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NEW TIMES IN NEW ZEALAND ?

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ABSTRACT

There is widespread agreement that New Zealand, among other advanced nations, has experienced major economic, political and cultural change in recent times. Yet the causes, the extent and the implications of these changes are still very much contested. The 'New Times' thesis has offered one interpretation of change which suggests a transformational shift has occurred following the 'breakdown' of the 'postwar settlement'. This breakdown is seen as a result of the declining influence of structural forces where the effect has been the emergence of a society characterised by diversity and difference.

In this thesis, I critically assess the New Times position, and in doing so, contemplate its ability to help clarify and define more precisely the meaning of New Zealand's recent change. I conclude that while the New Times project is ultimately ineffectual in providing a sound theoretical and empirical account of contemporary developments, it does usefully highlight the need, particularly in New Zealand, for a new approach to account for changing social formations.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1984, New Zealand has experienced widespread changes throughout all spheres of society. This has seen the emergence of a new era in New Zealand's development which has in the process generated extensive social upheaval, resulting in a protracted mood of uncertainty. Given the general level of apprehension and perplexity that is characterising contemporary New Zealand society as it contemplates its ongoing insecurity in the global economy, a new system of political representation and the uneasy development of a post-colonial national identity, this thesis is an attempt to provide a clearer indication of what the changes since 1984 have meant. This is achieved through defining the *extent* of change that has occurred more precisely, and reflecting on what these changes mean for future economic, political, and cultural developments in New Zealand.

In doing so, the thesis offers an evaluation of the reformations of 'Left' thinking, in light of the perceived transformational changes experienced in *all* the advanced nations in the past decades. In particular, it assesses the contentions put forward by the New Times project, and considers the possibility of applying New Times to New Zealand. While providing a descriptive account of recent change in capitalist society, New Times is in essence a 'theoretically' and 'politically' engaged project which has been most often associated with offering a sharp departure from conventional Left thinking to help explain the increasing complexity and diversity of modern capitalism.

The first chapter is concerned with outlining the New Times debate in some detail, contextualising its origins, motives and theoretical orientations. A critique is then made of the project which draws from some of the critical responses to New Times' major theoretical departures. This is followed by a brief comparison of the changes associated with Britain and New Zealand in order to assess the potential

for using New Times style analysis to explain New Zealand's experience of change.

In considering the efforts of various commentaries to make sense of New Zealand's transformations, the main issue in assessing the viability of New Times is whether New Zealand's unique, regional and national characteristics can possibly fit such a general, abstract explanation of change. I conclude here that despite the importance and the continual influence of historic developments, New Zealand as much as any other advanced nation is able to be contemplated in such a way. Indeed, regardless of the apparent theoretical and empirical inaccuracies of New Times, its explanation of change in a holistic fashion does offer something that can be used in trying to establish what kind of socio-political formation New Zealand is, or could become.

The remaining chapters are concerned with looking at specific dimensions of social structure and political change, namely the economy, politics and cultural identity, assessing both the level of change that has occurred in these areas, and the degree to which a New Times explanation convincingly represents that change. For each of these related components an overview of the general New Times position is given, followed by a detailed consideration of New Zealand's experience in these particular areas. The second chapter is concerned with the economy, paying particular attention to changes in the production process, work organisation and the labour market. The third chapter considers changes in political life and consciousness, specifically in voting behaviour, the profile of political parties and political culture in general.

The fourth chapter considers changes in the socio-cultural sphere, and in particular assesses the New Times contention that cultural identities are no longer fixed and determined by structural forces, rather that they are increasingly chosen and fragmentary. While this element was not initially a part of the main New Times line of thought, it is an area where the New Times argument corresponds with a

wider recent literature articulating the decline of nationalism and national culture, and positioning the growth of more hybrid cultural formations. Put this way, it is reasonable to associate the 'new cultural politics of difference' with the New Times project, and by extension, with the important issue of New Zealand's engagement with a post-colonial future.

Overall, the position I have taken in this thesis is one of guarded scepticism towards the interpretation of change made by the New Timers. At the same time, in recognising that *some* quite significant changes have occurred in New Zealand (among other advanced nations), I find the New Times paradigm useful in the ongoing attempt to more precisely conceptualise these shifts, and in the matter of reconstituting an intelligently robust and popular style of radical politics.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW TIMES DEBATE

INTRODUCTION

The New Times project originated from a desire by a group of writers, academics, and political analysts attached to the journal *Marxism Today* to find a way of cohering, and making sense of the economic, political, and cultural changes that were occurring in Britain, and more generally throughout the advanced nations in the 1980s. Essentially, New Times refers to a recognition that the world has changed in a fundamental way in the past thirty years from a society based around Keynesian economic management, class compromise and homogeneous social experiences, to one reflected by 'monetarism' or 'neoclassical economic management', increasing social fragmentation and cultural diversity, and the subsequent disintegration of consensus and compromise.

New Times was created with the intention of providing a synthesis from an on going attempt to give an understanding and an explanation of the populism of *Thatcherism*. The project was deemed a necessary intervention when it was realised that previous efforts to respond to Thatcherism had been unsuccessful. As noted by Jessop et al (1990:83), there was among the writers at *Marxism Today* a realisation that Thatcherism would not collapse under the weight of its economic contradictions and class struggles, and therefore a focus on the *cultural* struggle, was seen to be a more valid and accurate objective.

New Times then, was primarily concerned with providing a focus for the Left to counter the hegemonic rule of the New Right by establishing a strategy which recognised Thatcherism as a 'response' to, rather than the 'creator' of the changes. Consequently, the view that has been most commonly associated with New Times has been the way changes in the economy, politics and in civic culture have been linked together to provide a holistic account of change.

The assertion that such radical change has occurred is vindicated by the underlying presumption that Britain and other advanced nations have experienced an 'epochal' shift from a *Fordist* society, prominent in the post-war era until roughly 1974, to a *post-Fordist* one, which began to emerge towards the end of the 1970s, following a period of paradigmatic collapse.

Among the salient economic components of Fordist mass production were the standardisation of products, the employment of special purpose machinery, the adherence to techniques of scientific management, or Taylorism, and the application of the flow line assembly system of production (Murray 1990:38). Each of these characteristics had the effect of contributing to a system that emphasised repetition, long runs of fixed product lines and low levels of technical innovation. Complementing mass production was mass consumption, orchestrated by a series of specifically oriented economic and social policies cohered by the state known as 'Keynesianism', which was adopted by successive governments during the 1950s and 1960s to ensure a sustained level of demand. Among some of the measures undertaken to perpetuate this were the protection of national markets, the maintenance of a national infrastructure guaranteeing the provision of housing and transport networks, and the preservation of full employment. This was to ensure wage earners and also those on welfare benefits remained active consumers.

While Fordism was deemed to be efficient and effective during the 1950s and much of the 1960s, the economic principles on which this system was based (namely Keynesian macroeconomic theory) eventually began to fracture. The first world oil shock in 1973 is often seen as a crucial turning point, however the system of demand management had begun to falter in the late 1960s. Profit levels had fallen as Keynesianism found its limitations, inflation began to rise, and when demand could not keep pace with supply, Keynesian economic management proved ineffective in dealing with the resulting economic crises. The New Times thesis argues the disintegration of Fordism in the 1970s sparked the emergence of a new

regime of accumulation classified as 'post-Fordism'.

Post-Fordism represents a production process characterised by flexibility and adaptability in terms of the types of goods produced, and the machinery used to produce them. Production in post-Fordism is organised in short- as opposed to long-run batches, and technological innovation plays a pivotal role, as the main productive advantage is found in the 'new', or the 'novel'. The organisation of labour is based around various degrees of intensification, depending on the type of technology in use. The end result is a much wider variety of goods produced aimed at more specific markets.

Additionally, patterns of consumption have significantly changed. While Fordism encouraged the consumption of standardised products through 'mass' marketing, techniques of 'niche' marketing have become increasingly evident in catering for increasingly widespread and diverse tastes. Where mass marketing aimed standardised products at the entire market, 'niche-marketing' is designed to target small sub-markets and lifestyle groups.

The most important assumption made in New Times regarding post-Fordism is that it does not *just* reflect the effects of changes in the economy. Rather, New Times understands post-Fordism to be a new social and cultural experience *as well* as a new economic one, where the forces in 'civil society' have had an equally telling impact on the shift to a post-Fordist society as those in the sphere of production. Crucially, New Timers argue that it is not just technological advancement that has led to a new form of production. Nor was it specifically the need for capitalism to revitalise itself to continue its dominance in the advanced nations in an effort to become more powerful, and even more unchallengeable. Instead, the New Times proponents insist changing patterns of *demand* have had much to do with this transformation. Indeed, Stuart Hall, one of the leading exponents of New Times states that "post-Fordism... is not committed to any prior determining position for

the economy" (Hall 1990:119). Consequently, the emergence of New Times can be seen as the result of a 'market-led' transformation.

New Times stresses the importance of the 'social and political crisis' of Fordist social democracy. In dismissing the determination of productive forces in creating the post-Fordist transformation, New Times, represented politically in various social movements argue that a plethora of social forces helped to reject the foundations of Fordism. And given this, social *class* (in the traditional sociological and Marxist sense) is no longer seen as the sole site of unification and political association. Subsequently, politics has come to have more to do with people's individual identity than their socially determined subjectivity.

As an example, the Fordist social democratic concept of *citizenship* was based around the recognition of specific gender and racial settlements, where women were treated in relation to their position in the traditional family structure – not as individuals, and ethnic minorities were referred to and treated as immigrants rather than legitimate citizens. The growing independence and resulting politicisation of minority groups challenged existing social conventions which subsequently began to contest the Fordist 'social' compromise. The resulting feminist and ethnic revival movements of the late 1960s were a reaction to the rigid and conservative social requirements of Fordism.

David Harvey places those counter-culture movements as important causes of the social transformations that led to the break down of Fordism as autonomous and significant in their own right.

The self-referential myths such as the 'American dream', and other human aspirations and eternal truths were the catalyst in causing the various counter-cultural and anti-modernist movements of the 1960s which sprang to life. Antagonistic to the oppressive qualities of scientifically grounded technical – bureaucratic rationality, as purveyed through monolithic

corporate, state, and other forms of institutionalised power (including that of bureaucratized political parties and trade unions), the counter-cultures explored the realms of individualised self-realisation through a distinctive 'new left' politics, through the embrace of anti-authoritarian gestures, iconoclastic habits (in music, dress, language, and lifestyle), and the critique of everyday life (1989:38).

Taking this into account, New Times places cultural changes at the heart of any explanation of the shift to post-Fordism and insists that new identities borne in this transformation are not economically derived. Indeed, for Hall (1990:119) post-Fordism

signals greater social fragmentation and pluralism, the weakening of older collective solidarities and block identities and the emergence of new identities as well as the maximisation of individual choices through personal consumption.

It is perhaps this rise to prominence of what New Times refers to as the 'politics of consumption' which most clearly dissociates itself from traditional Left political analysis. In Fordism, identities were forged and negotiated largely through an individual's relationship to the productive process. Post-Fordist New Times however, reflects identities which are obtained through negotiating cultural experiences within civil society such as through acts of consumption and leisure. In Fordism "consuming, as opposed to producing, was at best handled as secondary and trivial, confined to the private, feminised sphere of household duties and personal life" (Mort 1990:165). Post-Fordism however sees consumption as a serious political sphere, a process where political consciousness is raised and negotiated. In this sense the actions of individuals can be seen to have guided changes in production.

THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

There are two key areas of theoretical influence evident in the New Times project. Firstly the concept of post-Fordism has been borrowed from Regulation theory, particularly that of the French Regulation School.¹ Of most import for the Regulationists is the way in which an economy maintains stability, and how people's "needs, expectations and consumer powers on the one hand, and the productive capacity of society on the other are met" (Neilson 1993:2). Moreover, Regulation theory is concerned with "analysing successive phases of capitalist development in terms of a series of modes of development based on a combination of 'regimes of accumulation' and 'modes of regulation'" (Hirst and Zeitlin 1991:18). Lipietz (1992:2) defines a regime of accumulation as "the parallel development over a long period of the conditions of production on the one hand (productivity of labour, degree of mechanisation) and on the other, the conditions under which production is put to use (household consumption, government spending etc)", and a mode of regulation as "all mechanisms which adjust the contradictory and conflictual behaviour of individuals to the collective principles of the regime of accumulation", such as the extent to which capital and labour, men and women, are willing to compromise for the 'good' of the regime.

In a period when a regime of accumulation is operating within a mode of regulation there will be one dominant group which asserts its values. When these values are shown to disadvantage certain groups, the essence of a regime loses acceptance and eventually collapses. In a time of crisis when the mode of regulation is no longer able to hold together the principles of the regime of accumulation, a period of intense social and political conflict occurs until one set of new conditions are agreed upon, as articulated by a new dominant group. The Regulation theorists argue that in the post-war era, a 'Fordist' regime of

¹ see Aglietta, M. (1982), Lipietz, A. (1987).

accumulation was sustained by a successful mode of regulation, based on state-centred social democracy and a mixed economy. Fordism however broke down when it proved unable to satisfy the needs and expectations of society. In its place a new 'post-Fordist' regime has begun to assert itself, recognised as 'flexible specialisation', with a corresponding mode of regulation based on social and cultural diversity, and libertarian values of individualism. The Regulation School though, are careful to stress that change is not uniform across all economies, and they provide a range of labels to assess various nations experience of change such as neo-, flawed-, flexi-, and peripheral Fordism.

The second major influence in the New Times project has been derived from a theoretical standpoint which acknowledges a social and cultural transformation, symbolised in the shift from a 'modern' to a 'postmodern' society. The theoretical variant associated with this school of thought which has been instrumental in the development of the New Times position is *'post-marxism'*. Essentially, post-marxism represents a radical departure from traditional marxist theory by rejecting the privilege given to class and productive relations, and instead, focuses on cultural relations as the primary site of struggle. The idea of postmodernism in particular has created an undeniable impression upon this theoretical reconstruction, with its wholesale rejection of 'metanarratives'. Eagleton (1987) suggests

post-modernism signals the death of such 'metanarratives' whose secretly terroristic function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of a 'universal' human history. We are now in the process of waking from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of the totality, into the laid back pluralism of the post-modern, the heterogeneous range of lifestyles and language games which has renounced the nostalgic urge to totalise and legitimate itself.

Post-marxism has accepted much of this logic and its analysis of political culture recognises such transformations evident in its fresh prescriptions for the left. The most significant post-marxist presumption is that 'class', or the 'economic', not only

no longer holds as the ultimate determinant of social change, but change is no longer necessarily determined by structural forces at all. Instead of class ideology being the sphere where political consciousness is acquired and subsequent social change derived, 'social movements' are believed to play the most important role in being able to secure a position of hegemonic impact through '*discourse*'.

Gramsci is sited as a pivotal reference point for post-marxists who have adopted his concept of *hegemony* to refer to the way social relations are organised and secured between various groups without prior reference to the sphere of the economy. The principal text in articulating these points has been Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) which has clearly inspired the proponents of New Times. Laclau and Mouffe set out the differences between an acceptable form of left politics, and one which they believe is no longer applicable to the social conditions prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s. They claim that Left-wing thought is standing at a crossroads.

Evident truths of the past have been seriously challenged by an avalanche of historical mutations which have riven the ground on which those truths were constituted (1985:1).

This basically means it is now untenable to believe in a

conception of socialism which rests upon the ontological centrality of the working class, upon the role of Revolution with a capital 'r', as the founding moment in the transition from one type of society to another, and upon the illusory prospect of a perfectly unitary and homogeneous collective will that will render pointless the moment of politics is possible (1985:2).

What Laclau and Mouffe propose is a move away from the language of universal socialism and towards a notion of '*radical democracy*', which tries to mediate a middle way between Marxist socialism and capitalist democracy.

Radical democracy... is a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any 'essence of the social', but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every 'essence' and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism (1985:193).

Laclau has since developed his position to bring the debate surrounding the crisis of ideology to the centre of the post-marxist discussion, and in *New Reflections of the Revolutions of Our Time*, he sees ideology's "continued alignment with modernity and determinism as increasingly problematic" (1990:89).

The questions surrounding the validity of ideology concern debates about 'subjectivity', and whether it is still possible for subjects to be 'interpellated' into specific class ideologies, or whether an individual's subjectivity is instead characterised by a free flowing, and undetermined 'identity'. Michel Foucault, another major influence on post-marxism and New Times thinking rejects the relevance of ideology by stating that because ideology rests on a humanist understanding of the individual subject, it is no longer appropriate. Foucault proposes to replace ideology with *discourse* by developing the term to refer to a domain of language use which is unified and structured by common assumptions about what can or can't be said or thought, to a broader context as a concept that focuses on the 'production of knowledge'. Foucault opposes the determination of social structures, and rejects the idea that there exists some form of ultimate truth. This creates a new emphasis on the construction of non-determined identities, and most importantly an acknowledgement that the distribution of *knowledge* is the key to power, as opposed to some already determined class formation (Barrett 1991:131).

Stuart Hall, one of the key authors of New Times, developed a style of analysis increasingly concerned with 'identity' and the 'individual' within late capitalism instead of the class-based subject. When assessing the meaning of New Times, Hall refers to 'the revolution of the subject', declaring that the "individual has

become more important, as collective social subjects – like that of class or nation or ethnic groups become more segmented and pluralised" (1990:119). In the New Times project, considerable emphasis has been placed on this shift. Hall argues the fragmentation and decomposition of collective identities, which in turn have naturally changed the shape and course of politics, means it is now fruitless to concentrate on the idea that personal politics can be "permanent, fixed or essential" (1990:133).

This recognition has directly transpired through to the way proponents of New Times relate to social and political change. As the subject's economic class position can no longer be relied upon to predict attitudes and other social motivations, the language of politics can not, as traditional marxism argues, be read from the assumed correspondence between the economic and the political (Hall 1990:121).

RESPONSE TO THE NEW TIMES THESIS

Given the novelty, and the provocative nature of the New Times project, there has understandably been some wide ranging debate surrounding its pertinence. Amongst the most scrupulous critiques have been those from the *traditional* Left who still maintain that the fundamental marxist ideas of class struggle remain as relevant today as they did when conceived in the nineteenth century². The opposition to New Times in terms of its theoretical persuasion has however also come from 'moderate' marxists who have been influenced by Gramsci's concepts of *hegemony* and *civil society*, used to explain the continuing dominance of the bourgeoisie in the twentieth century, but who are not willing to adopt the notion that all that Marx said about class struggle and economic determinism is now irrelevant and must be abandoned.³ Additionally, some of the most compelling

² see Sivanandan, A. (1990), Callinicos, A. (1990), and Wood, E. (1986).

³ see Rustin, M. (1989), Geras, N. (1987), and McLennan, G. (1994), (1995).

condemnation has been served by those concerned with the lack of empirical evidence offered to support the existence of the specific epochs under question.⁴

Of those concerned with the *theoretical* position adopted by the New Timers, the major sites of contest revolve around the dismissal of class and economic relations as basic determinants in the structuring of social relations; the way new social movements articulating 'personal politics' have replaced class-based political movements as the voice of 'leading edge' political articulation and mobilisation; the way in which 'radical democracy' is now seen as best placed to achieve a desirable form of socialism; and more generally, the way New Timers have reconstructed the theoretical and political programme of the Left to meet their own agenda.

Firstly, the most hotly disputed issue is the way class is no longer recognised as the primary source of inequality. Sivanandan (1990) in particular labels the New Times explanation of change without prioritising class, as a serious misrepresentation of the social and cultural transformations which have surfaced in the past decades. Rather than the economic relations of capitalism becoming less important in comparison to cultural forces, Sivanandan believes it has been Capital emancipating itself from Labour that has been the precursor to changes in culture. He argues that instead of being 'market-led', and originating in the sphere of culture, the widespread changes that have taken place have primarily resulted through the advent of new forms of technology. Sivanandan believes that instead of recognising the complex relations that have arisen are a result of changes in production, New Times represents a body of thought intent on simplifying the complexity by rejecting the influence of the economy.

It is not only the defendants of technological determinism that oppose the New Times treatment of class. Others have found a problem with the New Times

⁴ see Hirst, D. and Zeitlin, J. (1991), and Jessop, B. et al (1990).

position through its rejection of class's 'relative' determination. The New Timers have decided that marxism and its concepts of *any* degree are all but redundant and in so doing are unwilling to acknowledge the possibilities of more complex relationships between class and other forms of structural determination. Geras (1989:48) presumes that simply for reasons of clarity, such positions are untenable.

A second and associated concern for opponents of New Times is the way in which politics has been 'over-personalised' at the expense of more traditional methods of relating to politics. Implicated here is the way New Timers believe a plural array of 'new social movements' have become the most effective and representative voice of the Left. The New Times thesis stresses the inability of old political forces such as the Labour movement to cope with the growing diversity in areas of political identification. Consequently, the New Times approach has given more weight to the 'personal' sphere of politics; that of gender, ethnicity, and age for example, and also specific movements that generate an un-determined interest such as the environmental and peace movements.

It is not specifically the acknowledgement of the importance of personal politics, but the *degree* to which politics has been extended to 'the personal' in New Times which has come under fire for causing a 'generalisation' of politics. Sivanandan (1990:36) for example, argues the celebration of personal aspects of politics has meant the enemy – those who create and reproduce inequality – are treated less importantly, and less of a continued threat. The move away from a focus on the essential dynamics of capitalism and its abilities to uphold structures of exploitation and oppression, minimalises any effect that the recognition of personal politics can possibly have.

Furthermore, it is argued that the new social movements who are seen to represent a 'politics of the personal' are not as universally encompassing as New Times makes out. Indeed, these movements are frequently associated with a specific class

location; namely the professional bourgeoisie (McLennan 1995:86). Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the association of new social movements with a 'radical' Left politics is debatable, as a politics based on a plural diversity of interests must by definition recognise *all* movements as valid, whether they are 'socially progressive' or not, meaning movements celebrating forms of 'jingoistic' nationalism for example, are as equally legitimate as promoting anti-racism (ibid).

Thirdly, the way 'radical democracy' is argued in *New Times* as some form of socialist utopia has been seen as a rejection of the need to strive for class emancipation. This issue is taken up by Wood (1986) who is critical of the way the adherents of post-marxism (and by association, *New Timers*) believe 'democracy' to be a more feasible and realistic socialist goal, given that class politics can no longer uniformly unite people. Democracy, Wood argues, as a basis for society in any sense of the term, can never be anything like that of socialism as Marx had meant it; merely changing the variables (*popular force* for *class*) can't hope to achieve the same outcome – the ultimate problem being that democracy specifies a separation of political rights and powers from the economic and social ones. Parliamentary democracy for example, is not a celebration for the individual rights of plural subjects, rather it is a denial of popular power.

