

operate to prevent more than a smattering of female members. A strong political voice still eludes women, and parliamentary representation, as later documents show, will be one of the battlefronts of the 1990s.

The documents give an encouraging picture of how legal injustices have been whittled away in such areas as divorce, guardianship of children, inheritance, recognition of the woman's contribution to marital property. But women still have to fight world-wide against attitudinal discrimination within the justice system, which influences judgments against them.

Mary Ann Muller began the protest against the habitual belittlement of women in 1869, but has the battle yet been won in joke culture and the modern media? Another sad and angry refrain runs through the collection: the woman's demand for protection against violence, both domestic and outside the family.

Some friends thought the title striking, but I did not find it satisfying. The vote and the pill each marked important points in the development of women's freedoms, but although temperance coloured the feminism of many 1880s and 1890s agitators, 'the demon drink' belongs on the sideline in a perspective of 140 years. The quality of the paper used is poor and the print for the documents is appallingly small. No doubt the publishers had financial limitations — publishers of feminist books often do — but this publication deserved better. Comparisons will show that the first nation in the world to enfranchise its women was, and is, a microcosm of the western world. Remote geographically, it has never been isolated ideologically. Print, visitors and migrants have always flowed into and out of it. It is a part of the mainstream of feminist apologetics and struggle.

This collection appears when new and younger writers like Susan Faludi and Naomi Wolf are emerging, reiterating basic principles and formulating (sometimes controversial) strategies for the continuing struggle. New Zealand will certainly move into this next stage in step with the rest of the world.

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*Minding Children, Managing Men: Conflict and Compromise in the Lives of Postwar Pakeha Women.* By Helen May. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1992. 371pp. NZ price: \$34.95.

WOMEN'S HISTORY is often concerned with the gap between societal prescriptions of women's role and behaviour and the actuality of women's experience. In *Minding Children, Managing Men* Helen May has used the life experiences of 24 women, and contemporary commentary from sources such as the *New Zealand Listener* and *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, to examine the articulation between prescription and reality in the decades following the Second World War. The lives of women who reached adulthood and reared children during the 1940s and 1950s are contrasted with the experiences of a 'transitional generation' of women who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s.

May argues that the privations engendered by the Depression and World War II led to a widespread desire for material possessions and economic security in the immediate postwar period. For women marriage and motherhood provided the only socially

acceptable means to achieve these goals. The domestic ideology and consumerism of the 1950s rested on a rigid construction of separate spheres for men and women. Judging from interviews conducted with this earlier generation of women, societal prescriptions on sexuality, gender roles within marriage, and the rearing of children did significantly influence women's lives in the postwar period. May strongly argues, however, that many women from the 1950s quietly subverted the ideology of domesticity and sought to achieve a degree of autonomy by undertaking part-time or voluntary work. Most commentators state that the incidence of married women in paid work was relatively low during the 1950s, and May concedes that women's paid work was generally undertaken to supplement the family income. Thus the contention that women's involvement in paid work can be seen as evidence of their desire for self-determination remains open to debate.

Nonetheless, a greater social acceptance of women working outside the home during the 1970s and 1980s forms the most cogent indicator of change between the two generations. In contrast to the domestic ideology of the 1950s, where women's paid work was hidden beneath the facade of the family income, a strong expectation that married women would work outside the home had emerged by the late 1970s. This new paradigm was reinforced by the concerns of Second Wave Feminism and by the desirability of two incomes in a period characterized by economic recession.

Changing attitudes to women and work were accompanied by a new fluidity pertaining to women's traditional roles as wives and mothers. May asserts that, in the 1970s, women of child-bearing age began to see motherhood as only one of a number of activities that they might undertake, while others chose to remain childless. May states, however, that continuity rather than change characterized the life experiences of the women she interviewed. Throughout the period under scrutiny, women retained primary responsibility for child-rearing, and women continued to adhere to the belief that economic security within a heterosexual relationship was desirable.

While many of May's conclusions are convincing her thesis is undermined, to some extent, by her methodology. The study is based on the life experiences of a small group of women (12 women from the 1940s and 1950s and 13 women from the 1970s and 1980s were interviewed) and to ascribe generational representativeness to such a limited sample seems somewhat injudicious. Furthermore, May makes little attempt to analyse the effects of socio-economic status and levels of education on the life experiences of the women she interviewed. Nonetheless, May's study combines oral history with thoughtful commentary and *Minding Children, Managing Men* represents a valuable addition to the growing body of writing on women's history in New Zealand.

SHAYLEEN THOMPSON

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*Sir Joseph Ward: A Political Biography.* By Michael Bassett. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1993. xi, 330 pp. NZ price: \$39.95.

POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY is a hard taskmaster/mistress. It may involve up to ten years from start to finish, as it did for Michael Bassett. Sustaining interest in a single life over that period involves something like mental RSI. The writer has to maintain sympathy with his subject across the gaps created by differences of time, temperament, personality and