

The National Council of Women. A Centennial History. By Dorothy Page. Auckland University Press/Bridget Williams Books with The National Council of Women, Auckland, 1996. 240 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-154-9.

AFTER THE FLURRY of publishing around 1993 on first-wave feminism in general and the National Council of Women in particular, I felt more of a sense of duty than excitement when I picked up this book. I could not have been more wrong. *The National Council of Women: A Centennial History* is an insightful addition to our literature.

Dorothy Page has used this commission to produce an elegant history which performs several functions. First, it makes a fitting companion to Charlotte Macdonald's *The Vote, The Pill and The Demon Drink* (1993), as it provides many examples of a different kind of feminism in action. Comparing the two books raises a host of fascinating questions about what feminism is and how it has expressed itself over time. The National Council of Women became and remains a wide-ranging, mainstream umbrella organization which gives a platform to many different kinds of women's groups, particularly those affiliated with the Christian churches. Compared to its first incarnation in the period from 1896-1905, about which so much has already been written, the inter-war NCW was more conservative and 'radicalism was being tempered by democracy' (p.56). Yet Page argues that this trade-off had a beneficial effect: the politicization of a much wider group of women.

Even at times of highly visible and more radical feminist activity, such as the early 1970s, the NCW's participation and its reaction to surrounding events broadens and complicates our understanding of women's and feminist activism. This book shows how diverse the women who worked for change were. Page contrasts the 1971 women's liberation groups, with their often angry and confrontational public statements which spoke of discrimination and subordination, and the NCW. Yet she argues that many of the liberationists' demands were established NCW policy. Both groups wanted to get rid of media stereotyping, campaigned for equal pay, and believed in affordable, quality childcare. It was mainly on issues of contraception and abortion that the two disagreed. Page believes the extent of common ground was not always recognized by the women's liberation movement, or the press of the day. Her discussion opens up space for historians to consider this in more depth.

In this way, *The National Council of Women* becomes what the blurb claims for it — 'a book about women's history'. As we would expect with her experience and expertise, Page frequently provides the crucial context of what was happening for women more generally and, in turn, the wider society. She also points out some interesting features of the organization's development. For example, is it significant that, compared with the situation before and after this time, the inter-war presidents were all unmarried and held responsible paid jobs? Similarly, during the decades of the 'quiet generation', when it is often assumed that nothing much was going on politically or socially in the name of women, the number of NCW branches mushroomed. In 1944 there were 14 branches and 7 invited, nationally organized societies. By 1960 33 branches and 21 societies made up the NCW. In these pages we find a broad range of women and their activities: the extraordinary and more ordinary women, the educated, the religious, the community-minded and many more. This account reveals much about the history of politics, and women's involvement in it. The NCW is a sophisticated political tool and that development is analysed in some detail. This includes the process of policy formation, the never-ending round of submissions and the demands of lobbying in Wellington. The changing role of the state is a strong theme.

Organization histories are demanding, and written within the constraints of time, commission brief and publishing needs. The NCW represents 250,000 women. It has a regionalized branch structure and successive presidents have become national figures in the wider sense. It also has a strong international dimension. It is, as Page comments, a 'do-everything' organization. To convey all of this and yet retain a coherent narrative structure is an achievement in itself. Interesting potted biographies of the presidents are spaced at intervals throughout the text, and a careful selection of photographs enables the presentation of further information and interpretation. Room has been found for the activities of local branches. Westland, for example, is noted for its strong presence. Throughout the 1950s it made regular radio broadcasts, and celebrated the province's centenary in 1960 by publishing *Women of Westland and their Families*, which was joined by two further volumes in 1977 and 1990. One member was on the editorial committee of all three volumes, typifying the long loyal service of many members.

Academics will of course want more; here is the rich material with which to ask further questions.

BRONWYN LABRUM

Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

The Next Generation: Child Rearing in New Zealand. By Jane & James Ritchie. Penguin, Auckland, 1997. 248 pp. NZ price: \$24.95. ISBN 0-140-26604-6.

The Discovery of Early Childhood. The development of services for the care and education of very young children. Mid-eighteenth-century Europe to mid-twentieth-century New Zealand. By Helen May. Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books, co-published with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Auckland, 1997. 244 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-166-2.

THE PROFESSORIAL AUTHORS of these two works relating to children and childhood are well-known social scientists whose academic interest in their subjects has been enhanced by perspectives gained from parenthood, political activism and professional association. *The Next Generation* is an informal but well-informed essay in which two committed campaigners against inadequate and violent child-rearing practices survey the findings from their 40 years of research into the methods by which New Zealand parents since the 1960s have sought to raise and control their children. This newest publication is 'more an integration than a summary, reflecting with hindsight, projecting with foresight, in the hope that . . . future generations of children will be better served' (p.8). *The Discovery of Early Childhood*, a carefully-structured and tightly-written text, surveys the intellectual roots of early childhood practices and policies as these have evolved since the mid-eighteenth century. The New Zealand case studies concerning crèche and nursery care services, kindergartens and the plight of abandoned and unwanted youngsters are explored within this wider historical context. The Ritchies move easily in a bicultural world for their research has long been inclusive of Maori, Pakeha and Polynesian. May awaits the published findings of Maori colleagues but signals that the interplay of Maori and Pakeha attitudes towards early childhood policy and practice will be much more apparent in a projected volume dealing with post-1950 developments in New Zealand, the period on which the Ritchies have focused. Several of Helen (Cook) May's earlier