As an example of an attempt to recognise a plural array of social forces through an adherence to democracy can not achieve class emancipation, Wood draws attention to the fate of the British Labour Party following its response to Thatcherism. She claims that rather than fail when it has tried to defend and promote the interests of the working class, the Labour Party has experienced the most significant electoral defeats when it has *abandoned* it, and tried to broaden its electoral base by moving to accommodate the supporters of the 'common good' or 'national interests' (Wood 1986:192).

Fourthly, there is a general agreement that *New Timers* have reconstructed the

socialist debate in an effort to find an immediate solution to an increasingly complex political situation, and to create a position that adds justification to the role played by middle class intellectuals. Rustin (1989:62) for example suggests the New Times analysis of post-Fordism has been developed for a 'designer socialism'.

Post-Fordism, and in particular 'flexible specialisation', is analysed and accepted "from the point of view of some of its beneficiaries... researchers, communicators, information professionals, and designers", and although this social strata chiefly spoken for by the New Times programme may possess little *material* capital, they do hold considerable *cultural* capital. Rustin believes that New Times represents a struggle between material and cultural capital, while the large part of the population who possess few material or cultural resources are no longer considered important in the political struggle. The old working class is subordinated from the post-Fordist class struggle, and now acts as a bystander, largely because its institutions are defined as "obsolete, inefficient, and undefendable" (1989:62). Furthermore, Sivanandan sums up New Times as representing an "eat, drink, and be merry socialism... a socialism for disillusioned marxist intellectuals who had waited around too long for the revolution – a socialism that holds up everything that is ephemeral and evanescent and passing as vital and worthwhile" (1990:50).

The other major area of critique surrounds the way the terms Fordism and post-Fordism are conceptualised in the New Times argument. The primary concern here is with the lack of *empirical evidence* offered to provide proof that a dichotomy of epochs has in fact occurred to the extent that New Times presupposes. Alex Callinicos for example, believes the scale of the transformation as argued by the New Timers is grossly exaggerated. Not only that; Fordism itself, the society which we have supposedly departed, has been incorrectly conceived as the universal application of mass production – another serious overstatement. According to Callinicos, Fordism was "always primarily limited to the production of complex consumer durables, and did not embrace basic consumer industries such as clothing

and furniture or capital-intensive process industries such as steel and chemicals" (1990:136).

The unjustifiable totalising nature of Fordism is also one of the major criticisms directed at *New Times* by Hirst and Zeitlin, who argue that Fordism involves a "simplified view of manufacturing and macro-economic management, homogenising the postwar world to over stress the social and political differences after 1973" (1991:10). Hirst and Zeitlin's main gripe is that the *New Times* argument takes Keynesianism for granted. To place doubt upon the alleged world wide hegemonic rule of Keynesianism, they illustrate the direction taken by Japan and West Germany, who during their postwar expansion, chose to use more orthodox fiscal and monetary policies. Among other areas of questionable evidence is the extent to which Taylorism was as universally applied to the workforce as is claimed. Hirst and Zeitlin argue for instance that the organisation of the division of labour was never totally dominated by management, rather there was far more complexity in productive and labour processes in the post-war than is deemed to have occurred in the *New Times* account of Fordism (1991:9).

While the notion of Fordism is greeted with little approval, there is even more opposition to the use of *post-Fordism* as a concept that attempts to describe the society which supposedly came to be in the 1980s, as it has proved to be as equally empirically impossible to justify. Following his dismissal of Fordism, Callinicos naturally believes it futile to invent a break from something that was never such a standardised experience in the first place. Consequently he asserts the "novelty of flexible specialisation is much overstated" (1990:136). Instead of a widespread replacement of technology, the *kinds* of technology used in different industries have not greatly altered.

Hirst and Zeitlin point out that the production methods used in contemporary Britain are far from the post-Fordist types illustrated by the *New Times* authors.

Instead of becoming more economically efficient, using labour more productively and using new forms of technology to create innovative and original commodities, Britain continues to be slow in its response to the changing circumstances of the market, more than capable of misusing technology, and inattentive when it comes to re-educating and re-locating the workforce. Moreover, rather than empirically accounting for the extent individual firms have adopted new techniques of production or forms of workplace organisation, or specific arenas in which niche-marketing have surpassed techniques of mass marketing, all that the term post-Fordism does is highlight the fact that in the 1980s there has occurred a range of economic and social changes, and that the structures that held Fordism together are now decomposing (1991:10).

Hirst and Zeitlin conclude that "post-fordism's analysis of 'New Times' is a little more than pop sociology" (1991:11) and as a result, the only way the advanced nations who have encountered changes in the 1980s can be described as post-Fordist is by recognising post-Fordism not as a concept, but as a "loose sociological metaphor" (1991:10).

Finally, the issue of New Times' neglect of regional and national variations is seen as a further inadequacy as its concentration on all things universal doesn't take into account regional differences. Jessop et al (1990:99) make these criticisms from a Regulationist perspective. Their main concern is with the way New Timers "conflate global trends towards post-Fordism and the specific forms which economic restructuring is assuming in particular national modes of growth" (1990:99). They stress that although the Fordist regime of accumulation has generally disintegrated, the resulting changes have led to varied responses in different regions, nations and localities. Furthermore, the Fordist regime itself had many different variants, and there was not only one way of legitimating the Fordist style of accumulation; there were multiple modes of regulation operating in different situations. Additionally, they stress that while diversity is indeed more

obvious now, and identities are more fragmented than they were perhaps thirty years ago, it cannot be assumed that the same cause is some essential post-modern dynamic (1990:100).

It can be seen from this overview of the general debate around New Times, that whilst the New Times initiation has proven provocative and interesting, heralding significant reassessments of standard 'left' thinking and standard sociological reasoning, it is also extremely contestable in its main tenets. In the following section, I construct a survey of the potential impact of New Times on Aotearoa/New Zealand, both as a concept having some influence on our own social commentaries, and as projecting a set of real socio-cultural changes. Subsequent chapters will provide greater depth in the various aspects of the New Times thesis as they pertain to this commentary.

NEW TIMES IN NEW ZEALAND

When comparing the interpretations of change in Britain to those made in New Zealand, the most obvious difference can be seen in a prevailing emphasis placed on the 'unique' aspects of New Zealand's development, and how certain characteristics quite specific to New Zealand's own transformation are deemed not to fit the model of New Times. There is a general consensus among the various commentaries of change that these unique, historic factors have played a leading role in New Zealand's negotiation of change and perception of future possibilities, and subsequently, there has been a general suspicion towards the rightfulness in applying the New Times rhetoric to New Zealand's recent experiences of change.

This suspicion towards New Times can be witnessed through more of an adherence to, or at least an appreciation of, the arguments outlined by Jessop, and to some extent Hirst and Zeitlin, which stress the need to focus closely on national and

regional particularities when assessing social change. Among these particular features, most frequently referred to are New Zealand's fundamental precariousness in the world economy, the distinct political circumstances which brought about economic and social changes in the 1980s and the particular cultural developments that have arisen in New Zealand since the 1970s.

Firstly, it is argued there are several exceptional *economic* aspects which have manifestly shaped New Zealand's recent reformation. As important as any have been the implications of New Zealand's distinctive agricultural base which has had historically significant consequences regarding our position in the global economy. As opposed to other mass producing Fordist nations, New Zealand did not have huge factories that churned out value-added goods, rather we were a primary producing nation based on family farm scale production. Similarly, the practice of scientific management was not able to develop in New Zealand to the extent it did in other advanced nations as there was only a relatively small urban working class. Additionally, because of the relative absence of an intensive manufacturing industry, the New Zealand economy was not based on domestic capital, as the internal market was too small to generate enough financial investment to maintain satisfactory production levels, instead New Zealand relied on foreign capital input (O'Brien and Wilkes 1993:18).

By implication, mass consumption was not generated by internal production, rather New Zealand relied heavily on imported consumer products to sustain the high levels of demand required by Fordism. This reliance highlighted New Zealand's intrinsic precariousness, as any economic downturn, or change in trading conditions was always likely to be felt harder with a comparatively low level of self sufficiency. Subsequently, the perilous complexion of New Zealand's dependence on overseas markets was underlined when Britain entered the EEC in 1973. This left New Zealand without a guaranteed export market and in the position which again exposed the inherent economic insecurity.

Another issue often emphasised is the way New Zealand reacted to the emergence of the 'international economy' and the global rise in new forms of technology. While multinational corporations were beginning to dominate global business using countries with cheap labour markets to locate their production sites, New Zealand was unable to compete with their demands. As a result, New Zealand's own manufacturing industry lost out as it could not match other countries, particularly those in Asia, for cost efficiency. Not only were the multi-national corporations looking for cheap labour-markets, but also national economies that were suitable to make use of and employ new technology. New Zealand suffered as the majority of our existing technological abilities involved the processing of primary resources and the extraction of raw materials, which could not be improved by new technologies as rapidly as other forms of industry.

Gould (1985:58) argues convincingly that New Zealand's major problem was that its primary capital resource was not able to take advantage of the new wave of technical innovation because "pastoral production cannot grow rapidly if the area of grassland cannot be increased". Moreover, our productivity in the sphere of agriculture has not increased since the introduction of the global technological boom in the 1970s as

neither further geographical expansion nor technical advances have been capable during that period of generating continued growth of the output New Zealand pastoral products at anything like the rate at which had characterised most of the country's previous history (Gould 1982:12).

It is argued then, that these factors have at least constrained any contemplation of adopting post-Fordist economic principles because New Zealand's internal productive abilities are not naturally suited to house a post-Fordist industrial environment.

Secondly, and perhaps more conspicuously have been the *political* developments

in New Zealand's recent history which have placed doubt upon the ability to use the New Times thesis to describe New Zealand's contemporary situation. Essentially, this involves the way the traditionally left-wing Labour Party was elected to Government in 1984 replacing the National Government led by Robert Muldoon, which uncharacteristically, given its own history, proceeded to implement libertarian reforms. This was in contrast to other advanced nations where traditionally Right-wing parties acted as the governments of change. The differences are contextualised by Kelsey (1993:296) when outlining the political configurations surrounding the implementation of New Right reforms in New Zealand:

During the 1970s and the early 1980s the Muldoon administration had displayed the conservatism, but not the liberalism, of the New Right. Labour had done the reverse. Liberalism certainly provided the philosophical and practical direction for the Rogernomics programme to deregulate and globalise the New Zealand economy, privatise state resources and power, and commercialise and centralise the residual state. But the element of conservatism was largely absent... Instead of reaching an accord between liberalism and conservatism, the fourth Labour government faced an arguably more difficult task – reconciling liberalism with social democracy.

This contradiction has also been highlighted by Jonathan Boston who, when comparing the differences between Rogernomics and Thatcherism cites the main difference as the respective attitudes to the state. Unlike the Conservative Party in Britain, there was a commitment by New Zealand Labour (token or not) to see the state as an institution capable of enhancing the capacity of individuals to have a reasonable standard of living (1987:150). This reinforces the point made by Kelsey, that Labour in New Zealand *did* have a concern for social justice, mapped by their historic connection with social democracy; while they practised economic liberalism, they were forced initially at least, to acknowledge the state's role in dealing with inequality. As a consequence, the Thatcherite experience of 'authoritarian populism' talked about by Stuart Hall is not immediately applicable

to New Zealand's experience of the transformation, although this is not to deny a resurgence of social conservatism did appear.

Finally, the renewed interest in the cultural history of New Zealand is perhaps now seen to be the most important contemporary factor influencing social change. More specifically, the relationship between the indigenous Maori people, and the Pakeha majority has become a political issue impacting on all spheres of New Zealand society.

While the experience of Maori people since the arrival of white settlers in New Zealand has largely been one of subordination, the recent politicisation of issues concerning New Zealand's origins have both strengthened the demands by Maori for the state to address historic grievances against the Crown, and intensified the awareness and importance of Maori culture to New Zealand's development as a nation. Not only that, but the general increase in ethnic awareness has also made New Zealand more conscious of its post-colonial status, which has questioned the prevailing sense of New Zealand being a culturally homogeneous nation. Most of all, the rise in prominence of Maori politics has challenged the legitimacy of the state's position on its loyalty to the principles outlined in the Treaty of Waitangi.

The result of this has been the emergence of a formal recognition of New Zealand as a 'bi-cultural' society through the institutionalisation of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. The major effect of this in wider economic and political terms is that the preoccupation with acknowledging these historic developments has clashed with the principles of economic libertarianism, which successive governments in New Zealand have been trying to implement. In this respect it is regarded that the growing acceptance of bi-culturalism has added a unique complexity to New Zealand's contemporary experience of change, and in so doing prevents the use of universal theoretical explanations to categorise change in New Zealand.

From the emphasis placed on these unique, locally specific developments, commentaries on change in New Zealand have generally tended to shy away from advocating the more abstract interpretations of change. As a result, there has been a reluctance to apply theoretical propositions to the local context which have originated overseas, such as New Times.

So far the only serious attempt to evaluate the relevance of New Times to New Zealand was made in a special issue of *Sites* in 1990. However, this was more a discussion rather than a critical evaluation. The issue brought together a series of articles focusing on New Times dealing with among other things, the changing perceptions of feminism; the implications for ethnicity and racism; new roles for trade unions; and the future of democracy regarding devolution in both central and local government. There was no particular order or shared theoretical slant within the articles, and the issue does not therefore offer a single position on the suitability of the thesis to New Zealand. The editors did acknowledge that in their view, New Zealand could be increasingly seen in terms of post-Fordist New Times, and that a response to the New Times was needed from the New Zealand Left, just like that being demanded of their British counterparts.

Amongst the other contributors though, there was a reluctance to celebrate the novelty of New Times and its applicability to New Zealand, perhaps most of all because of the way it could be seen as supportive of the reforms carried out by the Labour Government. For example, the idea that devolution of government decision making, a potentially liberating move according to New Times, drew particular scepticism. Hugh Oliver argued that devolution in social responsibility was unlikely to provide more grass roots democracy, rather in New Zealand at least, it was more liable to stagnate social policy (1990:116). Similarly, Christine Cheyne suggests that moves to invigorate a democratisation of local government was destined to be ineffective if no financial commitment was offered by local authority politicians (1990:125).

The most comprehensive single account of the changes in New Zealand can be seen in Colin James' *New Territory* (1992), a consideration of the period of transformation that closely parallels the eras under discussion. In *New Territory* (1992), an updated version of *The Quiet Revolution* (1986), James provides a detailed analysis of New Zealand's transition from the type of societal conditions experienced in New Zealand in the post-war era to those which have led to a new social formation in the 1980s and 1990s. James uses the term '*Prosperity Consensus*' to describe New Zealand's post-war experience, which refers to many of the characteristics consistent with the *New Times* portrayal of the era. He argues the main agents of the break up of Prosperity Consensus include the transformation in the international economic order, the rapid discoveries in technological innovation, and the emergence of a range of social movements which rejected the Prosperity Consensus in terms of its social discrimination.

While James gives a lot of attention to the detail of the transition in all spheres, there is no serious attempt to theorise the changes, instead he appears comfortable to congregate the aggregate transformations from an 'untheorised' Prosperity Consensus. As a result, changes at the level of the social structure are not systematically debated, and with the vast information provided, one is forced to make their own assumptions to the essential structural causes of these changes. Interestingly, James appears comfortable in using an abstract concept to describe the features of the post-war era, but does not show the same investment when considering the society of the 1980s and 1990s, which he so emphatically describes as radically different. He does flirt with the term '*policy consensus*', referring to the similar nature of both the leading political parties economic policy, though it is not given a serious consideration other than as a way to describe the pragmatism reflected by what James sees as the 'end of ideology'.

While this book is useful for its insights into the peculiarities which need to be taken into account for any valid assessment of change in New Zealand, it is short

of some structural analysis evident in the New Times approach, which would have given this contribution more coherence and strength in being able to map future possibilities.

By contrast, Brian Roper (1991) and (1993) has been conspicuous in trying to explain in structural terms the changes that New Zealand has experienced in the last twenty years, which he categorises as the historic shift from 'Keynesianism' to 'neoclassicism'. For Roper, "1974 marks a crucial turning point in New Zealand's recent economic history... (as) it separates an epoch of unprecedented growth and prosperity from an epoch of stagnation, declining incomes and rising unemployment" (1993:1). It was in the 1970s where the legitimacy of Keynesian economics was lost, and a corresponding acceptance of the tenets of monetarism began. Roper's explanation of change firmly centres around a marxist analysis of economic crisis, and consequently singles out the declining rate of profit and the decreasing level of surplus value as the key determinants of the ensuing crisis of capitalism in New Zealand in the 1970s. He argues that the contradictory forces of the long economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s created the crisis in the form of real wage increases leading to the decline in surplus value (1993:20). While the state has historically attempted to manage these problems, Roper believes it could do little that was effective in managing the economy, be it in the form of Keynesian or monetarist responses, as the state is incapable of managing supply and demand through the tinkering of policy directions. Instead, one must look at the tendencies of capitalist development for a real understanding of the changes endured in New Zealand.

In this analysis, Roper is almost entirely concerned with economic changes, which is especially evident in his choice of terms to describe New Zealand's transformation, namely Keynesianism and neoclassicism. An impression is therefore given that the terms of reference are not socially and politically, as well as economically inclusive concepts. Roper however justifies his use of these

concepts to illustrate the differences between the two eras by stating that they "constitute the frame of reference within which business leaders, bureaucrats and politicians actually make policy" (1991:154).

Roper does provide a thorough examination of the changes that have occurred, as well as a sound basis from which an explanation of the changes can be made. He also spends an appreciable amount of time discussing the merits of Regulation theory, and the value of looking at the ideas of Fordism with respect to modes of regulation and legitimation, and post-Fordism as a new regime of accumulation. He argues the idea that there occurred a crisis of Fordism "provides valuable insights, and even more importantly, provides integrated and holistic analyses of recent changes in economy, class, ideology and polity" (1991:53) Nevertheless, he is careful not to associate himself with the New Times camp. He claims "the 'new times' perspective involves a vulgarisation of the more sophisticated variants of regulation theory" (ibid).

Mike O'Brien and Chris Wilkes' *Tragedy of the Market* (1993) gives a more *political* account of the changes in New Zealand in terms of the policy directions undertaken by the fourth Labour Government between 1984 and 1990. They use the actions of the Labour Government to describe the changes as the transitional phase between Fordism and post-Fordism. Fordism is characterised by focusing on four dimensions in particular, mass production, mass consumption, social democracy as administered by the Welfare State and full employment, and is said to be representative of New Zealand society until the late 1960s when a period of recession pre-empted the decline of Fordism, after which elements of 'post-Fordism' began to emerge (1993:14-15). In contrast to Fordism, flexible production and niche-market consumption have arisen in New Zealand encouraged by the Labour Government during the 1980s, and the consensus politics of Fordist social democracy has been eclipsed by a form of authoritarian politics.

As their use of the post-Fordist thesis is a way of contextualising the changes made by the fourth Labour Government, O'Brien and Wilkes assess post-Fordism specifically relating to the changes made by Labour which include the deregulation of the economy, the privatisation of the public sector the introduction of commercial logic to the state sector and the opening of the economy to international pressures as far as possible (1993:26-27). To a certain extent, this distracts from the purpose of using the concepts in the first place. Instead of rigorously analysing the validity of the terms, they are eager to apply them and define them, firstly to suit their own thesis, and as a consequence, without a fully considered theoretical assessment. Consequently, they are susceptible to criticism from both Regulationists for trying too hard to fit evidence to concepts, and from New Timers for restricting the definitions of Fordism and post-Fordism to a specific context.

A less 'conceptually' political analysis, but one which implies a basic adherence to the points noted by Roper's assessment of regulation theory is Bruce Jesson's account of the Fourth Labour Government in *Fragments of Labour* (1989). Jesson develops the concept of the "historic compromise" in accounting for the era preceding the turbulence of the 1980s. Jesson grounds his explanations in the historic developments of the post-war era, and sees the emergence of a new social formation as a result of the disintegration of the historic compromise.

Like James, Jesson concentrates to some extent on the 'micro' issues, such as the political persuasions of the personnel within the Labour Party, Treasury, and the Reserve Bank, and claims a significant amount of change which occurred was due to the political hijacking of the Labour Party by a group of middle class Aucklanders. Unlike Roper, Jesson prefers to concentrate on the 'social and cultural' changes as a reflection of other changes in the economy, and in so doing, pinpoints the effect of the challenge to social conservatism by the educated middle class, and the infiltration of free-market libertarian ideas in the finance community,

as examples of shifts which contributed to the decline of the historic compromise. While Jesson provides an insightful account of New Zealand's crisis, it is not a theoretically driven thesis and therefore does not explicitly highlight the structural changes that might indicate a resolution to the crisis of legitimacy. Nevertheless, Jesson's recognition of the influence of new social movements in the era of transition implies he is willing to acknowledge there are forces within the transformation that acted independently of class, and as a result now have considerable political power.

Finally, Paul Spoonley examines the value in using Regulation Theory and the New Times thesis to explain the impact of New Zealand's transformation with a special consideration for ethnicity, and ultimately finds a series of issues concerning racism and ethnicity that fall outside the existing coverage of Regulation theory and New Times. He claims these encompassing theories do not account for the historic disadvantage in the economy that Maori and Pacific Islanders in particular have experienced, and in general do "little to address the question of the racialisation of the labour market or to understand the particularities of the New Zealand situation" (1992:170).

Among the elements which are not explained by these theories are the oppositional nature of the flexible regime of accumulation to types of capitalism organised around clan/familial systems of regulation, mainly provided by women and significantly Maori and Pacific Islanders, and the fact that new ideologies based on free market principles exist "alongside the communalistic orientation embodied in iwi/whanau service delivery which still operate with basic notions of Welfare and community good" (1992:171). Probably the most important one with regards to New Zealand is the development among Maori of claims to 'economic rights' relating to grievances against the state's attitude to the settlement of Treaty claims.

As a result of these problems, Spoonley argues "The crises of New Zealand must

be separated from the general crises of fordism" (ibid). Furthermore, paramount to any discussion of new modes of regulation as an explanation for social change in New Zealand is the "position faced by an indigenous group which is negotiating a 'bicultural' option with the state" (ibid). Spoonley then, sees flaws in both the New Times argument and Regulation theory, adding force to the idea that New Zealand has a case that needs more theoretically-specific attention than perhaps others make out.

