

MEET MR. AND MRS. HAWERA

ANY time you are round about Hawera, which lies under the shadow of Mt. Egmont, you should look up the typical Hawera man and his wife. You will know this citizen of Hawera when you meet him because, for one thing, he will be rather proud of his town and especially its parks and gardens. He may tell you that he has been in Hawera most of his life and expects to stay there as, after all, his job is as good as he'd get anywhere. He sends his children to school (imagine that he has children) because school develops good moral character; but, even so, he is not very happy about letting his son out alone at night until he reaches the age of sixteen, or his daughter until she is eighteen.

He will turn out, perhaps, to be fond of music, spending his spare time, which he appreciates as a welcome change from work, listening to the radio, gardening, visiting friends or entertaining them, in between whiles helping his wife with the dishes and an occasional spot of shopping. He prefers to take part in sport rather than to watch, likes exercise, amateur theatricals and lectures. Most of these preferences and prejudices he shares with his wife. Neither of them particularly want a community centre in Hawera, but if others would like to build one, well, it's up to them to pay for its upkeep.

As you may gather, Mr. Hawera is little different from the typical citizen of other small towns in New Zealand, or, for that matter, of the bigger ones either, which means he may be some of these things and take his enjoyments mostly like this. But on one subject he may have strong opinions. It is Hawera's proposed community centre and the Hawera Social Survey.

The idea for this Hawera Social Survey actually arose out of discussions about a war memorial community centre, and originated with L. M. H. Cave, adult education tutor in Taranaki, and the Hawera and District Progressive Association. Did the people of Hawera really want a community centre, and, supposing they did, what sort of a place would they want to make it? What sort of a building should it be? What range

of activities should it be designed to accommodate? More important still, how to drive home the point that a community centre is not just a building, that it is more than a Town Hall, that it should be, as its name suggests, a centre of community interests without which it could rapidly decline into a civic white elephant. Faced with these problems and a lively interest in their solution, the committee of the Hawera and District Progressive Association approached the Victoria University College School of Social Science to provide material for the discovery of the answers. Under the guidance of A. A. Congalton, Lecturer in Psychology, Victoria University College, a consultative committee was set up. The Hawera Social Survey was under way.

Comprehensive questionnaires were drafted, designed to extract as much information as possible, directly or indirectly relevant to the matter. With these in hand, students of the School of Social Science descended on Hawera and, selecting a representative cross-section of the community—a "sample"—proceeded to sound the heart and lungs of Hawera, measure its blood pressure, X-ray and dissect. This type of project is part of these students' training, work for which they are adapted by preparation, practice and temperament. It can be assumed, therefore, that for Hawera the operation must have been painless and even pleasurable.

The tabulated results, published in the form of a report by the Hawera and District Progressive Association and the Hawera Star Publishing Company, make a quite impressive volume. The reader's first impression is that Hawera people must be very pleasant people and Hawera a salubrious place in which to live—despite some criticism of its climate. Photographs and a well-written description of the town and its history are no mere tourist guide, but a reflection of civic pride and the expression of a community conscious of its present stature and alive to the future. There is, too, what seems to be a valuable documentary of the status of the Maori in the district. And then there are the tables of figures.

Figures, they say, can prove anything. Those associated with the survey, both within and without Hawera, may possibly be able to sort things out and establish a picture of Hawera thronging to its Community Centre, but, studying the report in cold blood and remote from Hawera, it is difficult not to be sceptical about the validity of a great many of the facts brought to the surface. Looking at New Zealand through the pulse of Hawera, moreover, one may be a little depressed at the implications of some of the other information; but more of that anon.

The value of the Survey seems, indeed, to be more than anything a negative one. If Hawera is to design a centre which will be happily used by the community maybe it had better seek advice from those "other sources of information"

which, as the Survey states in its "Conclusions," "were available to the War Memorial Committee" and which "were used to advantage in all stages of the planning." The report suggests, also, that the information should have value for adult-educationalists, youth leaders, welfare and church workers. But then any reasonably energetic, sympathetic and observant worker in these fields can discover all he needs to know about a place and its people much more easily and quickly and at least as accurately.

