

Of Unfolding Dialectics, Shifting Paradigms and Fickle Fashion

SEDDON AND THE HISTORIANS



NIGEL BENSON'S 2010 *Otago Daily Times* piece on 'Kiwi Rogues, Rascals and Renegades' is representative of the caricature of our longest-serving Prime Minister, Richard Seddon, that has become widely accepted by many New Zealanders. Benson wrote that the 'old rogue's record tenure' seemed even longer to 'women, Maori and Chinese'. He went on to inform readers that Seddon 'compared Chinese to monkeys and believed Maori should be crushed with Gatling guns and locomotives'. Benson concluded by expressing surprise that 'many historians regards [sic] him as one of New Zealand's greatest political leaders'.¹ This article argues that after more than 30 years of stiff, revisionist critique, many historians have made similar judgments, even if they are written in less sensational style. Over the course of the twentieth century debunkers developed a consensus that this heavily bearded, obese and vulgar man was a ruthless pragmatist lacking any kind of guiding philosophy or idealism, an imperialistic jingoist, a rabid racist and a particularly cunning misogynist. I claim that such a view is unbalanced and extremely unfair to the man himself, as well as to the New Zealand people who elected him to the premiership five times. It is also wildly ahistorical and presentist.

Political history, and the related field of the history of ideas, has fallen badly out of fashion. The fact that over 50 years elapsed between the publication of R.M. Burdon's *King Dick* in 1955 and my book, *King of God's Own Country* (2014), suggests that New Zealand historians in the interim had turned their attention towards more fashionable fields of social, cultural, gender, environmental and race relations history, yet political biographies that attempt to link to those subfields can reveal much about how each of these important historical dynamics intersected with the complicated world of politics. Furthermore, no matter how unfashionable political history might be currently, actions taken by governments affect both the everyday and longer-term experiences of citizens in whatever polity historians happen to be investigating.

My interpretation of Seddon's place in New Zealand history in *King of God's Own Country* is decidedly different from that of debunkers. Erik Olssen claims two particular paradigms dominated the writing of New Zealand history to the 1970s; namely, what Olssen described as the 'ethno-centric', 'more British than the British' and 'progressive-evolutionary' assumptions

(or what I call an ‘Anglo-whiggish’ paradigm) articulated by the Fabian socialist William Pember Reeves, both in his general history of New Zealand, *The Long White Cloud* (1898), and in his more detailed *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand* (1902).² A newer nationalist paradigm dominated between the 1950s and 1970s and dismantled Reeves’s earlier one, although it contained some similarities in continuing to elevate Reeves’s contribution far above that of less self-consciously intellectual Liberals such as John McKenzie and Seddon. My interpretation of Seddon results from a critique of both those paradigms, as well as interplay with the dialectic of historical writing and a determination to complicate shifting disciplinary fashions.

A dialectical schema has been applied to the writing of biography in many Western countries, with original ‘hagiography’ giving way to a much more critical ‘revision’ of the person and their times. In turn, this reassessment is displaced, often many years later, by a ‘post-revisionist’ work that attempts to restore balance between the two perspectives.³ Lytton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1918) is a famous example of debunking in which he revealed as flawed four Victorian heroes and heroines: educator and poet Thomas Arnold; General Charles Gordon, the hero of Khartoum; ‘the lady of the lamp’, Florence Nightingale; and champion of working men Cardinal Henry Manning.⁴ New Zealand has not produced many revisionists as severe as Strachey, although ‘founding father’ Edward Gibbon Wakefield and the New Zealand Company came in for some rather harsh censure in the late 1950s from the likes of John Miller and Michael Turnbull.⁵ My interpretation of Seddon thereby reflects a turn of the historiographical wheel in which historians of several different kinds came to realize that dismissal of Seddon as an unscrupulous populist, who lacked any kind of consistent ideology, misrepresented our past.

The Reevesian paradigm has been problematic for understanding Seddon. Although Reeves produced some of the best prose relating to Seddon, his innate snobbishness meant he never really understood Seddon’s motivation, popularity or success. Reeves’s refusal to take ideas seriously in relation to anyone other than himself has also distorted our understanding of Seddon, as has the fascination of the nationalist historians with the atypical, intellectual Reeves who stood so far apart from the majority of the New Zealand electorate. Even so, in most respects the newer nationalist paradigm that dominated between the 1950s and 1970s dismantled Reeves’s earlier one as these historians held little sympathy for Seddon’s or Reeves’s imperial ambitions and dismissed their sub-imperial adventures in the Pacific as downright embarrassing.

From the 1970s feminist and women’s historians challenged this particularly masculinist paradigm. Postcolonial theory further exposed

Reeves's rather glowing account to further critique from the 1980s, especially in relation to matters of race, while the Māori resurgence led to severe questioning of the worth of whisky, dead white men. The more trans-national approach advocated by the 2009 *New Oxford History of New Zealand* also questioned Reevesian notions of New Zealand 'exceptionalism', specialness or progressiveness. The so-called 'cultural turn' of the 1990s and early 2000s and a shift of attention towards the environment further delayed reconsideration of key figures such as Seddon by diverting attention away from political history in general.

Yet, despite appearing to be a rabid racist (especially towards the Chinese and Asians), a cunning misogynist, a jingoistic supporter of imperial adventurism, a champion of environmental vandalism and a reluctant supporter of the welfare state, reconsideration of Seddon began in several important places from the 1990s. This shift resulted partly from a major effort to move beyond the so-called 'presentism' of some postcolonial practitioners who seemed determined to impose their values upon people living in the past, and an acknowledgement from the early twenty-first century that the unfashionable dynamics of inequality and class were still important in explaining historical change.

King of God's Own Country argues that the success of New Zealand's longest-serving Prime Minister has not been especially well understood because his extraordinary story has been viewed through a distorting lens, or compared against criteria to which he did not adhere, whether Marxist, Fabian socialist, broadly socialist, Labourite or modern liberal. Furthermore, most historians writing about him have been to some degree self-consciously intellectual and have felt uncomfortable with his ebullient populism, as is the case with William Ferguson Massey.⁶ As a result they have failed to either understand Seddon's popularity or discern ongoing consistency in his political beliefs and actions which, as my book makes clear, followed a clearly discernible 'popular Liberal' trajectory not very different from that pursued by William Ewart Gladstone in the 1870s and 1880s. Seddon's story, when filtered through groups opposed to him such as the Temperance movement and many first wave feminists, has also distorted our understanding of both the man and the Liberal governments he led.