CONCLUSION

The preceding examination of the worthiness of the New Times project in relation to both Britain and New Zealand gives in most parts a damaging, or at least, sceptical critique of both the validity of the idea, and the intentions of its proponents. The common complaints revolve around the proposition that viewing contemporary society as purely post-Fordist is foreclosing a debate engineered specifically to construct instant political pay-offs. Additionally, there are major charges against the way New Times overlooks empirical evidence, as well as more complex and considered explanations of the nature of change in the past decades. Moreover, and especially concerning New Zealand, there is a lack of close assessment of social and economic change on regional and national levels. For the Regulationists in particular, New Times can not be taken seriously as it lacks any potential for the application of conceptual rigour.

In my view, many of these criticisms are sustainable, and rightly show the New Times project to be inadequately conceptualised, and its vision of society in the 1990s significantly misleading. Its celebration of the market through the concentration on consumption as a major site of political identification at the expense of more structurally determined forms of identity is just one assumption which is in my view made incorrectly. That said, the question must be raised,

"does New Times as a loose metaphor deserve a comprehensive and elaborate analysis in the first place?" My answer is perhaps surprisingly, yes.

While it would appear to be unsustainable as a solid researchable concept, New Times *does* highlight trends that cannot be ignored, and which remain inadequately grasped by standard explanatory strategies. Moreover, its totalising 'catch-all' conceptualisation does have a role in bringing wider changes to attention. Indeed, while an explanation of social change must in the last instance be derived from empirical evidence, "specific enquiries for their part leave us unable to generalise and make larger sense of human meaning (so) perhaps 'pop sociology' has its place after all" (McLennan 1993:7). This view is also echoed by Rustin, who despite his reservations outlined earlier, does show some favouritism towards the post-Fordist hypothesis implicating the New Times approach. For Rustin (1989:56-58), post-Fordism

is the nearest thing we have to a paradigm which can link widespread changes in forms of production to changes in class relations, state forms and individual identities... The value of this model is that it attempts a historical materialist explanation of the changes in the means of production and their consequences for class structures and ideological forms.

There are then, at least two reasons why the relevance of New Times to New Zealand is an idea worthy of further investigation. Firstly, in concurring with McLennan and Rustin, I believe there *is* a place for abstract concepts which refer to perceived changes as long as they are viewed in such a light.

Following what has been universally seen as a period of extensive economic and social change in New Zealand there has arisen much debate surrounding the way in which these changes should be articulated. Significantly, there has been virtually no support for a pure adoption of the New Times thesis. At the same time though, there is no consensus as to the most desirable level of theoretical abstraction. If

there is an overriding tendency amongst those analysing New Zealand's experience of change, it is to strongly underline the 'atypical' factors in New Zealand, which has meant commentators have been careful not to exaggerate the similarities between New Zealand and other advanced nations. While this shouldn't be seen as a strategic fault, the wider picture is to some extent neglected. Roper, one of those who appears to defy this trend, cautions against an over exaggeration of differences by reminding us of the inherent tendencies of capitalist economies which are shared throughout all the advanced nations (1991:47). Similarly Kelsey argues that when assessing New Zealand's position in the world economy, our uniqueness shouldn't be over-stressed, as we are essentially also just another western democracy (1994:173).

Secondly, *New Times* highlights the rise in interest of 'identity politics' and provides a platform for an analysis of its appropriateness. While the move towards identity politics has been seen as detrimental in several of the critiques above, the idea remains a pertinent one in the 1990s, not least because of the wealth of attention it has been given, both politically and conceptually. Indeed, despite the way in which commentators on New Zealand's transformation have tended to side step comparisons with *New Times*, ironically, there appears to be an abundance of writing dedicated to the 'politics of difference' as it is increasingly believed that the most critical sites of contemporary social unrest and debate in New Zealand involve a politics based on identity.

CHAPTER TWO

A TRANSFORMED ECONOMY

INTRODUCTION

The idea of a transformation at the level of the economy is central to the New Times thesis. It is argued that a conspicuous transition occurred during the 1970s and 1980s referred to as a shift away from 'Fordism', centred around mass production, mass consumption and economies of scale, towards 'post-Fordism', based on 'economies of scope', characterised by the flexible use of technology and labour. And instead of mass production, the New Times thesis posits 'flexible specialisation' based on the application of computer technology to all stages of the productive process, as the style of production most suited to the new environment.

Flexible specialisation also represents more than the use of new forms of technology in the production of goods and services. It denotes a new style of work organisation, and encapsulates widespread changes in methods and attitudes towards industrial relations and the labour market. Additionally, these changes are not just specific to manufacturing. Flexible specialisation can be seen to have infiltrated the organisational methods of financial markets and the retail industry, as well as public services. Subsequently, this age of information technology is shaping new environments of work where former lines of demarcation such as those between blue and white collar are breaking down, and being replaced by divisions between a core of highly skilled professional workers with flexible skills, and a secondary labour market made up of low wage, low skill, and in many cases, part-time workers (Hall and Jaques 1990:33).

This chapter is concerned firstly with outlining the changes in production, work organisation and in the labour economy that have supposedly been adopted by different firms, and secondly, providing an analysis of the extent to which these changes have been experienced in New Zealand, and the degree to which firms in New Zealand have moved towards embracing methods of flexible specialisation.

PRODUCTION

The New Times thesis argues the most fundamental changes to have occurred at the level of the economy are those in the sphere of production, where a distinct move away from the technology and organisational principles of mass production is identified, with a corresponding shift towards a system based on flexible production.

According to Crook et al (1994:40), mass production was based on two intrinsic principles. The first one was the larger the scale of production, the greater the return on investment, which accounted for the idea that economies of scale were unquestionably the most efficient way to manufacture goods. Secondly, it was believed that "the greater the extent to which human skills were replaced by technology, the greater the return". As a result, it was unequivocally viewed that the less worker input into the production process, and the more technology that was employed, the more efficient the operation would become. These principles were responsible for the intensified levels of mechanisation and the large industrial production sites, which created standardised product lines, for a standardised market.

As a way of characterising the practical consequences of mass production, the term Just-In-Case (JIC) has been used. The term is a recognition of the major assumptions behind the perceived efficiency of mass production, where goods were manufactured regardless of immediate demand. The term refers to the rigid levels of machinery, the necessarily long-run waves of production, and the large inventories and buffer stocks which this system of production created. It also meant the use of specific types of quality control, where the monitoring of 'quality' was checked at the completion of the production process.

While this system thrived in the post-war era, helped by supporting measures taken to maintain levels of consumption by the state, the philosophy of mass production was seriously challenged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Amongst other things, rapid increases in inflation; instability in exchange rates; and the decline in ascendancy of European and American manufactured goods helped to diminish the effectiveness of mass production (Mathews 1989:29–30). This culminated in the saturation of goods on domestic markets as demand dropped which could not be maintained. The fundamental principles upon which Fordist mass production was based, such as the standardisation of goods, and the neglect of market signals to foresee future levels of demand, proved inadequate to deal with the impending crisis.

Sayer and Walker (1992:167) argue that mass production was unable to respond to market changes due to the uniformity and standardisation of production. They stress that strategic planning was forgone in a system based on a principle of "learning-by-doing". Other major problems associated with JIC included high costs of storage and the monitoring of buffer stocks. Additionally, it was increasingly found that the procedure for quality control in JIC systems was wasteful of both time and resources. In summary, the multiple levels of specialisation that were entered into, and the strict degree of demarcation in the stages of production, created a crippling bureaucratic system of control that necessarily entailed a high degree of rigidity and inflexibility in the production process.

Initially, the responses to Fordism and the crisis of mass production were positions of compromise, often labelled 'neo-Fordist', which described efforts to improve the efficiency of systems of mass production. Firstly, there was an attempt to retain the system of mass production, but at the same time internationalise operations by locating sites of production off-shore in countries where sources of labour were cheaper. Another effort to improve efficiency was to abandon some of the

principles of the Fordist production process, such as the standardisation of goods in order to become more flexible in product output, but retain the Fordist apparatus of work organisation with low skilled workers. These measures did not solve the problems to any marked degree because firstly, the minimalisation of costs was only *part* of the problem, and secondly, product innovation necessarily requires a skilled workforce which was not a feature of Fordist production systems (Mathews 1989:31–33).

Since these initial efforts to adapt proved unsuccessful, a brand of *post*-Fordist principles emerged which have categorically abandoned the tenets of mass production. Post-Fordist production techniques are based around the idea that the best returns are achieved through the ability to respond quickly to the market, and as opposed to Fordist production, greater success through ongoing innovative development is more possible with human, as opposed to technological inputs (Crook et al 1994:40). Consequently, the emphasis is placed on short-run batch production with the use of machinery that is quickly reoriented towards alternative product lines depending on market demand, and technology which has been adjusted to allow for maximum levels of human creativity.

As opposed to JIC, the new system of production is referred to as Just-In-Time (JIT). The most obvious difference is that while JIC systems mass produced goods to 'create demand', JIT systems manufacture products as the market requires them. This principle means that the costs of retaining buffer stocks to protect against machinery failure, and the costs of wastage through quality control at the end of production line are minimalised.

As a result, flexibility has become the salient feature of the post-Fordist production system. *Flexible technology* has been achieved through the increasing use of 'soft' automation which allows computers to control machine operations, replacing 'hard' automation of Fordist-type production (Crook et al 1994:181). Secondly, firms

using *flexible organisation* have replaced market-oriented firms concerned with cost and revenue, minimising wages, and maximising immediate profit. Finally, JIT involves 'total quality control' (TQC) which is based on a statistical control of quality at all stages of production as opposed to checking the final product as a way of eliminating mistakes. All these new principles are seen as antidotes to the hard, inflexible procedures of Fordist style production.

WORK ORGANISATION

While New Times represents a major transformation in methods of production through the use of new technology and new practices of management, there has also been an equally significant transformation in the realm of work organisation, both in the way workers relate to their work and the type of skills that are required. The key differences between Fordist and post-Fordist systems of work organisation are located in task specialisation and job demarcation, and the level of responsibility demanded of the worker.

As has been shown, Fordist mass production was associated with a system of assembly-line production where each stage of manufacturing a product was broken up into tasks as small as possible. In this system, the workers were compelled to perform highly specialised jobs that necessitated minimal skills, and were given little responsibility as far as quality control was concerned. Demarcation between jobs was also high, as workers were only likely to be trained to use the one particular skill that was needed to carry out their part in the production process.

This type of work organisation put in place to meet the requirements of mass production was influenced by Frederick Taylor, who believed that to create maximum economic efficiency, and therefore maximum profits, employers had to be able to have total control over labour, and to do this they had to create jobs that

were repetitive and required low skill. This type of labour management subsequently came to be known as 'Taylorism'. The application of scientific management in the workplace did however create significant problems, including the difficulties in maintaining a loyal and devoted work force towards the tedious and alienating type of work mass production involved.

While the workers found Taylorist practices unrewarding, it was management who ultimately discovered that the supposed efficiency this type of work organisation offered was often false economy, as the uncooperative conditions that were created between management and workers meant a unified approach could not be achieved. For example, the administrative problems associated with Taylorism such as the high levels of demarcation in job description created a bureaucracy that needed maintaining at a substantial cost (Crook et al 1994:168). Instead of efficiency, it was found that Fordist principles of work organisation were in many respects economically wasteful.

Strict levels of job demarcation inhibited restructuring, and equally importantly, stifled efforts of product innovation because workers were not trained to deal with changing production methods. Ironically, one of the other major criticisms levelled at Taylorist practices is that labour was under-utilised as opposed to maximised, because the restriction to one small task prevented workers from using their abilities in other fields. The de-skilled nature of the work inhibited them from contributing to innovative work methods and product development (Crook et al 1994:169).

As a way of addressing these problems, a new set of principles of work organisation have been developed to match the introduction of new flexible forms of manufacturing technology. Consequently, 'post-Fordist' work organisation can be seen as the antithesis to the forms of organisation influenced by Taylorism. Mathews (1989:108) outlines the major changes as those including the shift to a

horizontal integration of tasks as opposed to a vertical one; increased levels of responsibility placed with the workers including multi-skilling; the decentralisation of decision making to include worker input; and supervision to be shared between workers instead of having a specified division between workers and supervisors. These measures are determined essential if the use of new technology in the production process is to be maximised. Workers must become multi-skilled in order to understand and relate to all spheres of the production system. Not only must multi-skilling be a necessary requisite for workers, but they must also undertake more responsibility for quality control and supervision.

The gap between management's role in decision making and the workers role as 'cogs in a machine' is drastically reduced, as workers are called upon to contribute to the decision making process. By taking on broad-based job categories, being involved in group skilling, and taking part in extensive on-the-job training, the problems previously associated with work organisation can be eliminated (Mathews 1989:112). Furthermore the requirements of workers are designed to enhance loyalty to the job, and provide more motivation to work harder and longer. Post-Fordist forms of work organisation then, offer a potentially closer relationship between workers and management and a consultative process of decision making bringing an end to the old divisions in the workplace.

LABOUR ECONOMY

As a consequence of a change in the organisation of work, there has been a simultaneous shift in the power relations between employers and workers. Most significantly the decline of job demarcation and the shift towards a more horizontal integration of tasks in the workplace has left unions without a clearly defined constituency. As the industrial sites that manufactured mass produced goods are disappearing, leaving workers dispersed in smaller firms with less demarcated jobs,

it has become harder for unions to unify and mobilise workers. Also as a result of the changing nature of work, the structure of the labour market has gone through a substantial transition in response to the flexibility required by new forms of technology in the production process.

In Fordism, the relationship between employers and workers was a highly formalised one, based on strict rules of negotiation and time honoured procedures of etiquette. The working conditions of employees were organised collectively by unions, and workers were treated collectively by employers. Among the major features of Fordist employment contracts were the centrality of money wage rates with payments by tasks performed; narrow definitions of job categories; disputes settled through a grievance procedure; the lack of a skill-based career path; and the promotion by seniority (Mathews 1989:140).

The conditions of these understandings that prevailed in Fordism suited the needs of mass production where differentiation between workers was minimal. However, as skill levels have become more important in moves towards post-Fordist production, and a more flexible labour force is required, homogeneous work agreements have in many cases become unsuitable. Consequently, the 'employment contract' has been remodelled to suit new forms of production and work organisation which stress co-operation, and co-determination. These contracts allow employers to use workers in more flexible conditions, and give workers more autonomous, and responsible roles in the running of the production process. Subsequently, the post-Fordist employment contract promotes a new found coordination that supports technological change, multi- and group-skilling, and wage systems linked with skill and group remuneration (Mathews 1989:148). Additionally, post-Fordist employment contracts structure wage distribution according to the actual worker, rather than the job the worker does, which allows the achievements of the worker to be judged individually, receiving more recognition for personal input.

The representation of workers by trade unions in post-Fordist industrial relations has naturally undergone a radical change. As job demarcation in many workplaces has disappeared, it has become more appropriate for only one union to represent all workers on one particular site, as opposed to multiple unions who represented workers defined by their particular skill or trade. Not only have unions been forced to adapt due to the changing job descriptions of workers, but also to the new environment which sees the relationship between employers and employees less demarcated. Instead of the hostility between unions and management, unions are being seen as necessary team players in the strategic planning of a firm's activities.

The second area of the labour economy to undergo reform has been the 'labour market', where an environment of regulation has given way to one where market forces are of greater importance in determining employment levels. In Fordist companies using Taylorist work practices, a large, homogeneous, semi-skilled labour force was required where there was little differentiation on the basis of skill. Age and length of service within a firm was likely to be the main difference between conditions and levels of remuneration. In a post-Fordist setting, a 'dual-labour market' has become obvious, with a clear division between types of work, which has occurred due to the requirements of labour market flexibility.

The major features of this post-Fordist labour market include the emergence of a 'core', or 'primary' sector, made up of workers with full-time and permanent jobs who have guaranteed job security. This group represents the core labour force largely because they meet the flexible needs of post-Fordist production. They are likely to be multi-skilled, or able to be re-skilled quickly, geographically mobile, and as they provide the most desired skills of the labour force, they are rewarded with high wages and other financial provisions.

Secondly, there is the 'peripheral' labour market which is split into two groups. The first peripheral group provide a supply of support staff which include jobs such as

clerical and secretarial work. These workers are also full-time, but as the work is often routinised with few career prospects there is likely to be a relatively high turnover of staff. The second peripheral group provides a market of part-time workers and workers that are not permanently employed, and offers a labour reserve for fluctuations in the market. This pool of workers are hired on short term contracts or sub-contracted to provide labour shortages. This group is also disproportionately made up of women, the old, and racial minorities, who share a distinct lack of employment security (Harvey 1989:150–151).

With this dual-labour market comes different types of flexibility. Firstly *numerical* flexibility is a way for employers to adjust the actual amount of labour employed and its mix of skills and qualifications according to market demand. It is also the type of flexibility that creates and preserves the existence of the secondary labour market, or 'reserve army of labour'. Secondly, *functional* flexibility accounts for the need for workers to become multi-skilled and to cope with task integration. This form of flexibility is applicable to the core group, and mostly associated with leading technology industries.

As a result of this growing segmentation of the labour force, the traditional groups of workers unified in Fordism are fragmenting. The working class for example, relatively homogeneous in their skill base and working expectations are according to Kern and Schumann (1987:165), likely to split into four groups. They include the modern skilled production workers; the older primary sector workers whose protections stay in place; those made redundant by the rationalisation process; and the long-term unemployed whose situation is made worse by demands for formal qualifications.

It is not only traditional class divisions that are being challenged and re-organised through the labour market though. Gender differences in work are also becoming more clear cut. Harvey points out that while there are women who exist in the core

labour market, the new system of industrial organisation is in many cases making it easier to exploit women. The re-emergence of domestic, familial, and paternalistic systems are being rejuvenated, as a considerable amount of work is taken up by outwork, home-working, and other forms of sub-contracting. The revival of paternalistic and patriarchal home-working systems means women are far easier to exploit, as they are unlikely to have access to organised protection against exploitation (Harvey 1989:152-153).

In summary, Crook et al (1994:188-193) provide a landscape of the new labour market, taking into account the emergence of the dual-labour market in post-Fordist production systems. They argue an increasing importance is placed on a core sector of the workforce who have become professionalised, and their skills more important in the ability of firms to retain their market share. Secondly, middle management has been down-sized in many spheres, as the role of supervision is no longer considered a stand alone occupation. Specialised services in this field are now contracted out. There has subsequently arisen a wave of professional and technical firms operating for a fee-for-service basis. Finally, from a broader perspective, there is now a clearer differentiation between specialist craft-work shops producing 'niche' goods employing labour on a contractual basis, and labour-intensive sweatshops employing secondary labour market reserves on an insecure basis.

POST-FORDISM IN NEW ZEALAND

The experience that New Zealand has had of the type of economic transformation outlined in New Times is closely associated with the economic reforms carried out by the fourth Labour Government in the 1980s, which were similar to those reforms carried out under Thatcherism in Britain. These reforms, often summarised as the 'deregulation of the economy' were an attempt to bring about an injection

of 'economic efficiency', something that was considered overdue given the increasingly ineffective system of economic management that had been in place in the previous decades. It has been argued that this programme of deregulation was the beginning of New Zealand's shift towards a post-Fordist economy – one based on the production of high quality goods, enhanced by the employment of flexible production techniques, the elimination of deeply engrained levels of bureaucracy, and the implementation of a streamlined system of work organisation.⁵ Also deemed important in developing a rejuvenated economy in New Zealand was the creation of flexibility in the labour market, and this recognition pre-empted the disposal of highly regulated industrial relations procedures.

Among the economic reforms that the fourth Labour Government introduced to create the new climate were the removal of extensive controls on prices, the removal of state-regulated monopoly rights, the reduction and phasing out of import licensing and import tariffs, the removal of export subsidies, the removal of special protection for specific sectors, and the floating of the dollar (Campbell-Hunt et al 1993:22). However, while all these legislative procedures were institutionalised in a relatively short space of time, there is no evidence that a major abandonment of old style productive practices has occurred and been supplanted by techniques associated with flexible specialisation. Not only that, but there is limited evidence to suggest that firms at the 'leading edge' of production have adopted procedures such as JIT, TQC, and numerical and functional flexibility. A reoccurring trend shows that firms do not generally consider the tenets of flexible specialisation particularly profitable to them, nor to the New Zealand economy as a whole.

⁵ see O'Brien, M. and Wilkes, C. (1993), and James, C. (1992).

FROM DEFENSIVE PRACTICES TO INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES ?

Up until the economic restructuring during the 1980s, there was little incentive to look at improving methods of production in New Zealand as internal markets were heavily protected from overseas competition. This meant domestic producers could rely on guaranteed trading conditions which offered a relatively stable economic environment, and no real encouragement to change. As a result, the main goal of most firms was to 'defend' their position rather than search for new markets. Following the period of economic restructuring however, this protection that local producers had enjoyed was removed, exposing them to a more competitive environment.

The implementation of these measures aimed at enhancing competition had a direct impact on the context in which New Zealand firms operated. Deregulation essentially gave New Zealand firms the impetus to change from a 'defensive' mind set to a 'dynamic' and forward thinking one, where major changes in attitudes of management were anticipated along with a shift towards Just-In-Time production. Nevertheless, recent research shows that for a number of reasons the expectation of a widespread adoption of flexible specialisation has not been realised.

Most of the empirical research concerning the extent of changes in production in New Zealand has centred around change in management practices. Changes in production are often considered to be a result of transformations in the attitudes of management, and as has been obvious in attempts to assess reasons for why changes in production have not occurred in New Zealand, major studies in management practices have been undertaken to provide the answers. Of those studies, the most comprehensive one has come from Campbell-Hunt et al (1993), who summarise all the significant studies of management practices since the onset

of deregulation. Significantly, they conclude that only a small group of firms have made an adjustment to new production practices with the help of economic deregulation, while the significant majority have in most instances retained the same or similar techniques that were deemed appropriate *prior* to deregulation.

One of the most significant findings was that many managers do in fact believe a move towards Japanese methods of production could well be advantageous in the current economic climate, however, ultimately they consider there to be too many factors that would count against such a shift. This finding is evidenced in several dimensions of management activity, firstly regarding attitudes to research and development, and the implementation of new technology. While the majority of managers believe in long-term strategic investment into research and development and technological innovation, Campbell-Hunt et al (1993:51) found that very few have actually put these ideas into practice. This has been shown in how research and development is categorised by firms. Two surveys are quoted that show 58 per cent and 60 per cent of firms consider research and development as an expense as opposed to 19 per cent and 25 per cent as investment.

