

JOHN GREEN

"New Zealand seemed concentrated on an intellectual pattern"

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a political sere only a hundred years ago. As in Britain the first phase was pastoral and her first leaders owed their fortunes to wool. The second phase was agricultural, when, following enclosure and closer settlement, the dairy and mutton farmers passed into the ascendant. The last and present phase is industrial.

To understand contemporary politics in New Zealand, I must divert for a moment to explain the conservative attitude of the farmer. He is a very important person because 87 per cent. of the Dominion's exports are primary products. He is also one of the last Free Traders on earth. Only men with unchallenged natural advantages ever are Free Traders, for the logical reason that they have no need of Protection. If nature allows you to carry one cow or six sheep to the acre, without overheads in buildings or machinery, and your product is the best of its kind in addition, you expect to purchase the cheapest and best in return. The New Zealand farmer, therefore, resents being taxed to produce goods like clothes and shoes, which he could buy better from England or America. They do not all realise that this view would entail New Zealand remaining a Pacific Denmark; some do and frankly believe it to be the right policy. It is this conflict between the grazier and the townsman which has brought so much bitterness in the last 10 years to a country otherwise favoured by time and circumstance.

Social Precocity

Why is New Zealand as a country politically capricious? Why is it doctrinaire about social transitions that have after all a material basis? I have already said that the foundation of the country was planned and conscientious. But this does not explain her chronic

social precocity. Neither is it the result of being in a hurry to catch up with older Powers, as might explain Soviet Russia; nor because she was isolated and polyglot like the Middle West of America. After all, it was years ago that the Australian took to his Mechanics' Institutes while the New Zealander had his Mutual Improvement Societies. The one was always interested in life and things, while the other already had this Platonic susceptibility for ideas. The most significant fact is that New Zealand's reformers have never been New Zealanders. Social genius is not the cause of native political initiative, so much as the effect of being politically plastic in the hands of alien theorists. Indeed, Wakefield himself, Grey, Vogel (an immigrant from the Australian goldfields), Ballance, Mackenzie, Seddon, Henry Holland (an Australian and the architect of contemporary

socialism), and the leaders of the present Cabinet were all born out of New Zealand and mostly in Britain. They have merely found New Zealand the social laboratory in which to work, and we are only left to wonder at the ease of their successes. Some of the greatest of these in chronological order are free, compulsory, secular education in 1877; women's suffrage in 1893; industrial arbitration and a government trading bank in 1894; and since 1935 the 40-hour week and a Social Security Act that grants every Beveridge benefit.

Collectively Smug

To-day in New Zealand it is impossible to buy a razor blade on Saturday morning. Not only has the Government a plan of your house, but it may have one of your teeth and intestines. Broadcasting is nationalised. The State is more than a source of social credit, and has become a capital superstructure, in architectural fabric as well as finance. An R.A.F. pilot in uniform will fly you in a government aeroplane for a handsome profit, while a sergeant checks your baggage in a government-owned railway station. The bargaining of the individual contractor has become as still as the voice of the bookmaker on the New Zealand racecourse. You may well ask: "Is the New Zealander a prig?" Individually he remains a most delightful person, but collectively I think the nation is smug. I found some truth in the Australian warning that they would beg the question—"What do you think of our lovely country?" By spurning individual distinction they are producing a population that is statistically average. This would not matter in appearance, but in thought it can be very depressing. Kipling's lines—

Who wonder mid our fern why men depart
To seek the Happy Isles,

has to-day a meaning the poet of Empire did not intend. The Happy

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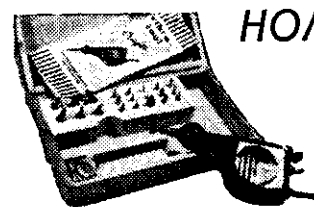
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