Indeed, the classic pattern of 'bunk', despite James Drummond's 1907 hagiography, soon degenerated into debunking of Seddon as a pragmatic and populist precursor of the more advanced Labour government of 1935. The misunderstanding was founded upon Reeves's observation that 'If you had spoken to him of Utopia, he would have asked where it was. On being told that it was "nowhere", he would have sharply answered that he had no intention of

going in that direction'.⁷ Reeves's inaccurate claim made to the British press in 1900 that Seddon came from the 'humblest ranks of mechanical workers' amplified the notion that Seddon was poorly educated and badly read.⁸ In fact, Seddon came from the highest rank of the trades because he was a certified mechanical engineer.⁹ John Ballance, who died in office in 1893 to be replaced by Seddon as Premier, reinforced this impression by denouncing as 'vulgar' the man he did not want to succeed him.¹⁰ The English Fabian socialists who visited New Zealand in 1898, the Webbs, especially Beatrice, compounded the misunderstanding of one of New Zealand's most intelligent politicians. Beatrice found Seddon to be 'a gross, illiterate but forceful man, more like a trade union official in such an industry as steel-melting, than an M.P.' Her husband, Sidney, at least acknowledged Seddon's courageous and energetic determination to act as 'the servant' of 'the common people'.¹¹ Overall, however, their combined judgment tells us much more about their class distance and distrust of 'bottom up' democracy than it does about a successful colonial politician.¹²

The two left-leaning Frenchmen educated at the Sorbonne, Albert Métin and Andre Siegfried, who visited in 1899, also dismissed Seddon as a pragmatist unattached to any clear-cut ideals or philosophies. Siegfried revealed the condescension typical of sophisticated, metropolitan commentators on small and newly emerging societies on the periphery of empire when he described Seddon as 'a frog who wished to swell to the size of an ox'. Ignoring Seddon's trade training, Siegfried judged him according to the trope of the 'self-made man' who 'began at the bottom, and raised himself by his own worth to the top.' More astutely he classified Seddon as a 'radical', and noted that he had a 'marvellous knowledge of the New Zealand people, whence he can claim to have sprung, and he knew well with what speeches and measures to satisfy them.'¹³ Although Seddon's rowdy style of imperialism offended the sensibilities of the young French republican, Siegfried intuitively recognized that Seddon's enthusiasm for empire contained strongly nationalist impulses. He went on to make the suggestive comment that pragmatism itself constituted a kind of ideology and that English traditions of radicalism lacked a doctrine in the European sense.¹⁴ Similarly, the very title of fellow French visitor Métin's book — *Le socialisme sans doctrines* — also provides an important insight into the 'progressive' actions of New Zealand and Australian governments in the 1890s that seem to be detached from any kind of European-style ideological blueprint. Métin conceded that Seddon had done much for labour 'and would do more', a claim borne out by my reconstruction of Seddon's relations with the labour movement.¹⁵

Debunking Accelerates from the 1920s

According to the Marxist view of history Seddon missed an opportunity to make significant changes because he accepted capitalism, rejected any notion of revolution and suffered from all the limitations of most bourgeois, reformist politicians. Such disappointment helps explain William (Bill) Airey's description of Seddon in a major interwar school text as 'no scholar' who was only ever seen reading books on the 'Spanish Main' and 'had few of the graces of a cultured man.'¹⁶ Furthermore, Seddon's noisy imperialism was even more of an anathema to Marxists and Syndicalists than to republicans like Siegfried. Movements set on revolutionary change, such as the Federation of Labour, condemned and rejected it outright.¹⁷ Although many of these men were initially attracted to New Zealand by the Liberals' reforms, they soon decided that these reforms did not go far enough and that more could be achieved via direct industrial action.¹⁸

One of New Zealand's best known historians, J.C. Beaglehole, wrote in a playful mode in 1936:

Inescapably genial, inexhaustibly itinerant, expansive in body and in claims, with an unrivalled capacity for identifying the workings of the Deity with the politics of New Zealand, radical with a real sympathy for the oppressed under his eyes, and imperialist with a vulgarity noisy and flamboyant, devoid of theory but shrewdly apprehensive of the concrete fact, an astute manager and a good administrator, he united within himself a whole orchestra, or, rather, brass band, of achievement; and as a performer on the big bass drum he was without a peer. Yet the noise did ... signify something. If the corruption of his 'roads and bridges policy' was so open as almost to lose the savour of iniquity, if he stormed the defences of a sensitive mind with the rush of a barbarian on Rome, at least he did in some sort fairly represent the colonial mind ... his humanity was fundamental, if unimaginative, and in the colony itself his disregard for the rigours of ceremonial was over-balanced by the passion of his unforgetful friendliness.¹⁹

W.B. Sutch held views far to the left of Seddon, but his writings from the 1940s–1960s did more than those of any other historian in developing the notion that the Seddon-led Liberals acted as a kind of forerunner to the first Labour government by paving the way for the introduction of a fully fledged welfare state. Walter Nash had earlier promoted the idea in 1938 when, in introducing his own social security legislation, he quoted Opposition speeches against the Old Age Pensions Bill in 1896 to suggest that National Party opposition was seriously outmoded.²⁰ Sutch pursued this agenda in *Poverty and Progress in New Zealand* in 1941 (revised version 1969) and again in *The Search for Security in New Zealand* (1942 and 1966 revision). In his essentially 'whiggish' version of New Zealand history in which things continued to improve despite temporary setbacks brought about

by war and depression, Sutch could praise Seddon's early efforts as 'brave' before dismissing them as inadequate, especially because they concentrated on the so-called 'deserving' poor instead of tackling the problem of poverty as a whole.²¹ The paradigm of the Liberals as being relatively progressive and providing the antecedents for Labour's bolder programme thereby became entrenched in most writing about New Zealand political history down to the 1980s. Sutch also persuaded many readers that the reforms instituted by Seddon's administration brought about more radical change in the countryside than in the towns.

Keith Sinclair's *A History of New Zealand* (1959) popularized Sutch's view as it soon became easily the most widely read New Zealand history book before Michael King's Penguin history (2003). Sinclair's nationalistic and masculinist propensities came in for much criticism from the 1980s, but, rather like Seddon, he told New Zealanders what they wanted to hear about themselves. His pungent prose and penchant for telling epigrams won many readers. Despite describing Seddon as 'a benevolent despot', Sinclair enthused about Seddon's personal magnetism and compared him with the great American populist Andrew Jackson. After criticizing Seddon for distributing favours like a 'political Santa Claus', always without straining his own conscience, Sinclair noted that Seddon became more idealistic in his later years and genuinely tried to improve the lot of women and children. Sinclair pointed to real improvements in the standard of living and levels of material comfort under Seddon's stewardship and claimed that New Zealand 'touched greatness' in its care of 'the poor and laggard.' He also challenged the Marxist view as espoused by the likes of Airey that the New Zealand Liberals were only very moderate reformers by pointing out that they greatly extended the power of the state and were 'among the first to step on a political road ... towards the Welfare State.' After reinforcing Sutch's view he dismissed as 'absurd' the charge that the Liberals were practical men who owed nothing to theory. He wrote, without further explanation, that 'the Liberals had a doctrine, but they were not doctrinaire.'²²

Sinclair, in his biography of Reeves, understandably tended to accept Reeves's view of Seddon and portrayed the Premier as feeling threatened by the well-read, rather radical and waspish Fabian socialist who initially opposed his assumption of leadership of the Liberal Party. Reeves found Seddon vulgar and bullying, and the two men never really worked well together. Personal discomfort with his leader supposedly helped persuade Reeves to take up the job of Agent-General in London in 1896. Sinclair also suggested that Reeves considered Stout to be more radical than Seddon, but Stout's time as Premier (1884–1887) revealed that he was incapable of

carrying radical ideas into law. Sinclair portrayed Reeves as fundamentally a reformer, whereas Seddon was primarily a politician interested in holding on to power by passing reforming legislation only if it won votes. This philosophical difference caused difficulty in their relationship more than any personal animus. Sinclair quoted Reeves's affectionate portrayal of Seddon in *The Long White Cloud* to support this interpretation.²³

In fact, both Sinclair's more general and specific positive accounts proved much more influential than those made by earlier commentators associated with the left. His interpretation was more positive than the only full biography of Seddon, written by the rather conservative R.M. Burdon in 1955. Even so, given that archival collections had not yet been properly organized or centralized, Burdon's *King Dick* offered significant insights. At this point the study of New Zealand's political history and race relations was skeletal at best, while understanding of Liberal politics in Britain, let alone in other new world societies such as Australia and the United States, also remained rather rudimentary.