Secondly, as has been stated by numerous commentators, a unique feature of New Zealand's economy is the moderate level of total production due to New Zealand's relatively small internal market. Perry et al (1995:256) argue that lower production volumes make it harder to maintain concerted pressure for continuous improvement in production. The intensity of production and competition in Japanese companies is a crucial factor in contributing to the continual effort of improving their JIT style of production. However, the size of New Zealand's domestic market has never allowed for the same degree of output, and hence the lack of intense competition does not provide the same level of encouragement as does for Japanese firms.

Thirdly, there is a strong tendency for New Zealand firms to make sure their products are 'price competitive', rather than worry about whether their methods of

production are the most innovative or whether they are employing production strategies that are seen to be more efficient elsewhere in the world. For example, in Japan, rapid design changes are seen as critical indicators of efficient production, while in Korea it is the rapid introduction of new products (Perry et al 1995:42). Consequently, as New Zealand firms are primarily concerned with low costs as their main competitive strategy, ensuring financial survival is seen as the most important task. Harper (1994:2) cites this focus on cost-efficiency to support the assumption that the average practice of New Zealand managers is still consistent with a management style suited to a 'stable' rather than a 'dynamic' environment.

A further hindrance to inventive management methods is the lack of skills possessed by New Zealand managers. Campbell-Hunt et al 1993:3) quote a study called the "World Competitiveness Report" which shows New Zealand management to be very poorly skilled compared to other OECD countries. Among the areas New Zealand was considered worst in were management development, corporate performance, and business efficiency. This implies that the training for managers is inadequate, and that lack of training is having an adverse effect on New Zealand firms' ability to succeed with new forms of production. A study by McMorland (1987) found the training policy of the firms examined had a poor link to strategy. Only 10 out of 72 firms derived training policy from strategic plans and only 21 from business plans (Campbell-Hunt et al 1993:67). This lack of training for managers means that any firm considering the implementation of methods such as JIT must be aware that management are unlikely to be conversant with the techniques required. Moreover, Bayly (1990:118) found the most inhibitive feature of New Zealand management adopting JIT techniques was the widespread lack of understanding about its implications and what it actually meant.

There have also been findings to suggest that firms have not taken to Japanese methods such as JIT because they are not perceived to be suitable to New Zealand business culture. Harper (1994:80) quotes a Japanese manager who suggests that

for JIT to succeed in New Zealand, "greater flexibility, greater acceptance of group responsibility, greater emphasis upon cost reduction and better training are cultural changes which need to be bought about before JIT production methods can be applied more generally in New Zealand".

On a similar level, it is argued that the customer environment does not appear to be particularly receptive to change, which is essential if methods like JIT are to be introduced successfully. If firms are unable to rely on customer loyalty and notably supplier loyalty, then the integration of certain methods become problematic. A majority of firms believed that in New Zealand there is still too much willingness to shop around for the cheapest deal rather than enter into strategic contracts for the supply of materials and the distribution of goods (Perry et al 1995:259). Once again, this highlights New Zealand's continued emphasis on cost as being the most important factor in business transactions, a factor which does not assume priority under the systems of JIT.

One element of Japanese management practice that *has* received attention and consequential endorsement in New Zealand firms is 'quality control'. Corbett's (1990) study of manufacturing strategies found that the ability to provide products with low defect rates was the most important competitive attribute for the future of business (Perry et al 1995:5). Campbell-Hunt et al also note that of those Japanese business practices evident in New Zealand, quality strategies are the most widely adopted practices. However, Harper concludes that a significant reason for the relative successful implication of techniques such as TQC is because they are more 'culturally neutral'. More importantly though, Campbell, Bollard, and Savage (1989) adjudged over half of the firms who had employed quality strategies in New Zealand had begun them *prior* to deregulation (Campbell-Hunt et al 1993:55). This perhaps suggests that the implementation of a deregulated economy has not necessarily been the key to improving New Zealand's production standards, as has often been assumed.

Ultimately, Campbell–Hunt et al revealed there to be a marked difference in attitude between firms who are at the leading edge of change in management practices and those that have not adapted to dynamic–environment management styles (1993:35). In summary, there are three significant problems that have arisen which explain why methods such as JIT have not been adopted in New Zealand to the degree that may have been expected. Firstly, it seems that the confidence of New Zealand firms is not at a level that allows them to consider investing time into future business strategies. The New Zealand economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s has not created the stability to encourage firms to think of research and development and product innovation beyond competition of price alone. Secondly, it is evident that JIT is only suitable to a certain type of firm in New Zealand. Typically they are involved in export oriented production, and are competing with overseas companies who have adopted similar methods of production. These firms must also operate in an environment where their style of production is respected and acknowledged by their suppliers and distribution outlets. Finally, where Japanese production techniques *have* infiltrated New Zealand firms, they have been in areas that have required limited financial and cultural investment such as quality control, but significantly, do not represent a comprehensive shift in the organisation of production.

FROM MANAGEMENT CONTROL TO WORKPLACE COOPERATION ?

The anticipated changes in methods of production following deregulation in New Zealand were also presumed to carry through into changes in work organisation, for to be successful, it was perceived a transformation in work organisation would necessarily accompany changes in production. In the recent past it has been widely accepted from both employers and workers that reform was necessary to both improve productivity through more flexible working arrangements, and to provide

more recognition of workers potential skills. Yet despite the perceived need for change, work reform in New Zealand has only occurred in selective firms and there is still much resistance to any further and wider change, due to the reluctance of individual firms, some worker organisations, and also significantly an unwillingness on behalf of the government to facilitate measures to encourage workplace reform.

The most comprehensive study of workplace reform in New Zealand has been made by Perry et al (1995) who use the case study method to illustrate the type of reforms that have been undertaken to date. The use of the case study method does have significant problems however, especially for the purposes of assessing the degree to which reforms have been undertaken throughout *all* New Zealand firms, as it does not represent a *national* consideration of workplace change. The authors freely admit the use of case studies was considered necessary as workplace reform in New Zealand is still limited to a small number of organisations. This supports the assumption that in New Zealand, there has only been certain types of industries and firms, rather than the economy as a whole which have adopted post-Fordist forms of work organisation. Given this recognition, it is necessary to consider why reform has not been a universal phenomenon.

Firstly, as mentioned in relation to the changes in production, the attitudes of management towards change are not consistent with positions needed to instigate workplace reforms. Management in New Zealand do not seem to be prepared to concede the necessity for worker participation in decision making, and multi-skilling of the workforce as a pre-requisite for successful reform. While management generally understand the importance of improved communications and employee participation, actual management practice in New Zealand is still more reminiscent of a 'machine bureaucracy' that maintains strong management control over workers (Campbell-Hunt 1993:17). Corbett (1990) for example disclosed that two thirds of business people below middle management neither understand nor share their organisations goals and objectives, which does not indicate evidence of

the co-operative environment needed to implement workplace change (cited in Perry et al 1995:7).

A second major problem is that the skills needed to both implement workplace reform, and to manage and maintain it are not evident or being pursued. Page and Wilson (1994:64) discovered that New Zealand managers still abide by very traditional approaches to management with the most important skills seen to be "direction, supervision, and control of personnel". Furthermore, when difficulties arose in the workplace the most common resolution was found to be 'ruthless' and 'hard-nosed' attitudes, which emphasised the gap between management and workers (ibid). Training for workers to extend their skills is also not prevalent. Some expansion in training schemes can be seen for multiple job responsibilities, yet the main concern for employers here seems to be that it "provides greater flexibility in labour deployment rather than as a way of enriching work" (Perry et al 1995:256). Perry et al argue that any reform that has occurred in an attempt to train multi-skilled workers "has been dominated by a narrow focus on matching training outcomes more closely to industries' immediate work requirements" (1995:258). Successful adaption of post-Fordist work organisation will only eventuate when workers have skills which are multi-functional throughout industries, not just to one particular firm.

A third reason preventing New Zealand firms from adopting workplace reform has been the lack of serious consideration for human resource management. Perry et al (1995:268) discovered that while firms may be adopting Japanese manufacturing practices, there is less commitment to putting in place comprehensive, Japanese-style human resource policies. In the New Zealand cases, "the relative lack of human resource management policies commensurate with the increased flexibility and commitment expected from workforces is a limitation of current achievements not just felt by production workers". Furthermore, both Baird and Savage (1990) and Harper and Malcolm (1991) found human resource management receiving very

little attention. Their respective studies found that "labour relations staff training and personnel policies were at the bottom of the heap in terms of areas of improvement in management and operations" (Campbell-Hunt 1993:67).

Fourthly, it is obvious that workplace reform needs more than favourable national economic conditions for reform to be induced. While deregulation had an effect on all spheres of the New Zealand economy, none of the eight firms in Perry et al's case studies claimed the main incentive to initiate workplace reform was due to favourable economic and legislative conditions. At best, reform was carried out derived from more general changes in the economy. Instead, the reasons for change varied from market growth of particular products, the availability of new technology, shifting consumer demands and the collapse of domestic demand (Perry et al 1995:64). Nor did any of the firms studied attribute their primary reason for change to a realisation that new methods of work reform would bring about distinct economic benefits or improved relations between management and workers. Additionally, of the eight firms studied, only three were New Zealand owned, and of the five firms with overseas ownership, there was considerable overseas influence in various forms towards the type of work organisation that should be pursued. This indicates even further disassociation from the influence of the particular style of economy operating in New Zealand on firms intentions of reform.

Finally, the hindrance to workplace reform in New Zealand is accentuated by the lack of institutional and legal backing from the government. In successfully reformed economies such as Germany, there has been a strong role played by the government in promoting and fostering such reform. By contrast, the economic policy of successive New Zealand governments has been that government has no direct role to play; their job is to provide the freedom for firms to promote their own system of work organisation and leave it up to firms to decide the merits of making change in the workplace. Clearly this is not adequate for such reform to

take place. Perry et al (1995:270) argue the German economy in particular has succeeded because there is a "high level of co-operative behaviour between government and business, among businesses and between management and workers". They also argue Germany has a strong skill-based workforce because the institutional and political environment is supportive of high levels of vocational training. This is in marked contrast to current thinking in New Zealand which is at best concerned with simply supplying current skills demands (ibid). Most significantly, workplace reform in Germany is a result of co-determination and a corporatist system of vocational training. New Zealand has in recent times moved away from these measures. Instead, a narrow conception of workplace flexibility has been institutionalised which sees employers freedom to hire and fire workers as a strength of successful workplace policy (ibid).

In summary, the lack of institutional provision for a highly educated workforce and broad ongoing training schemes are preventing the growth of post-Fordist work organisation in New Zealand. Investigations into workplace organisation in New Zealand shows that there is still a low use of skilled labour, and that skill development is limited to immediate job requirements. Job content continues to be restricted by limited skills and low levels of training, and where job roles are expanded, the target is increased deployment flexibility (Perry et al 1995:257).

FROM LABOUR FORCE UNIFORMITY TO EMPLOYMENT FLEXIBILITY ?

Before 1991, New Zealand's industrial relations had been based on the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act (ICA) instigated in 1897 which regulated the environment in which labour relations were managed. When this system was partially replaced in the 1980s and finally supplanted in 1991 with the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act (ECA) it was assumed that what was being

eliminated were the remnants of a Fordist-type labour economy, and in its place was emerging one with significant post-Fordist characteristics. Nevertheless, while the conditions for this were legislatively created, the incentives to generate a more cooperative and productive labour market have essentially not been taken up. What has occurred instead is the end of union representation for many workers, and the use of the new legislation by employers to simply cut costs rather than adopt more strategic employment policies.

An assumption of post-Fordist labour relations is that the rigidities in Fordist labour relations are removed to allow workers and employers more autonomy in their work arrangements. Yet the effect of the remodelled labour legislation in New Zealand has not been equally beneficial to both employers and workers in the employment relationship. The legislation introduced by the National Government in the form of the ECA essentially re-drew the balance of power firmly in favour of the employers who were basically given the opportunity to hire and fire at will. For workers, the most significant loss was the ability to demand collective nationwide agreements or to strike for multi-employer contracts. Consequently, the overall coverage of collective bargaining in New Zealand declined from 721 000 employees in May 1991 to approximately 370 000 in May 1994, a decline of between 40 and 50 per cent (Hince and Harbridge 1994:237).

Douglas (1993) argues that the loss of collective bargaining in New Zealand is ultimately unhelpful to both employers and employees. Moreover, he asserts the ECA is not the sort of legislation that will provide a more cooperative environment, or more importantly, help build a thriving economy; rather it assumes an inherently high level of mistrust and dissension between employers and workers. As has been shown, successful economies employing 'post-Fordist' measures which include decentralised labour relations, have at the same time strong ties and an understanding between both groups. In contrast, the ECA is a conflict model of industrial relations rather than a conciliatory one. The argument Douglas puts

forward insinuates that rather than helping to create a new cooperative environment, the ECA has placed an emphasis on traditional measures such as cost cutting as opposed to investing in skills development. Rather than focus its attention at industry level where technology, skills, and marketing development are achieved, and competitiveness is ultimately reached, labour relations are now based on the immediate demands of the individual enterprise (Hince and Harbridge 1994:198).

Not surprisingly, as a result of the Employment Contracts Act (1991), and to a considerable extent the Labour Relations Act (1987) before, the influence of trade unions in New Zealand labour relations has severely diminished. While this was expected in the transition to a post-Fordist labour economy it was anticipated new style unions would emerge based around a particular enterprise, where a single union represents the workers in one firm instead of around a particular industry representing masses of homogeneous workers performing the same task or skill. Nonetheless, a pattern of enterprise-based, particularly company-based unionism has not emerged to any noticeable extent despite the philosophic provision in the legislation (Hince and Harbridge 1994:240). What *has* happened is that the old unions have seriously collapsed leaving a large part of the workforce without any form of representation.

While much can be explained by legislation changes, part of an interpretation for the massive decline in unionism can be attributed to the wider economic changes in the 1980s, as the industries that were the hardest as a result of deregulation were ones where unionism was strong. The manufacturing industry for example lost up to 200 000 jobs from economic restructuring and with it a considerable degree of union membership. By contrast, any re-growth in the economy has come through traditionally non-union industries with unconventional working arrangements, such as outworking and contracting.

The fate of unionism is made particularly clear by the total drop in the number of unions, and their aggregate membership. Between 1986 and 1991 the number of unions declined from 253 to 80. In 1991 the ECA ended compulsory unionism, and abandoned registration of unions. In 1992 the number of unions in New Zealand had declined to 58 (Hince and Harbridge 1994:239). As of 1995 only a quarter of all workers belonged to a union. In December 1994, 375 906 belonged to a union, down from 409 112 in 1993 and 603 118 in 1991 (*Evening Post* 15/7/95).

There are a few examples where post-Fordist trends in the economy have been recognised successfully by unions. A notable exception to the decline in unionism for instance is the rise in strength of the Engineers Union who recognised the need for change in 1988 well before the introduction of the ECA when they began to negotiate awards with more flexibility. The Engineers Union claim that their relatively stronger position now is because they acknowledge that in the new environment the way forward is to work alongside employers rather than against them. This attitude is also endorsed by the Council of Trade Unions but significantly, it has not received widespread appeal. This was made particularly apparent by the emergence of an alternative 'Trade Union Federation' in 1993 who represents some of the old, manual worker unions. Several of the TUF unions are opposed to the tactics of the Engineers Union in particular, accusing them of acting on behalf of management instead of the workers. This shows that while some unions acknowledge there has been change in the labour economy that requires changes in union tactics, there is still an element that believe more traditional forms of representation are still appropriate.

While changes in labour legislation do not appear to have inflicted a universal transformation towards a fairer and more individually representative set of employment relations, there are indications that the new legislation along with other economic changes have considerably altered the shape of the labour market. There is a widely held contention for example, that a shift to a 'core-periphery'

type segmented labour market has resulted in New Zealand from wider economic reforms.

Brosnan and Wilson (1989) argue the economic restructuring of the fourth Labour Government in the 1980s had a big impact on the labour market where major changes have occurred in different employment sectors. For example, there was the massive decline in manufacturing, down 19.6 per cent between 1986 and 1991, and building and construction down 22.4 per cent for the same period, which had traditionally provided work for low-skilled males. Equally indicative was the corresponding rise in finance and retail work, up 20.1 per cent which provided work for those with quite different skills, and which also tended to be relatively more female oriented (Anderson et al 1994:508). Additional to changes in the degree of employment opportunities by gender, a major division was drawn in the labour force by ethnicity, particularly following the decline in manufacturing. 32 per cent of Maori and 60 per cent of the Pacific Island workforce had been involved in manufacturing work (Brosnan and Wilson 1989:49). These changes have helped to create a widening gap between a skilled labour-force and a semi-skilled one, where the former have more chance of finding work in a growing industry, while the latter's work prospects have significantly diminished.

Changes in the labour market are further illustrated when considering the effect of changes in the labour legislation. The ICA largely prevented the possibility of a dual-labour market, as the wages of the lowest paid were set on the basis of need, and a system of wage differentials was maintained based on notions of union strength, training, and job security. This limited the extent of variation in wages and conditions of employment between tiers of the labour market. There was a hierarchy of jobs, but it was more a result of social status and bargaining power of the workers performing different jobs than the emergence of a dual-labour strategy (Brosnan and Wilson 1989:52).

Since the 1980s and the introduction of legislation promoting labour flexibility, divergences between different sections of the labour market have become more obvious. For example, women have been hit particularly hard by the ECA as women's labour is predominantly located in the secondary 'periphery' sector where union protection has declined. As women have traditionally been marginalised into service, part-time and domestic work, they have been losers in the realignment of power in labour relations (Sayers 1993:215). Similarly, as has been mentioned, a high proportion of Maori and Pacific Islanders are traditionally located in low-skilled jobs where employment conditions have worsened.

While these developments offer a fairly close resemblance to a post-Fordist account of the future structure of the labour-market, the anticipation that labour market reform would be *strategic* has not been proven. In fact, the only evidence available on whether there has been such a transformation in long-term labour policy has shown there has been *no* real change. In a 1991 survey of employers attitudes to flexibility in the labour market, Anderson et al (1994:491) showed that the "pursuit of flexibility was not part of an unrelenting drive to achieve new forms of work, but was in general, an opportunistic reaction to recession". Additionally, it was found that while post-Fordist theories presume that casual or externalised employment will continue to grow, employers anticipated that permanent full-time jobs will accompany any future growth in employment in New Zealand.

Anderson et al (ibid) attempted to find out if there was any validity to the assumption that the New Zealand labour-market before the introduction of the ECA was rigid, and that flexibility could only come through further decentralisation. What they discovered was that the legislation already in place adequately offered employers the flexibility that they required (ibid). The implication is that New Zealand employers were unwilling to initiate strategic programmes of flexible labour deployment.

Hince and Harbridge (1994:241) also established that a greater capacity for flexibility and enhanced productivity existed in the pre-ECA era. They believe that management, either through incompetence or political and ideological reasons, failed to initiate and work through the necessary process of change. The fact that there was plenty of existing scope for flexibility in the workplace is further evidenced by the considerable rise in the casualisation of the workforce in the late 1980s. However, what has not happened is the instigation of innovative working practices. Instead, "the most common flexibilities involved crude methods of reducing hours of work" (Anderson et al 1994:502). One of the most critical findings was that contrary to post-Fordist predictions, functional flexibility was not significantly used in New Zealand. Retraining within the workplace was not a feature, and its lack of existence was evidenced by firms attempts to further reduce labour costs (ibid).

The evidence here suggests that the labour economy shows similar trends to the findings in the other areas of the economy, and is consistent with the notion that while in some circumstances employment relations may have shifted towards a more conciliatory environment, it is difficult to see the changes in the organisation of labour as 'leading edge', let alone as an emerging common sense.

CONCLUSION

As has been shown, New Zealand has experienced 'post-Fordist' changes to some extent, in some firms, and in some industrial settings. However, the relatively small degree of change, and the fact that it is mainly located within specific types of 'niche' industries, means that it is more relevant to acknowledge the fact that New Zealand firms have by and large not adopted post-Fordist techniques. What is more, the reason for those firms to have changed their practices have not necessarily been strategic, rather, in many cases it has been a short term response

to economic crisis. In many ways, the evidence provided here supports this claim, and the idea that changes in the economy may not be long lasting and as transformational as is argued in *New Times*.

While the wider economic environment has supposedly created the scope needed for reform, there appears, paradoxically, to be more to prevent a change to a post-Fordist economy in New Zealand than to encourage one. Most of all, New Zealand's historic economic and political developments still appear to have an effect over future productive orientations. Additionally, such features as a small population does not encourage the adoption of Japanese production techniques, as the requisite of intense competition is not evident. The attempts to create a post-Fordist economy through legislation such as the ECA has not had the universal outcome that was desired. Management and workers skill levels have not significantly advanced and the infrastructure at the moment does not appear to be aiding any change. Lastly, low prices still appear to be the main competitive advantage that New Zealand firms are trying to hold, and this is more of a characteristic of a Fordist economy than a post-Fordist one.

CHAPTER THREE

BEYOND CONVENTIONAL POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

While New Times represents explicit changes in the economy, the dimension of politics in New Times has also undergone a decisive transformation. This has occurred not only in the formalised areas of the administration of the state and in the bodies who represent people's political concerns, but also in the whole perception of what politics is. As an example, at a fundamental level, the use of the terms Left and Right as indicators of political conviction has, according to the New Timers, lost its traditional meaning. Instead, it is argued that a whole new discourse is needed in order to understand the spectrum of political thought. David Marquand provocatively illustrates the essential irrelevance of the terms Left and Right in the 1990s by contrasting their traditional interpretations and what they mean today. Marquand argues that the orthodox understanding of Left and Right is that

the Left stands for movement and the future, and the Right for order and the past... The Left is also supposed to be the party of the exploited – by definition, the proletariat – and the right of the exploiters, by definition the bourgeoisie (1990:372).

This however, is no longer the case. Parties ostensibly of the Left can in many cases no longer be associated in conventional terms with the substantive beliefs and projects of the Left, while parties in the Centre are also no longer necessarily 'centrist'. Marquand goes further to analyse the assumptions that characterise associations with the Left, Right and Centre, and argues that none of these assumptions can be mapped coherently onto the political terrain today.

