BOOK REVIEWS

Title	Author(s)/Editor(s)	Reviewer
The Ideal Society and Its Enemies	Miles Fairburn	Erik Olssen
Radical Underworld	Iain McCalman	Robert G. Hall
El magonismo	Salvador Hernández Padilla	John Mason Hart
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FAIRBURN, MILES. The Ideal Society and Its Enemies. The Foundations of Modern New Zealand Society 1850–1900. Auckland University Press, Auckland 1989. 316 pp. Ill. £ 17.50.

This is an unusual social history because far from exploring one of the known sub-areas of the subject – such as gender or class – Fairburn elaborates the myth which underlay "the colony's social organisation" between 1850 and 1900. Not that he is very interested in myths, symbols or their deconstruction. Rather he starts from the assumption that colonial New Zealand possessed an animating or organising idea, that of an ideal society. In this sense New Zealand was but a province of the New World. Fairburn goes on to explore the specific conjuncture of ideas which shaped the New Zealand variant, which he calls "The Insiders' View". Using definitions taken from J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society . . . 1516–1700* (1981), Fairburn argues that colonists in New Zealand accepted an Arcadian ideal which "imagined that the simplicity of the social organisation together with natural abundance prevented the emergence in New Zealand of the Old World's social problems". These were "demeaning and inefficient paternalism, workingclass poverty and disorder, and the tyrannical social pressures which forced the middle-classes to live beyond their means" (p. 27). Why the colonists went back so far in time to find their ideal is never explained.

Fairburn has little difficulty establishing the existence of (and faith in) natural abundance, although he relies heavily on promotional literature. The more original (and difficult) part of his argument stresses the centrality, in fact and belief, of minimal social organisation. It seems that this was wanted because it maximised

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freedom and opportunity. Abundance and minimal social organisation reinforced each other to yield the positive blessings of social opportunities, individual virtue and prosperity (p. 77). "Community structures were few and weak and the forces of social isolation were many and powerful. Bondlessness was central to colonial life" (p. 12). Bondlessness – used interchangeably with atomisation – explains the absence of collective protest and group disorder and the extent of drunkeness, violence, and loneliness. Implicit in the ideal were the seeds of its destruction. The overall structure of the argument has a precariously tensile quality; one can grasp it as a structure but remain perplexed by its relationship to the minds and worlds of farm labourers, servants, or artisans who travelled 12,000 miles to settle in New Zealand. One also wonders why Fairburn ignores completely the carefully articulated ideal society of the founding generation of settlers, those of the 1840s, not to mention the missionaries, present since 1814 and the Maori (present for 1,000 years). It may have been possible to imagine an ideal society in a vacuum when you sat in London but not once you landed. The argument is focussed too narrowly to be entirely persuasive.

One suspects, however, that this tightly articulated and narrowly focussed argument in part grew out of the evidence about how life was lived in New Zealand. Fairburn has done an impressive amount of work on crime and draws upon this in chapter 7 especially. He establishes that high levels of drunkeness and interpersonal violence existed and that they correlate positively with the excess of males in the population, the extent of immigration, and the ratio of small to large dwellings. He infers from these patterns high levels of transience, "the dearth of kinfolk" and "extreme dispersal of settlement, the paucity of communications, the solitary nature of much work, . . . and so on" (p. 195). These inferences vary in their plausibility but they have not been investigated with the same thoroughness as the criminal statistics. Yet all the variables are fused to create a curiously lifeless portrait of an atomised society. Yet in handling each single variable Fairburn relies on rhetoric to determine the level of social pathology. He does not, even where he has reliable statistics, compare New Zealand to other New World societies. The implicit comparison is always with Britain. Although he systematically sets out to demolish the views of other historians, especially those who have identified the existence of bonded communities, he largely ignores family, the role of women in social life, and of social organisations such as churches. This is a remarkable omission.

It is easy to raise doubts about aspects of Fairburn's argument or the characterisation of the colony as atomised. Yet his boldness in attempting to uncover the main principles of the colony's social organisation, together with his recognition that this cannot be done without analysing the expectations of the colonists, deserves respectful attention. So too does the fact that he attempts to present his argument in the form of testable propositions. I suspect that he has helped to demonstrate the way in which the act of migration and settlement in a new world amplified European individualism and its problems.

In the end the book is oddly unsatisfying. By his own account, by 1900 the society he portrays was being replaced by one that differed radically. Why and how that should have been remain unanswered. He has no doubt identified a central feature of colonial society, but like many discoverers he exaggerates the novelty and

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importance of what he has found. Oddly, his argument stands as a confirmation of E. G. Wakefield's fears, even if it tries to prove the failure of Wakefield's system. Any social historian, concerned by the discipline's fragmentation, will find Mr Fairburn's attempt to write the history of an entire society both instructive and stimulating.

Erik Olssen

McCalman, Iain. Radical Underworld. Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, New Rochelle 1988. xvi, 338 pp. Ill. £ 27.50.

Deeply resentful over gibes in the loyalist press about their proclivity for riot and anarchy and their ragged dress, the working men and women who gathered at St. Peter's Field, Manchester on 16 August 1819 were determined to make the mass meeting of that fateful day a display of order, sobriety, and decorum. Such concerns were of limited interest to most of the " 'old blackguard' Spenceans" of Iain McCalman's brilliant study. For over forty years, from the mid-1790s to the late 1830s, a small band of ultra-radical Spenceans lived and laboured in London's radical underworld, "a loosely-linked, semi-clandestine network of political organisations, groups, coteries and alliances", where radical politics intersected not only the world of the degraded artisan and the labouring poor but also London's notorious underworld of petty criminals, blackmailers, pimps, and pornographers (p. 2). Key figures in this shadowy world, the followers of Thomas Spence sought to spread their leader's views on land reform and politics through their connections to the rough and very masculine culture of London's workshops and tavern free-and-easies; these often thoroughly unrespectable radicals grafted "humour, escapism, sex, profit, conviviality, entertainment and saturnalia" (p. 234) onto the radical tradition and turned to blasphemy, burlesque, and a form of "obscene populism" to ridicule aristocrats, "arsebishops", and royal parasites. This ribald, vigorously anti-establishment culture of Thomas Spence and his disciples acted as a magnet for the impoverished journeymen, bankrupt tradesmen, and failed professionals of the metropolis. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's work on French artisans of the 1830s, McCalman suggests that Spenceanism offered the jobbing tailor and marginal professional an alternative to the demeaning world of work and provided them with a sense of camaraderie and hope as well as an outlet for their intellectual and literary activities.

In the opening chapters, McCalman inroduces the reader to London's radical underworld through the lives and careers of Thomas Evans, Robert Wedderburn, and George Cannon. He has selected these three men as the "focal-points" of his study because they were " 'ideal types', each broadly representative of separate but convergent radical traditions" (pp. 3–4). The twists and turns of the life of Thomas Evans, the best known of the three Spenceans, embodied the contradictory impulses of the marginal, restless artisan. An influential leader in London's radical circles from the days of the London Corresponding Society of the 1790s to the mass

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