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**The Transformation of an Icon  
in the New Economy:  
A Theoretical and Empirical Exploration  
of the New Zealand Reforms**

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## Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the impact of neo-liberal reforms, initiated in response to the exigencies of a new technologically-driven global economy, on a conservative interventionist state. It is a sociological work, which encompasses history, politics, economics, organisations, social action and societal change.

Between 1984 and 1990, the Fourth Labour Government embarked upon the reform of the structure and operation of the New Zealand economy. That reform ranks amongst the most radical and far-reaching in twentieth century New Zealand. Not only were the scope and magnitude of the changes significant but they were also implemented with a rapidity that took most of the country by surprise. Consequently, New Zealanders were exposed to a new and flexible economy, where market forces provided a major contrast with the ideals of equity and consensus that had shaped social conditions since the 1950s. This new environment had significant implications for the career expectations and working environment of many people, and for the delivery and content of public services.

This thesis adds to the existing body of knowledge on the New Zealand reforms by capturing and investigating the perspectives of key actors who were involved, in a number of ways, with the transformation of the economy. It explores the theoretical and empirical basis of the reform programme, the restructuring process, the nature and scale of an intense commercialisation strategy, the attitudes of a new generation of workers and the reactions of New Zealanders when their ontological security came under threat.

Key aspects of the reforms are framed and analysed through the transformation of the New Zealand Post Office from an icon of the interventionist state, a major employer and key service provider - to a commercial enterprise which sought to be a competitive, flexible, profit-driven organisation typical of the new economy. The experiences of politicians and senior managers who were responsible for this transformation - through to individuals who depended on the organisation for services and jobs, are represented in the thesis as indicative of the actions and responses of New Zealanders, generally, regarding much broader social and organisational changes brought about by the reforms.

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