Burdon managed to produce a surprisingly rounded portrait. He praised Seddon for his energy, courage, astuteness and humanity, and for using his enormous popularity to remove both 'privilege' and 'Conservatives' from New Zealand politics. On the other hand, Burdon condemned Seddon for his anti-intellectualism and for increasingly surrounding himself with 'non-entities'. Burdon suffered from the same kind of intellectual snobbery as Reeves, a failing which blinded him to the deeper ideals that lay behind Seddon's often apparently instinctive political behaviour. Overtly influenced by the acerbic but often amusing commentary of the conservative press, Burdon also tended to portray Seddon as a buffoon from a Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera. He summarized the arguments of his book largely verbatim for the *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand* published in 1966, but laid more stress on the 'elementary' nature of Seddon's education and suggested that Seddon was 'indifferently literate'.²⁴

W.H. Oliver's *The Story of New Zealand* (1960) had much smaller sales and much less impact than Sinclair's *Penguin*, but provided a more critical counterpoint to Sinclair's enthusiastic assessment of Seddon. Oliver described Seddon as a 'gargantuan figure' with notions of 'social betterment.' He stressed that Seddon was the first truly professional politician in New Zealand with no life beyond politics because once he became a Minister he 'ceased to be a private citizen'. Consequently, all subsequent political leaders walked 'in the footsteps of Seddon'. Oliver also credited Seddon with developing the first effective and highly disciplined party machine in New Zealand history that helped him head off enemies from left and

right. He also applauded Seddon for beating off a hostile press, a sarcastic Opposition and fanatical prohibitionists. Oliver admired Seddon's overthrow of the challenge offered by the better educated and more refined Stout and acknowledged that the Liberals would not have held power for anywhere near as long if Stout had won the premiership. On the other hand, Oliver criticized the Liberals' questionable purchase of the last quality land held in Māori hands and blamed Seddon's irrational hostility towards Asians on his mining background. He also suggested that by aiming most of his reforms at farmers Seddon reduced the appeal of Liberal policies to urban working men. Oliver condemned Seddon's propensity to attempt state social control and thereby foster a 'humdrum' conformity.²⁵

This suspicion of the use of state power so admired by Reeves and Sinclair helps explain why Oliver sent students off to the newly organized national archives from the late 1960s to examine Seddon's achievements rather more sceptically. Peter Gibbons and Margaret Tennant carried revision to new levels of sophistication to demonstrate the very limited nature of Seddon's welfare experiments. Their utilization of Antonio Gramsci's notion of social control also suggested that there was something coercive and sinister about Seddon's welfare experiments.²⁶ David Thompson, trained at Canterbury and Cambridge, followed this line of inquiry a few years later.²⁷

Labour historians followed Sinclair's lead and brought Liberal claims of progressive innovation in the area of labour relations under severe scrutiny. Following British labour leader Ramsay MacDonald's earlier dismissal of New Zealand's Industrial and Arbitration system as a colonial irrelevance, the likes of Len Richardson tended to view Seddon as 'a bulwark' against radicalism. Richardson also encouraged his post-graduate students such as Jim McAloon, Melanie Nolan and Libby Plumridge to investigate the arguments and destinies of groups dissatisfied with Liberal efforts as they marched on to something better in the form of the Labour Party.²⁸

Olssen, after exposing the Liberal experiments to the fierce anarcho-Syndicalist critique of the Red Federation of Labour in his *Red Feds* (1988), took this critique further in an essay in *The People and the Land* (1990). After dismissing Seddon as 'an uneducated and garrulous publican', he went on to argue that the 'dominant men in cabinet' did not want Seddon as leader in 1893 because he 'was uneducated, uncouth, and ignorant of Liberal principles', a view I dispute. Thereafter Olssen suggested that Seddon moved towards the rural, right wing of his party and ignored the radical Liberal Associations based in the towns. Consequently, Olssen argued that the Advances to Settlers Act rather than the Old Age Pensions was central to Seddon's vision. After claiming that economic recovery occurred

almost entirely because of developments overseas, Olssen credited Seddon with ‘boldly’ saving the Bank of New Zealand and promoting New Zealand assiduously, if somewhat boastfully, when in London, and noted Seddon’s refusal of a knighthood approvingly. Olssen concluded by suggesting that Seddon believed in ‘protection’, not only via the tariff, but through exclusion of ‘alien “pollutants”’ such as Asians, Syrians and Dalmatians. Having condemned Seddon and his followers as ‘open racists’, Olssen conceded that Seddon put more effort into keeping the French and Germans out of the Pacific than blocking out ‘moral and genetic threats to the purity of New Zealand’s British stock’.²⁹ This is easily the most severe critique in more recent general histories.

David Hamer, biographer of Sir Robert Stout and an expert on the leadership of the British Liberal Party, continued to mine the revisionist vein in both his study of the Liberal government (1988) and his entry on Seddon in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (1993). Hamer tended to take a somewhat Olympian view of the New Zealand Liberals in general, and Seddon in particular, because of the huge gap in their formal education in comparison with British Liberal leaders. Hamer wrote that ‘One seldom feels that ... labour reform or liquor licensing or land, really fundamentally mattered to him as issues.’³⁰ He condemned Seddon for his bad temper and for surrounding himself with non-entities rewarded for loyalty rather than ability, a practice that eventually undermined the efficiency of Cabinet.³¹ Nevertheless, Hamer credited Seddon with great tactical nous in surviving as Premier during the difficult years of the mid-1890s. He praised Seddon’s energy and capacity for hard work and portrayed him as a thoroughly professional and democratic politician who had an innate ability of knowing if a reform ran ahead of public opinion.³² Hamer also made the suggestive observation that Seddon managed to view issues with a degree of detachment because, as member for the isolated Westland electorate, he operated in an environment little affected by the major issues of the day. By applying what he learned on the West Coast to national politics, Seddon became ‘a great survivor, a great endurer’.³³

Hamer’s *Dictionary* essay is less enthusiastic, condemning Seddon for being ‘devious’ in ousting Stout and in trying to dominate political organization by sheer force of personality. Hamer dismissed Seddon’s political philosophy as ‘unsophisticated’, as opposed to his earlier judgment that Seddon linked the Liberal ‘desire to make a better way of life in the New World, with the outlook of the gold rush generation.’ He concluded by suggesting that Seddon’s enduring legacies were ‘his humanitarianism, his boisterous imperialism, and his status as the originator of a populist style of

prime ministerial leadership in New Zealand.³⁴ A biography of John Ballance (1989) written by Hamer's doctoral student Tim McIvor, and another of Sir Joseph Ward by Michael Bassett (1993), tended to entrench Hamer's view.³⁵

Patricia Grimshaw tarnished Seddon's reputation somewhat by showing in her 1972 study of women's suffrage that Seddon had, in fact, done his best to undermine its introduction in 1893. Only political spite on the part of two Legislative Councillors caught Seddon out when they voted for the Bill he believed they would never accept. Thereafter the Premier who championed women's suffrage so enthusiastically after 1893 came under something of a cloud with women's and feminist historians; Grimshaw's account has usually been repeated verbatim ever since.³⁶ Judith Devaliant's 1992 biography of suffragist leader Kate Sheppard, for example, reinforced Grimshaw's condemnation of Seddon and specifically criticized him for opposing the notion of equal pay and the right of women to stand for Parliament and to become Justices of the Peace. His references to men as the 'Lords of Creation' and argument that nature had designed women to be child bearers and raisers is understandably dismissed as 'inane'.³⁷ Most of the publications associated with the centenary of suffrage in 1993 took a similar line.³⁸ As a consequence, few attempted to try and understand Seddon's particular position on women's suffrage, although Jean Garner's biography of Sir John Hall (1995) is more sympathetic regarding Seddon's attitudes towards women's winning the vote.³⁹

