

North Island, and mud was a powerful social and political factor. Settlers might be marooned, or travel no faster than in the old bullock-drays. The shortest journey between Wellington and Auckland took from twenty-four to thirty hours, and involved a night tossing in a small ship. Compared with later years, there was little travelling for pleasure; Auckland and the South Island were to each other like foreign countries. But please don't think of this as an unhappy time. The New Zealander was probably happier in 1900 than in 1950. For one thing, he had not lost faith in progress.

THE Great Prosperity began in the 'Nineties, and, though checked now and then, lasted until the slump of the 'Thirties. Prices rose; land was opened up; farming improved; science was increasingly applied to processes; and export quality was watched. Unfortunately the money that flowed into the pocket also went to the head. Land values became absurd. The trend was not appreciably affected by political change. In 1900 the Liberal-Labour party had been in office for ten years. It had encouraged land settlement, protected the wage-earner, provided old age pensions, and generally practised a mild socialism, which its opponents called Seven Devils. Richard Seddon, huge in size, powerful though crude in intellect, dominating in personality, a master of the political game, was the most forceful and picturesque Prime Minister in our history. Elections gave him big majorities, and in the sessions of 1900-1902 the disheartened Opposition worked without a leader. In 1903 William Massey took over the leadership after nine years' apprenticeship, but in 1905 Seddon reduced his force to sixteen. Nevertheless, seven years later Massey was Prime Minister, and stayed there for nearly thirteen consecutive years, not far short of Seddon's record reign. If Seddon had lived as long as Gladstone, it is doubtful if he could have held the party together indefinitely. Labour, hitherto satisfied with mild progress on the English model, became more and more restive. The left wing talked of the class war, and the Federation of Labour was popularly known as the "Red Federation." The Labour Party as we know it dates from 1916. The chief galvanisers

RIGHT: N.Z. troops leaving Wellington for the Boer War

were newcomers, and they shared in the Labour triumph of 1935. Michael Joseph Savage himself, and five of his colleagues in the first Labour Ministry, came from England or Australia. The Waihi strike of 1912 and the general strike of 1913 were uglier in their clashes than anything New Zealand had known.

Even before 1914 we had moved externally a good way from 1900. At one time we gave £20,000 a year to the British Navy; now we presented it with a battle-cruiser. We introduced compulsory military training, and the British Government consulted us about Imperial defence. Recognition of the German menace developed swiftly, but the coming of war should not have surprised anyone. The unforeseen lay in its range and fury, and the effort required to win. As Dominion status was then (we had become a Dominion in 1907), we could not have chosen neutrality had we wished, but there was no legal obligation to go to Britain's help. Actually, out of a population of 1,100,000 people, more than a hundred thousand soldiers went overseas, exclusive of New Zealanders serving in other units, and nearly seventeen thousand died. The presence of New Zealanders at the Dardanelles, as at Thermopylae a generation later, illustrated history's infinite capacity for surprise.

GALLIPOLI was the birth of a nation. The honour of selection for such a task, as well as the valour and the losses, gave us a new pride, which was increased as our general war record unfolded. With this came a stronger sense of equality with the Motherland. What so many New Zealanders saw of the British soldier and the British at home, modified our attitude. We were not less affectionate, but we were more critical. We had proved ourselves as good soldiers as the British; might we not rival them in other fields?

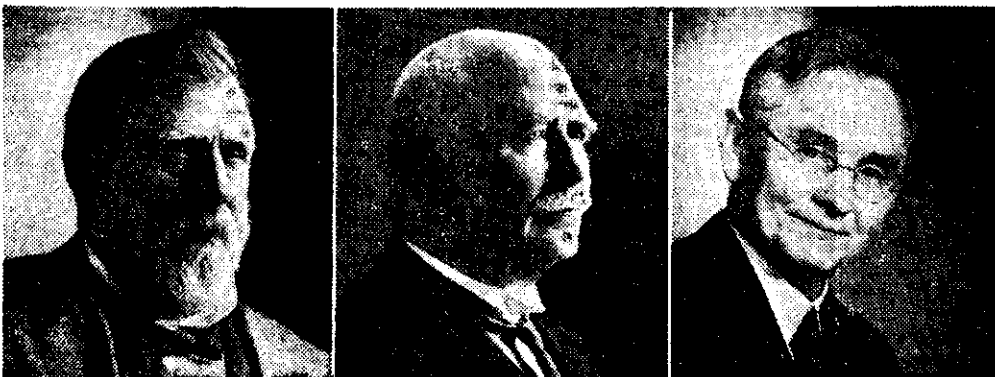


So a national spirit of independence and initiative was engendered, which grew in the difficult distracted armistice years, and shot up more quickly during the second war. We were now a recognised nation, with a seat on the League. Men and women wrote with a new outlook, and for the first time New Zealanders began to be really interested in New Zealand books. Writers were handicapped by the temper of a class which moaned too much about its disappointments when it should have been thanking God that society had saved its skin and its soul. However, a new voice was there, in letters and art, something that was, or promised to be, rooted in New Zealand. Our sense of history grew slowly. We left it to the generosity of a Governor-General and his wife to preserve the most historic building in New Zealand, and only now, at the beginning of 1950, is an official history of our part in the South African War being published. Not until our centennial year did this native sense come to flower. We are better than our fathers and grandfathers in knowledge and appreciation of our birds and trees, and realisation that our soil is a heritage to be nursed and not mined. When the notornis was rediscovered, it was captured, photographed and released, and steps taken at once to protect it. In this fifty years there has been a marked advance in scientific research, professional training, and the status of the expert. In Oliver Duff's words, "we have come to the end of blind living." However, with the rest of the world we face the terrifying fact that man's scientific progress has outstripped his moral.

between the incensed opposites of Reform and Labour. The old historic party gave of its strength to the others. Most important of all was the depression. That it came from abroad did not mitigate it. Conditions may not have been so bad as in the 'Eighties, but people demanded a higher standard of living and were therefore more rebellious. There was a lesson to New Zealand that it was vulnerable, and tied to world economy. The situation was handled with little imagination, and the plight of tens of thousands did more than anything else to give Labour its sweeping victory in 1935, and enable it to enact a wide programme of social and economic legislation.

We could have chosen neutrality in the second world war if we had wished, but Mr. Savage stood where Mr. Massey did in 1914. It was a greater war. Our enemies were more numerous, our responsibilities more widely spread, and our peril more mortal. The thought of the consequences of defeat was appalling. We had to mobilise our factories as well as our men, and call in an army of women. Victory left us more conscious of our nationhood and a more conspicuous figure among nations. Again our fighting men were second to none, but the world saw and recognised their qualities more clearly.

In 1950 we are a far more important country than in 1900. The international status of our statesmen has grown. What they say, and how they fare in elections, are news for the world. They travel to England in days as against weeks. A New Zealand type is emerging more clearly, so that some are saying they can recognise a New Zealander anywhere, even before he speaks. We have had close and vital contact with America, and the Far East is no longer a distant mystery, but has become the Near North, a vast problem that touches our destiny. One thing has not changed at all. In 1950, as in 1900, our economic life is bound up with Britain's. If she sinks, we sink. But though we see her with clearer, more experienced, and more independent eyes, we pray for her recovery as an affectionate daughter joined to her by innumerable common interests woven into the very stuff of our daily lives.



RICHARD SEDDON

WILLIAM MASSEY

MICHAEL SAVAGE

"In the new century there was another rough pioneering period"