

cultivation of large vegetable gardens was a central part of their lives. According to Richards, members of the literary community found 'the mental repose of menial work had its attractions'. Duggan also enjoyed the outdoors and holidays at the beach. *To Bed at Noon* tells of a way of life where blokes were mates who drank and yarned and did hard physical work. This community was for the boys. Women could stay in the kitchen. The book suggests that far from being outside the mainstream of New Zealand society, the literary community reflected many of the values of kiwi blokedom.

To Bed at Noon indicates that there are problems with a biographical approach to literary history. Often biography becomes less about developing a picture of a person, and more about cramming in as much detail as possible. The book suffers from this and the result is that Duggan's writing in particular is lost in a mass of detail. Duggan the writer is obscured by Duggan the alcoholic who suffers persistent physical and mental health problems. Although Sinclair claimed in 1978 'that the obvious book that is not yet written is on Maurice Duggan', there are questions as to whether Duggan was an important enough figure in the literary world to warrant such a large and detailed book. Biography fails to provide the balance between individual writers that would be possible in a more synthetic history. However, Richards' book is carefully researched, based on published writing, interviews, and especially correspondence between leading characters. Its approach and its subject raise some fundamental questions about New Zealand's literary history.

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In Stormy Seas: The Post-War New Zealand Economy. By Brian Easton. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 1997. 343 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877133-08-6.

THIS BOOK has had a bad press from economists and a business newspaper. The question that remains is whether it has any relevance for historians. With such a title one might expect enlightenment on the causes of the last 30 years of economic under-achievement. Unfortunately, after ploughing through 16 chapters, an epilogue and several lengthy appendices, a student of history is unlikely to be much wiser about New Zealand's comparatively poor economic performance in the last half of the twentieth century.

What is the purpose of the book? The general answer seems to be that it is another in a long line of books from Easton arguing that the last 14 years of New Zealand's economic and political history need not have happened. In a series of lengthy ruminations about life which give an appearance of being the texts from a not well-thought-out lecture series, Easton goes through a wide range of factors — declining terms of trade, excessive protection, unreal exchange rates, an over-rigid labour market, excessive inflation, rising debt levels, and an over-active government — and concludes that, all in all, things were not too bad by 1984. Robert Muldoon had the essentials under control: 'History may well judge Muldoon more generously than his contemporaries'. Muldoon carried out 'spectacular external restructuring', and he 'left office with annual consumer inflation at 4.6%,

and a reasonable chance it would stay near that level. It is a matter of record that while registered unemployment had reached unprecedented post-war levels from the late 1970s, it had fallen slightly to 5% of the labour force in March 1984 with some prospect of stability or of a further fall' (p.235).

At first sight there is something strange about all this. Why did the governor of the Reserve Bank on the evening of 15 July 1984 take the unprecedented step of closing the foreign exchange markets for four days? One is left to infer from this book — but Easton has said as much in other places — that a coup was staged, and the 'New Establishment' made up of 'New Right' extremists and 'Rogernomes trooping along' dropped enough hints about a pending devaluation to create the foreign exchange crisis, which then provided them with excuse enough to embark on a sinister — and unnecessary — restructuring of the New Zealand economy.

Along the way, Easton cooks the books here and there and ignores ingredients that will not help the improbable stew he is concocting. The Wage-Price Freeze did not end in March 1984 (p.214). Many cabinet members of the fourth Labour government, myself included, find that we were not part of the anti-Vietnam movement of the 1960s (p.222). Easton hints, tantalizingly, that there was a fairer way of handling the Great Depression (p.59), but does not tell us what it was. He is similarly vague about the alternative policies that could have been followed after 1984, hinting improbably that Australia was a model to follow. There is a great deal of hocus pocus masquerading as economics: on pages 36–38, 'Market Keynesians', 'Radical Monetarists' and 'Traditional Keynesians' rub shoulders, and share an unintelligible diagram with 'Traditional Monetarists' [sic] and 'Left modernisers'. In the middle of chatty, even informal paragraphs where the royal 'we' is used, terms like 'purchasing power parity', 'elasticity optimism', 'sinusoids', 'analytical lacunas' and acronyms such as TOTs and TFPs are suddenly introduced. Readability is not the strong point of this book.

