

*New Zealand Electoral Atlas*. By Alan McRobie. GP Books, Wellington, 1989. 154 pp. NZ price: \$44.95.

IN THE CURRENT climate of public disquiet and intensifying debate, both political and academic, over the merits of New Zealand's electoral system, it is helpful to be reminded that for over 100 years an important aspect of the electoral process has been carried out with impartiality and close to universal support. The *New Zealand Electoral Atlas* charts the evolution of electoral redistribution in New Zealand and provides a set of maps of every electorate since the first districts were defined in 1853.

The author's dedication to the project over some 16 years may account for the exaggerated opening claim that the first set of electoral boundaries drawn by the Representation Commission 'is as important to New Zealanders as the Declaration of Independence is to Americans'. The aims of the book are more restrained and include: bringing together a data base of material on each redistribution; describing the process by which redistributions are carried out; and analyzing the impact of redistributions on the electoral system as a whole.

The title, dustcover design, and layout tend to invite the reader to skip past the introductory essay and on to the electoral maps. To do so would be a mistake, for in some respects the books' greatest merit is its systematic and vividly illustrated account of the development of New Zealand's electoral system, including data on the electoral impact of the country quota and the incidence of multi-member electorates. The essay also includes a detailed description of the composition, role and functions of the Representation Commission. Its creation in 1887 is described as a 'pragmatic response' to the tensions and divisions which accompanied every representation review conducted by the House of Representatives. McRobie points out that New Zealand led the way in the establishment of an independent and non-partisan commission. Britain, for example, did not have such a body until 1948.

The book provides a fascinating account of the creation of special interest electorates, beginning with the 'Pensioner Settlements' seat for retired military personnel in Auckland in 1853 and the provision of separate representation for goldminers, with the creation in 1862 of a 'Goldfields' electorate overlaying other electorates in the province of Otago. Later in the decade their representation was extended to the 'Goldfield Towns' and 'Westland Boroughs' electorates.

Another electoral curiosity to receive attention is the triennial referendum on licensing laws. The book illustrates some anomalies caused by the link forged between electoral and liquor licensing districts. For example, the South Island town of Geraldine (population 942) remained 'dry', while Kumara (population 529) had twelve licensed hotels. A number of hotels were successively licensed and unlicensed, depending on whether they were placed in 'wet' or 'dry' electoral/licensing districts. It was a situation which vexed members of the Commission, with the result that 'all too often between 1893 and 1945 the location of licensed hotels was the most important factor determining where electoral boundaries were drawn'.

Strangely, the establishment of the four Maori seats, the most enduring category of special interest electorates, receives only scant attention. At the very least the author needs to direct readers to other, more thorough, sources of information on the creation of separate Maori representation (such as Keith Sorrenson's essay in the Appendix to the 1986 Report of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System).

Assembling in a single digestible publication a series of maps depicting each electoral redistribution has a number of potential pitfalls, not least the limited amount of informa-

tion which can be conveyed on one map. Unfortunately the author has settled for maps which are too small and poorly delineated to permit detailed analysis. Individual polling booths, an essential element for psephologists, are not shown, and there is no information on the past and present boundaries of the city electorates. For anyone requiring information on the 1992 by-election seat of Tamaki, for example, the Atlas has very limited value. Moreover, maps of the main population centres are reduced to small and incomplete insets, thereby distorting the electoral importance of the cities relative to the rest of the country.

The author analyzes weaknesses in the reapportionment system, including the absence of any provisions for the regular redistribution of Maori electorates (corrected in 1981) and the disruptive nature of some of the Commissions' decisions to an electorate's community of interest (such as the 1987 decision to remove the Thames borough from the Coromandel electorate). He concludes, however, that the reapportionment system is fair, impartial and largely fulfils the democratic objective of one vote, one value.

Despite the limitations of the electoral maps, this book is a mine-store of valuable information on the evolution of New Zealand's electoral system. Clearly the new electoral boundaries for the 1993 general election will require a second edition, by which time the results of the forthcoming referendum on the electoral system will be known. Maybe the next edition will also have to include some thoughts on the possible shape of the electoral map under a proportional electoral system.

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*The Quest for Efficiency: the origins of the State Services Commission.* By Alan Henderson with a chapter by Roberta Nicholls. Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs/State Services Commission, Wellington, 1990. xv, 442 pp., illus. NZ price: \$39.95.

THIS IS a timely book. It provides a valuable context for the growing number of histories of government agencies being researched or recently published under the auspices of the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. It also provides a necessary perspective on the impact of the State Sector Act, 1988, although this is not its ostensible objective. The primary focus is on the period of 'commissioner control' of the public service between 1913 (when the Public Service Act of 1912 came into effect) and the passage of the State Services Act 1962. The subsequent role of the State Services Commission up until 1988 is much more briefly surveyed in a chapter and a short postscript. An excellent chapter by Roberta Nicholls on the equal pay campaign integrates the perspectives of earlier accounts with that of the socially conservative Public Service Commission.

The origins of 'commissioner control' have been examined in earlier works; but Henderson's account supersedes them. He examines the development of 'political control' of the bureaucracy up until 1912, and in particular the Liberal resistance to civil service reform in the face of the growing size and complexity of public administration. At the heart of this resistance, according to Henderson, were Liberal fears of 'the