Implicit in the whole terminology of Right, Centre and Left are three crucial assumptions. The first is that the 'Left' is in favour of change and the Right is against it. The second is that change – radical and far-reaching change – is inherently 'progressive', emancipatory and anti-exploitative to be welcomed by the dispossessed, and feared by the dispossessors. And

although this is less obvious, a further implication is that the Centre is, in some sense, uncertain, pusillanimous or two-faced – in favour of trivial changes, perhaps, but not of fundamental ones; sympathetic towards the exploited, but unwilling to wage war on the exploiters (1990:373).

According to Marquand these inferences have also now broken down. As a result of the inadequacy of this terminology to describe the contemporary political spectrum, Marquand suggests that to make more sense of the contemporary confusion, the categories 'conservative' and 'radical' are more useful in an effort to provide an understanding of where people stand. Clearly this is a huge departure from conventional forms of political discourse. For a start it makes it very difficult to pigeon hole certain political perspectives, and it challenges the idea that an individual can have a coherent ideological position and a relatively stable political identity. It also implies that no one's political behaviour can be in effect taken for granted, and that the political culture of a given society is now habitually surrounded with uncertainty.

This chapter tackles the degree of political change that is said to have arisen, concentrating on the relevance of class voting, political party representation, and how political culture in general has undergone radical changes from conventional interpretations. Firstly an overview is provided defining the changes that are said to have taken place, and secondly, an analysis is made of the relevance of the New Times interpretation of political transformation to New Zealand's recent political upheavals.

VOTING BEHAVIOUR

One of the most obvious signs that there has been change in the realm of politics is by looking at the changes in electoral voting behaviour, and in particular the degree to which 'class' remains influential in voting.

Traditionally, it was taken for granted that class had a major effect on the way people cast votes, which subsequently drew most of the attention when it came to analysing voting patterns. However, the degree to which class influences voters has been questioned over the past twenty years as there are strong indications that class is losing its potency. From recent investigations into its effectiveness in determining voting behaviour, a trend of a declining influence since the late 1960s has been noted, and this trend has come to be known as the process of 'class dealignment'.

Class dealignment represents the idea that social class is no longer a valid indicator of predicting voting patterns in entirety, which has been highlighted in the computations of the "Alford index", the most widely used method of analysing voting along class lines. The index is calculated by subtracting the proportion of middle class voting for the Left from the proportion of working class voting for the Left. Where all the working class and none of the middle class voted for the Left the index would score 100. Where only the middle class voted for the left, the score would be zero. For example, in the period between 1952 and 1962 Britain had a level of class voting around 40, which has since diminished to be calculated at only 9 in 1983 (Lash and Urry 1987:213). This trend has also been replicated across Europe; in West Germany, the Alford index was calculated at 30 in 1953, and by 1983 it was only 10 (Lash and Urry 1987:218).

While this indicates a clear and categorical decline, there are some serious problems with the use of the Alford index as a valid measure of class voting. For a start it bases the contrast between the middle and working class solely on manual and non-manual lines, and in doing so does not take into account the relationship *between* workers and owners. Despite commonly held perceptions that class differences can be adequately quantified by determining the degree of physical exertion undertaken at work, they have never represented a worthy indication of the class relationships in a capitalist society. Subsequently, employing such

distinctions for analytical purposes offers little utility. Secondly, the Alford index does not take into account women as independent voters in their own right; rather a person's class position is determined by the male householder's occupation. Thirdly, it does not recognise the vast changes to the occupational structure in the past thirty years, where there has been a major decline in the aggregate number of manual jobs compared to a rise in low skilled, non-manual work. Finally, this popular definition of class dealignment also 'forgets' some of the more 'socio-psychological' determinants of voting behaviour. For example, there has always been an element of *deference* involved in voting, whereby many of the working class either voted for the 'natural' governors (i.e, conservative, Right-wing parties) or were happy to let Labour speak for them. These concerns point to considerable imprecision in the standard measurements of political allegiance, and strongly warn us against assuming too much about the relationship between 'working classness' and voting behaviour – in either direction.

Aware of these issues to some extent, the New Times writers nonetheless are insistent that there are significant changes going on in the class structure, and that such changes are disintegrative of traditional political affiliations, especially affiliations to mainstream Labour parties.

Firstly, the New Timers look closely at the effect *economic* changes have had on class voting. Piven (1991:7) argues the high levels of class voting in the postwar period were cultivated in working environments, where large groups of semi-skilled workers were employed in large industrial sites. The 'homogenisation' that these environments created, produced a distinctly 'working class' culture which transpired into a unified political position. These sites of mass production were also dominated by trade unions, and as representatives of the workers, their interests were expressed in the political realm through the Labour Party. However, since the level of mass production has declined, and other forms of production have arisen based in smaller industrial sites, there has been a reduction in class 'polarisation',

and consequently class influence on voting patterns has subsided. Piven goes on to say that "as workplace settings are now small and dispersed, work routines themselves do not build the solidarities that were fostered by assembly-line production" (1991:8).

The homogenous nature of the labour force has also subsided as more women and ethnic minorities have entered the workforce, not only in routine non-manual work, but importantly in the traditionally working class manual jobs. Consequently, identities cultivated by shared working experiences have weakened. Above all, the aggregate decline in manual jobs and the corresponding increase in non-manual work has had the most serious effect on maintaining social class as the main solidifying social force.

Complementing the occupational shift from manual to non-manual work has been the decline in aggregate numbers of workers affiliated to trade unions, which is of much significance when analysing class voting. Being a member of a trade union has been traditionally seen as an important influence on electoral behaviour as the trade unions had historically aligned themselves to the working class-based Labour Party. However, as the labour intensive industries have declined and smaller enterprises emerged, it has been difficult for trade unions to maintain their influence. In 1964 in Britain for example, members of manual trade unions were almost twice as likely to vote Labour as non-members of trade unions, yet by 1983 members of trade unions were basically no more likely than non-members to vote Labour (Webb 1989:278).

Just as the numerical decline of the manual working class has had a far reaching effect on electoral voting, the rise of the middle class, or 'salarariat', with the growth of the service sector and the expansion of white collar employment has also had a major impact on voting behaviour. The most important outcome of this has been the development of a large section of the workforce which has an ambiguous

relationship to the established political parties. The middle class are not inherently partisan to the manual working class Labour Party, nor the traditionally reactionary Conservative Party. The rapid rise in white collar work can be seen then, as one of the main precursors of class dealignment; the large number of people employed in non-manual labour had no *natural* instinct to vote for a particular party.

As a result of the rise of the middle class, it has been argued that the relative affluence of the 1950s and 1960s also reduced the perpetuation of class voting. Butler and Stokes (1974:193) point out that it is very difficult to perpetuate class games where there are relative increases in wealth. With a relative increase in affluence, social inequalities progressively declined. This triggered a rise in social mobility, a process where attachments to class are not necessarily ever binding. Conceptually at least, loyalty to class parties is difficult under these circumstances, where one's occupational location does not specifically map onto the constituency of one of the class-based parties.

Minkberg and Inglehart (1989:84) further this idea, by arguing that economic self interest became a less reliable predictor of ideology and voting behaviour in the 1970s, as the increase in affluence tended to take people away from fixations over class. Moreover, they have argued that

the higher the level of a country's economic development and success of the welfare state, the lower the support for classical workers movement goals, even among those that still profit from the achievements of the welfare state.

Instead, the relative rise in affluence has channelled people's political energy into 'non-economic' issues such as the spread of citizenship rights. The resulting liberation of certain groups within society had the effect of breaking down many of the traditional social barriers that had previously been prevented from fragmenting.

As a way of encapsulating these changes, Ronald Inglehart's theory of *postmaterialism* is perhaps the most decisive thesis comprehending the decline in class voting. Inglehart argues a culture shift is portrayed through a change of priorities from 'materialist' to 'postmaterialist' values, which represents the major political development since the Second World War. This shift has primarily occurred due to economic expansion and the resulting affluence, which has led to a change of focus from an emphasis on material 'well-being' and physical security towards a greater emphasis on the 'quality of life' (Inglehart 1977:3). Embedded in this theory is the idea of 'generational' or age value differences. Inglehart argues there is a distinct difference in values between the people who matured in an era of economic hardship and political insecurity, and whose major concern was security and stability, and those younger people growing up in relative affluence of the postwar boom years. This younger generation were able to concern themselves with political goals such as equality, social justice, the environment and nuclear disarmament. Consequently, differences between 'age' rather than 'class' have become centrally important, especially with regards to voting patterns. There is now a scenario that regardless of class, the older generations are voting for the party which looks after materialist concerns.

There are also further divergencies in that those concerned with postmaterialism tend to be economically secure and generally Left-wing. They by no means necessarily vote for traditional *Left* parties though. Rather, they are voting for parties who are tailor-made for them such as the Greens (Inglehart 1990:263). Essentially then, this separation of voters on materialist and postmaterialist grounds has neutralised political polarisation based on class.

In terms of analysing voting behaviour, this of course relies on the fact that it is easy to make a distinction between materialist and postmaterialist values, that materialism is exclusively associated with class and postmaterialism with individualism, and perhaps most importantly, that a significant number of voters

can be associated with having postmaterialist values. While it may be easy to associate postmaterialism with the Green Party for example, the fact that the Greens have received only minimal electoral support challenges to some extent the idea that such a distinction offers conclusive evidence of its importance. Ultimately, such a distinction, may well be too simplistic for an attempt to explain a decline in class voting.

Despite conceptual difficulties in defining class dealignment though, the New Timers appear comfortable to make the assumption that class was a reliable indicator of voting patterns a generation ago, but that tendency has been getting steadily weaker due to major changes in work, the economy, in culture, and importantly in political representation.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Sarah Benton (1990:333) provocatively asserts "the political party as we have known it is an anachronism... out of all the tasks it is set, there are only two it can carry out with any adequacy: it can contest elections and it can produce a caste of professional politicians to take part in the ritual of public affairs". Even then it is questionable whether these tasks are worthwhile and effective in representing the voters who elect these parties to power in the first place. Just as voting along class lines appears to have become a negligible concern in assessing voting behaviour, the class-based "mass party" has become increasingly irrelevant in articulating the political concerns of voters.

Most mass parties were set up in the 1920s and 1930s in response to two phenomena; the advent of the mass vote and the emergence of the all powerful nation-state (ibid). In both Britain and New Zealand, there emerged a stable and lasting electoral system based on 'two party' politics who represented economic and

social differences. One was a Left-wing Labour Party representing the working class, and the other, a Right-wing party – in Britain the Conservatives, and in New Zealand the National Party – which was established to further the interests of the middle and upper classes. However, these relationships have become consistently weaker to the extent that these parties now show only minimal similarity in both ideology and representativeness to when they were originally formed. New Timers hold that initially, these parties *did* tend to attract their natural constituencies in elections, but with extensive class dealignment, these associations have steadily subsided. Yet the impression of political parties largely attracting votes from their natural allies has been questioned, and in particular, whether parties of the Left have *ever* represented working class interests in an unequivocal way.

Adam Przeworski believes the problems class-based parties are facing now, originated at the time of their formation rather than at some point in the 1970s. He argues that the history of class-based parties has been shaped by the idea that they could never get an electoral majority in any society by appealing to their class alone, so right from the start they tried to woo the support of voters in other classes. This amounted to inevitable failure because the parties could never be able to satisfy both their wishes; firstly to categorically further the interests of the class they were established to represent, and secondly appear attractive to voters from other classes (Przeworski 1985:185).

The working class parties in particular, were faced with two major problems. Firstly, they were forced to court voters from outside their core constituency as they realised the manual working class wouldn't make up a majority of voters, but at the same time, also ensure their rhetoric didn't alienate the working class and give them reason to question their party allegiance. The parties of the Left found this virtually impossible to achieve. By diluting the general ideological salience of class as a means to attract and unify voters, class as a *cause* was weakened, and the working class voters had less and less to feel naturally identified with. Initially

the parties representing the working class thought the working class would continue to grow, and national constituencies would become further homogenised, which justified their dilution of class rhetoric in favour of a more 'mass' appeal, yet history has shown that a party compromising class appeal has actually *decreased* the vote from that particular class (Przeworski 1985:113). The great problem for mass parties established in the 1930s then, is that to be electorally effective they could not remain class pure, but for credibility and ideological reasons they could never cease to be a party of class interests (Przeworski 1985:106).

It must also be recognised that despite the similarity in policy between the two mass parties that is often taken for granted, the electoral politics of the two major parties who dominated politics in this era were markedly different. The parties of the Right recognised that they had no real ability to champion the interests of only the better off, and consequently dropped, at least in rhetoric, allegiance to any one class in particular. The parties originally of the Right were then able to act far more pragmatically without the strong ideological commitment, and their guilt at moving away from class interests was minimal. For Labour however, the shift away from class rhetoric met with serious problems as it alienated much of their natural support. Piven (1991:8) argues that not only have Labour parties fallen because they have been forced to cling to class connotations when class has declined in importance, but their natural constituency is rapidly disappearing as economic transformation breaks up the communities Labour was initiated to represent.

Firstly, part of the decline of the working class parties can be attributed to the transformations within the trade unions. It has become obvious that the less people are united in their place of work, the less politically unified they are on economic grounds, and therefore, the less they are going to feel affiliated with a party that is based on the representation of a particular class. Webb (1989:283) argues that as the Labour parties have moved away from concerning themselves with the

economic advancement of the working class, the rejection of the Labour Party is inevitable.

Secondly, while classes may have been the original core constituencies of the mass parties, the ideas of class diminished even further as the parties changed their appeal towards *national* interests. As Fordist mass production required divisions along national lines, which in turn strengthened the idea of the 'nation' as a unified society, national, rather than class goals became more important to voters. Butler and Stokes (1974:196) argue that before they could govern, the Labour parties had to adopt a programme of national interest, and move away from the more sectional and parochial interests of class. This was deemed necessary as the voters who demanded an adherence to 'national' concerns included a substantial part of the working class itself.

Thirdly, the move towards policies appealing to a 'national interest' meant that politics and more importantly politicians became necessarily bureaucratic, losing the ability to make any real progression or change in aiding the interests of a particular class. As Crook et al (1994:142) succinctly put it,

although... the large milieu parties did dominate politics throughout the postwar decades, most of the class- representing bodies proved reformist and tame. Class politics evolved into orderly and routinised processes cemented by formal rules and less formalised corporate deals.

While initially these class-based parties were set up to champion the interests of the respective classes, this became impossible given the constraints of bureaucratic formalism. "Opposed interests were articulated in the form of bureaucratically framed and negotiated policy demands which were aggregated within corporate blocs and systematically resolved through bargaining, arbitration and conciliation" (Crook et al 1994:142).

New Timers argue that the political party has reached a crisis of legitimation through its loss of a stable and reliable constituency and through its inability to attract the interest in voters to any one cause. Additionally, it is not only their inability to successfully maintain the representation of a defined constituency, but the Party has suffered due to (now inappropriate) internal, structural and organisational methods which have stifled any positive action that may have been aroused.

POLITICAL CULTURE

Underlying the political changes outlined in the spheres of voting behaviour and political representation has been a broader and more widespread transformation in the way politics is interpreted in civil society.

In *Politics in an Antipolitical Age*, Geoff Mulgan argues that there has been a recent political 'crisis', which has ultimately brought an end to one political culture and subsequently produced another. This 'crisis' is the result of a realisation that the 'modern' political culture developed earlier in the twentieth century to deal with specific economic and social settlements is no longer appropriate for the conditions which exist in the 1990s. Mulgan argues the foundations upon which modern political culture was built have already been irreversibly eroded.

For beneath the inertial momentum of elections and offices, the political traditions that become organising principles for so many societies, dividing them into great tribal camps identified with class, with progress or reaction, with nation or liberty, have lost their potency. They cannot inspire or convince. They do not reflect the issues which passionately divide societies. They are no longer able to act as social glues, means of recognition across distances of geography and culture (1994:7-8).

While the political solutions which were developed in order to deal with the

distribution of resources, inequality, and justice have spread throughout the world in the twentieth century, these solutions have just as quickly lost their ability to solve the problems that exist today. Mulgan goes on to highlight the inappropriateness of 'modern' political answers to contemporary problems.

In many of the most advanced and prosperous societies, the world of politics already has the feel of something archaic; a set of rituals, a container of tensions, a symbolic link with the past rather than a dynamic force in the present (1994:9).

The indicators of the inadequacy in persisting with modern political solutions are both numerous and pronounced.

In most of the democracies voter turnouts and party memberships have gradually fallen; where they have remained high, levels of commitment have fallen. Incumbent governments have tended to survive not because of any enthusiasm but more from cynicism about any available alternative... Beyond elections, political movements have been largely displaced by life or religious movements, and movements of group identity. Youth, the traditional home of the political passions has turned away from orthodox politics towards religion, hedonism and issues such as the environment, animal rights or AIDS... Perhaps the most visible symptom of depoliticisation is the absence of movements bringing people into the streets. The great marches are long gone. Those that do command attention are either the 'life politics' movements of environment or reproduction – creating a politics that is personal and global but only tangentially interested in the classic nation political sphere – or reactionary movements to protect vested interests from attacks (Mulgan 1994:9).

The general decline in political participation perhaps best illustrates the way in which modern political institutions continue to attempt to represent and articulate the concerns of a culture no longer familiar or receptive to them.

Ronald Inglehart provides evidence to show the decline in 'formal' political participation through illustrating the rejection of 'materialist-based' politics, and the

growing acceptance of a politics based on 'postmaterialist' concerns. He argues that collective, external mobilisation has been in decline, primarily as a result of the decay of political party machines, labour unions, and religious institutions, which represent materialist political concerns (1990:336). In comparison, there has occurred a gradual rise in the 'individual' interest in politics as a result of higher levels of education, increased availability of information, and the growing acceptance of women's involvement in politics. This has in turn caused a rise in postmaterialist movements focusing on specific values and issues. These new movements such as the Greens, which are at the leading edge of contemporary political discourse, also reflect both the emergence of a postmaterialist constituency whose outlook is not captured by the existing political parties, and the emergence of a growing pool of voters who are politicised but do not feel tied to established parties (Inglehart 1990:369). Consequently, the public is now more likely to be involved in new forms of political conversation which has little in common with traditional forms of participation.

There are several indicators in particular which show there is definitely a trend signifying the inadequacies of formal politics as a means to provide solutions for the issues important to people today. They include the decreasing level of voting at general elections, where there is an increasing number of voters who feel isolated and alienated from the modern democratic process. This is an occurrence that shows a growing disillusionment with modern forms of politics, and with the type of institutions that uphold democracy. While there is usually a core of non-voters at every election, there has been a trend in the last twenty years that shows an increasing level of non-voting. Not only is 'non-voting' an issue, but 'partisan' voting has plummeted in the last few decades which is argued to spell a just as important rejection of modern politics. There also appears to be an increasing trend to vote against a particular party in protest, rather than showing a strong preference for a party. Rose and McAllister (1986) observed that in the 1983 British election voters were motivated more by dislike of a party than having a positive attachment

to one (Rose and McAllister 1986:156). Finally, party memberships have seriously declined as voters find their relationship to these parties more meaningless in terms of democratic participation.

The limited effectiveness of a type of formal politics institutionalised earlier in the century to cope with contemporary issues has led to a 'dichotomised' distinction – that between the 'old politics' based on formal political organisations, and the 'new politics' representing the political concerns which emerge more organically through civil society itself. According to Rainbow (1993:3), the differences are essentially based on the pursuit of *materialism* through the promotion of personal and strategic security ordered around class interests, versus the recognition of plural political *identities* formed around specific issues and values, as well as cleavages other than class including ethnicity and gender, or around specific issues such as peace and environmental issues.

Although undoubtedly interesting, the distinction between old materialist, and new postmaterialist politics must be briefly questioned. While a rise in what Inglehart refers to as 'individual' interest politics can certainly be charted, it is debatable whether this actually represents a rejection of so called materialist political agendas. For example postmaterialism, much like materialist politics, is still concerned with the distribution of resources and the provision of welfare as well as enshrining an emphasis on non-economic concerns. Similarly, it must be remembered that while old politics may have revolved around class and economic interests, matters of justice, fairness and quality of life were very much part of these 'old' materialist debates.

With regards to the levels of disillusionment that is said to have been associated with the inability of 'formal' politics to represent voters, it must also be conceded that interest in politics in the heyday of what is referred to as 'old' politics was not particularly high and therefore political participation in the traditional areas does

not necessarily accurately portray the intensity in involvement⁶. Rather, it possibly just shows that voting and attachment to a party, was more 'social convention' and even cultural 'deference'. What is perhaps a more convincing argument is that rather than suddenly breaking down, the traditional political model has had to negotiate the emergence of alternative ways of articulating political concerns, and this has heightened a perception of a dramatic polarisation between 'old' and 'new' forms of representation.

In this context, Crook et al (1994:140) provide an account of the rise of the new politics in terms of what they claim it has replaced, namely 'bureaucratic-corporatist' politics.

By contrast with the old liberal-bourgeois and social labour movements, they appear to be apartisan or even apolitical in the sense that they reject the conventional institutional idiom of politics; they aim not to capture the state but to ignore or even abolish it. Also... they have proved to be persistent, widespread and politically fertile... (by) attracting the support of strategically important social categories and sympathetic media coverage.

To summarise the way these new political movements articulate their concerns, Crook et al emphasise five key developments. Firstly movement politics is driven by 'universalistic' moral concerns rather than 'instrumental' considerations. Secondly, new politics relies on self-organisation rather than centralised and bureaucratised intermediation known as corporatism. Third, activists are openly suspicious of established elites and centralised state apparatuses. New movements rely on 'public' rather than 'elite' oriented expression. Fourth, the new politics spills into, and fuses with, the socio-cultural arena; for example, protest combines with leisure activities. Finally, the new politics is highly dependent on the mass media. They manipulate the media by using images, symbols and icons rather than discursive arguments to determine outcomes (1994:148).

⁶ see Almond, G. and Verba, S. (1963).

It is this final development which highlights the most potent difference between styles of political articulation, as the level of accessibility ultimately determines the level of success of a particular politics. Where traditional political forms of communication tend to be written publications, and highly formalised television and radio debate, 'new' politics attracts media attention through unorthodox and eccentric behaviour that is likely to be newsworthy in an environment where news must involve action, drama and events out of the ordinary. 'Old' politics tend to rely on discursive platforms and programmes while new political formations use signs and symbols, and this non-discursive form fits in with the format of the mass media which is increasingly moving from discourse to image as its primary means of communication (Crook et al 1994:155-156).

