

tive topics they take as their subjects. At another level, they might be read as attempts to define the conditions under which the colonizers could forge an unproblematic relationship with the land. It is not only on the television screens that the 'land wars' are still being waged.

Like all recent books from this publisher, the volume is well-designed. The varied forms of annotation employed in different contributions are a matter of interest rather than irritation. An index ought to have been added. There are a couple of minor blemishes: the macron floats on and off Okarito with the tides; for McCormack, on page 56, read McCormick; and on page 63 antimony should be antinomy — or have I missed the joke?

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The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915–38. By Marilyn Lake. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1987. xviii, 317pp. Australian price: \$A35.00.

SOME YEARS ago I interviewed an elderly Queensland police officer who was stationed near the Beerburrum Soldier Settlement in the 1920s. With some exaggeration, he retailed harrowing accounts of life at that miserable place, where returned soldiers had a propensity for leaping off the Glasshouse Mountains.

Marilyn Lake's heart-breaking account of discharged soldiers and their young families settled on small farms in Victoria is even more dramatic and tragic. Between 1916 and 1917, 40,000 soldier settlers and their 60,000 dependants were placed on the land in Australia. At least 60% of them had disappeared by the onset of the Great Depression — a failure rate roughly comparable to that of the small selectors in the eastern states of Australia between 1860 and 1875. Nor was this tragedy confined to Australia. In New Zealand, where a similar attempt at social engineering and national gratitude was tried, at least 5000 of the 11,000 men who were financed on to the land were in difficulties by 1923, and most of the capital invested, mainly in the form of inflated land values, was ultimately written off. In Canada, where over 30,000 returned soldiers were settled on farms, mainly in the prairie provinces, over 14,000 had failed by the 1930s.

Yet in Australia the disasters were greater than in the other Dominions. As Lake indicates, this was particularly true of the Victorian closer-settlement schemes. Here is fruitful ground for the comparative historian working on problems first delineated in J. M. Powell's seminal article in the June 1981 issue of the *Journal of Australian Studies*. Why was the ideological emphasis on closer settlement so powerful in the country with the highest urban concentrations in the Empire? Were the lives of the Anzac pioneers and their families harsher than those of their comrades across the Pacific — if indeed one can measure human pain? What was the contribution of severe environmental and social problems? Did technological and scientific advances in artificial grassland farming, co-operative endeavour, and distance create critical areas of difference? Was the texture of rural political sophistication and organization significantly different in New Zealand's 'strugglers' gullies'?

Lake has supplied some of the human answers to these questions, but not without a certain amount of unnecessary repetition and criss-crossing of rather well-trodden ground in the history of Australian land settlement. Perhaps, in using about 300 samples from 11,000 personal files in the Victorian Lands Department, she has not sufficiently taken

into account regional variations, the environmental complexities of local social factors, and the fact that, for some, a form of rural independence and stability of tenure was ultimately achieved. But it is doubtful whether further number-crunching would have provided us with a more accurate picture or, indeed, have reinforced her twentieth-century tale of a great Australian tragedy produced by, and part of, the Australian legend and its offspring, the Anzac tradition.

Why, during the world's first industrial machine war, was the state of Victoria, encouraged by the Commonwealth Government, so concerned to revive the yeoman farming shibboleths of the nineteenth century? Lake's analysis is instructive. She clearly describes the power of the yeomanry ideal and the increasing need, as a stay-at-home urban society saw it, to 'settle' the ex-servicemen comfortably. The ripple effect of the international division of labour, as the British Empire attempted to rally, economically and socially, after the traumas of the Great War, is convincingly argued.

Useful, too, is her analysis of the coming-of-age of the role of the expert in both business and human nature. The new tools of social surveillance and categorization that were developed to oversee this costly failure are seen in action on the farm. The language of the inspectorate and the notion of 'accountability', familiar enough in contemporary social histories, were entering all forms of rural relationships.

The major underlying reasons for the failure of the majority of the settlers are familiar to historians in the three Dominions: land purchased by the state during the speculative boom just after the war, uncertain prices for specialized primary products, the need for capital for land development and machinery, the smallness of the blocks, and the unsuitability of many of the new settlers. The last, of course, was intensified by a phenomenon that still needs more detailed analysis in both Australian and New Zealand: the mental and physically-debilitating effects of the Great War on front-line soldiers, leading in many cases to their premature deaths. The Vietnam experience has resurrected such discordances in new forms.

Dr Lake is at her best in Chapter 7, 'The Mobilisation of Women', where she ploughs new ground. The realities of the new divisions of labour in the cities, and their complete incompatibility with the experiences of women and children on small farms, are brilliantly described. Under her skilful editorship, the physical pain, frustrations, and sheer drudgery of many of the wives and children leap from dusty files on to the page. Her reconnaissance of the family on the soon-to-fail farm is one of the finest pieces of research into the history of white land settlement in Australia that has yet appeared.

The Limits of Hope should be capable of stimulating further questions about the nature of rural enterprise in the white areas of settlement in what was then the British Empire. Dr Lake's epilogue, however, concludes that the old Victorian notion of populating 'wastelands' with hearty, healthy farmers and their large families was no longer part of the state ideology. This is far too sanguine. From the Depression onwards, it was accepted that only the minor capitalist or wealthier pastoralist could survive on the land. But the inexorable grind of international commodity prices, overwhelming capital needs, agribusiness and processing demands continue to place manifold pressures on those rural producers who attempt to maintain a 'reasonable standard of living' down on the farm.

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