Just as awkward misogynist ancestral attitudes fell out of favour from the 1970s with second wave feminism, so too did both Seddon's racist views towards Asians and his apparently jingoistic imperialism. Historians of the difficult Chinese experience in New Zealand such as Jim Ng, building on much earlier work of Bickleen Fong and several post-graduates, unleashed the pent-up anger of a whole community at Seddon. Ng wrote that Seddon 'inflicted a belated retribution of the white gold-seekers on the Chinese' and, along with his colleagues, 'adopted racist ideology against them'. Ng suggested that Seddon thereby pushed the colony towards a 'white New Zealand' policy.⁴⁰

An era of decolonization produced historical revision that reduced to ruins older triumphant colonialist narratives. Dick Scott, and more recently Damon Salesa, condemned Seddon's intrusion into the Pacific as bumbling and based upon the embarrassing premise that earlier 'success' in dealing with Māori equipped New Zealand to serve as a benevolent overlord of other Polynesian peoples.⁴¹ Māori radicals also found Seddon an easy target, helped by a growing body of condemnatory revisionist history produced by Pākehā historians.⁴² Some of the most trenchant critique made available to

the Waitangi Tribunal and iwi came from the much published and esteemed Alan Ward, M.P.K. Sorrenson and Judith Binney, all of whom held high public profiles.

With market-driven ideology at its height in the 1980s and 1990s some historians added to this rising crescendo of condemnation by joining economists and politicians in judging Seddon's state interventionism to be a major cause of New Zealand's economic problems and inefficiencies.⁴³ In many ways the criticisms Michael Bassett made as an historian in the early 1990s, along with the polemics produced by politicians Roger Douglas and Richard Prebble, echoed those of James Le Rossignol, Professor of Economics at the University of Denver and the Dunedin-based conservative, Legislative Councillor William Downie Stewart. Their *State Socialism in New Zealand* (1910) caught the breakdown of the old Liberal consensus and the move of New Zealand politics towards more entrenched conservative and socialist positions. This long-forgotten book provided the stiffest criticism of both the Liberals' reforms and 'Seddonism'. According to its authors the Liberals set up an inefficient system of state socialism that held back the country's development. They condemned just about everything the Liberals did, from pursuing variants of leasehold rather than freehold tenure, to their adoption of a pension system based on general revenue rather than instituting a contributory system. Similarly, they argued that industrial conciliation and arbitration only raised costs for employers while reducing real wages for workers. They reserved their strongest abuse for Seddon, who supposedly had used the public works monies as 'a veritable corruption fund' by only assisting districts that voted for the Liberals. Naturally they credited New Zealand's recovery after 1896 to the careful financial management of the Atkinson administration of 1887–1891.⁴⁴

Even the usually even-handed Michael King tended to follow Hamer's line in his hugely popular general history published in 2003. He summarized his view of Seddon in a couple of pithy sentences:

In contrast to his predecessors Seddon *was* charismatic *and* an orator. He had a huge appetite for the antics, the rituals and the effluvium of politics. He is the first leader of the country who viewed politics holistically — that is, treating every aspect of life as political. And his nickname, 'King Dick', indicates both the manner in which he bestrode his contemporaries and the extent to which he concentrated power in his own hands.⁴⁵

Philippa Mein Smith in her *A Concise History of New Zealand* (2005 and re-issued in 2012) paid less attention to Seddon than King, but blamed Seddon's egotistical fear of becoming the third most important politician

in Australasia for New Zealand's refusal to join the Australia Federation. Later, she qualified this claim by suggesting that the trade deals he struck with Federated Australia in 1903 and 1906 revealed New Zealand's desire to merge with rather than be taken over by Australia. She interpreted Seddon's St Helens hospital scheme as an appeal to 'respectable working class values' and attributed the initiative to eugenic concerns with declining birth rates.⁴⁶

Predictably the other provocative general history of recent times, Chris Trotter's *No Left Turn: The Distortion of New Zealand's History by Greed, Bigotry and Right Wing Politicians* (2007), described Seddon as 'more humanitarian than egalitarian'. Supposedly he ran New Zealand as a 'solicitous' 'working class publican' and 'in the knowledge that the well being of his clientele' was 'inextricably intertwined' with his own. Seddon, therefore, was a successful democratic leader and superior to businessman Joe Ward, but he was no socialist and is ranked as inferior to the more doctrinaire and anti-imperial Ballance.⁴⁷

Most of our understanding of Seddon comes from historians or popular folk memories rather than film, stage or literature. A celebratory low-budget 1975 television play entitled 'Richard John Seddon — Premier' had little impact and there has been no major documentary or feature film.⁴⁸ Mervyn Thomson portrayed him as the tool of the brewers in his 1974 play 'O! Temperance'.⁴⁹ Similarly, the 2013 Television New Zealand docudrama entitled 'What Really Happened? Votes for Women' portrayed him as a rather bone-headed male politician in contrast to the gallant and refined Sir John Hall. Oliver as poet rather than historian is not very flattering about Seddon, or most of his predecessors and successors, in his lengthy poem 'Poor Richard', with its ironic and critical tone:

squat and sturdy out of Lancashire
 With a barrel on his back from the thirsty miners.
 With graft and gall he clambered to the top
 And journeyed home to greet the wizened queen
 Amid the plaudits of the cotton barons.⁵⁰

Graeme Lay features Seddon as a manipulative populist playing on his audience's fear of foreigners in his novel *Alice and Luigi* about an Italian migrant who strays into the failing settlement of Jackson's Bay in South Westland in the 1870s.⁵¹ This small output, therefore, leans towards debunk. It seems that New Zealand dramatists, writers and poets are inclined to dismiss Seddon as an anti-intellectual oaf who stripped the New Zealand dream of any nobility by realizing it in such a modest, bigoted and restricted fashion.

Around 2000, just as Seddon's personification of embarrassing ancestral attitudes, and his enthusiastic supporter of state interventionism, seemed just too awkward for historians, the call for a reassessment began to emerge.

Rebunking: Seddon as a Popular Liberal and Reformer in his Own Right

Writing of the reforming Liberal Party, James Belich introduced Seddon in arresting fashion in *Paradise Reforged* when he wrote: 'Its three leaders were a trinity around whom legends gathered: Seddon the Father, Ward the Son, and Ballance the Holy Spirit.' He then becomes even more effusive:

Seddon was a remarkable man: the first guardian of New Zealand populism who was actually a populist himself. Like a later prime minister, Robert Muldoon, he attached voters to him by deceiving intellectuals into thinking he was unintelligent. His ability to ride the crest of public sentiment like a bulky surfer was quite extraordinary... in retrospect he tends to dwarf his fellow premiers.⁵²

Belich did, however, condemn this 'walking public opinion poll' for using 'direct and indirect patronage', pretending to be anti-intellectual and expressing hostility towards organized science. Seddon's prejudice against Asians and Dalmatians also came in for censure, as did his militarism. On the other hand, Belich added the important qualification that Seddon rewarded support rather than placated opposition and fooled Reeves and several historians that he 'was not encumbered with either theories or ideals.' Belich argued that Reeves was wrong in suggesting that 'If you had spoken to him of Utopia, he would have asked you where it was' because 'God's Own Country' constituted 'an announcement that paradise had been successfully reformed' — the very title of Belich's second volume. He concluded, therefore, that Seddon made 'a respectable case for the truth of such a claim.' Belich moved away from Sinclair's interpretation of Seddon's imperialism as driven by nationalist agendas, arguing that Seddon rather promoted 'better Britainism', so reinforcing the central argument of the book that New Zealand became 'recolonised' after the invention of refrigeration enabled the colony to adopt the role of the specialist grassland farm of the British Empire.⁵³

Similarly, Gavin McLean in *Frontier of Dreams* (2005) sometimes mocked Seddon's vanities, but he was also affectionate and conceded Seddon's political genius. McLean wrote:

His political antennae, cunning and tactical flexibility astonished friend and foe alike. He personified pork barrel politics in God's own Country ... a tubby, egotistical political dynamo who ran everything, meeting deputations, dishing out political favours and finding people jobs.

