

New Zealand and the Soviet Union, 1950–1991: A Brittle Relationship. By A.C. Wilson. Victoria University of Wellington Press in association with the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Wellington, 2004. 248 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 0-86473-476-X; *Lenin's Legacy Down Under: New Zealand's Cold War*. Edited by Alexander Trapeznik and Aaron Fox. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2004. 248 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-877276-90-1.

FOR LENIN, New Zealand was 'the country at the end of the world', according to an epigraph used to introduce the volume edited by Alexander Trapeznik and Aaron Fox. Yet even this small state in the South Pacific was not isolated from the far-reaching reverberations of the revolutionary triumph in Russia of Lenin and his fellow Bolsheviks in 1917. The two books under review examine different dimensions of the impact on New Zealand of 'Lenin's legacy'. These effects were most prominent during the Cold War from 1945 to 1991, when the ideological conflict between democratic capitalism and revolutionary socialism dominated the international political order.

The Cold War was unimaginable without the Soviet Union, as its conclusion in 1991 made manifestly clear. Tony Wilson seeks to analyze New Zealand's relations with this communist superpower on the government-to-government level from 1950 to its collapse. Accurately characterizing the relationship as a 'brittle' one between very different states of unequal size and power, he takes care to stress that Soviet–New Zealand interaction was invariably set in a wider multilateral context, shaped primarily, though not exclusively, by the changing dynamics of the Cold War. Although attentive to that international context, Wilson focuses on the most important political and economic developments in the bilateral relationship. He shows that the role of anti-communism (or 'Sovietophobia') in determining official attitudes toward the Soviet Union in Wellington did not preclude the pragmatic pursuit of commercial links. (Indeed, during Robert Muldoon's time as prime minister, a dramatic low point in the relationship in ideological terms coincided with a marked expansion in bilateral trade.) While tracing the changing impact of longer-term ideological and economic influences on the bilateral relationship, Wilson's balanced narrative also covers specific events such as the closing of New Zealand's embassy in Moscow by a National government in 1950, its re-opening by a Labour government in 1973, the expulsion of the Soviet ambassador to New Zealand in 1980 and the sinking of the Soviet cruise liner *Mikhail Lermontov* in the Marlborough Sounds in 1985.

Wilson offers a useful, unpretentious assessment of New Zealand's relations with one of the two major protagonists in the Cold War. Ultimately, however, the reader is left wondering about the wider significance of his account. There is little in this book to suggest that the Soviet Union took any deep interest in New Zealand, except for commercial reasons. It is disappointing, therefore, that Wilson did not consider including any comparative analysis to examine if New Zealand's experience was typical of relations between smaller Western states and the Soviet Union or if it was distinctive in some way. Nor does Wilson make reference to the so-called New Cold War History, based on new archival materials released as a result of the collapse of the Soviet bloc, which some scholars consider has transformed our understanding of the Cold War and the role therein of the Soviet Union.

The other volume under review has grander pretensions on this front. Its editors state that '*Lenin's Legacy Down Under* aims to introduce the international New Cold War history into the New Zealand context' (p.10). It is a misleading claim. Apart from references in passing by the two editors, the only chapter which discusses the term is a three-page piece by the pre-eminent American Cold War historian, John Lewis Gaddis, who is most responsible for popularizing the concept and for emphasizing the centrality of ideology as the driving force in the Cold War. Curiously, his magisterial overview of the New Cold War history, *We Now Know*, is not cited by any contributor, even though

it is listed in the (very) selective bibliography. In fact, none of the contributors shows any evidence of having read his work, let alone engaged with it.

Historians who have taken an interest in New Zealand's Cold War diplomacy and security policies will discover little that is new in this book. Barry Gustafson offers a sound but conventional overview (without footnotes) of 'New Zealand in the Cold War World'. Jim Rolfe's equally conventional evaluation of New Zealand defence policy surveys the well-worked period from World War II to the early 1960s. Anne-Marie Brady's emphasis on a moderate, 'independent' New Zealand approach to relations with the People's Republic of China will be familiar to scholars who have taken an interest in the issue.

If not offering new insights, the aforementioned chapters do raise points for debate. Gustafson, for example, overstates New Zealand ambivalence about participation in the Korean War. Rolfe claims that 'New Zealand's defence and security arrangements during and as part of the Cold War' have received only 'scattered and superficial' attention (p.35). He supports this contention, in part, by suggesting there are no references to the Cold War in such well-known works as *New Zealand in World Affairs, Volume II*. Yet at least two chapters in that book (including one by this reviewer) are explicitly set within a Cold War context, to the extent that Ian McGibbon's chapter on 'Forward Defence' begins: 'New Zealand's defence policy in the 1950s was dominated by the Cold War' (p.9). Rolfe also wilfully ignores the central place which the Cold War occupies in such key works as Malcolm McKinnon's *Independence and Foreign Policy*, David McIntyre's *Background to the ANZUS Pact* and Ian McGibbon's *New Zealand and the Korean War, Volume I*. Brady is open to challenge in denying that New Zealand policy-makers harboured few apprehensions of a Chinese security threat as opposed to that posed by the Soviet Union — an argument which contrasts with Rolfe's. She can only sustain this claim by effectively ignoring both the Korean and Vietnam Wars in which Beijing was very much viewed as a threat to regional security — a perception bolstered in the former case by the fact the New Zealand soldiers were actually engaged in combat operations against Chinese forces. Brady also relies too heavily on the views of officials in preference to those of actual policy-makers, especially National party ministers such as Keith Holyoake, the instinctively anti-communist (and pro-Taiwan) Prime Minister who was Foreign Minister for 12 years.

