

## EDITORIAL

# IN THE LIMELIGHT? THE 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF NEW ZEALAND'S INDEPENDENCE AND OF *POLITICAL SCIENCE*

With the publication of this issue of *Political Science*, the journal has successfully completed the first sixty years of its existence. *Political Science's* diamond jubilee follows by just one year two distinctive New Zealand constitutional anniversaries – the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its having gained 'Dominion' status; and the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its Parliament having ratified the Statute of Westminster. Not that the country was preoccupied by either of these commemorative moments. New Zealanders are not greatly interested in constitutional events and there would have been few inspired to any particular excitements by these anniversaries, either singly or together. In any case, the significance and meaning of these events would be obscure for many, however important they may have been in marking the country's progression towards independent nationhood and a distinctive national identity.

Efforts were made nonetheless to draw attention to the two anniversaries. In August 2007, the New Zealand Political Studies Association – with which this journal is associated – held its annual conference, convened on this occasion at Victoria University of Wellington, with the customary streams of disciplinary papers being complemented by a special theme, beginning with a keynote session and running through the programme. The theme – '60 years of New Zealand Independence' – had two elements to it: first, to highlight the Statute of Westminster, and New Zealand's tardy but in the end definitive choice of ratification in September 1947 – the 'independence' anniversary being marked by the conference theme. The second was to reflect upon the contributions made by prime ministers from that time onwards, consciously or otherwise, towards developing and enhancing New Zealand's independence.

This special issue of the journal publishes articles derived from a number of the papers presented to that conference and highlights both facets of the conference theme. The first aspect – the Statute of Westminster and New Zealand independence – was represented at the conference by the presentations from historian W. D. McIntyre and legal/policy expert Andrew Ladley (on behalf of himself and his co-author, graduate student Elinor Chisholm). A third article, produced by political scientist John Wilson and prepared initially for the Parliamentary Library, adds further detail and perspective to New Zealand's unique and indeed somewhat idiosyncratic approach to asserting (and recognising) its own legislative sovereignty.

The second aspect of the conference theme – the role of New Zealand prime ministers in moving the country forward as an independent nation in fact as well as in law – is reflected in the selection of articles that follow. The first of these, by Harshan Kumarasingham, looking at Peter Fraser – prime minister when Parliament ratified the Statute of Westminster for New Zealand – complements the analyses and commentary offered by McIntyre, Ladley and Chisholm, and Wilson. Fraser was, of course, one of New Zealand's most important prime ministers – with a tenure of almost ten years extending through the second world war and the founding of the United Nations, with which he was involved – and Kumarasingham's article underscores Fraser's role in enhancing New Zealand's independent role in world affairs.

There have been 15 prime ministers since New Zealand ratified the Statute of Westminster – eight of them Labour (Peter Fraser, Walter Nash, Norman Kirk, Bill Rowling, David Lange, Geoffrey Palmer, Mike Moore, and Helen Clark) and seven of them National (Sidney Holland, Keith Holyoake, Jack Marshall, Robert Muldoon, Jim Bolger, Jenny Shipley, and, since 19 November 2008, John Key). It was not the intent of the conference – nor of this

special issue – to include fully developed analyses of the role of each of these leaders in developing New Zealand’s independent status. Instead, a selection of ‘case studies’ is presented allowing the overall theme of prime ministerial leadership and New Zealand independence to be illustrated and developed.

This special issue includes articles about Walter Nash, Keith Holyoake and Bill Rowling by men who, in various ways, came to know their subjects well. Bruce Brown worked with Nash for many years and his article displays insights reflecting that close association. Likewise, John Henderson’s brief overview of Bill Rowling reflects a personal association with his subject: they worked together and came from the same part of the country.

Barry Gustafson’s article on Keith Holyoake likewise draws upon a close familiarity with National’s longest-serving prime minister, reflecting his years of research into his subject in connection with his biography, *Kiwi Keith: A Biography of Keith Holyoake*, published in 2007. Gustafson’s article provides a thought-provoking perspective on Holyoake which challenges the more or less conventional wisdom that virtually all ‘independent’ strivings and policy initiatives have their origins with Labour and its leaders.

