

New Zealand in World Affairs Vol 3 1972 - 1990

Reviewed by Gerard McGhie

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For New Zealand's foreign policy, the period 1972 to 1990 marked a time of upheaval and the quest for a more distinctive international identity.

Individual contributors to the third volume of *New Zealand in World Affairs* (edited by Bruce Brown) provide informed comment on vital issues ranging from defence issues and the viability of New Zealand's external economy, to the complexity of the situation in the Pacific (referred to here as "Oceania"). Contrapuntal issues relate to Law of the Sea negotiations, apartheid, trans Tasman relations, the development of linkages with Asia (in this volume pretty much North Asia with Ann Trotter writing on Japan and John McKinnon on China) and a growing public awareness of foreign relations. In a perceptive introductory comment, Merwyn Norrish, a former head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provides an overview of the book's contents.

A review offers limited scope to comment on all the contributions. There are, however, two areas which I think should be given some primacy. These are New Zealand's search for new markets, analysed by Bruce Brown and defence issues, in particular the 1980s ANZUS imbroglio which is covered by Ian McGibbon and by Malcolm McKinnon.

Brown's essay leads off. He notes that at the time of British entry to the European Union, New Zealand was still heavily dependent on the British market but the New Zealand Government decided not to obstruct British initiatives, seeking instead special access arrangements which were eventually achieved under Protocol 18 of the Treaty of Rome. Canada's and Australia's more assertive approach gained them little. Brown provides an informed discussion on New Zealand's trade diversification policy with Australia, Japan and the United States. He also discusses our involvement in the GATT and, later, APEC. But it was access to the British market that remained crucial. As Brown says "New Zealand's long rear guard action... to maintain the right of access to Britain was ... one of the most significant political and diplomatic achievements since the Second World War" (31). This reviewer agrees and considers that the Brown chapter together with those by Trotter on Japan and Stephen Hoadley on Australia provide an essential trade and economic backdrop to most of the other events covered in this volume.

Ian McGibbon's comments on the ANZUS row provide a useful analysis of that diplomatic upheaval. He outlines New Zealand's need to find a substitute as Britain's power waned after World War Two. The US was the logical choice. But McGibbon points to the difference between negotiating with Washington and with London – “the United States” he says “was not ‘family’ ” (p113). Australia too was emerging – or re-emerging - as a natural defence partner. But, as Malcolm McKinnon details, almost parallel with these developments the anti-nuclear lobby in New Zealand was working up its own agenda. The denouement came with the Lange Government's decision in 1985 to refuse entry to New Zealand's ports of a US naval vessel. In his introduction, Norrish sees the popularity of this move within New Zealand as “the idealistic stream of New Zealand's foreign policy [enjoying] perhaps its greatest time of triumph” (13). Perhaps indeed but some reference could also have been made to younger New Zealand seeking - albeit in a rather inchoate way – to assert its own identity.

McGibbon's comments on the coups in Fiji must be read in conjunction with the relevant parts of John Henderson's informative chapter on the South Pacific. McGibbon writes that Lange's “insistence” that the SAS anti-terrorist squad be readied for despatch to Fiji (to deal with the hi-jacking of an Air New Zealand plane) could be seen, in the words of Crooks, the then Chief of Defence Staff, as injecting a military presence into Fiji and representing “the height of folly” (128). John Henderson (284), a former Head of the Prime Minister's Department, refutes any claim that New Zealand and Australia contemplated military action against Fiji. Henderson states that “the envisaged use of the military was confined to limited and specific roles agreed to with the Fiji authorities” (285). Henderson's account provides a welcome antidote to the more extended allegations abroad at the time.

The volume marks a range of achievements. Relations with Australia went from one of “mutual disregard” (Hoadley) to signing of the Closer Economic Relations free trade agreement. Relations with Asia went from “piecemeal” (Norrish) to the development of significant economic linkages and, in 1999, to a gathering in New Zealand of Asia-Pacific Heads of State. South Africa joined the international community and the Commonwealth became a “principles-based” organisation (David McIntyre) though (as this reviewer would see it) an, at times, overly conservative one. In discussing the development of rules for the better ordering of the international game, Malcolm Templeton shows the special importance to New Zealand, with its huge coastline, of the Law of the Sea Convention. Additionally Rod Alley's documenting of the public involvement in foreign policy is illuminating.

There are of course omissions. South East Asia deserves a chapter while a discussion of Norman Kirk's clarion call (at the outset of the period covered

by this volume and contained in the foreword to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Annual Report for 1973) for the Government to “find and hold to a firm moral basis for its foreign policy” would have made for a lively chapter particularly in the light of Prime Minister Muldoon’s decision to allow the highly divisive 1981 Springbok tour to go ahead for what appeared to be narrow electoral purposes.

For New Zealand’s international relations the period 1972 to 1990 was a significant time indeed. What many of the contributors have done is chart the path followed by a geographically remote, ethnically varied, nation emerging from a colonial mindset. This process is still going on and will inform the contributions of the next volume.