McLean went on to suggest that Seddon was ‘the first New Zealand populist politician to outsmart people by appearing dimmer than he was.’ After conceding that Seddon allowed Edward Tregear to run the Department of Labour with minimal interference, McLean concluded that this ‘colossus’ ‘was the government.’ He also described Seddon as being more ‘John Bullish’ than the British during the Boer War. McLean summed up Seddon’s legacy by suggesting that his statue in front of Parliament still represents the authority of the state in New Zealand.⁵⁴

Erik Olssen, after many years of detailed investigation of Caversham, argued that Seddon espoused many of the ideals imbedded in the radical traditions of the skilled working class who dominated the life of the Dunedin suburb.⁵⁵ He also began to talk of ‘an accidental utopia’, thereby linking his work to that of American historians Leon Fink, Steven Leiken and Robert E. Weir, and Australian Bruce Scates, on ‘practical utopianism’.⁵⁶ Olssen’s argument was supported by Kerry Howe’s biography of Edward Tregear (1991) and John Martin’s history of the Department of Labour (1996) in that both confirmed Seddon, even when Minister of Labour, allowed Tregear to behave as a powerful under-secretary.⁵⁷

On the Māori side of the encounter with Seddon, things began to change too as Ranginui Walker in his biography of Sir Āpirana Ngata, Judith Binney in her work carried out on Tuhoe and the Urewera for the Waitangi Tribunal, summarized in her magisterial *Encircled Lands*, and legal historian Richard Boast investigating Māori land legislation, all showed the Premier and sometime Minister of Native Affairs in a better light.⁵⁸ Even Seddon’s appalling attitudes towards the Chinese began to be reconsidered by Mark Williams and other literary scholars and cultural historians as part of an attempt to build a white utopia in the South Seas that claimed to be distinctive by contrasting its progressive and democratic experiments with Chinese rigidity, inequity and despotism.⁵⁹

In fact, this reassessment linked to a much older, minority set of writings associated with the first celebratory assessment of authors, some of whom met the living Seddon. These accounts showed Seddon to be rather better educated and more consistent than his detractors suggested. Drummond used much of this material in his hagiography. A more positive account emerged with the enthusiastic Chicago-based progressive Henry Demarest Lloyd, who visited New Zealand in 1899 and interviewed Seddon. This experienced journalist, while pretending to be objective, provided a very enthusiastic endorsement of both the Premier and his government. American progressives were deeply concerned with the problem of corporate monopoly of every aspect of life, and it seemed to him that New Zealand had found the answer via what he

called ‘the cure of monopoly by monopoly’; that is, regulation by the state.⁶⁰ Lloyd gave Seddon much of the credit for this achievement, describing him as ‘a born democrat’. According to Lloyd, ‘Mr Seddon towered above the Australian premiers at the Queen’s jubilee, and they were all notable men.’ Supposedly this ‘dynamo’ had ‘an inborn sympathy with the people and all that concerns them’ and fully deserved his self-penned title of ‘the Premier of the Paradise of the British Empire’.⁶¹

Although Frank Parsons, law lecturer at Boston University, never visited New Zealand, he wrote effusively about Seddon and the Liberal government in his 812-page *The Story of New Zealand* (1904). Not to be outdone by a progressive from the mid-west, this easterner judged Seddon ‘the greatest democrat of them all ... a masterful leader, a natural king of men.’ He added that Seddon ‘is a master politician’ with ‘marvellous staying power.’ Supposedly the Premier was also ‘kind hearted, a good comrade, fluent and earnest in speech, always hard at work, 300 pounds full of vitality, strong will, self reliance, and imperturbable assurance.’ This paragon, who represented both working men and progressives with ‘courage and force’, was neither ‘corrupt nor corruptible.’⁶²

The Irish land radical Michael Davitt who visited in 1895 also seemed enthusiastic about Seddon. Despite his republican suspicion of Seddon’s imperialism and sympathy for Māori, because like the Irish they had lost so much land,⁶³ Davitt judged the Premier’s claim that ‘no man, woman or child’ went hungry because of his government’s enlightened land laws to be ‘a proud but true boast’. It seemed to Davitt that legislation had achieved a secure form of peasant proprietorship in New Zealand which direct and violent action had failed to win in Ireland. This achievement made New Zealand into ‘probably the most progressive country in the world of today’.⁶⁴

Journalist and botanist James Drummond rushed his hagiography into print in 1907 and incorporated much of this gushing material hoping to create a legend. For all its bias, this vibrant hagiography captures much more of Seddon’s appeal than later, more sober accounts. Drummond made the point that Seddon himself never claimed to be either socialist or a Labourite, but rather a ‘humanist’. He described his hero as ‘a true democrat’ acting ‘on the will of the people’, an extremely benevolent despot loved by children as well as voters, a champion of the weak and vulnerable, a gadfly of privilege, an ardent imperialist, a ceaseless promoter of New Zealand as ‘God’s own Country’, the scourge of the Chinese, and a worker for racial purity whose creed was humanitarianism. Drummond concluded that Seddon was ‘a truly great man, and a man whose influence has irrevocably moulded for good the

features of our country, New Zealand.⁶⁵ Drummond also had an eye for telling apocryphal stories that reveal so much about Seddon the man. He thereby helped shape popular understanding of Seddon more than most single authors.

Journalist Guy Scholefield, who observed Seddon in action when a young parliamentary reporter, produced a restrained assessment in *New Zealand in Evolution* (1909). Even so, Scholefield judged Seddon to be as courageous as John Ballance and argued that he possessed more energy and vigour in his pursuit of reform. Scholefield also credited Seddon with waging ‘ruthless war’ against sweating, praised his ‘prescience’ in saving the Bank of New Zealand and approved of his success in improving the terms of trade with Britain. Yet he concluded that Seddon, like Ballance, set his face ‘steadfastly against State Socialism for its own sake.’⁶⁶ Scholefield’s later essay published in the first version of the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* in 1940 is more enthusiastic. In it he adds that Seddon had received a relatively good education and proved his ability as a hydraulic miner during his early years on the West Coast. This more considered analysis goes on to suggest that Seddon acted as a ‘vigorous lieutenant’ to Ballance and controlled his departments in an ‘always firm and personal manner.’ Scholefield also judged Seddon’s imperialism to be ‘independent’ in tone and ‘wide’ in reach. He concluded that Seddon’s importance in New Zealand history ‘is not easily measured’ because he was ‘Infinitely more practical than Grey’ and neither Stout nor any other leader could have ‘implemented the Liberal programme with the same sure vision and ready opportunism’ of Seddon. Scholefield’s appreciation of a man he had known since his youth increased with the passing of the years.⁶⁷