The other articles in this section of the issue also draw to some extent upon authors’ access to their subjects. Jon Johansson’s article about Jim Bolger is an analysis of Bolger’s prime ministership based not only on observations but also, at least in part, on conversations he has had with Bolger on various occasions. Similarly, as Colin James makes clear in his wide-ranging article – which covers several prime ministers (Kirk, Rowling, Muldoon, Shipley, and Clark), with a perhaps prescient postscript on John Key – his contribution provides an overview of prime ministers whom he has ‘covered’ – observed, commented on, conversed with and came to know – over the course of his long career as one of New Zealand’s leading political journalists.

Thus, in a sense these articles on prime ministerial leadership and New Zealand independence reflect the position of many a New Zealand scholar and commentator, able to write about political figures whom one has met personally, and observed, close up and for an extended period. This is an analytic perspective not always enjoyed by academics and authors in other political environments. The work is authoritative and informed, and yet less fully ‘detached’ from the subject than would be the case if the analyses were made simply on the basis of a study of speeches, policy initiatives and public gestures.

The focus on New Zealand’s path to independence, reflected in the conference theme and in this issue’s contents, was shared by the New Zealand government itself. In September 2007, only a few weeks after the New Zealand Political Studies Association’s conference, a day-long symposium on ‘Concepts of Nationhood, marking 100 years since the proclamation of Dominion status for New Zealand’ was held in the Legislative Council Chamber of Parliament, under the auspices of the incumbent Prime Minister herself. Indeed, apart from the presentation of papers highlighting the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dominion status, an attempt was made to replicate the 26 September 1907 photograph of the proclamation of New Zealand’s new Dominion status when those in attendance were assembled in the very same spot as in the original, on the steps of the Parliamentary Library, for a commemorative photograph. The two photographs, juxtaposed together – from 1907 (with the Prime Minister, Joseph Ward, and the Governor, Lord Plunket) and from 2007 (including the then Prime Minister, Helen Clark, and former Prime Ministers Geoffrey Palmer and Jim Bolger<sup>1</sup>) – are printed on page 5.

The publication of W. D. McIntyre’s book, *Dominion of New Zealand: Statesmen and Status, 1907-1945* – launched at Victoria University of Wellington in 2007 – likewise represented an attempt, by the author and the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs (which published the book), to remind New Zealanders of the significance of their own history:

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<sup>1</sup> It might also be noted that among those in the 2007 photograph are several of the contributors to this issue of *Political Science* – Bruce Brown, Harshan Kumarasingham, Andrew Ladley, and David McIntyre – as well as the editors of the journal.

of the Statute of Westminster; of the importance of New Zealand's having become a Dominion; and – consistent with the theme of his article in this issue – of the curious yet in some ways appealing process by which the country had at some point, with little public awareness, gained its independence.



The British journal, *The Round Table*, has also published a special ‘theme issue’ this year – in October 2008 (vol. 97, no. 5, issue 398) – focusing on those midnight ‘strokes of the hour’, those moments when independence was achieved by former British possessions on several continents: by India, Pakistan, Ghana, Guyana and Zimbabwe, among others. What is noteworthy here, of course, is not only that *The Round Table* chose to devote an issue to highlighting these changes in political status – zealously fought for, in most instances – but that, needless to say, a ‘case study’ on New Zealand’s achievement of independence is not to be found in its contents. No doubt this reflects, in part, the ambiguity surrounding just when, and how, New Zealand gained its independence and, as well, the absence of much zeal, or indeed any fight, in its having done so. After all, as was made clear at the August 2007 NZPSA conference – through a projector displaying an image of a page from the Wellington newspaper, *The Dominion*, from November 1947 – the debate on the passage of the Statute of Westminster bill was evidently considered to be of less importance to the newspaper than heated parliamentary discussions on the financing of lime and fertiliser subsidies.

*Stephen Levine and Nigel S. Roberts*