Ultimately, the strength of political articulation is determined by how convincing it is to its audience, and how compatible it is with people's experiences. The ground that old political forms have conceded has been due to its loss of ability to communicate effectively. New political issues have arisen precisely because they have recognised the vast changes that have occurred in people's perception of politics in general and have therefore become a major force in the representation of a *postmodern* society's values.

New Times, in order to accentuate the differences between old and new politics stress the inappropriateness of formal style's of articulation in contemporary society. While there is reason to be suspicious about the extent to which it is claimed old and new politics differ, the focus on the appearance of 'alternative' and 'novel' forms of political expression are principally used to justify these divisions.

THE CHANGING SHAPE OF POLITICS IN NEW ZEALAND

Like the perceived economic transformation in New Zealand, a political

transformation is said to have intensified following the election of the fourth Labour Government in 1984. Indeed, the radical break with tradition made by Labour through its unprecedented economic policies left many voters confused as to their usual political party allegiances. More generally, the disillusionment with politics in the past ten years has been registered by a diminishing interest in political parties, not least due to the declining representation of both voters and party members by the parliamentary parties. Additionally, it can be seen in subsiding levels of party identification and participation at elections. However, the evidence here does not establish that as *New Times* presumes, a drastically new political culture is emerging, despite evidence to suggest record levels of disenchantment with traditional political institutions. There have clearly been significant shifts in the articulation and representativeness of political issues, but what characterises the New Zealand political landscape in the 1990s is more of a relatively successful negotiation by the traditional political institutions of the so called 'new' political issues, and a corresponding return to a focus on more material concerns.

FROM CLASS ALLEGIANCE TO INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS?

In an often quoted passage from Austin Mitchell's *Politics and People in New Zealand* the voting patterns in New Zealand are illustrated by using a metaphor of armies fighting each other in a war...

In each army people have donned uniforms which merge with the colour of their social and personal background. They are voting the same way as most of their neighbourhood, their workmates, their family. Voting is a social act, socially conditioned (1969:215).

The inference here is that there was in New Zealand, a direct correspondence or

mapping of social and economic class to the way people voted. The two major parties in New Zealand, Labour and National represented opposing constituencies. Labour appealed to the urban working class, while National attracted farmers and business interests, and it was believed these parties gained the support of their targeted constituencies without question.

If this was in fact ever true, the salience of class as a determinate of voting behaviour in New Zealand has been seriously challenged in the 1980s and 1990s. Recent voting surveys suggest that contrary to what Mitchell found in the 1960s, social class has a remarkably low influence on the way people now vote. Indeed, Vowles (1992a:115) states that

membership of social groups has an influence on voting choice in New Zealand but that influence is weak to modest, and operates in complex ways that are frequently difficult to specify. The assumption that social interaction within such groups is the major mechanism for the formation of political opinions and loyalties must be questioned.

Bean (1988) goes one step further, questioning the idea that class as a determinant of voting has ever had a significant effect in New Zealand. Based on the assumption that early data used to measure class voting was unreliable, Bean claims class voting was never exceptionally strong in the first place, and therefore the idea that New Zealand has experienced a process of class dealignment is overstated, and actually misleading.

While Mitchell's analysis of New Zealand can be relatively easily dismissed when looking for an explanation of voting patterns in the 1990s, it is unclear to what extent New Zealand has actually experienced class dealignment. Gold (1992), Vowles and Aimer (1993), and Vowles (1994a) have all suggested a clear and categorical process of class dealignment has been a major feature of New Zealand voting patterns over the past thirty years, yet both recent evidence, and recognition

of the inadequacies surrounding the conceptualisation of class dealignment suggests that this may not necessarily be the case. Vowles et al (1995) for example show there is reason to suspect a possible *realignment* in terms of class, using data obtained from the 1993 New Zealand Election Survey (NZES), which, if not offering grounds to dismiss the idea that dealignment as it has been perceived is at an end, definitely places doubt upon the unqualified acceptance that class is now largely insignificant.

Regardless of debate over the relative levels of class dealignment though, it must be acknowledged that there are several well substantiated indications in New Zealand that class as a voting influence *has* declined. For example, one area that does correspond to the idea of class dealignment argued in the New Times thesis has been the loss of influence of trade unions over voting. As has been noted, the decline in both the number of trade unions, and membership of unions still existing has been profound in New Zealand. In aggregate terms, it stands to reason that the number of people in contact with politics through association to a union is small. Not only that, but as Webber (1978:185) notes, those manual trade unions who are associated with the New Zealand Labour Party do not make up a political vanguard as did the watersiders', miners', labourers', railwaymen's workers', and seamens' unions in the inter-war years, and therefore the unions still affiliated are not characterised by a high degree of political consciousness.

Associated with the disappearance of trade union influence on voters was the 'non-political' role played by the white-collar unions who emerged in the post-war era to represent the middle class workers. These unions never affiliated themselves with the Labour party, and consequently political consciousness did not develop in working environments for white collar workers. Instead of affiliation to the Labour Party, these white collar unions were more inclined to join the Federation of Labour as it was seen as a "better vehicle than the Party for the furtherance of political objectives" (Webber 1978:185). While Gold found in 1990 that trade

union links had more of a determination than occupational stratum as to voting behaviour, the strength of the connection was not strong. "[T]hose with current union ties were only about 11 percentage points less likely to support National and only about 9 percentage points more likely to support Labour" (Gold 1992:486).

Another reason for the lessening influence of class on voting in New Zealand has been attributed to the decline in employment in rural-based primary production. For example, Vowles (1987:23) calculated the labour force involved in rural-based production to be only 10.9 per cent in 1981, down from nearly 30 per cent in 1916. Bruce Jesson argues that as the primary industry that provided employment in the regional centres has shut down, the infrastructure it required became redundant. As industry moved closer to the cities, workers naturally followed, and a changing working cultural environment ensued. Jesson outlines the consequences of this.

(as) the working class communities began to disintegrate... the mining and timber towns were visibly disintegrating at the growth of the consumer society... Working class families moved to new subdivisions on the outskirts of the cities, they owned cars, accumulated possessions and ultimately lost that working class identity (1989:23).

The effects of this can be seen to be similar to those outlined by Piven (1991). As the homogenous experiences of work are eroded, so are the political solidarities which transfer into voting habits.

Thirdly, there has been a marked change in the actual 'class structure', with the relative decline of the 'old middle class' of higher professionals, businessmen, and farmers (from 21 per cent in 1911 to 9 per cent in 1976), and the relative increase of the 'new middle class' of lower professionals, sales, managerial and clerical workers (from 19 per cent to 41 per cent) (Vowles 1987:23). According to Gold (1992) those changes have had a significant effect on how people perceive differences between political parties, as class identifications have become

indistinctive and voters' associations with class and party have become blurred. As an example of this confusion, Gold found that in 1990 "blue collar manual employees and their families were no more ready to vote Labour (and no less reluctant to support National) than were white collar non-manuals in business, top jobs or lesser white collar occupations" (1992:485).

The degree to which these structural changes have been a result of a shift towards postmaterialist values has been recently investigated in New Zealand, notably in the 1990 NZES, which found some evidence to suggest postmaterialism has an influence on voting habits. The emergence of the Green Party at the 1990 election for example, signified a contemporary political vehicle for postmaterialist values, and as Inglehart predicted, the Greens were supported by younger and more highly educated people. Conversely, National were more inclined to attract voters who could be considered 'materialists' (Vowles and Aimer 1993:145). Additionally, both Vowles and Aimer (1993), and Gold (1992) have established that the two key indicators of materialist or postmaterialist persuasions, those being age and education, provided consistent evidence to match Inglehart's assumptions.

When looking at levels of education, Vowles and Aimer (1993:139) discovered those possessing a university degree were more than twice as likely to be postmaterialist than those without school certificate. Gold (1992:487) revealed that the university educated were distinctly less ready to vote National and compensatingly more prepared to vote for the Greens. As far as age was concerned, Gold found that those in the 18–39 age group were twice as likely to vote Green as those between 30–59, and five times more likely than those over 60. Furthermore, the Greens were relatively well supported by those on higher incomes giving the impression they attracted a significant level of middle class voters (Gold 1992:475–476).

However, there are several factors which question the overall influence of

postmaterialism on voting in New Zealand. Firstly, while these connections were made between age, education and the Green Party, the fact that the Greens gained only 6.9 per cent of the vote in the 1990 election means that the proportion of people being considered is modest. Indeed, Vowles and Aimer (1993:141) estimated postmaterialists only made up 9 per cent of the population, meaning the actual aggregate number of people sustaining the significance of postmaterialism does not offer much relevance. Most of all, Vowles and Aimer found that contrary to Inglehart's belief, the existence of postmaterialism in New Zealand has done little to explain changing levels of class voting, and that the overall influence of postmaterialism on the social structure is slight.

While these findings to some extent contradict the New Times assumption that non-economic issues of a postmaterialist nature are increasingly important in electoral voting, other evidence also implies the idea that class is becoming irreversibly insignificant lacks testimony. For example, while it may lack validity as a reliable indicator of class voting, the 1993 computation of the Alford index showed a slight rise. While New Zealand has followed a trend evident in other nations where the index has steadily declined, from 30 in 1963, down to 16 in 1981, 9 in 1987, and only 5 in 1990, in 1993 the index rose for the first time in thirty years to 10 (Vowles et al 1995:20). Given the limited scope of its conceptualisation this perhaps signals an even stronger indication that class is regaining importance.

To add strength to this, Vowles et al (1995) discovered that instead of focusing on the distinction between manual and non-manual workers as a way of calculating the level of class voting, by looking at the relationship between employers and employees, a class cleavage may be 'intensifying' rather than subsiding. For example, from the 1993 NZES, a strengthened relationship was found between support for Labour, and the percentage of employers by each electorate. Where the swings to Labour were higher, so was the percentage of employees in that

particular electorate. More generally, the electorates experiencing a significant swing to Labour were more likely to be populated by voters from lower classes (Vowles et al 1995:20–21).

Vowles et al (1995:18) conclude that one of the main reasons for this rise in class voting is a result of the ongoing application of free market economic policies in New Zealand. As the material outcome of these policies has been a widening gap between rich and poor

it is reasonable to suppose... that the implementation by successive governments of policies which are directly experienced by many and perceived by other to be hostile to poorer people has revived the class dimension of voting in New Zealand (1995:18).

While the changes in work environments, the declining influence of trade unions, as well as changes in the class structure have obviously influenced the levels of class voting that have in fact existed, by focusing on alternative ways of measuring the influence of class, an intensification rather than a retreat from class voting can be witnessed.

FROM CLASS-BASED PARTIES TO ISSUE-BASED MOVEMENTS ?

It is clear when looking at the changing configuration of the mass political parties in New Zealand that their legacies parallel in many ways the ideas forwarded by the New Timers. The parties in New Zealand have gone through periods of extensive reformation and now in structure, organisation, and constituency pay little resemblance to their original forms. Furthermore, the shifts they have made have not appeared to retain, let alone improve their standing, as they can be seen to inspire low levels of confidence, shown in a number of ways by the parties'

inability to articulate and resolve the political concerns of the majority of New Zealanders. Nevertheless, despite the evaporating legitimacy in their role as political representatives, the New Times position is challenged by the fact that there does not appear to be any alternative political form moving in to take their place. Moreover, with the launch of MMP in New Zealand, there has been a renewed focus on "the Party" as an institution most likely to take *more* control of political power.

The reasons for the contemporary problems associated with the mass parties in New Zealand can be directly linked to the early difficulties they faced in response to the changing shape of their traditional class constituencies. To some extent, the National Party dealt with this problem more easily as it minimised references to class from the outset, and focused its politics on a commitment to practical, rather than ideological solutions. Labour suffered though, as they were trying to appeal symbolically at least, to class interests, and at the same time trying to attract support from those who found no identification with class rhetoric. While Labour in the 1930s limited its earlier emphasis on class in order to capture a wider range of voters, its rhetoric was still based on championing the causes of the working people and the less privileged. When in government in the 1930s and 1940s however, Labour made little effort to turn towards a programme of socialism as proposed in the original manifesto.

Labour's principles of 'nationalisation' and the 'socialisation of the means of production' were never a realistic goal after their victory in 1935; instead, it effected a compromise between Capital and Labour, with an emphasis on a strong welfare state and national economic security as a way of ensuring the best deal for working people. This was the first of a series of abdications from the original goals, policies and direction that the Labour Party was set up to achieve.

In 1951 the Labour Party conference deleted reference in the New Zealand

Labour Party's aims to the passing and administering of laws to socialise the means of production, distribution and exchange (Gustafson 1992:268).

In 1962 the Labour Party conference went further, claiming

Labour stood for fair shares for all and in pursuit of this we are all free to adopt any policy that will multiply the total sum of human satisfactions to be shared, and will add to the equity of their division among mankind (Gustafson 1992:269).

As Przeworski predicted though, this met with opposition from those still concerned with class interests. For example, the Federation of Labour in 1963 and 1964 reaffirmed the belief in the class struggle and deplored the Labour Party's abandonment of traditional socialism (ibid). Despite this opposition, the Labour Party continued to broaden its electoral base, and further rejected its working class origins. Labour Party leader Norman Kirk said "The New Zealand Labour Party is the New Zealand Party... the words New Zealand are as important as the word Labour" (ibid). Here was a firm indication that the 'nation' had become more important to Labour than 'class'.

As might have been expected, the downturn in class rhetoric caused a degeneration in the association between the Labour Party and Trade Unions. The Labour Party, initially built up by organised workers has become less and less sympathetic to unions. This can be understood when looking at the fall in the number of MPs with union backgrounds. In the first election the Labour Party contested, 90 per cent of MPs had had affiliations with unions, which by 1972 had declined to 27 per cent (Webber 1978:183). In 1984 only 9 per cent of the Labour caucus was made up of manual workers or trade union officials (Vowles 1987:24).

Webber claims the overall tendency was for Trade Unions to opt out rather than to be pushed out. The participation of the unions in the 1970s declined as their

concerns were primarily with economic issues such as wage benefits. These however, were not issues that the Labour Party in the late 1970s considered electorally important. Rather, Labour turned their attention to non-economic concerns. Webber (1978:190) wrote:

The dominant ideology in New Zealand requires the Labour Party to disassociate itself from the trade unions if it is to maximise its prospects of electoral success. Apart from electoral constraints, the transformed social composition of the PLP, in which power in the Labour Party is effectively centralised, means that its members' innate predispositions towards trade unions are less benevolent than they once were. In the trade union's absence, other social groups have converged upon the Labour Party and turned it into their political vehicle.

Vowles (1987:24) argues that the latter 1970s proved to be the major turning point in the perception of party politics in New Zealand as "middle class liberals formally associated with the National Party began to gravitate towards Labour, while working class voters began supporting National in greater numbers than hitherto". The election of Labour in 1984, and the policies it implemented shows the result of this remodelling in the 1970s. By 1984 Labour had basically turned itself into a middle class party, as its policies and aims were increasingly accepted and championed by the middle classes. This is unsurprising if attention is paid to the make up of its parliamentary members. In 1935 the Labour caucus included 10 professionals or semi-professionals and 15 manual workers. In 1984 with the same number of MPs in Parliament, there were 41 professionals and only 3 manual workers (Gustafson 1992:276). The major implication of this reformation however has not been a revival in interest and activism within the Labour Party, rather it has actually represented a net *loss*.

While Labour was ultimately successful in the 1980s due to the electoral support it received from the middle classes, their backing did not transfer into a more active commitment to the Party, nor did it lead to any lasting electoral loyalty. This

can be plainly seen by the wholesale rejection of Labour by the middle class in favour of National in 1990. This represents the crux of Labour's crisis. As it has appealed more and more to middle class interests, it has lost the respect of the working class who have been traditionally more politically active and loyal to Labour. Consequently, Labour has become a Party with no firm commitment from either camp, and can no longer rely on a core constituency for support. Vowles (1992b:55) takes this crisis into account when he summarises the major contemporary problems faced by National and Labour.

Labour over represents elites, higher paid workers and those with higher education, at the expense of the larger mass of workers in less attractive jobs on lower incomes. National fails to be the broad-based popular party that it was during its hey day of the 1950s and 1960s, and there is little to suggest that the party became more broad based after 1975 when it began to appeal to a constituency more traditionally Labour in orientation. The strategic dilemmas now facing each party are to a large extent associated with these difficulties.

As Labour has begun to depict National's ambiguous relationship with the electorate, there has developed further problems, particularly those concerning democratic representation. Clements (1982:164) argues that effective political representation of the public depends upon political parties being clear about who they are representing and why. As has happened in New Zealand, Labour and National have grown to mirror themselves, focusing their attentions exclusively on the 'interests of the nation'. Clements asserts that the political consequence of the lack of difference between parties causes confusion and despondency amongst voters which is not a democratically desirable outcome. "This general alienation from politics reinforces the power of permanent government bureaucracy and strengthens the hands of the planners advising the Executive" (ibid).

Moreover, Clements claims the result of moving away from class as a basis of representation has meant

New Zealand political parties eschew a representative role in favour of a managerial government. The Executive and the bureaucracy are not seen as means to the achievement of specific ends but as ends in themselves. In this way, politics are being depoliticised in New Zealand (1982:163).

It is important to remember here though that the role of governments have essentially been managerial and bureaucratic since the time of their inception, which places some doubt upon the significance of claims that it has been only recently that a widespread decline in representativeness has occurred. While acknowledging this, it is possible to recognise that the loss of representation is a particularly *key* area where there has been an accentuated change. While mass political parties have always alienated voters to a certain extent, the more that unilateral decisions on policy direction are made by the parliamentary parties, the more voters and party members appear to have become disinterested.

The fourth Labour Government provides a case that highlights this trend where the polarisation between parliamentary, and party politics has had an adverse affect on electoral support. When considering the assumption that the social composition of political party activism 'conditions' and 'constrains' party strategy, Vowles (1992:55–56) found quite the opposite to have occurred in that Labour's politicians dominated party members, and rather than party activists (still significantly made up of organised employees), the Labour parliamentarians were almost entirely responsible for the politics of Rogernomics. The implication being that the dramatic shifts made by Labour lacked the mandate from those members of its own party, let alone the electorate, and the decline of democratic participation within political parties (the traditional form of access to political decision making) did not help Labour's cause.

There are several further indications that *both* the Labour and National parties have become increasingly ineffective in articulating the political concerns of their constituencies. Firstly, the dissatisfaction with Labour and National has been

represented in the declining percentage of votes for the two main parties. For example, in 1946, 91 per cent of voters chose between National and Labour. In 1990, of those eligible to vote, 69 per cent voted for the two main parties, and in 1993 the figure has decreased to 57.8 per cent (Vowles et al 1995:42).

Secondly, discontent has been acknowledged through various attempts by third parties to establish themselves as alternative voices to National and Labour. Social Credit emerged in the 1960s with the view that there was a middle way between the supposed Left of Labour and the Right of National, and gained significant support peaking in 1981 with 21 per cent. The Values Party, an environmental party, appeared in the 1970s and was the first party to show there were political concerns neither of the major parties were able to deal with, especially in the realm of democratic participation in politics. While the electoral system was largely prohibitive of third parties becoming a force, the more recent formation of the Alliance as a coalition of the Greens, New Labour, the Democrats, and Mana Motuhake has attempted to unite those disaffected voters who felt disillusioned with Labour's and National's style.

In this light then, the major traditional parties in New Zealand would appear to be enduring a protracted crisis. Nevertheless, while the evidence suggests a major change in political representation to be a distinct possibility, if not a *probability*, the uncertainty of their futures must be checked by the fact that there is no obvious alternative emerging to foster and stimulate political activity in the formalised political sphere. Moreover, several factors indicate that at least for the time being, political power is likely to remain with, and possibly become *more* concentrated in the mass parties.

Firstly, the decision by the Greens and New Labour to unite with other minor parties to form the Alliance is evidence that the most effective way to formally articulate a political position is still to operate as a mass party with an extensive

national infrastructure. While this may have initially been seen as an attempt to compete in the electoral environment of First-Past-The-Post (FPP), there has been no signs that it will fracture back into its original interest groups now that proportional representation has arrived. Indeed, the Alliance has at times given the impression of greater internal stability than the two original mass parties.

Secondly, while several political parties have formed with the intention of expressing the interests of a smaller, more defined constituency in anticipation of MMP, their support so far has been minimal. The recently formed ACT, Christian Democrats, and The Conservatives have only made a negligible impact, and it would appear at this stage that the traditional parties will retain the same type of influence which they had been used to under FPP. Thirdly, the introduction of MMP means that there is likely to be *more* emphasis on the parties, who are being required to offer clearer and more defined positions regarding policy and direction. Additionally, in anticipation of the first MMP parliament, much of the talk surrounding its make up, and where particular parties are politically positioned, has been in terms of the conventional Left-Right spectrum, in stark contrast to what Marquand had predicted.

Although the new electoral system may not significantly help to change the low levels of legitimacy currently held by the parties, it is, in the immediate future at least, likely to provide an environment in which the original political parties retain their importance and their power.

FROM SECTIONAL INTERESTS TO POSTMATERIALIST POLITICS ?

It is quite clear in New Zealand that the inability of traditional political institutions to successfully reform has created much public disillusionment, which can be seen

no more clearly than in the decision by New Zealanders to change the electoral system in the hope of a more democratic and representative government. The traditional political culture in New Zealand has been increasingly marginalised as the public feel less inclined to involve themselves in political customs and conventions which are no longer meaningful. This is represented in the vast reduction in partisanship and identification with traditional political representatives, declining levels of electoral voting and diminishing levels of interest and participation in political debate.

The *New Times* argument suggests that the outcome of this disillusionment is an increasingly explicit shift towards a 'new politics' based on postmaterialist interests and values. However, while new political issues have become evident in New Zealand, they can not be seen to have replaced or surpassed the importance of old political concerns. Moreover, as has been stated, it is debatable whether the interests of new and old politics differ to the extent that is perceived. It would appear in New Zealand that while a distinction can be drawn between older issues and newer, more recent ones, the 1990s represents a period of conciliation, which has in turn led to a renewed engagement with more conventional political concerns.

The 1989 *New Zealand Study of Values* provided a clear indication that New Zealanders were most unhappy with the environment surrounding their political system. In particular, they were disillusioned with the governmental decision making process and were highly sceptical of the motives behind politicians actions. Furthermore, it appeared from the Report that there was a great distance between the political issues the people of New Zealand were concerned about, and those the Government were preoccupied with.