Assessments of the 1920s and 1930s were generally negative, but W.P. Morrell’s long forgotten *New Zealand* (1935) is an exception. More than anyone before him Morrell pointed out that Seddon weathered very difficult times early in his premiership, both in heading off financial disaster and by avoiding the serious divisions threatened if the highly organized Prohibition movement had won its tussle with government. Morrell got closer than most in unlocking the key to Seddon’s popularity, by observing that ‘No democratic leader has ever excelled Seddon in making it appear to the people that he was indeed one of themselves and thought as they thought’. Morrell concluded that Seddon was ‘more than a demagogue’, being ‘cool and cautious in committee’ and possessing ‘a thorough grasp of detail, an immense power of work, and a deep-rooted belief in social reform.’ In his usual careful manner Morrell balanced this praise by noting that because Seddon preferred the ‘ordinary to the clever man’, he tended to surround himself with less able lieutenants and underestimated the need for specialist training to carry out top-level jobs in government and the bureaucracy. Overall Morrell considered Seddon a ‘less

creative' but 'subtler' politician than Vogel. Morrell argued in anticipation of much later scholarship that Seddon made 'Imperialism a part of the New Zealand democratic tradition.' He also noted, equally suggestively, that in 1897 Seddon found in England 'an imperial mood which suited him very well. He liked being lionized; he enjoyed the dinners and receptions; the Lancashire school master's son felt that he had "arrived."'”⁶⁸

Sutch and Sinclair followed Morrell's argument to a point, but muddied our understanding of Seddon by conflating his story with the emergence of full-scale welfarism under Labour in 1938. From the 1960s a hiatus developed as various international intellectual and social movements and fashions made Seddon almost too difficult to handle and raised questions about his relevance to modern New Zealand.

In my biography I tried to steer somewhere between these majority and minority 'schools' of writing on Seddon so that we can understand him according to the ideals and values of the time in which he lived. My position can be thus loosely described as 'post-revisionist'. So the historiographical turn, which seems to have had little impact upon popular perceptions of Seddon, enabled me to show that he was not only much better read than anyone realized, but followed a coherent set of 'popular liberal tenets', had a far more complex relationship with Māori than is usually acknowledged, and achieved far more than earlier historians, blinded by his glaring faults, admitted. He was, in fact, builder as well as maintenance man of the social laboratory.

The discovery of both his personal library and of the day book from the General Assembly Library that reveals his personal reading show him to have been surprisingly well read. Most politicians of this era around the English-speaking world read Charles Dickens and Walter Scott, but Seddon added Dostoevsky, Emile Zola and Thomas Hardy. He was thoroughly familiar with *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Thomas Babington Macaulay's *History of England*, as well as the poets privileged by popular Liberals, including Phillip Sydney, Edmund Spenser, Shakespeare, John Milton, Oliver Goldsmith and Robbie Burns.⁶⁹

The work of British political historians Eugenio Biagini and Patrick Joyce on 'popular Liberalism' makes it clear that Seddon adopted a view of the world and politics not unlike that of William Ewart Gladstone in the later part of his career; a set of beliefs adhered to by Gladstone's many followers amongst the skilled working and lower middle classes of England and Scotland. Popular Liberals viewed the world in both populist and moralistic terms and advocated gradual reform of the excesses of untrammelled capitalism through the passing of remedial legislation. They rejected revolutionary, direct action. Unlike 'classic laissez-faire Liberals' (or later

day ‘neo-liberals’), they placed ‘fairness’ ahead of ‘freedom’ and favoured state regulation of all forms of monopoly. Even though skilled artisans dominated, they idealized the country way of life and supported redistribution of farm land. Gladstone and his followers also championed the ‘people’ ahead of privilege, but still insisted upon self-reliance and respectability. Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help* served as a key text and modified any radical tendencies. Seddon and the New Zealand Liberals supported most of these tenets, although they advanced them somewhat once in power, most notably by extending universal manhood suffrage to women.⁷⁰ Equally, reconnecting with the now decidedly middle-aged ‘new imperial history’ enabled me to both place Seddon’s apparently imperialist adventures into a much broader context and make sense of Seddon’s nationalistic imperialism.⁷¹

Seddon’s active, broad church and liberal Anglicanism provides a vital key to understanding his moralism, humanism and drift towards Christian socialism.⁷² Given his links to Methodism through his mother and wife, and tolerance of Catholicism, Seddon immediately connected to about two-thirds of his electorate, as well as the ‘wee dram’ Presbyterians who accepted moderate consumption of alcohol. His active church life and broad ecumenical inclinations, unlike his active involvement in the Free Masons mentioned by Burdon, provided something of a contrast with his free-thinking predecessors Robert Stout and John Ballance and his successors, the Catholic Joe Ward and the sometimes narrowly focused Presbyterian who, like Seddon, was a Mason — the Ulster Scot William Ferguson Massey. Acknowledgement of the importance of religion in both Seddon’s personal and public life also forced a reconnection with both Australian and North American historiographies on utopianism, gold mining and race relations.⁷³ This work helped explain, but never excused, his racist attitudes towards non-British people in general, and Chinese in particular.

In contrast to his unpalatable anti-Asian sentiments, Seddon developed complex relationships with different iwi and Māori in general. He had close relationships with Ngāti Kahungunu of Hawke’s Bay and Wairarapa and with Ngāti Porou on the East Coast of the North Island. James Carroll holds the key to understanding this orientation. Indeed Carroll, one of only two Cabinet members who backed Seddon in the succession crisis of 1893, desperately needs a new biography because he was so important as a negotiator between the races in the period of Seddon’s leadership. The Waitangi Tribunal report on relations between the Crown and Tuhoe, led by Binney, also revealed that Seddon had closer ties with Tuhoe than had formerly been realized.⁷⁴ Māori-language newspapers helped untangle goings-on between Seddon and te ao Māori,⁷⁵ but hopefully the evolving iwi archives (oral and written) will help

future scholars discern how the powerful Premier related to other iwi and how those iwi viewed the most powerful Pākehā politician of the day.

The Seddon Papers held at the Alexander Turnbull Library have also swollen in size considerably since 1955, especially in relation to other family members, including his sisters Phoebe and Mary, brothers Edward and Jim, and a bewildering range of cousins who joined Richard John on the West Coast. These papers highlight the important role Seddon's wife, Louisa Jane Spotswood, and five of his six daughters — Jane Anne ('Jeannie'), Phoebe, Louie, Mary Stuart and May — played in his success. They also contain much correspondence with the 'great' — especially governors, generals, Joseph Chamberlain, shipping magnates, bishops, leading Australian politicians, leading New Zealand politicians and Māori leaders — and the modest, in the form of a bewildering range of well-wishers and supporters.⁷⁶

Papers Past enabled me to gauge a much wider range of press opinion than Burdon or any other pre-digital researcher could humanly manage.⁷⁷ Yet, a man who held so many portfolios and served in the top political job for so long has left such a vast and widely scattered archival trail that much remains to be done. I hope, therefore, that my book will prompt others to study in their own way the many facets of this fascinating man and the exciting, optimistic period in our history with which he was so closely associated when progressive change, improvement and building a better society still seemed possible.