A report such as the Hawera Survey is only as accurate as the skill with which the findings are interpreted. As suggested above, those in the know may have already drawn their own conclusions, and not necessarily what may seem the most obvious ones, from the plethora of figures. To someone on the outside, looking in, there appear some curious angles. For one thing the "sample" barely reached the minimum that the report admitted to be reliable and this cross-section was further reduced by refusals to answer and "not at homes." Is this, then, what Hawera really thinks?

Moreover, the weight of answers must surely have been unbalanced by such a qualification as "imagine you had a son" added to the question: "At what age do you think that a son of yours should cease his schooling?" "Imagine you had a son." Well, now, just imagine you were present (invisibly, of course) at this interview between Miss Hawera, as beautiful as the misses anywhere else in New Zealand, and the student from Victoria College School of Social Science.

Question: "At what age do you think that a son of yours should cease his schooling (imagine you had a son)?" Miss Hawera ponders. In these brief moments of thought, she relives those poignant interviews, not with handsome students of the School of Social Science, but more painfully with Mum and Dad, or remembers those lost dates when parental authority won the day and—she looks up, smiles sweetly and replies: "Well, really, I don't know."

Six per cent of those faced with this question were unwilling to commit themselves, and most of these were single. Incidentally, the report points out with interest that of those "imagine you had a son" single interviewees, the women were much more ready to be definite about the going-out age of girls than boys, and the men vice versa! Add to this the opinions of Mr. and Mrs. Hawera still imagining they might have children. They have wound the clock, put the cat out, locked the back door and settled down comfortably for a peaceful night's rest. Their answers may very well be vastly different from Mum and Dad (see above) waiting up for Junior at two o'clock in the morning.

This question, selected from the carefully worded list of 34, is not without some significance when it comes to counting the heads at hypothetical evening functions at the "imagine you had a" community centre. But its importance at the moment is to demonstrate how



"Imagine you had a son . . ."

fictitious the tabulated results of the survey may turn out to be if they are not added up and then subtracted skilfully. They may mean anything, something or nothing. And what they mean is much more than an arbitrary point of view.

What, for instance, lies behind the answers to the 64-dollar question: "Which of the following activities do you think should be in the Hawera Community Centre?" How to account, first of all, for the omission from the selected list of activities submitted to those interviewed, of anything directly pertaining to music when this interest topped the list of "Particular Subjects—Like to Study?" And are they tough in Hawera, or was it an oversight that table-tennis appears among the "Outdoor" sports?

The answers to this leading question of what should be provided for in the community centre gave an indoor gymnasium and a lounge for the elderly as the most popular suggestions, with 83 per cent and 82 per cent, respectively. Yet when asked which of the listed facilities they would use, only 8 per cent indicated that they would rest awhile in the lounge for the elderly and the indoor gymnasium was preceded in popularity by lectures and amateur theatricals. As a side comment—you can work this out as you like—it can be mentioned that it was the 30-49-year-old group who plumped for the lounge for the elderly. The over-50s preferred the indoor gymnasium!

As mentioned previously, however, the strongest evidence in favour of a community centre is negative and among this the "don't knows" are significantly influential. Six per cent of the "sample" didn't know if they would take part in more leisure time activities if facilities were made available (90 per cent definitely would not participate); 22 per cent had no idea at all what clubs might be expected to use a community centre; 24 per cent couldn't say whether there was adequate co-operation between town and country round about Hawera; 48 per cent could not suggest how money should be spent on adult education; 51 per cent were ignorant of the United Nations' work; and, as negative, 92 per cent preferred to spend their evenings listening to the radio.

These figures and the totality of the Survey add up to one thing at least, a

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