

PUTTING NEW ZEALAND ON THE RIGHT TRACK

BY THE EDITOR

What this country needs is bold original thinking with people prepared to stick their necks out by tossing into the public arena ideas which will ferment debate.

All the better, too, if that thinking is based on solid experience and knowledge, underpinned by a strong sense of justice and Christian commitment.

Indeed, one of the problems about Christian contributions to our society is that all too often the ideas presented sink without trace, not because they are wrong, but because the people putting them forward have not done their homework thoroughly enough.

Which brings me to the case of Rolland O'Regan, a distinguished Wellington Catholic surgeon, now retired. Rolland a couple of years ago wrote a book, *Te Ara Tika: Ten Undelivered Lectures*, which I have just finished reading.

I should have been into it long ago, because since I first heard him give a commentary on a paper at a Guild of St Luke, SS Cosmas and Damian conference some 10 years ago, I have known him as a bold and independent mind, a man of deep erudition and one of solid Christian values.



ROLLAND O'REGAN
... a patriot gives tongue.

KEY TO FUTURE
In English "Te Ara Tika" means "The Right Track". In this book, Rolland charts the path which he believes New Zealand must follow if, as he puts it, "she is to have any future as a South Pacific nation".

Apart from his distinguished medical record, he has a long record of public service, and rates a considerable entry in "Who's Who in New Zealand". He has a passionate feeling for this country and he is not afraid to show it.

It is interesting to note that his father, the late Mr Justice O'Regan, as a young man of 24 was elected to Parliament in 1893 (the year Balance died, to be succeeded as Premier by Richard John Seddon) and stayed there for six years. His idealism runs strong in Rolland.

THE PACIFIC

Rolland O'Regan's approach to our future is two-fold. On the one hand, he looks at the external and defence policies which he thinks we should adopt; he follows up that by looking at the organisation of New Zealand society, and argues radical changes are needed.

Underpinning all this is an utter conviction that "on the wall of every home and school in New Zealand there should be a good map of the Pacific Ocean and the lands bordering thereon. . . . These peoples will in time be great and prosperous nations, and our future and theirs, for good or ill, are inevitably entangled."

(It is worth noting here that there is at last beginning to develop a realisation that the Pacific Basin has a tremendous future; this makes what Mr O'Regan has to say all the more relevant.)

Mr O'Regan makes no bones about pointing out uncomfortable facts which many prefer to ignore, as, for instance, that Russia is today pre-eminently the dominant military power in the Western Pacific.

In one of the opening lectures,

he examines the geo-political-strategic set-up in the Pacific, and concludes: "New Zealand's future as an independent State could be determined by events far removed from our shores. We should look to our defences."

That is the kind of realism which we do not see in New Zealand today. How long is it since there was any serious discussion about our defence needs?

INTERTWINED

Mr O'Regan believes, as I do, that the futures of Australia and New Zealand are inextricably intertwined and that we ought to recognise this in all our policies, and especially in defence.

He rejects the notion popular in some circles that we should try for neutrality in the hope that nasty people will leave us alone. Again, while recognising the importance of achieving security through alliances, such as Anzac, he says that ultimately we should follow what he calls a "Fortress Anzac" policy.

By that, he sees us joining Australia in developing defence forces sufficient to deter would-be aggressors, with the outside perimeters of those forces taking in the island States to our north.

These are not just ideas. He spells them out in detail, and he makes a convincing case. No doubt about that.

LAND TENURE

But perhaps the most stimulating section of this book is the latter portion, where he deals with the question of land tenure in New Zealand.

He is a very strong opponent of freehold land tenure. It is not a field in which I have any expertise, but it seems to me that he makes a devastating case. (In the process, he contributes some valuable insights on the Treaty of Waitangi. Not the least of these is his interpretation of the events leading up to it becoming lawful for private citizens, as distinct from the Crown, to acquire Maori land.

That was in 1863, and he describes it as "the first step along the road to disaster for the Maori people".)

Mr O'Regan is a firm advocate of the family farm and of the need for expanded farming production in New Zealand. But he believes that this will not be possible if we carry on the way we are at present. He views with alarm the aggregation of land which is now going on. This is central to his argument that the whole system of land tenure should be reformed, with freeholding being abolished.

TWO OWNERS

He believes that a Crown leasehold system should be introduced. This would mean that each farm would have two owners — the Crown, which would own the land, and the tenant, who would own the improvements on it. Leases would run for 50 years, with provision (though not an absolute right) for renewal, so as to maintain the ideal of the family farm.

There is truth in his argument here that this would lead to stability, "because at the moment the present average term of occupancy for a New Zealand farm is only 10 years."

He rejects any suggestion that what he is proposing is nationalisation. He says that what he is proposing is in accordance with our ancient cultural traditions (under which all land was held from the Crown), and he insists that he believes in "a free enterprise economy", but I do not believe such an economy can function efficiently or produce a just society while we allow resources provided by nature to be bought and sold like chattels". Hear, hear!

These are ideas that will bear looking at. Indeed, they may well hold a key to our future. For one thing, it is a fact that land values have escalated to a point where they bear little relation to reality.

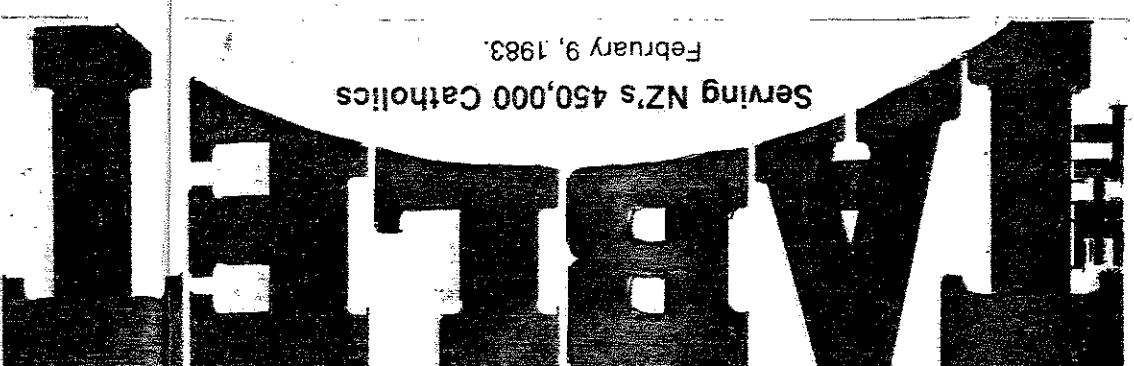
PUBLIC SERVANTS?

Certainly it is time for some thinking about the whole basis of our farming scene when it is considered that Government assistance to farming amounts to about two-thirds of farm income.

No wonder Labour MP, Stan Rodger, shrewdly observed recently that "we have created a completely new category of State-sector employees. The 70,000 or so members of Federated Farmers are probably not thinking of affiliating with the Combined State

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Unions, but they must be casting some nervous glances at the unemployed as the two groups compete for their own versions of a shrinking pool of dole money."

Farm values have gone up 40 percent in quick time; deserving young men are finding it impossible to get on to the land.

They cannot compete against the tax avoiders from Queen, Featherston and Herford Streets, or the speculators. And what chance have they against well established farmers who can use the equity in their present farm as the base for a loan to gobble up the farm next door?

This is a stimulating, provocative book. It fills, I believe, very well, the prescription I set out at the beginning of this article; Mr O'Regan has given us a piece of bold, original thinking. More power to his elbow.

Te Ara Tika is published by the Crown Leasehold Association, P.O. Box 951, Wellington, and the price is \$9.