Those who have read my biography of John McKenzie will know that I have no desire to revive the tired cliché of the 'great man' theory of history and, besides, Seddon's many faults make any such dubious classification impossible. Rather my political biography shows that like many successful democratic leaders, Seddon had an uncanny ability to understand the hopes and fears of his contemporaries, or what modern journalists might call 'antennae'. He not only greatly reduced the power of old elites but related to many broad-based groups, including the indigenous people of New Zealand, the women's and labour movements, and many working people of modest means not usually associated with 'great men'. Any biography of such a figure will, thereby, reveal much more about the broader New Zealand society than the individual politician. In revealing more about the times in which such an individual lived, we should also come to understand better the limits and flaws as well as the strengths of the dominant values of that period in New Zealand history. And thorough biographies also reveal much about a large cast of other politicians, lobbyists, pressure groups and ordinary voters — both supporters and opponents — meaning that individual biographies become mass biographies

Equally important, more recent research by Brian Easton has confirmed the older orthodoxy that the New Zealand economy flourished between about

1896 and 1907 as New Zealand won a greater share of the British market for its greasy wool, fatty meat and yellow butter.⁷⁸ This realization has often been used to downplay Seddon and the Liberal government's achievements on the somewhat fatuous grounds that he and they were 'lucky'. Referring to a different context, French economic historian Thomas Piketty has challenged such a view of mere good fortune.⁷⁹ Piketty's systematic and meticulous research supports Margaret Galt's and Erik Olssen's earlier work, as well as my own, that suggested New Zealand and Australia were in the vanguard of the drive to greater equality (as were Argentina and Uruguay and the Scandinavian countries to a lesser extent)⁸⁰ because Europe, Britain and North America did not see a significant decrease in gross inequality until after the First World War, and especially from the mid-1930s to the late 1970s.

Seddon's racial attitudes and his initial suspicion of women's suffrage along with his militarism and imperialism are very soft targets for later historians because these attitudes were pervasive in the broader New Zealand society in which he lived, and very much of 'their time'. But unlike Reeves, Stout and the super bureaucrat Duncan MacGregor, he was no social Darwinist and did not treat the poor as a criminal class to be *excluded* from the social laboratory.⁸¹ Rather he tried to *elevate* them through opening secondary education to all academically able children, by providing quality, affordable housing, by increasing access to health care for mothers and babies, and by supplementing the Old Age Pension with contributory superannuation. This effort and the ideals behind them deserve much greater acknowledgement, especially as New Zealand and Australia have become two of the most highly unequal societies in the developed world over the last 30 years.⁸²

As the entire globe divides into a small minority of wealthy elites and vast numbers of disempowered 'have-nots', increasingly drawn to fascism, demagogues and other totalitarian leadership styles supposedly directed at resolving the problem of gross inequality, Seddon's efforts to attack entrenched privilege and extreme wealth, while promoting rough equality and vigorous democracy, along with the broad-based support for such reforms, look more impressive. Positive lessons as well as warnings concerning the destructive power of questionable attitudes can be learnt from studying such a life in detail. If biographers attempt to establish the broader context of the individual life under examination and relate it to the dynamics that mattered to their subject's contemporaries then political biography will continue to provide an important contribution to our historiography despite unfolding dialectics, shifting paradigms and prevailing fashion.

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NOTES

- 1 *Otago Daily Times*, 29 December 2010.
- 2 Olssen quoted Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed., University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, p.44, defining a paradigm as ‘an apparently permanent solution to a group of problems’, in Erik Olssen, ‘Where to From Here? Reflections on the Twentieth-Century Historiography of Nineteenth Century New Zealand’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, (NZJH) 26, 2 (1992), p.54. On Kuhn and paradigms also see Vaso Kinti and Theodore Arabatzis’s introduction to Kinti and Arabatzis, eds, *Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions Revisited*, New York, 2012, pp.1–11, e book.
- 3 On the dialectical propensities of biography see Robert Gittings, *The Nature of Biography*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1978, pp.16–17, 19–40, 62–67 and 92–93; Ira Bruce Nadel, *Biography: Fact, Fiction and Form*, Macmillan, London, 1984, pp.5–12 and 13–66; Paula R. Scheider, *Reflections on Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp.xx–xxii, 14 and 226–35; Shirley A. Leckie, ‘Biography Matters: Why Historians Need Well Crafted Biographies more than Ever’, and John Milton Cooper, ‘Conception, Conversation and Comparison: My Experiences as a Biographer’, in Lloyd E. Ambrosius, ed., *Writing Biography: Historians and their Craft*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 2004, pp.15, 18–19 and 90; and for New Zealand, Keith Sinclair, ‘Political Biography in New Zealand’; Michael King, ‘Political Biography: A Commentary’ and Erik Olssen, ‘Political Biography: A Commentary’, in Jock Phillips, ed., *Biography in New Zealand*, Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1985, pp.30–36, 36–39 and 39–41; Olssen, ‘Where to From Here?’, p.58, and ‘Mr Wakefield and New Zealand as an Experiment in Post-Enlightenment Experimental Practice’, NZJH, 31, 2 (1998), pp.197–218.
- 4 Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1921.
- 5 John Miller, *Early Victorian New Zealand: A Study of Racial Tension and Social Attitudes*, Oxford University Press, London, 1958, and Michael Turnbull, *The New Zealand Bubble: The Wakefield Theory in Practice*, Price Milburn, Wellington, 1959, cited in Olssen, ‘Where to From Here?’, p.58.
- 6 See James Watson and Lachy Paterson, eds, *A Great New Zealand Prime Minister? Reappraising William Ferguson Massey*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2011.
- 7 W.P. Reeves, *The Long White Cloud: Aotearoa*, Horace Marshall & Sons, 4th ed. 1924 (1st published London, 1898), p.301.
- 8 *Daily Express*, 8 May 1900. Reeves’s article is full of factual mistakes, including the claim that Seddon was 45 years old when he was approaching 55 and that he left school at 10 years of age rather than 12. ‘Reeves–Seddon Correspondence’, Folder 2, Seddon Papers, MS-Papers-1619, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington.
- 9 The Board of Trade certificate of a ‘Mechanical Engineer’ can be found along with a letter confirming that he was a fully paid-up member of ‘The Amalgamated Society of Engineers, Machinists, Millwrights, Smiths, and Pattern Makers’ in ‘Letters from Organisations’, Folder 44/1, Seddon Papers, MS-Papers-1619, ATL. Seddon was also surprisingly well read as is made clear later in the article.
- 10 Timothy McIvor, *The Rainmaker: A Biography of John Ballance: Journalist and Politician 1839–1893*, Heinemann Reed, Auckland, 1989, pp.182, 215 and 240.
- 11 David Hamer, ed., *The Webbs in New Zealand*, Price Milburn for Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1974, p.38.
- 12 Hamer, ed., *The Webbs*, p.36.
- 13 Andre Siegfried, *Democracy in New Zealand*, trans. by E.V. Burns, introduction by William Downie Stewart and David Hamer, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1982; ‘ox’, p.96; ‘self-made man’, p.95; ‘radical’, p.94; imperialism, pp.96, 365–7 and 370.

14 Siegfried, *Democracy in New Zealand*, the comments regarding pragmatism can be found on pp.90–91 and 100–101.

15 Albert Metin, *Metin: Socialism Without Doctrine*, trans. by Russel Ward, Alternative Pub. Co-operative, Chippendale, NSW, 1977, pp.70–71 and 171 on labour.

16 J.B. Condliffe and W.T.G Airey, *Short History of New Zealand*, 6th ed., Whitcombe and Tombs, Auckland, 1938, pp.208–13.

17 See Erik Olssen, *The Red Feds: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism and the New Zealand Federation of Labour 1980–1914*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1988, passim.

18 See Olssen, *The Red Feds*.

19 J.C. Beaglehole, *New Zealand: A Short History*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1936, pp.57–58.

20 See Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1976, pp.130 and 166–8. Interestingly, Nash made few such references in his book, *New Zealand: A Working Democracy*, J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1944.

21 W.B. Sutch, *Poverty and Progress in New Zealand*, Modern Books, Wellington, 1941, pp.99–101; and *The Search for Security in New Zealand, 1840–1966*, Oxford University Press, Wellington, 1966.

