

during German rearmament, but it was irrelevant to the trajectory that Hitler envisaged for Germany. It might have become relevant if the much-maligned policy of non-intervention had been abandoned by the Popular Front government in Paris and civil war had ensued in France, which was already fiercely divided, not least on the issue of Spain. In 1937 Hitler speculated that he might bring forward aggressive moves in that event, recognizing how disastrous it would be to the position of the democracies.

Both the editor and many contributors acknowledge their debt to other New Zealand historians, notably Susan Skudder for her 1986 doctoral thesis, which remains the definitive work on New Zealand and the Spanish Civil War, and Michael O'Shaughnessy for his ongoing international exploration of the subject. This volume is very valuable in bringing the fruits of their research to public attention. While it does relatively little to enlighten readers about the complexities of the Spanish tragedy, *Kiwi Compañeros* provides some worthwhile insights into the politics and culture of some New Zealanders in the late 1930s.

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#### NOTES

1 A measure of the disagreement regarding the scale of the Francoist repression is that here it is stated that 'In the years from 1939 to 1945 between 100,000 and 200,000 Spaniards were executed by firing squads' (p.258), while Chris Ealham, a positively savage critic of 'revisionism' in Spanish Civil War historiography, declares that '50,000 were shot and 4000 died of hunger'. Chris Ealham, 'Review Article: "Myths" and the Spanish Civil War: Some Old, Some Exploded, Some Clearly Borrowed and Some Almost "Blue"', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 42, 2 (2007), p.374.

2 *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 March 2005, p.3.

3 Xose-Manoel Nunez, 'New Interpretations of the Spanish Civil War', *Contemporary European History*, 13, 4 (2004), pp.517–27.

4 For a detailed recent study of the suppression of electoral opposition and of vote-rigging by the Republicans in power before the outbreak of the civil war, see Roberto Villa Garcia, 'The Failure of Electoral Modernization: The Elections of May 1936 in Granada', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 44, 3 (2009), pp.401–29.

*Beyond the Battlefield: New Zealand and its Allies, 1939–45.* By Gerald Hensley. Viking, Auckland, 2009. 415pp. NZ price: \$65.00. ISBN 978-0-67-007404-7.

THE BRITISH DECLARATION OF WAR AGAINST GERMANY in September 1939 placed Australia and New Zealand in a quandary. While they were committed to supporting the 'mother country' in the European war, they could not ignore the fact that they could not defend themselves if the war spread to the Pacific. Nevertheless, the two dominions both committed the bulk of their limited forces to the war in Europe. New Zealand's predicament provides the central theme of Gerald Hensley's authoritative and very readable study of a distant dominion struggling to survive, economically and militarily, at the farthest reach of empire.

The leaders of both dominions took some comfort from the British naval base at Singapore and the British commitment to send a fleet to defend the dominions in the event of Japan entering the war. They were also reassured by vague but supportive statements from Washington. More fundamentally, neither dominion could envisage a world without the British Empire, and both were convinced that their own survival depended upon Britain surviving.

By 1941, Australia had sent four divisions of troops to the Middle East and Singapore, and dispatched ships and airmen across the world to fight alongside British forces. Despite

its much smaller population, New Zealand was just as supportive of Britain's struggle, sending a division to the Middle East and recruiting thousands of airmen for the Royal Air Force. Along with sending two brigades to Fiji, this was a commendable effort from a country whose pre-war permanent army numbered just a few hundred men, and whose rush of eager volunteers had to train with sticks instead of rifles.

Despite Wellington and Canberra's identical interest and purpose in supporting Britain while boosting their own defences, Hensley shows how little coordination there was between the two capitals. He notes the several instances prior to Pearl Harbor when suggestions came from one government or the other for closer ties to be established, only for the suggestion to be met mostly with indifference. Indeed, New Zealand sent a high commissioner to Canada long before it sent one to Canberra. Yet Australia's eastern approaches depended upon New Zealand staying out of the hands of the Japanese, while New Zealand similarly relied upon Australia remaining inviolate.

As a former top official with the departments of foreign affairs, prime minister and defence, albeit in a later period, Hensley brings a wealth of inside knowledge and experience to the task of writing this diplomatic history. Although the book is based on a mass of official documentation, Hensley rarely bores the reader with lengthy quotes from cables or the minutes of meetings, and he freely daubs the narrative with colourful anecdotes gleaned from memoirs and interviews with a few of the surviving participants.

New Zealand's minister to Washington, Walter Nash, was perhaps the most colourful of the characters. A member of Prime Minister Peter Fraser's Cabinet, he not only held onto his position as finance minister while serving in Washington, but also took on the job of New Zealand representative in London. Hensley recounts how the pious politician reportedly took half a ton of files with him to Washington, but was so averse to making decisions that he sometimes shuffled bundles of files about his desk without any result being reached.

