

*Changing Times: New Zealand Since 1945*

By Jenny Carlyon and Diana Morrow

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Reviewed by Barbara Brookes

Those born the year this book takes as its starting point would now be approaching 70. How helpful, then, for a younger generation to learn about New Zealand's history apart from the action in World War One which is the country's current preoccupation. It seems with war we can commemorate the past but it appears more difficult to glorify a time when people enjoyed picnics instead of shopping malls, when benefits were universal so that no one should feel stigmatized by receiving state assistance, and when there was full employment. *Changing Times* takes us through important transitions, from the mid-1940s in a thematic and chronological approach, which serves readers well. Writing a general history is an unenviable task and the authors have done a good job of surveying the decades since 1945.

Of course, any starting point relies on what has gone before. The experience of war underpinned the desire to create a safe and healthy world for children, which preoccupied New Zealanders in the 1940s and 1950s. The universal family benefit introduced in 1946 benefitted, extraordinarily, about a quarter of the population of not quite two million. If anyone doubts that children were the focus of policy in the past, it is salutary to remember that this payment boosted the income of a three-child family by one-third. The authors do not ask what this meant for Māori families but it must have meant a lot since those families, on average, included more children. It may well have assisted the doubling of the Maori population, between 1936 and 1961, that the authors note.

From examining the internal developments in chapter one, Carlyon and Morrow turn to 'Loosening the Bonds: New Friends New Enemies' analyzing changing foreign policy away from a 'dutiful daughter of Great Britain' to the evolution of independent citizenship, a rethinking of Asia, and the turn towards the United States. This second chapter provides a useful overview of the changes that led New Zealand, as Mary Boyd put it, to realize 'that it was a Pacific country, not a European outpost' (p.72).

'Character and Culture' are explored in chapter three which covers well-trodden ground on the evolution of a New Zealand identity in the Arts. The split between chapter three on 'culture' and chapter four on 'popular pastimes' reinforces notions of high and low culture which seems, in a way, to perpetuate British notions of the 'good'. The authors engage with this argument and illustrate the anti-Americanism of New Zealand's literati but their very organization works to perpetuate the dichotomy between the popular (American films for example) and the worthy (locally-produced literature and fine art). Yet the chapter on pastimes engages broadly and usefully on media trends, sport and the rise of youth culture.

Chapter five explores 'contested and protested values' suggesting that the increasing availability of jet travel and the growth of the student population opened up more space for debate within New Zealand society. This reader would have liked to learn more about what the actual 'values' of citizens were: what did they really value about living in New Zealand? In what ways did politicians see the state working to improve people's lives? The debates charted in *Changing Times* centre around secularism and permissiveness, New Zealand's involvement in Vietnam, and rejection of sporting contacts with South Africa. With the coming to power of the Norman Kirk-led Labour government in 1972, the authors suggest that a leader at last

represented the desires of the dissenters: to get New Zealand out of Vietnam, to save lake Manapouri and to stop French nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Robert Muldoon, leading National back into office in 1975, represented a very different style of leadership, encapsulated in the title of Chapter Six: 'Schisms: A Society Divided', which addresses arguments of pro and anti-nuclear factions, those who supported conservation opposed to those who wanted development at all costs, and the biggest schism of all: the nation divided over the 1981 Springbok tour of New Zealand.

The following chapter continues the theme of divides by examining the ruptures over feminism and gay rights. Signs of haste appear where Betty Friedan's pivotal book is misnamed as *The Feminist Mystique* (p.213) only to be correctly named later on the same page. That aside, the overview of the development of the feminist movement is well done. Lesbian and gay liberationists, many with feminist sympathies, took up the fight for homosexual law reform, finally achieved in 1986.

Māori politics are at the heart of chapter eight, which charts the unsettling decades when Pākehā New Zealand had to come to terms with statistics that revealed the poor educational, employment and health outcomes for Māori. Matiu Rata, the first Minister of Maori Affairs in 28 years, managed to clamp down on land sales but the pace of political change was too slow for activists such as Whina Cooper, leading to the land march of 1975. Readers are usefully reminded of the loud and ugly opposition of some New Zealanders to any suggestion that learning Māori language would be of benefit to anybody. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, issues escalated leading to protests at Waitangi and increasing concern about unemployment and poor health. The authors are also alert to the situation of Pacific peoples which came more to the fore as the government tried to round up 'over stayers' in the 1970s.

The small-scale of New Zealand allowed the 1984 Labour government to enact massive 'transformations', the subject of chapter nine. It was left to a man from a family with a strong history unionism, Roger Douglas as Minister of Finance, to begin dismantling the welfare state and impose free market reforms. In doing so, he hoped to turn back the tide of rising unemployment and diminish the country's indebtedness. In this case, New Zealand went faster and further with ideologies about the free market than the places overseas that generated the novel economic theories. The new generation of young, well-educated politicians, the authors argue, had different objectives to the older generation who 'believed that the role of government was to intervene in the economy and the lives of citizens to bolster the commonwealth'. This seems an absurdly reductive view of earlier politicians who held certain values about the importance of housing citizens, providing free education, supporting families, and maintaining production in New Zealand.

What Labour had failed to overturn was left to the National government who came to power in 1990, discussed in chapter ten. Ruth Richardson was keen to reform the 'no-go areas for Labour – the labour market, social policy, the size and role of the state' (p.318). The authors highlight the opposition to many of the changes, including to the 'Mother of All Budgets' by which Richardson cut welfare across the board and provided only minimal and targeted assistance to those in need. If the government was 'focused by events', so were local communities who organized against the closure of local hospitals, for example. In response to voter dissatisfaction with the electoral system, the government held two referenda in 1992 and 1993 on changing from a first past the post system to mixed member proportional representation. The latter was voted in and governments now had to make alliances in order to govern

effectively. In November 1999, a new Labour-Alliance coalition government was voted in under the leadership of Helen Clark.

Underneath the political agendas of successive governments, the 'shifting tides' of race relations ebbed and flowed and these are discussed in chapter eleven. Much assisted by the 1985 Waitangi Tribunal Amendment Act, iwi around the country organized to make claims. The authors argue that the government's promotion of biculturalism fed off an upsurge of nationalism caused by the 1985 *Rainbow Warrior* bombing and by civil rights ideas coming from America. Within the country, a commitment to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi came up against the government's commitment to creating State Owned Enterprises, since once Crown lands were sold to a third party they could not be considered as a part of a claim. Consequently, the Maori Council filed a successful injunction against such land transfers. There are many strands teased out in this chapter, from this significant 'Lands case' to developments in attacking 'institutional racism' in government departments, schools, in social welfare and health policy. After the highpoint of the 1990 Sesquicentennial, the authors detect a backlash against commitment to the Treaty, but MMP enabled Maori to win more influence within the political system.

The final chapter, 'A Plaited Rope', allows the authors to end with a celebration of multiculturalism. The blurb on *Changing Times* makes this trajectory clear: that the book will explain how New Zealand moved from 'dull conformity' to 'one of the most ethnically, economically and socially diverse nations on earth'. In essence, we are told, the book charts how we moved from the boring old days to the exciting place we've become. But perhaps rather than a 'plaited rope' New Zealand is now more like a rope ladder, where people cling on at different rungs with almost impossibly wide steps between them. In this book's telling of our history, conformity can only be dull, but replace the word conformity with equality, and it means something very different. And surely it was that equality which once made New Zealand a great place to bring up children. It is not something – with one in four children growing up in poverty – that can be said with pride today.