There is also scope for debate about Trapeznik's own contribution, which uses declassified Soviet archival materials to argue that in the 1920s and 1930s the Communist Party of New Zealand (CPNZ) was unequivocally a party controlled from Moscow through the Communist International (Comintern). His chapter is somewhat abstract and devoid of local perspective, relying on a few documents to draw a very long bow. While demonstrating the Comintern's obvious intention of directing national communist parties around the world, Trapeznik does not convincingly overturn the conclusions of Kerry Taylor's more detailed work on New Zealand's Communist movement and conveys little sense of what the CPNZ actually did. James Bennett offers a more nuanced analysis of Australasian radicalism, trade unionism and communism, which integrates trans-national and domestic levels of analysis in explaining, *inter alia*, the limited impact of communism on the New Zealand and Australian labour movements in the inter-war period. Interestingly Bennett upholds Taylor's work, concluding that 'the traditional argument of CPNZ passivity to external influences, namely the Comintern and CPA [Communist Party of Australia] is debunked' (p.90). Tony Wilson, in his chapter on 'Russophobia' takes a similarly positive view of Taylor's work, noting that the extent of Comintern influence on the CPNZ is 'a matter of debate' (p.104). It seems strange that in a collection featuring such directly conflicting views, the editors did not seize upon this dramatic difference of interpretation as an opportunity for relevant contributors to engage with each others' arguments.

The collection is rounded out with a chapter by John Goodliffe on Soviet-era published perspectives on New Zealand society, an interview featuring some typically forthright reflections by Gerald McGhie, New Zealand's last Ambassador to the Soviet Union, and Aaron Fox's assessment of the cases against William Sutch and Ian Milner, two New Zealanders accused of spying for the Soviet Union. The latter chapter is a meticulously thorough and fair-minded analysis of recently declassified American, Australian and New Zealand official files concerning these two cases. Ironically, Fox concludes that any definitive conclusions about the two men's guilt or innocence still await the declassification of relevant Soviet sources.

In reality, it remains an open question if archival revelations from the former Soviet bloc will ever yield anything of great significance for New Zealand historiography. With the possible exception of the relationship between international and domestic communism or espionage cases, they are only likely to show us how communist states regarded New Zealand rather than to alter our existing knowledge about this country's participation in the Cold War. Consequently, these two volumes only reinforce the fact that, for New Zealand, the Cold War was more about the management of relations with allies, through the brokering of national and international interests within coalitions of like-minded states, rather than about engagement with distant ideological adversaries.

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Adventures in Democracy: A History of the Vote in New Zealand. By Neill Atkinson. University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2003. 319 pp. NZ price: \$39.99. ISBN 1-877276-58-8.

THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION is charged with the unenviable task of encouraging political participation in the face of an increasingly jaded and cynical public. They have sought to do so by a variety of means, including the commissioning of this history of the vote, a project initiated to mark the 150th anniversary of the first parliamentary elections in 1853. It is to their great credit that they have chosen the form of a detailed monograph rather than a 'once over lightly' history. This is a serious piece of research. We have come to expect nothing less from the History Group, the recipients of the commission, and once again they have delivered a work that will become a standard reference tool for years to come.

Taking the publication beyond the realm of 'reference work' was a challenge for Neill Atkinson. At face value this is not a naturally compelling subject. Political scientists, especially psephologists, have refined the art of turning elections into dull, dense tomes, often devoid of humanity except as aggregates. Many historians have simply turned their backs on politics, especially electoral politics, in favour of more 'interesting' subjects in the realm of social and, more recently, cultural history. Atkinson has taken up this challenge and succeeded in producing a highly readable work, with a nice balance between context, legislative and administrative detail, statistical analysis and anecdote.

The book is divided into seven main chapters. These are divided chronologically, each exploring a period of roughly 20 years. The chapter divisions, and therefore the periodization, are largely determined by 'turning point' elections. That most readers will guess the dividing points before opening the book may be a problem for some. But this is to miss the point of the book. The author's brief was also, perhaps principally, to discuss electoral law, its administration and the processes by which elections were conducted at the ballot box level. Given that this inevitably leads one into certain technical and procedural detail, Atkinson has written a remarkably engaging and accessible text. In