Nash and his colleagues could afford to fiddle while the world burned. New Zealand was not only distant from Britain but also from Japan, whose forces were over-stretched by their run of sudden and unexpected successes. Moreover, compared with South East Asia, New Zealand had few of the resources that Japan needed for its war machine. With New Zealand not as fearful as Australia about the possibility of a Japanese invasion, its government took a more relaxed and cooperative attitude towards its great power allies, Britain and the United States.

While Fraser wanted New Zealand to be an active participant in the Pacific fighting, the limitations of his country's manpower meant that he could not have one division fighting in Europe and another in the Pacific. When Australia withdrew its forces from the Middle East, it seemed that Fraser would follow suit. Instead, Hensley shows how he adroitly convinced the reluctant Labour caucus and parliament to commit the Second Division to the campaign in Italy, while the Third Division in the Pacific was allowed to wither away. No wonder the Australian government was upset by what it considered to be a New Zealand betrayal, and a grateful Churchill called Fraser 'that dear old man'.

There are a few questionable judgments, such as when Hensley writes that closing the Suez Canal would 'cut off Britain's links with India and Australia' [p.89], when in fact the sea route would just be made longer by having to go round Africa. Hensley also has John Curtin as prime minister of Australia in early September 1941 [p161], when Curtin would not become prime minister until October. And there is an understandable tendency by Hensley, as a long-time official turned historian, to privilege the role of seemingly selfless officials and disparage the role played by supposedly self-serving politicians.

The publisher is to be commended for placing the footnotes at the bottom of the page, which makes for easy reference, and for providing two useful maps of the Mediterranean and Pacific theatres. But it is pity that it allowed a book of this stature to be published without a bibliography. These are minor quibbles, though, about this important book, which

is based on a close reading of primary sources from archives in Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Hensley's lucid and engaging appraisal of how New Zealand grappled with the realities of a world at war, and then helped to shape the post-war world, deserves to be widely read.

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*Looking for Answers: A Life of Elsie Locke.* By Maureen Birchfield. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2009. 500pp. NZ price: \$69.95. ISBN 978-1-877257-80-3.

I FIRST MET ELSIE LOCKE when I was ten years old. I went to many schools but luck would have me at Villa Maria in Christchurch when 'Mrs Locke' visited. Sister Miriam did not tell us that she was an ex-Communist Party member when she introduced her. Locke did not mention it either; she was invited because she was a local author of children's fiction. Of course Locke's visit was part of a 'unit': we walked over the Bridle Pass on the Port Hills; we visited the Rhodes' homestead; we went to the Canterbury Museum and walked along the cobbled colonial street; and the school trip was to the West Coast in Mary Phipps'/Small's fictional footsteps in the narrative of Locke's award-winning book *The Runaway Settlers*,<sup>1</sup> which Sister Miriam read to us aloud. But it was Locke's visit that made an impact on me and hers was certainly the first New Zealand history book I remember. I found myself researching in Locke's cottage 25 years later, reading her personal archives of activism in the working women's movement during the Depression with the privilege of chatting to the subject as I worked through her material. She invited me to join her for tea, and her husband Jack joined us. I told them about when Locke and I had first met and we talked about education. There were other meetings and other conversations over the years. Maureen Birchfield's conflict of interest is much greater than mine. Her mother, Connie, and Locke were friends from 1933 when they first met, both were Communist Party members who broke off membership over 1956, both were correspondents and both were the subjects of biographies by Birchfield. The webs of connection get thicker still. But do not discount Birchfield's book or my review because of the familiar New Zealand phenomenon of close connection. For I can give you a number of unsentimental reasons why this is a fine biography.

Above all this biography involved Birchfield in a great deal of hard historical research which she has written up well. Sometimes, because of the richness of sources and the waves of interpretations, it is easier to write a biography of a famous person than it is of someone lesser known whose activism was local. Moreover, Locke was modest and private — especially about some aspects of her life. She wrote about her years before joining the Communist Party in *Student at the Gates* (1981) and she began, albeit never finished, a sequel before she died. Although Locke wrote almost 40 books, numerous articles, *School Journal* stories, and over 100 radio commentaries as well as being a published poet, there was surprisingly little about her in all this material. The surviving correspondence is patchy. The newspaper and ephemera research was massive. Birchfield conducted just under 50 formal oral interviews. Moreover, she did not get permission to use the declassified information released by the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) until the last moment and, by then, little was added.

Sheer diligence meant that, in the end, there was enough material, certainly there was more than enough visual material in this beautifully presented account. More problematic was the complexity of Locke's life; it was an awkward-shaped life to write up. It is completely appropriate, symbolically and physically, that this is an awkward-shaped book. It is a heavy non-standard tome which is not easy to hold; just as Locke's life is difficult to grasp with her involvements in social justice, women's rights, birth control, nuclear disarmament and