Some of the findings included very negative evaluations of the political system. Two thirds of respondents agreed that "Public officials don't care much about what people like me think". More (72 per cent) agreed that political parties are only

interested in peoples votes and not their opinions. An index of responsiveness to public opinion from the Government found that only 9 per cent believed the political system was interested in their opinions (Gold and Webster 1990:8). Interest in politics was also found to be low. An index of political self confidence found only 12 per cent were confident in their ability to act effectively in politics, while 49 per cent claimed they had no confidence in their ability to act politically. From this, only a minority was found to be interested in actively participating in politics, while the rest only participated in activities that required little or no effort such as voting in general elections or signing a petition (Gold and Webster 1990:11-13).

While accepting that there is an overwhelming dissatisfaction evident with the political system in New Zealand, it is quite possible a comparable study of such political attitudes in the Fordist era would have provided similar results. As Almond and Verba (1963:474) demonstrated in the 1960s, a "successful" democracy did not appear to require a particularly participative voting public. Nor did it require informed and politically interested citizens. Furthermore, it would be wrong to assume that there are necessarily more people now than then that feel ostracised from the political process.

This however, should not detract from the recognition that there *are* specific, contemporary problems which have developed in the political arena. Indeed, there is clearly a recognisable indifference to politics in New Zealand when assessing people's verdicts of *recent* government policy decisions. It was found that the majority of people oppose government policy with regards to spending cuts and privatisation of national assets. Nearly eight out of ten people for example believe that more money should be put into education and health care as opposed to being taken away (Gold and Webster 1990:6). Naturally, when the government fails to respond to the wishes of the public the obvious outcome is a forsaking of confidence and respect for the political system, as can be seen to have occurred.

As a consequence of this growing disbelief in the political system, other measures of assessing levels of contentment show many forms of traditional political activity to have lost impact. Electoral volatility which refers to those voters who switch allegiances from one election to another has risen sharply at recent elections. Aimer (1992) calculated the rate of volatility at 6.6 per cent for the period 1954–69 and 13.3 between 1972 and 1990, while the years 1984, 1987, and 1990 had an average of 17.3 per cent. Moreover, post elections surveys in 1987 and 1990 found that less than two thirds of eligible voters voted for the same party in two consecutive elections (Aimer 1992:331), and in 1993, taking into account non-voters, 45 per cent of potential voters chose differently in the 1990 and 1993 elections (Vowles et al 1995:45). Understandably, this volatility has had an effect on traditional identifications with political parties, and as a consequence, party partisanship has also declined. In the 1990 election little more than 35 per cent of electors felt a strong attachment to a political party.

Party identification is also slipping, with an increasing amount of 'don't knows' when people are asked about party preference. The 1987 and the 1990 elections showed fewer than two thirds of the electorate actually cast a vote in accordance with a prior partisanship; 32 per cent of those asked in the 1990 survey made up their mind who to vote for during the election campaign (Aimer 1992:332–333). This trend continued through the 1993 election, although significantly, as identification with Labour and National further decreased, there was a relative increase in identification with the minor parties (Vowles et al 1995:35).

An additional rejection of party identification, and indeed politics in general can be seen in the way parties and politicians have abandoned traditional methods of appealing to voters. For example, party manifestos used to be a way for parties to pledge their intentions to voters, however this process has been broken as successive governments have abandoned their promises. Lamare (1992:67) contextualises these shifting patterns of political affiliation and responsiveness to

change, and offers a possible outcome if the problems noted above are not resolved.

What is emerging in this time of discontent in New Zealand is not necessarily a democratically wholesome development: growing party independence amongst voters is not translating into a highly informed, active electorate ever attentive to parties or candidates who expose solutions that closely proximate voter's issue concerns. Instead, the ranks of the independents are more likely to include the politically apathetic and the indifferent.

Thirdly, the dissatisfaction with the political system can also be clearly observed by examining the levels of non-voting and demobilisation in New Zealand politics. Vowles (1994b:96) associates party dealignment and voter demobilisation with a "declining interest in politics, political efficacy and party identification". While the official turnout rates at elections have fluctuated in New Zealand since 1938, there has been a general decline, most noticeably after 1984. The highest turnout was in 1946 with 97 per cent of those enrolled, voting, however this had dropped to 85 per cent in 1990 (Vowles and Aimer 1993:42). This does not show the whole story. The real participation rate, that which takes into account the total number who were eligible to vote regardless of whether they enrolled or not was much less. A high in 1938 of 93 per cent has dropped to 76 per cent in 1990, which meant one in every four of the adult population failed to vote in 1990 (Vowles and Aimer 1993:43).

Vowles (1994b:105) argues that as the party system has dealigned, non-voting has risen. While increasing inequality and unemployment is one of the usual reasons associated with non-voting, more recently the incidence of non-voting has stretched throughout the whole of society. This means the dissatisfaction with modern politics is an increasingly widespread phenomenon, encompassing much of the middle class, who might otherwise have been expected to be more likely to participate in elections. By 1990, public sentiments of powerlessness was at a high

and interest in politics was low across the board. When comparing attitudinal changes between 1963, 1981 and 1990 elections, Vowles found that interest in politics declined considerably. Those very interested in politics numbered 38 per cent in 1963, 31 in 1981 and only 15 in 1990. Also those who were not a supporter of a political party rose from 9 per cent in 1963 to 26 in 1990.

Finally, the traditional way of showing an active interest in politics – that being through membership of a political party – has seriously declined. While it is difficult to assess the level of membership of political parties due to the cautiousness that parties have in expressing levels of support, it can be confidently argued that membership has definitely dropped, especially since 1984. The Labour party in particular has suffered. In 1938 there were 630 Labour Party branches with 51 174 members. By 1969 it had declined to 307 branches with 13 476 members (Jesson 1989:23). Branch membership did pick up after 1975 with a renewed support of the Labour party, and it is believed to have risen to 45 000, however it had dropped to 27 000 in 1987, and only 11 000 in 1988 (Gustafson 1992:275–276).

These examples of change in New Zealand's political culture clearly show some definitive movements in the perception of politics, signifying more specifically, an increasingly widespread attitude of disinterest towards conventional political discourse. Whether these changes in New Zealand can be associated with a paradigmatic shift from an old to a new politics as implied in the *New Times* thesis and detailed more extensively by Crook et al (1994) and Inglehart (1990) though, is contestable.

Certainly many of the examples outlined above reflect those changes Crook et al (1994) specify as indicators of a shift towards new politics, and as a result of the quite evident loss of legitimacy for traditional political institutions in New Zealand, several explanations of this in terms of the influence of new politics have been

made. Rainbow (1993:3) for example, clearly believes new politics to be relevant when contemplating the contemporary political situation in New Zealand. He argues such relevance dates back to the emergence of the Values Party in 1972 which highlighted the fact that old political forms could not respond to new political concerns, and that the traditional parties had no room or ability to articulate non-economic issues. This, he believes has ultimately remained a problem for the traditional parties, which can be recognised when looking at those who represent the major political issues of the 1970s and 1980s.

The anti-nuclear protests, the debates surrounding Maori sovereignty and land ownership, and the movements expressing concern for the environment had no basis within party politics, rather they were driven by smaller organisations located in civil society. More recently, the political issues that have raised the most attention have not been party oriented. The protests over French nuclear testing for example have been organised outside traditional sites of political association. Indeed, consistent with Crook et al's analysis of new politics, the media in New Zealand have been most influential in unifying and promoting these campaigns. The media's role in cultivating a new political dimension has been immense, especially with the shift in emphasis of news broadcasting in New Zealand towards entertainment value, stylistic peculiarities and personal image, which has suited the requirements of specific issue-based politics such as the campaigning against French nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Nevertheless, despite the evidence of an alternative form of political articulation, recent data provided by Vowles and Aimer (1993) and Vowles et al (1995) places doubt over whether there has in fact occurred an obvious transition towards new politics. They are also sceptical of the idea that a swing towards postmaterialism is an inevitable outcome of disenchantment with modern politics.

Contrary to what Rainbow and others have suggested, Vowles et al (1995:110)

have identified a resurgence of old political concerns and a corresponding decline in interest towards issues championed through new politics. For example, matters of welfare and trade unionism were determined as more important issues for voters in 1993 than they had been at previous elections. At the same time, issues of the environment, and those involving Maori declined in importance. This is illustrated by only 27 per cent of voters considering the importance of the environment as 'extreme' in 1993, down from 50 per cent in 1990. Similarly, 26 per cent thought the importance of race relations was extreme in 1990, but that had decreased to 14 per cent in 1993.

Vowles et al suggest that the reason for the relative decline in interest of the new political issues that arose in the 1970s and 1980s is because, to some extent they have been resolved, and the conflict that gave them prominence has been neutralised within an old political dimension. While Rainbow argues the new political issues did not originate in the traditional realm of politics, it is apparent that they have been adequately negotiated within that realm, and therefore do not pose as much threat to the established political institutions as might have been initially expected.

The primary reason for the attention to be turned back towards old political issues in New Zealand however is not directly a result of this negotiation, rather it is a consequence of the economic policies, and in particular those of market liberalisation undertaken by successive Labour and National governments (Vowles et al 1995:121). Among other things, these policies have had the effect of widening, and accentuating the gap between rich and poor, which has created more of an 'economic' divide within society. In combination with low levels of economic growth, these two factors have had the effect of diminishing rather than enhancing the growth of postmaterialist values, and consequently re-emphasising those of the materialist kind.

Ultimately, the decline in respect for traditional political institutions noted above may not necessarily correspond to a decline in interest for materialist, or old political issues. Rather, a reason for such a loss of legitimacy could well be a result of consecutive governments and political parties side-lining materialist issues in favour of new political concerns.

CONCLUSION

My own developing perspective on the question of the contemporary political configuration in New Zealand has been twofold. Firstly, there are theoretical and historical grounds for questioning a hard and fast polarization between the 'old' politics and the 'new', both with respect to social formations in Europe, and here in New Zealand. Issues of class affiliation are often murkier than is made out, and any straight equation of the old with material interests alone is questionable. Secondly, whilst shifts in the nature and content of political representation are to some extent undeniable, and feel intuitively 'right', the character and stability of the social basis of 'movement' and 'cultural' politics remains fairly uncertain, and in any case it is surely in terms of 'non-material' concerns. Thirdly, the evidence from the last twelve years in the New Zealand socio-political 'experiment'⁷ indicates that the actual new, as opposed to the hypothetical New, will involve a complex blending of material and non-material concerns, class interests and other socio-cultural aspects of group politics.

⁷ see Kelsey, J. (1995).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES

INTRODUCTION

While the debate over New Times has been predominantly concerned with a new economic and political landscape, it is the more latent references to the increasing complexity of cultural identities, and the way these identities have become centrally important in mapping future political possibilities, that has perhaps offered the most profound interest. While initially at least, cultural identity was not a dimension that was given much attention in New Times debates, it is the aspect which I believe has come to represent the key contribution from the New Times writers. Indeed, much of the more recent writing on the changing role of identity and subjectivity can be traced to the New Times debate, although, interestingly, this topic area is somewhat more nebulous and less clearly related to the available 'evidence' than previously considered questions of political alignment and shifts in the socio-economic 'regime'.

For example, a good deal of the wealth of literature which has surrounded the conception of a '*politics of difference*' can be seen to have originated in the New Times arguments, especially in terms of references to the interrelated connections between economics, politics and culture. Consistent with the New Times argument, the politics of difference is essentially a way of negotiating and articulating the development of cultural diversity, and above all is a style of politics that rejects all the ideas that identify with the possibility of unifying people politically for one single cause (McLennan 1995:88). The cultural politics of difference can be seen as the political response to New Times, a form of cultural politics which, it is argued, is better placed to represent cultural change in the 1990s than a conventional 'politics of sameness'.

The emphasis placed on the pluralist nature of cultural identities has meant that more recent attention has increasingly been placed on the construction and

development of cultural and national identities. This progression is particularly relevant to New Zealand, with the contemporary preoccupation with the formation of a bicultural, post-colonial identity. The politics of difference then, has understandably been an important reference point for cultural debates in New Zealand. Yet as I shall point out, in any obsessive form, this concern with difference and identity politics is of limited value in the search for a satisfactory account of recent cultural change.

THE DECLINE OF THE SOCIAL SUBJECT

Stuart Hall in particular has made clear references to the processes taking place which seem to involve the fragmentation of social subjects based on a collective identity such as a class or a national culture, and a rise in importance of individual or more precise subcultural subjects. In the *New Times*, Hall (1990:120) argues

the 'self' is conceptualised as more fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds we inhabit... (and) the 'subject' is differently placed or *positioned* by different discourse and practices.

Central to this belief is the assumption that the subject no longer has a coherent 'essence' – or that the subject has a pre-determined social construction. There is also no 'essential' logic to the existence of particular discourses or practices, which means that any given subculture can not be understood in terms of wider, more structural influences. Ernesto Laclau (1990:40) has been a chief proponent of this view, arguing that from a fixed and centred conception of the self, modern identities have fragmented to a position where they no longer have a single articulating principle. Instead, they have been 'dislocated', and are made up of a pluralised array of centres. As a result, societies are not based around a culture of sameness or unity, rather they are articulated together by the (always partial)

acceptance of difference.

Hall argues that it is the lack of recognition of these tendencies which has caused a crisis within traditional cultural politics. Specifically, the undivided concern with 'collective identities', and the lack of acknowledgement or ability to recognise the evidence of cultural diversity has been where the problems for the Left have begun. Therefore, Hall, along with other New Times writers conclude that socialism, if it is to progress, must look to the subjective dimension in politics instead of focusing exclusively on objective contradictions, and must be "committed to, rather than scared of diversity and difference" (1990:130).

This rise of diversity and the pluralisation of subjectivities can be directly associated with the emergence of the new social movements and in particular feminism, and more recently, the rapid spread of globalisation. Firstly, of the new social movements, feminism provided the most consistent challenge to the distinction between public and private worlds, which encouraged the *personalisation* of politics. This highlighted the fact that *all* acts of social life were political acts, whether they be in the domain of private households, or in public workplaces. Additionally, feminism questioned the idea that men and women were part of the same identity by paying more attention to sexual difference and the formation of gendered differences. This placed an emphasis on the individual in recognising their own sites of personal identification (Hall 1992:290). More generally, the new social movements provided more of a focus on 'subjective' as opposed to 'objective' dimensions of politics. As a result, these movements showed more interest in the specific *identity* of their proponents or followers such as their gender or ethnic group, rather than their class location (ibid).

The second, and more recently acknowledged cause of fragmenting identities has been that of *globalisation*, or more specifically the way global processes have cut across national boundaries, disrupting 'national' cultural identities. What these

processes have threatened is the on-going existence of *national* identities, as they have acted to dispel many of the myths surrounding national origins, tradition and primordial status. The advance of globalisation has achieved this with the creation of a much more interconnected world system through rapid improvements in communication systems, of which the most important development has been the access to globally networked media images.

One of the major effects has been the easy access to, and interaction with, previously unfamiliar cultural lifestyles, not only as a result of the media providing more accessibility to these foreign cultures, but also owing to the rapid increase in the migration of people from poorer undeveloped nations to the West. Essentially this has challenged the actual underlying strength of national cultures, and for the advanced nations, Hall suggests there have been three significant consequences.

Firstly, national identities are being eroded due to the growth of a global culture with no specific geographical location, (although primarily originating in the United States); secondly, and at the same time, local or particularistic identities are being strengthened as a form of resistance to globalisation; and thirdly, new identities of hybridity are being formed taking the place of old national ones (Hall 1992:300). Globalisation then, has had a profound and telling impact on these cultural identities created in the development of modernity, which have subsequently been ruptured, and have become "detached – disembedded – from specific types, places, histories and traditions, and appear free floating" (Hall 1992:303).

In place of the types of identity constructed by modernity has emerged a distinctly postmodern cultural formation which has been referred to as cultural *hybridity*. Principally, the formation of ethnic minority enclaves in the advanced nations as a result of migration has inspired the development of new hybrid formations, although hybrid cultures cut across *all* traditionally demarcated cultural lines. Without doubt though, the growth in international migration has intensified these

developments, as ethnic groups have been forced to go through a process of cultural re-identification in their new environments, making the justification of the existence of 'national' culture as being representative of all those subjects within a nation, problematic. Ultimately, these new cultural formations have had the effect of dispelling the myths that national identities are 'natural' identities, and therefore the idea that subjectivity is inherently fixed.

In summary, this New Times explanation of the contemporary cultural configuration is ultimately justified by highlighting the inadequacies of how traditional modernist thought perceived identities to be constructed. Hall (1992:314) argues the great ideologies such as marxism and liberalism believed that modernism meant identities of ethnicity and attachment to the 'local' would become less important and in their place a universalistic identity would emerge. However, as a result of the ever increasing intensity of globalisation in particular, these notions have floundered, which has essentially necessitated a new, alternative explanation of the construction of cultural identities, and a new, radical politics to represent a reformulated cultural matrix.

Like the other elements of the New Times project, the suggestion that there has occurred such a significant transformation has stimulated plenty of critical debate. Firstly, the major contestable site surrounds the way that the focus on the importance of hybrid cultures has diminished the relevance of conventional types of cultural unity. McLennan (1995:90) believes that too much attention has been awarded to the existence of cultural hybridity, and the extent to which 'fluidity' and a 'lack of exclusivity' are powerful features of cultural organisation. He argues that the people who Hall makes a particular example of as those most likely to affiliate with hybrid formations, such as migrants who have experienced cultural and social dislocation, may be perhaps more inclined to turn towards "essentialist symbolic strategies, rather than syncretic modes of expression". This suggests that hybridity has been falsely represented as something more 'cohesive', and unifying than older

forms of cultural identification. In this light, McLennan doubts whether hybridity has the ability to satisfactorily unify a 'people' to the extent it is argued by the socially concerned intelligentsia, and whether those people participating in new cultural formations actually see those formations as representative of their basic identity. What is perhaps most understated here is the way that hybrid culture is just a 'complex front' for traditional forms of cultural identity in an increasingly complex society.

Related to this, is the lack of clarity surrounding the extent to which hybridity is a sign that social and cultural formations have explicitly *changed*, from the uniformity of the past, to the irregularity of the present. The New Times position presumes that the emergence of hybridity is a *recent* phenomenon, yet it may well be that the supposed increase in fragmented identities and difference is more simply an *awareness* of difference, intensified by the spread of global economic and cultural processes (McLennan 1995:89).

The position taken by New Times has also attracted considerable criticism in relation to the *political* implications of an adherence to hybridity. In particular, the ability to formulate a *radical* politics from the acknowledgement of difference is complicated by the compulsive adherence to anti-essentialism. While the New Times argument points out that class movements carry a prohibitive essentialist logic, they fail to acknowledge that most of, if not all social groups or movements have *some* form of 'essence'. For example, all groups generally define themselves in relation to some 'other', and project a set of values which is in 'opposition' to other values. Women's movements for example perceive a world which is organised and structured around certain patriarchal values and ideas (McLennan 1991:57). That said, it would appear the New Times efforts to highlight the problems with essentialist-based movements through the creation of a radical politics of difference, is 'restrictive', rather than 'emancipatory'.

The idea that a 'politics of difference' is in fact 'radical', 'alternative', and 'new', has been further challenged by those who find the dismissal of certain movements because of their essentialism and 'exclusionist' politics, problematic. If a politics is 'radical' and 'progressive', it should be presumed that specific types of politics would be undesirable, such as certain nationalist groups and fundamentalist religious groups. Yet within a framework which is preoccupied with ensuring the pre-eminence of 'difference', *no* form of politics can be unacceptable. The lack of concern for a 'unification' of interests, and therefore any form of metanarrative or dominant focus, means a 'radical' politics of difference conceivably becomes a 'conservative' politics of *indifference* (McLennan 1995:84).

The point of these remarks is not to foreclose on the debates around identity, culture and difference, merely to point out that there is a danger that a new orthodoxy may be in the making before some of these taxing and important matters have been fully considered.

CULTURAL CHANGE IN NEW ZEALAND

In a sense, New Zealand can be seen as an excellent example of a nation experiencing the cultural changes argued by the New Timers. Firstly, New Zealanders' inherent cultural insecurity has made it significantly easier for a homogenised global culture to take hold and squash lingering (but not fixed) icons of New Zealand's cultural development. Secondly, there has been a resurgence in an identification with 'local', and especially for Maori, 'traditional' cultural identities, placing question marks over the established representativeness of national identity. Lastly, these reflections upon the partial representativeness of New Zealand's distinctive cultural identifications have realised the existence of numerous other forms of identity which have never been included in the accustomed sense of 'Kiwi' culture.

Subsequently, much attention has been given to the relevance of 'difference' to New Zealand's cultural situation, and the recognition of developing formations of hybridity. In this context there is a larger and perhaps wider genre of writing which supports this aspect of the New Times framework as applied to New Zealand than the other economic and political dimensions. This is particularly evident in the debates around the construction of national identity, where considerable interest is awarded to identity politics, especially given the increasing awareness of ethnic difference between Maori and Pakeha.

Not surprisingly then, the observance of national identity has not centred around the recognition of a 'fixed' national culture, rather it has revolved around the celebration of 'multiple' cultural identities. Indeed, the text edited by Novitz and Willmott, *Culture and Identity in New Zealand* (1989), clearly establishes that it is inappropriate to speak of a 'single' Kiwi identity. Willmott argues that national identity offers an individual the chance to associate with an identity which is not premised on distinctive cultural behaviour, giving the opportunity for individuals to choose their own level of association (Willmott 1989:8).

Similarly, in an exploration of interpretations of New Zealand's nationalism and national identity, Bell and McLennan (1995:2) observe that a focus is now

placed increasingly on cultural identities in the plural, rather than identity in the singular. Not only are there a great many given and inherited cultural identities to take account of in any analysis of political subjecthood, increasingly the interchange between these local identities is producing a whole range of *hybrid* forms of consciousness, lifestyle and action.

Additionally, Bell and McLennan argue there are a growing number of sites where various cultural beliefs and practices are merging, creating situations where individuals may have multiple cultural identifications. This is especially relevant to New Zealand with a growing recognition of biculturalism, and also the rapidly

diversifying nature of the migrants entering New Zealand (Bell and McLennan 1995:2).

Wendy Larner also argues non-traditional sites of inequality are becoming increasingly obvious and important in New Zealand. From a feminist perspective, Larner furthers the level of focus on cultural difference by arguing that as far as women are concerned, there is no longer a possibility for a feminist standpoint in New Zealand, and attributes much of this to ethnic differences, primarily between Maori and Pakeha women's experiences. With regard to a feminist explanation of recent change in New Zealand culture, Larner concludes that the "overwhelming focus has been on the relationship between the indigenous people and the descendants of British migrants and the major issue for women in New Zealand has surrounded this relationship" (1993:90). Interestingly, Larner charges the inability to champion a feminist standpoint in New Zealand to the rise in consciousness of ethnicity, which has been placed without much doubt at the leading edge of political posturing in the last ten years.

