise sombre story and to evidence their vision. Grateful acknowledgement is made for permission to use their original work (and to the publication where the work first appeared) to Bob Brockie (National Business Review), Lawrence Clark (New Zealand Herald), Tom Scott (Evening Post), and Garrick Tremain (Otago Daily Times). All cartoons are reproduced from copies supplied by the Alexander Turnbull Library.

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