It would be unfair to leave the impression that there are no redeeming features. While the book is a magpie collection of often unrelated thoughts, some stories are interesting. There is a cogent short account of the collapse of wool prices in 1966 (pp.73–4), and chapter 11 contains both detail and analysis that is challenging. At his best, Easton can dissect questions carefully. But he is unable to deal with many factors over a lengthy time span, which a good economic historian has to be able to do. For those of us who lived through the period after 1965 and watched successive governments struggling with the ups and downs (mostly downs) of the overseas markets, while pandering to impatient pressure groups and usually making things worse with endless 'fine-tuning' of the economy, it boggles the imagination to believe that more of the same after 1984 would have produced a better world than we have had. In any event, it is unprovable and consequently idle speculation. How can an historian accept the judgement that the market must be judged a failure because of the bad years 1984–1991, when the problem it was dealing with had taken a century or more to create?

Easton seems to live in hope that if he goes on writing the same sort of book long enough, people will believe his version of New Zealand history. This is where an historian interested in the truth turns to Easton's sources. Large numbers of his references are to himself. A check with several of his other books reveals the same thing. He seems endlessly to be recycling himself — perhaps the cause of the 'solitary period in my intellectual life' that he complains about in the Preface (p.4)? Furthermore, the nearest Easton gets to what an historian would regard as a primary source is a published

departmental document. National Archives has splendid Treasury and Industry and Commerce files. With persistence one can access documents as late as 1986. It is possible to trace the thought patterns of top civil servants as they wove their way around the complexities of the regulated economy, seeking better outcomes. One would have thought that an economic historian would find such files meat and drink. Not so. Nowhere in Easton's writings have I been able to find more than exiguous use of archival sources. Even one of his chapter headings is a hand-me-down: at the start of chapter 15 a quote from André Siegfried's *Democracy in New Zealand*, scarcely the rarest of books, came to him, he tells us, from David Choat via Jack Vowles.

Perhaps the saddest aspect of this work is that a university press published it. Have we reached a stage in academia where anything goes? If so, it just might be the most serious outcome of the last 14 years, something that we could start to rectify by applying higher standards to publishing.

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The Mother of All Departments: The History of the Department of Internal Affairs. By Michael Bassett. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1997. 312 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-175-1.

IN *THE MOTHER OF ALL DEPARTMENTS* Michael Bassett has produced a clear and well-written departmental history. He has avoided the temptation, evident in other departmental histories, to indulge in tedious detail. Instead, he chronicles the department's evolution from the department of everything to its modern status as department of everything that does not fit somewhere else.

Originally the department (known until 1907 as the Colonial Secretary's Office) was simply the governor's office. Bassett concisely describes the problems of setting up a functioning government structure in Kororareka. Willoughby Shortland emerges as William Hobson's essential deputy, although unimaginative and not above using office for personal gain. From 1856, with responsible government, the office became a Cabinet appointment with a permanent head. Abolition of the provinces in 1876 increased the department's influence. Among other matters, it had the job of designing the new local government structure, which quickly grew exponentially: 'By 1892 New Zealand was governed at the local level by a total of 2125 authorities with 13,981 elected members' for a total population of only 630,000 (p.43). Successive governments from 1895 attempted to reduce this administrative complexity, but with so many members of parliament susceptible to local pressure and porkbarrel politics, it was an intractable problem.

The growth of the centralized state under the Liberals gives context to the department's evolution. Paradoxically, while functions proliferated, others were lost to new ministries, and the department's prestige declined. World War I brought in the administration of war funds, conscription and passports, as well as patriotic gambling and film censorship. From 1918 the department was also disburser of discretionary funding to voluntary organizations.