

*Australia, New Zealand and Federation, 1883–1901*. By Ged Martin. Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, King's College London, 2001. 164 pp. NZ price: not available. ISBN 1- 85507-115-0.

PROFESSOR MARTIN is a Canadianist, via Cambridge, writing in an English publication about Australian federation with about a third of the text concerning New Zealand. That third was first published in 1998 in the *British Journal of New Zealand Studies* and was used by me in a book published on the centenary of the Australian constitution.

The monograph — rather than book — is mostly and gratefully an old fashioned political history with healthy doses of economics, trade, strategy, ideology and some discussion of the vision that drives men. The founders of the Australian constitution were, with the exception of the Queen Empress herself, all male. It also contains large and quite wise slabs of historiography.

The monograph is in two sections. The first discusses the federation movement in six British colonies which brought about the construction of the Australian state and nation — still the only one with a continent to itself. This is well done and searches for the main motives among the main protagonists for that cause.

While Martin attaches importance to the grubby subjects of free trade, economic expansion and defence, he ends up mostly on the side of the vision thing. Mostly — and following Helen Irving's 1997 study in this respect — he suggests that the vision of nation building took hold among enough of the six Australian colonies' community leaders to ensure that project achieved fruition despite the considerable obstacles then prevailing and now too easily ignored.

The second section traces the historiography of debate about the decision — or is it non-decision? — that led to New Zealand's remaining apart. This traces discussions among scholars and identifies the usual and most prominent suspects in Sinclair and Wood with some reference to Australian contributions.

The whole text is enlivened by asides to Canada's experience of confederation and even aspects of the United Kingdom's constitutional development. It is a lively and interesting read, mostly appealing to the academic specialist who has covered this ground before but would like to know what a senior scholar of Martin's standing makes of the federation achievement a century after the fact. Mostly he is impressed with the construction of Australia.

New Zealanders may be more interested in his assessment of the reasons for New Zealand's staying aside. Chiefly, he argues that the dominant New Zealand politician of the day, Richard John Seddon, might have led New Zealand into the federation but lacked the motive or inclination to do so. In this he, like I, follows Wood. I can hardly, therefore, argue with this conclusion.

Martin, also like myself, makes some assumptions about the successful pursuit of genocide in Tasmania by the British state/convicts/settlers which helped set the Australia experience, particularly with indigenous people, apart from that of the more benign trans-Tasman pattern of occupation. A couple of years later and this assessment might have been changed by the debate currently raging in the Australian mass media about the veracity of this conclusion. Historiography has indeed become a nearly mass spectator sport conducted in Op-Ed pages and television documentaries.

Like this monograph, that is a development to be welcomed.

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