

Cabinet decided to allow a summons to be served (p.180). Only P.J. O'Regan understood the gravity of that step. Thereafter, the lawyers were in charge and Sweetman does an excellent job of dissecting the legal issues and the shaping and presenting of the Crown's case and the bishop's defence.

In his preface Sweetman asserts that he aims to tell a story and there are some splendid stories here — the detailed set piece of the 1922 St Patrick's Day celebrations, the accounts of the lower court hearing and the sedition trial itself. In some small respects this book does not meet the usual high standards of the Auckland University Press. I detected a few typographical errors, one important (the misspelling of Thomas Wilson Leys on p.23). The quality of the reproduction of the illustrations is often poor. Other faults may be ascribed to Sweetman's over-exuberance. There are too many lists of quotations, especially from newspapers. It is hard to see the point of some excursions — into the topic of sectarianism and the police in chapter xi, for example.

The harsh sectarian bigotry of the 1920s has been overtaken by other passions, but *Bishop in the Dock* provides an instructive case-study as to how we dealt with controversy, grievance and value issues at that time.

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*Holding the Balance: A History of New Zealand's Department of Labour 1891-1995.* By John E. Martin. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 1996. 478 pp. NZ price: \$49.95 (limpbound). ISBN 0-908812-61-2.

*HOLDING THE BALANCE* is an official history of the Department of Labour prepared under the auspices of the Historical Branch, written by John Martin, one of New Zealand's leading labour historians. It is a very welcome and timely addition to our historical literature, not least because the role and function of the state remains one of the hot issues of current political debate.

In seven chronological chapters the book spans just over 100 years of history. Born in 1891, the department in its early years was an unashamedly partisan enterprise focused especially on the issue of unemployment and the need to ameliorate its effects on society. In the 1990s unemployment is no less an issue yet the department has evolved into a very different beast, less activist and certainly less partisan in favour of the victims of economic cycles. This transformation from partisanship to so-called 'neutrality', which occurred surprisingly early in the century, is one of the major themes of the book. While the process of story telling is restrained, dispassionate and seldom riveting, the extensive detailing of the development and transformation of the New Zealand state, at least as represented by the Department of Labour, is in itself sufficient to recommend this book to readers.

Another theme of the book is the octopus-like expansion of functions carried out by the department. Over time more and more activities came under the umbrella of the Labour Department. We learn of the state farm, the barmaids' register, the supervision of weights and measures, and a myriad of other activities. New light is shed on many areas of New Zealand history and new subjects are brought in for the first time. Sometimes, however, the attempt to cover, no matter how briefly, the totality of the department's activities breaks up the readability of the text and lessens the impact of the overarching arguments.

This is an expected and perhaps unresolvable problem with commissioned histories of institutions. The author is conscious of this problem, but whether he has managed to resolve the competing demands of comprehensive coverage and making a strong and compelling argument is debateable.

Having said this it should be acknowledged that Martin works hard at achieving a satisfactory balance between an analysis of the legislation administered by the department, the day-to-day activities this instituted, and profiles of the people who ran the department. In this sense *Holding the Balance* is a very successful institutional history. Such equilibrium is seldom achieved in commissioned works; too often such histories slip into hagiography of officialdom or chronologies of legislative change. The text is also well illustrated.

But will this book become a watershed in New Zealand historiography in the way the author's previous study of rural labour, *The Forgotten Worker*, has become? I would suggest this is unlikely. In part this is because one of the core assumptions of the book is unconvincing. The author contends that the state has been neglected in New Zealand history, and labour history in particular, and therefore needs to be 'brought back in'. This call has become something of a cliché in recent times, not just in New Zealand, yet is it any more convincing for being so often repeated? I think not. New Zealand historians seldom neglect the role of the state; New Zealand labour historians especially have not left the state out of the picture. One could argue that the existence of the Historical Branch gives the state a special, perhaps privileged, place in New Zealand historiography. Certainly it is unlikely to be neglected while the Branch continues to produce work of this high standard. What this book does achieve is a most comprehensive account of a key department of the state. The author is right to remind us all that the state has fulfilled many roles and that it has a history to be told. He is right to chide labour historians for a too simplistic analysis of the state and dwelling on its repressive dimension. Yet the 'bring the state back in' mantra has become tiresome to this writer at least.

The impact of this work in a broader historical sense will also be diminished because the often challenging revisionist ideas of the author are relegated almost entirely to the footnotes. This is probably a result of the 'commissioned status' of the work and may not therefore have been in the control of the author, but it is a shame to perpetuate an artificial separation between 'history' and 'argument'. Surely it is not an insurmountable problem to convince clients that history is more than one thing after another. Let us adopt a new mantra of 'bringing debate back in'.

While this work will not set the world alight as a riveting read, nor fundamentally alter the orientation of a generation of historians, it will become an absolutely indispensable reference volume. One cannot help feeling that this was one of Martin's primary goals. The book is well structured for this purpose. There are extensive footnotes which contain not only historiographical debate but a large amount of additional factual information. The book also contains very extensive and valuable appendices, including a chronology, diagrams of the department's structure, lists of officials and statistical tables. To suggest a book will become an invaluable reference volume may be read by some as an implied criticism. In this case it is meant as a significant compliment. I can see myself mining this book as a resource for teaching; there is no fear that it will sit on my bookshelf untouched. The considerable endeavour and care of the author will be appreciated over the long haul.

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