22 Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed., Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969, pp.187–92.

23 Keith Sinclair, *William Pember Reeves: New Zealand Fabian*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965, pp.167–71, 175, 184, 238–40 and 339–40.

24 R.M. Burdon, *King Dick*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1955; and ‘Richard John Seddon’ in W.H. McLintock, ed., *The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, Government Printer, Wellington, 1966, pp.216–19.

25 W.H. Oliver, *The Story of New Zealand*, Faber and Faber, London, 1960, pp.151–61.

26 P.J. Gibbons, ‘“Turning Tramps into Taxpayers”: The Department of Labour and the Casual Labourer in the 1890s’, MA thesis, Massey University, 1971; Margaret Tennant, *Paupers and Providers: Charitable Aid in New Zealand*, Allen & Unwin/Historical Branch, Wellington, 1989.

27 David Thomson, *A World Without Welfare: New Zealand’s Colonial Experiment*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1998.

28 Len Richardson, ‘Parties and Political Change’, in W.H. Oliver and B.R. Williams, eds, *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1981, p.205; E.W. (Libby) Plumridge, ‘Labour in Christchurch: Community and Consciousness, 1914–1919’, MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979; Jim McAloon, ‘Working Class Politics in Christchurch, 1905–1914’, MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1986; Melanie Nolan, ‘Jack McCulloch: Workers’ Representative on the Arbitration Court’, MA thesis, University of Canterbury, 1985.

29 Erik Olssen, ‘Towards the Ideal Society’, in Judith Bassett, Judith Binney and Erik Olssen, *The People and the Land = Te Tangata me Te Whenua: An Illustrated History of New Zealand 1820–1920*, Allen & Unwin, Wellington, 1990, pp.240–4.

30 David Hamer, *The New Zealand Liberals: The Years of Power, 1891–1912*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1988, p.203.

31 Hamer, *Liberals*, pp.204–205.

32 Hamer, *Liberals*, pp.202–203 and 205.

33 Hamer, *Liberals*, p.207.

34 David Hamer, ‘Seddon, Richard John’, in *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (DNZB), Vol. Two, 1869–1900, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993, pp.447–51.

35 McIvor, *The Rainmaker*, pp.182, 215 and 240; and Michael Bassett, *Sir Joseph Ward: A Political Biography*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1993, pp.91, 127–8, 179, 189, 192–3, 200 and 283.

36 Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1972.

37 Judith Devaliant, *Kate Sheppard: A Biography*, Penguin, Auckland, 1992, pp.176–7.

38 Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, eds, *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1994; Dorothy Page, *The Suffragists: Women Who Worked for the Vote. Essays from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1993; *The National Council of Women: A Centennial History*, Auckland University Press with Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1996; and Barbara Brookes, *A History of New Zealand Women*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2016, pp.129 and 131.

39 Jean Garner, *By His Own Merits. Sir John Hall-Pioneer, Pastoralist and Premier*, Dryden Press, Hororata, 1995, pp.238–9, 278–9 and 259–60. There was also an abandoned doctoral thesis at Otago on male opposition to suffrage.

40 Jim Ng, *Windows on a Chinese Past: Larrikinism and Violence, Immigration Issues and Twentieth Century Assimilation*, Otago Heritage Books, Dunedin, III, 1993, p.88. Ng built on Bickleen Fong, *The Chinese in New Zealand: a study in assimilation*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, 1959, who called Seddon 'a great persecutor of the Chinese' (p.20) and relied heavily on Francis Fyfe, 'Chinese Immigration to New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century', MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1948, and Vernon H.H. Scurrah, 'Asiatic Immigration to New Zealand', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1950. Also see Miles Fairburn, 'What Best Explains Discrimination Against the Chinese in New Zealand, 1860s–1950s', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, 2, 3 (2003), pp.65–85; and Philip Ferguson, 'The Making of the White New Zealand Policy: Nationalism, Citizenship and the Exclusion of the Chinese, 1880–1920', PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, 2003.

41 Dick Scott, *Years of the Pooh-Bah: A Cook Islands History*, Hodder and Stoughton, Auckland, 1991, and *Would a Good Man Die? Niue Island, New Zealand and the Late Mr Larsen*, Hodder and Stoughton, Auckland, 1993; Damon Salesa, 'New Zealand's Pacific', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2009, pp.149–56.

42 Some of the more hard-hitting examples of revisionism include — by date — R.J. Martin, 'Aspects of Maori Affairs in the Liberal Period', MA thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1956; Alan Ward, 'The History of the East Coast Maori Trust', MA thesis, Victoria University, 1958, and *An Unsettled History: Treaty Claims in New Zealand Today*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 1999, pp.149–58; M.P.K. Sorrenson, 'Land Purchase Methods and their Effect on the Māori Population, 1865–1901', *Journal of the Polynesian Society (JPS)*, 65, 3 (1965), pp.183–99; Dick Scott, *Ask that Mountain: The Story of Parihaka*, Heinemann/Southern Cross, Auckland, 1975, pp.163–81; Judith Binney, 'Amalgamation and Separation, 1890–1920', in Binney, Bassett and Olssen, *The People and the Land*, pp.203–34; G.V. Butterworth, *Maori Affairs: A Department and the People Who Made It*, GP Books, Wellington, 1990; Harry Evison, *Tē Wai Pounamu, the Greenstone Island: A History of the Southern Maori during the European Colonisation of New Zealand*, Aoraki Press, Christchurch, 1993, pp.462–81; Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*, Penguin, Auckland, 1990, pp.171–2 and 175–6; Tom Brooking, *Lands for the People? The Highland Clearances and the Colonisation of New Zealand. A Biography of John McKenzie*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1996, pp.131–56; Paul Moon, *Ngapua: The Political Life of Hone Heke Ngapua, MHR*, Penguin, Auckland, 2006, passim, especially pp.70–82; and Paul Monin, 'Maori Economies and Colonial Capitalism', in Byrnes ed., *The New Oxford History*, pp.143–5.

43 Roger Douglas, *Unfinished Business*, Random House, Auckland, 1993, pp.172–93; Richard Prebble, *I've Been Thinking*, Seaview Publishers, Auckland, 1996, pp.23–34; and M. Bassett, *The State in New Zealand: Socialism without Doctrines?*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1998, pp.19–20, 57 and 108–11.

- 44 James Edward Le Rossignol and William Downie Stewart, *State Socialism in New Zealand*, Harrap, London, 1911, passim. On charges of corruption, pp.108–109 and I C and A, pp.119–20.
- 45 Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Penguin, Auckland, 2003, p.261.
- 46 Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, pp.114, 120.
- 47 Chris Trotter, *No Left Turn: The Distortion of New Zealand's History by Greed, Bigotry and Right Wing Politicians*, Random House, Auckland, 2007, pp.69–70, 77 and 94.
- 48 'Richard John Seddon — Premier', National Film Archive F42525, Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, Wellington.
- 49 Mervyn Thompson, *O! Temperance*, Christchurch Theatre Trust, Christchurch, 1974.
- 50 W.H. Oliver, *Poor Richard: poems*, Port Nicholson Press, Wellington, 1982, pp.9–11.
- 51 Graeme Lay, *Alice & Luigi*, David Ling Publishing, Auckland, 2006, pp.30–34. Ian Wedde's short novel *Dick Seddon's Great Dive: a novel* published in *Islands*, 5, 2 (November, 1976), p.156 has nothing to do with Seddon other than making reference to a supposed record dive of five minutes under the Waikato River he made at Ngāruawāhia.
- 52 James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Penguin, Auckland, 2001, p.53.
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