From the interpretations of recent trends in the formation of identities relating to national culture, it would appear that a new style of cultural politics is necessary in New Zealand. Paul Spoonley believes what is needed is the construction of a 'post-colonial' politics which gives a better understanding of New Zealand's most recent cultural developments. Spoonley (1995a:97) observes that "what is intriguing about politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and distinguishes it from similar debates elsewhere is the dominance of the bifurcatory politics of Maori and Pakeha". This, claims Spoonley is a key development in New Zealand's association with post-colonialism. In accord with Larner, he believes New Zealand has increasingly taken on a 'bi-cultural' form as globalisation has created an assimilation of national culture, and argues that what post-colonialism means to New Zealand is an awareness and subsequent acceptance that 'colonialism' has been rejected, and some alternative form of cultural politics has become more appropriate (1995b:49).

The term post-colonialism is, according to Spoonley, the best way to encapsulate the direction in which New Zealand is moving politically, because three of the most significant developments in recent times have primarily affected cultural and ethnic relations within New Zealand. Firstly, the dismantling of universal welfare benefits and the introduction of targeting has reinforced the marginalisation of Maori and Pacific Islanders. Secondly, the traditional basis of politics has tended to shift away from work-based politics. For Maori, it has been replaced by a form of 'ethnic politics' developed by an increasingly organised political voice from both urban and iwi based Maori groups laying claims to resources under the Treaty of Waitangi. Thirdly, the immigration policy over the last decade has encouraged new groups to move to New Zealand, from Asia, and more recently South Africa, which has added to the ethnic diversity in New Zealand (1995b:48). The consequence has been a necessary recognition of cultural difference, and also importantly, a recognition that ethnicity has in many cases superseded the salience of class as an explanation of social difference in New Zealand.

While the focus on post-colonialism as a basis for an understanding of contemporary New Zealand society allows for the institutional recognition of ethnic minorities, it has at the same time also necessarily demanded a more explicit statement of the identity of the majority culture. The successful adoption of a post-colonial politics rests on the idea that the formation of a *Pakeha* identity can be achieved to satisfy the requirements of biculturalism. Spoonley suggests there are several possible points of unity that may be able to give Pakeha a cultural distinctiveness. For example, there is a possibility for Pakeha to recognise the assertive cultural politics practised by Maori, and adopt a similar style to "identify their cultural values and contribution" (1995b:55). There is also the potential for Pakeha to identify themselves as part of a culture that is now truly independent of that which marked New Zealand as a colony of Britain (*ibid*).

The response to the call for a Pakeha identity has however been by no means

widely supported. On the one hand it has been welcomed as an avenue for Pakeha to assert their own independence from an association with the British colonialists who originally settled in New Zealand, but there has also been a clear and numerically forceful rejection, particularly by the conservative middle class, of a label that is claimed to represent New Zealanders of European descent. The recent attempt to 'invent' such an identity has struck serious problems, most notably with the difficulty in recognising a common cultural linkage that had not been previously contemplated.

Firstly, it has been strongly argued that the appropriation of 'Pakeha' as a focus for cultural identity has been a political act, in many ways confined to the 'liberal' middle class who are in a privileged position to enjoy self reflection (Spoonley 1995a:107). Moreover, this only represents a small section of the middle class. There is a strong middle class voice that does not believe a specific Pakeha identity exists, and therefore questions the logic behind trying to celebrate such an identity. Instead, they believe it is being invented to advantage Maori and other minorities. This section of the middle class who see no benefit at all coming to them, are ultimately concerned at the level of government resources being used for the unnecessary institutional recognition of biculturalism.

Additionally, while the socially 'conservative' middle class have been the most vocal in the opposition to calls for a Pakeha identity, there is also "little to suggest working class Pakeha share an interest in 'pakeha' as a cultural or political identity" (Spoonley 1995a:107). The working class can be identified as the group who primarily bore the brunt of the economic restructuring of the 1980s, and many lost what financial security they had. Consequently, the working class can still be seen to be burdened with attempts to achieve economic security, let alone a cultural identity.

The salient point here appears to be that those articulating post-colonial politics

are those constructing public policy, who tend to be middle class, which signifies a minority viewpoint. This raises an important observation made by McLennan (1995:90), who emphasises the fractional interest in the construction of hybrid cultures by pointing out that most of the reflection upon new cultural formations is found in radical *intellectual*, rather than popular circles. What is more, these communities tend to have specific class and geographical locations, primarily in sophisticated urban settings which places doubt over whether the majority of people outside this environment feel, or experience the same degree of cultural upheaval that is spoken of. This seems particularly relevant to New Zealand where the attempt to create a Pakeha identity may be excitingly possible in theory, but its practical application does not appear to have forged the same spirit.

It would seem obvious then, that an acceptance of a cultural understanding of New Zealand based on 'difference' is problematic. Firstly, it appears that not all identities share a level of equal importance. As Larner concedes, feminist concerns in New Zealand have been overshadowed by ethnic issues, and it must be accepted that ethnicity is more powerful in shaping cultural identities in New Zealand. This gives the impression that one dominant form of identity politics is taking over from old class-based politics, rather than the forecasted equal representation of a plurality of identities. Indeed, 'post-colonial' politics in New Zealand, while potentially referring to the inclusion of multiple identities appears to be very much about ethnicity.

Secondly, while a key to identity politics is the celebration of 'anti-essentialism', ethnic politics in New Zealand in terms of the mobilisation of Maori is inconceivable without some form of essentialism. The grievances held by Maori are historic and structural, and are situated in a cultural location which has distinct boundaries in terms of what it sees its as intrinsic identity. Thirdly, as has been shown above, the attempts to construct a 'Pakeha' culture has come up against considerable opposition and shows that as McLennan suggests, hybridity does not

necessarily produce a strong, unified culture. It may even lead to a renewed form of 'liberalism', in which each individual can lay claim to a special identity based on a unique and sovereign genealogy. Indeed, from the criticisms levelled at attempts to formulate such a culture, issues of class feature predominantly, showing that economic issues are still critically important in the construction of cultural identity. Ironically then, it can be forwarded with specific reference to New Zealand that an understanding of a cultural configuration based on difference is perhaps even *more* 'exclusionary' than a politics based around class.

NEW ZEALAND'S CULTURAL CRISIS: TWO RESPONSES

So far I have given the impression that despite the obvious occurrence of significant cultural changes in New Zealand, an explicitly new understanding of cultural formations and a radically new set of politics are unnecessary to adequately acknowledge the changes. However, complementing this general belief must be an acknowledgement that recent cultural changes in New Zealand are seriously challenging conventional ways of understanding cultural relationships. This is highlighted in this section by contrasting two different interpretations of New Zealand's recent political, economic, and cultural change. One is provided by Anna Yeatman, who gives a postmodern account of change focusing on the 'politics of identity', and how the formation of a particular way of acknowledging diversity will be able to significantly redress the unease that is characterising New Zealand society in the 1990s. Secondly, Jane Kelsey offers a marxist interpretation of change in New Zealand, paying particular attention to changes in the economy, and ownership of resources. While this comparison does highlight in my mind the inappropriateness of the use of a politics of difference to describe the contemporary cultural configuration in New Zealand, the most interesting outcome of the debate is that as cultural identity has become more complex, specific issues of a New Times nature *have* become evident, which does signify *something* new, and which

subsequently requires a political reassessment to adequately acknowledge these changes.

Firstly, Kelsey clearly locates New Zealand's 'crisis' as she labels it in the way the economy has transformed in the past ten years. For Kelsey, this economic transformation was a result of New Zealand becoming fully involved in the globalisation of national economies, which fundamentally altered the dynamics of power that had previously existed (1994:192). Subsequently, the democratic process was placed under immense strain as the state increasingly lost economic power through the disposal of its social responsibility by selling nationally owned resources. The state simultaneously lost its ability to make key decisions on social policy concerning all New Zealanders, and the legitimacy of the democratic institutions was critically reduced. Essentially, Kelsey argues New Zealand's crisis has largely been an economic one, and suggests the only way this crisis will be resolved is if the state recovers its autonomy by regaining control of New Zealand's sovereign assets.

By contrast, Yeatman is intent on highlighting the inappropriate way in which the state characterised and represented its subjects as the element which brought New Zealand society towards turmoil in the 1980s. Yeatman maintains that the reason why the state has suffered a loss of legitimacy is due to its lack of recognition of cultural difference. The state failed because it was not able to address the needs of the people as it did not have the ability to relate to people in different circumstances. To illustrate this, Yeatman distinguishes between two different approaches to national community.

Firstly, the 'customary' sense of national community encapsulates an individual's identity as fixed by a 'founder status', and given for all time (1994:209). Additionally, other aspects of one's identity are also fixed, such as one's gender. For example, the state identifying with a customary form of identity "accorded (with

the) masculine role of protecting the motherland and mother country" (1994:210). It is this ideal, according to Yeatman that constituted the Welfare State in the 1930s, and the one which broke down in the 1970s and 1980s as various groups rejected the limited and fixed nature of the state's representation, only satisfying people fitting one particular identity. Yeatman suggests an alternative 'conventionalist' form of national community is needed, given the diversity and cultural difference evident in contemporary New Zealand society. As opposed to 'customary' forms of national community, it is not structured by kinship, instead the state represents people who bear different identities and interests, and is upheld by legal structures, based on the concept of justice.

From this brief contrast, it appears that Kelsey feels the state is impotent without economic sovereignty, and that selective legal changes to the constitutional role of the state to recognise multiple identities would be ultimately ineffective in achieving a more representative state. Yeatman on the other hand believes the failures the state has experienced are a result of its unresponsiveness to cultural change, and this can be put right through appropriate legislative and judicial changes.

To add weight to her argument, Yeatman gives an example of how legislative changes can create the conditions for a conventionalist conception of national community by drawing attention to the changes in the recognition of difference with the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act. She argues that "enterprise bargaining has the potential both to implement and to develop this contractual capacity in ways that disrupt established employment practices and culture" (1995:205). With enterprise bargaining, women for example are considered more individual, and thus, sovereign selves. Until the instigation of the Employment Contracts Act, Yeatman holds that women were not constituted in industrial law as contractual equals, rather they were presumed to be dependants on their fathers or husbands (ibid). With the elimination of this dependence through the

implementation of new legislation, "women workers have, in principle at least, become independent workers with full contractual capacity as employees" (ibid).

Furthermore, Yeatman declares new forms of production such as 'Total Quality Control' are methods that hold recognition for sovereign selfhood, and contends that the move towards these practices has broken down established paternalistic relations. Yeatman concludes that if employment contracts are made more adequately contractual to satisfy justice, employers' prerogative will be challenged at its roots for the first time (1995:206). So by acknowledging cultural difference in law, and institutionalising a conventionalist type of national community, the state will be able to treat its present crisis successfully, and presumably as a result, a satisfactory level of democracy will be made possible.

Kelsey though, is firmly of the view that if the state has no economic control or power, then it cannot provide the institutional settings for a participative democracy. In the case of New Zealand, the autonomy of the state has diminished in the past ten years and consequently, with little or no autonomy, any efforts to maintain and uphold democratic procedures became ineffectual. As a response to the state's failure to at least be seen to be providing a satisfactory democratic environment, a demand for parliamentary reform eventuated with the call for an implementation of proportional representation. Such a realisation was considered to be a means to place more control on the politicians in the decision making process, however Kelsey disputes the idea that proportional representation will do anything "to genuinely empower those who had traditionally been excluded from, or marginal to the sources of institutional and economic power" (1994:190). This is because on its own, proportional representation can do nothing to address the question of state autonomy. At best, it may force the state to become more formally democratic and accountable, nevertheless it would still be relatively powerless in creating a genuine environment for participation within decision making (ibid). The main reason for this of course is that the powers of the

government are restricted to 'national' territories, yet business organisation and economic activity is 'multi-national'. The crucial decisions affecting New Zealanders are increasingly made by global and transnational bodies outside New Zealand, which severely limits the level of democracy that is possible.

Interestingly, despite Kelsey's emphasis on the power of the state as the institution that is most equipped to effect economic redistribution, she is at the same time sceptical about the ability of the state as an institution capable of ultimately providing the economic sovereignty that New Zealanders are demanding. At the moment, there is a state that has many features which Yeatman uses to describe 'customary national community', where subjects are "equally represented within the state-defined national identity, national economy and national interest"... a perspective that "champions a colonial state which is premised on the suppression of Maori sovereignty... (and) which denies the structural inequalities of economic and social power" (Kelsey 1995:167). Clearly, this type of state cannot be the focus of calls for greater sovereignty. However Kelsey makes these claims only within the context that there is clearly still a key role for national governments in that they do have the ability to exercise certain amounts of economic redistribution, despite the relatively lesser degree of power they may hold.

In comparison, Yeatman believes that once a form of conventionalist national community is institutionalised, the chance for equality of opportunity and participative democracy is quite possible, as the state recognises people on their own terms. The state's use of customary national community does not offer the process of scrutiny as all mores and rules are fixed, and beyond criticism. Hence, the shift to a 'civic' nationalism from an ethnocentric one will open the way for policy discussion, processes of public learning and subsequently, more participation (1994:218). For Kelsey, the implementation of a 'broader-based interest group pluralism', something akin to what Yeatman is talking about, would still have to accept the 'realities of the market' (1994:191). For example, Maori would be invited

to contribute to debates about their concerns, however they would also have to acknowledge that Treaty aspirations could only be looked at in a market oriented context (ibid). In this sense, the opportunity to participate does not necessarily mean different groups hold equal power.

Indeed, the case of resolving Maori grievances is one area that exemplifies the difference in approaches taken by Kelsey and Yeatman. While Yeatman celebrates the politics of cultural difference, she doesn't appear to afford a place for prioritising specific historical settlements based on founder status. The conventional idea of national community does not privilege the idea of founder status as a desirable way of addressing equality, rather founder status is a characteristic based on a customary notion. Yeatman then appears reluctant to acknowledge the importance associated with solving such grievances which have been established as one of the most pre-eminent concerns in New Zealand. "Biculturalism ... is something which is both historically contingent, and maybe overtaken in time by changes in the cultural-ethnic composition of the New Zealand population" (1994:209). Kelsey however pays particular attention to the issue of Maori grievances as she firmly situates New Zealand's economic crisis in a context arising from a nation coming to terms with its history of being developed by settler colonialism, and at the same time dispossessing the tangata whenua. In this light, Kelsey perceives 'founder status' as specifically important to New Zealand, and in so doing is unwilling to dismiss the concept just because it doesn't fit with the prevailing tide of recognition of cultural pluralism.

I make no apology for concentrating on two particular authors in seeking to appraise the value of a 'politics of difference' approach. As with my other dimensions of New Times, there is simply not a critical mass of writing in this vein, in this country. But more importantly, we have here a 'debate' between two feminist authors who are both influential and whose respective feminisms intersect with class and ethnicity in very contrasting ways.

In my view, this comparative analysis exposes major weaknesses in the argument favouring a 'politics of difference' as a replacement for a class-based politics in response to New Zealand's ongoing cultural crisis. Essentially, two main failings are presented in Yeatman's argument. Firstly, while a significant influence upon the rise of identity politics in New Zealand has been the result of an increasing politicisation of ethnicity, the problems faced by Maori in New Zealand do not appear to be sufficiently explained in terms of identity politics. For Maori, their primary concern is with the injustice they have experienced at the hands of the Crown in the past 150 years, and naturally their social grievances are lodged in historic developments. Yet Yeatman believes concerns over founder status are now irrelevant and outdated, as they belong to a form of 'customary' identity. Additionally, it would appear that Maori are interested first and foremost in recovering *economic* rights, illegally acquired in the past, which are not addressed, or given any priority through achieving recognition for their cultural difference.

This leads onto the second shortcoming, which is the way the adoption of an analysis of difference to understand New Zealand culture neglects structural, or economic factors affecting various groups. For example, the institutional recognition of Maori as being a distinct culture within New Zealand doesn't take into account the fact that the overwhelming majority of Maori are in the working class. Indeed, no matter how detached Maori feel, their level of economic independence in the last ten years has in most cases *declined*. Similarly, while Yeatman stresses that the Employment Contract Act recognises women as legally sovereign selves, the findings in this thesis have revealed that more women have been *disadvantaged* since the introduction of the ECA.

The most important point that comes from this debate however is not that a politics of difference is an entirely inappropriate way of analysing contemporary cultural relationships, rather that there are several points where a traditional Left understanding of culture is equally unable to fully explain recent changes. For

example, despite their differences, Kelsey appears to broadly share with Yeatman the idea that a satisfactory solution to New Zealand's crisis can only be achieved by acquiring a reformulated set of cultural politics. Yeatman talks of an equality based on institutional property rights and a non-exclusive cultural identity. To achieve this, a form of politics is needed that breaks with the past, and rejects 'customary' forms of community. Kelsey also argues that new avenues of politics are essential if these goals are to be met. Traditional corporatism, welfarism and established parliamentary democracy must be superseded by a new, alternative style of political action.

As with the New Times scenario in general, whilst it would be mistaken to imagine that this paradigm generates any obvious and convincing answers to pressing matters of cultural politics, it certainly succeeds in at least problematising older sociological and radical stances.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned with providing an assessment of both the degree of change that has occurred in New Zealand in the past decades, and the best way to contextualise and understand it. To do this I have attempted to apply the New Times thesis, a project developed to explain the widespread transformation occurring in Britain in the 1980s, to the New Zealand context.

Given the often described 'revolutionary' changes to have occurred in New Zealand since 1984, which broadly parallel those in Britain from which New Times draws its conclusions, I considered it beneficial to examine the applicability of this thesis to New Zealand. Firstly because it is undeniable that New Zealand has endured decisive changes throughout the recent decades which can be seen to be similar to those experienced in other advanced nations, and secondly because there has been a general lack of agreement on why these changes have occurred in New Zealand, and what they mean for the future. However, the major finding in the thesis is that the proposition made by the New Timers is ultimately problematic, both theoretically, and also in a practical application to New Zealand.

The three areas studied clearly highlight two major findings which contradict New Times thinking. Firstly, that economic, or class relations still have a strong influence in determining social relationships and social consciousness, and secondly, that no evidence has pointed to a specific paradigmatic shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, or from an 'old' to a 'new' politics.

In terms of economic processes, New Times suggests that the decline of mass producing industrial sites and the increase of smaller less labour intensive sites of production, the proportional decline in manual work and a corresponding increase in non-manual work, together with the 'deregulation of the economy', has made it harder to depict and easily categorise traditional class differences. But in New Zealand there is evidence of an *intensification* of class difference, as general deregulating policies culminating with the introduction of the Employment

Contracts Act have acted to maintain and in many cases accentuate an economic division between various sections of society.

In addition, almost all the evidence runs against the idea that a major turn has been taken. In the production process the number of firms shifting to post-Fordist, just-in-time practices were found to be few. Where changes had materialised they were located in specific industries or firms which were often forced by overseas trading requirements, or other express motivations. What was more evident in New Zealand were factors that *prevented* change, such as the technological limitations to the productive strengths of New Zealand industry, and the continued focus on cost efficiency as the primary form of competitive advantage. In work organisation and the labour market, similar experiences were discovered. Rather than adopting long-term strategies to maximise a highly skilled and flexible workforce, it was found that employers in New Zealand were more likely to take short-term advantage of labour laws which provided less regulation and institutional protection of workers rights. The main conclusion here is that there is more incentive for firms in New Zealand to resist economic change which questions the existence of a dichotomous framework to explain the changes that *have* arisen.

In the sphere of politics it is also apparent that class remains a highly relevant explanatory focus. New Times argued that class dealignment has reached the stage where economic conditions have no more significance as an influence on people's voting habits and political participation than other forms of social difference. Yet recent studies on electoral behaviour in New Zealand show there are signs that class is not only still important in influencing various types of political action, but as a result of economic policies carried out by successive governments in the past ten years, class is actually *increasing* in importance.

The New Times contention that a division has occurred between 'old' and 'new' politics could not be supported either. There is no explicit evidence to suggest

recent changes evoke a wholly new conception of politics as argued by the *New Times*. Moreover, the idea that there has occurred a value shift from materialist to postmaterialist political concerns has not been substantiated, rather this division has been substantially over-emphasised. While there is evidence that confirms serious dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the political system in New Zealand, there is equally a lack of evidence to imply the democratic system has ever been entirely representative, which is a presumption that *New Times* alludes to. The idea that a new postmaterialist politics based on non-economic concerns is representing supposedly 'new' issues in a 'new' political culture has also not proved to be the case. Instead the issues that are being taken up in the name of new politics still involve matters of resource distribution such as the universal provision of welfare.

In the realm of cultural politics, the *New Times* argument has fuelled the current fascination with identities and difference, with the effect of dismissing class as a force in shaping cultural beliefs and behaviour. But once again, in a climate where the redefining and renegotiating of cultural identities holds considerable attention as New Zealand contemplates a post-colonial future, economic interests continue to be centrally involved. For example, the major problems surrounding the development of a Pakeha identity in response to the aspirations to institutionalise bi-culturalism have been found to be primarily economic ones. Not only that, in spite of its contemporary and engaged feel, 'difference' appears to offer no clear or more decisive practical ways forward than older social democratic frameworks in terms of the intersection of biculturalism and multiculturalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

In the balance-sheet of my assessment then, the weight of evidence and argument (in my view) fails to substantiate any strongly phrased *New Times* perspective. Nevertheless, I do not wish to argue simply that 'nothing is new' or that older perspectives such as marxism can be gleefully reinstated. That would be far to

complacent. While I have argued that the general philosophical drift of *New Times* is flawed because changes of the scale outlined in *New Times* do not match the changes that have materialised in New Zealand, I have not dismissed the fact that some definitive changes in *have* taken place. Just as I have found it unproductive to adhere to the strict *New Times* logic, it is equally futile to argue that no changes have occurred at all. Accepting that, I have argued there is something to be salvaged from the thesis in helping to understand changes in New Zealand. Of most use I feel is the way in which *New Times* highlights the need for a fresh *holistic* account of the way changes in the economy can be linked to changes in class structures and identity formations. Moreover, while it has not proven to be empirically accurate as such, or even theoretically thorough, the great virtue of the *New Times* scenario is that it prompts us to recognise what has been missing; namely a politically engaged project which offers practical solutions, supported by a sound conjectural framework.

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