

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.

MICHAEL BASSETT

*Auckland*

*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.

Although a more thematic approach would have helped, the growth in functions is clearly traced.

A succession of efficient but colourless under-secretaries was followed by the appointment, in 1935, of Joe Heenan. Sportsman, journalist, bibliophile and optimist, Heenan was one of the great nation-building civil servants of the 1930s and 1940s. Heenan's legal training and his eye for policy made him much more than an administrator. He was largely responsible for the centennial celebrations, for sponsorship of culture, scholarship and literature, and the embryonic Historical Branch. The two chapters covering the Heenan era are strongly focused on this remarkable man, a contrast to the previous chapters, which move lightly across diverse topics. Bassett's habitual suspicion of the state is severely challenged by the evidence of the ability of such as Heenan, McIntosh, Ashwin and Beeby (in partnership with like-minded ministers) to use the state to do good.

Post-war — or post Heenan — things drifted. National ministers shared none of Labour's enthusiasm for supporting the arts. Physical welfare was also weakened. Nor would a National government offend the hundreds of local panjandrams of counties and boroughs. The diversity of functions, and the ad hoc way in which the department had acquired them, made for a decentralized — possibly inefficient — department by the 1950s. Jack Hunn led a review and reorganization at the end of the decade, which made some improvements, but there was little innovation in the Holyoake years.

In contrast, the reforming zeal of the Kirk years is well documented. There was a higher profile for recreation and sport. The Authors' Fund was established; arts funding was increased and national heritage better protected. Daylight saving and a national fire service were established. All this was driven through by Henry May, but May's contribution to a long line of attempts at local government reform was again fodder for the National party and its networks of local nabobs. May has not been well-served by public recollection but Bassett shows him to be an effective and reforming minister.

His successor, Allan Highet, kept a lower profile but preserved the department's position. A succession of outsiders as Secretary saw the department limp through to the mid 1980s. Under the fourth Labour government the department lost many staff but preserved most of its functions. Local government was finally reformed, and there was increased cultural and historical funding, and the 1990 commemorations. After 1990, there was a period of bickering, devaluation, and ill-starred proposals. Bassett judges the luckless Perry Cameron (1990–1994) as 'never . . . the right person for Internal Affairs' (p.266), but his own account suggests that the ministers through the period — Lee, Cooper, Banks — were not exactly of the highest calibre. Good descriptions of recent personalities are not matched for the earlier period. Few of the ministers appear, and even if many of them have been nonentities, that could not be said of Findlay, nor Russell, nor even quiet David Buddo.

It must be very rare for a former minister to write the official history of his department. Bassett notes that 'there are both pleasures and risks in writing about something one knows well' (p 11). Generally he has avoided the risks; one or two authorial comments on recent events are needlessly waspish, but overall this is a very useful contribution to administrative history.

JIM McALOON

*Lincoln University*