

Beautiful New Zealand Socialist Republic

Editor's Note—The following article was received by a local resident from a relative in New Zealand. It has so much of interest in it that the Gazette Times was granted permission to print it. The author reveals his identity, needing no explanation from the editor.

By BLACKWELL SMITH

The two green pastures studded with volcanics and garnished with glaciers that contain the southernmost city of the world are known as New Zealand, until recently a very vague name in the minds of Americans. A New Zealander told me of an experience in America which shows how vague this idea may be in the average American mind. The New Zealander, a colonel, with a very handsome set of insignia, was riding in an American bus when his neighboring passenger inquired of him what country he represented. He told her, whereupon he overheard a whisper from the seat behind, "What country did he say?" Answer: "Switzerland." The New Zealander colonel, "Pardon me, I said New Zealand." Confused inquirer: "Well, will you kindly tell me what is the difference?"

Now some hundred thousand plus, of American marines, soldiers and sailors have seen New Zealand and told their friends and relatives. New Zealand's magnificent part in the toughest combat in this war has become widely known. New Zealand's very large contribution of supplies to our Pacific forces, on reverse lend-lease, has been given some publicity, though not enough to do justice to the subject. Walter Nash, the first New Zealand minister to the United States, has been very popular here and has written a good book on New Zealand for American consumption. Peter Fraser, prime minister, has been publicized in his recent trip here. Thus, New Zealand doubtless has begun to register with Americans more generally than heretofore, but I should like to accelerate this process for two most fascinating experiences await the traveler to New Zealand.

Not only is New Zealand probably the most concentrated collection of beautiful nature, in relatively small compass, that the world can furnish, but it also is the most understandable and worthwhile test we are likely to find in real life as to what happens in an Anglo-Saxon socialist republic.

When Lend-Lease asked me to spend six months in New Zealand last year in charge of their problems in that area, the public service that I could perform came, frankly, third as the reason for my acceptance. I wanted to know how come a conservative group of Englishmen and Scotchmen had set up a socialist way of life, and I wanted to know how it worked.

Likewise the romantic vision of live volcanics capped with snow and glaciers pouring almost into the sea from 2,000 feet mountain ranges through tropical-like foliage lured me for the sheer feast of beauty that I expected.

Both reasons for the trip, as well as some—I hope—public service well justify the six months spent.

Admittedly, the test tube trial of socialism in New Zealand is not fully applicable to us because the country is almost exclusively agricultural, relying almost entirely on England for its outlet and, due to lack of natural resources in the mineral and heavy industry lines, likewise depends on imports for its industrial necessities.

There remains a great deal to be learned, since the type of people there are closely akin to ourselves, we also being an agricultural nation though we often forget it, and the small size of the country permits observation in a way that a larger one does not.

I became acquainted with a sub-

stantial sample of the leaders of the country, both in government and in business, and saw all parts of the country and visited much of the activity there.

The appreciation of the country that I can convey by words will leave much to be supplied until the reader actually visits New Zealand, as he will do easily by air in some two-week vacation after the war, but a word picture may be of some help, so I will try a condensed version.

In the first place, as already indicated, nature has been very kind, so far as beauty is concerned. As you come in over the country by air, and see it spread below you like a relief map, the most startling first impression, even in the New Zealand winter, is the all-prevailing green. Green mountains, covered by forests of native evergreen trees, found no where else in the world, are green the year round except as they may be covered with snow. The native growth of smaller size is likewise green the year round, with few exceptions. Where the trees and shrubbery (called "bush" in New Zealand) give way to pasture land this likewise is green. Every hill, lying at the base of the mountains, that is not too steep for a sheep, has been stripped of bush and planted to a variety of perennial grasses. Since these are kept mowed by the sheep and the cows, a lovely effect is thereby produced.

As the plane swings low and you begin to pick out detail, one of the first and most fascinating observations is the giant tree fern, the "punga", which is found throughout the country in every little draw or crack in the landscape. It also makes up a good part of the bush. Its fronds may be as much as 18 feet long and six feet across and it may stand 20 feet high.

What is not green is blue or white except the houses which are all red or green, as seen from the air.

The sight of the mountain tops is more spectacular than most mountain scenes in the world, because of the fact that the mountains stand out sheer in their complete majesty, rising from the sea level to altitudes of 8,000 to 12,000 feet in a single continuous rise. There is no high intervening plateau. Many of the snow fields are perennial and terminate in the valleys in the form of glaciers.

The most spectacular of the glaciers are on the west coast of the southern island, where they reach down to a relatively few feet above the sea, giving the impression of a vast frozen torrent pouring off of the ice fields at the top of the 10 and 12 thousand foot range and almost reaching the sea before being warmed enough to turn to water.

The bush luxuriates all around the lower terminals of these glaciers on the west coast, so that you have the startling experience of almost tropical growth, with dozens of types of fern and evergreens, at the base of the glaciers.

The sea is always near. Its color is always blue. At no place in the country is the sea more distant than 80 miles and long blue fjords reach in from the sea through the hills to make spectacular beauty.

The beauty spots of the country, when approached on foot, close up, are found to be well populated with unique birds. New Zealand, when first discovered by the white man, had no four footed creatures and no snakes—nothing but birds. Fortunately, it still has no snakes, although many deer and pigs populate the bush, descendants of generations imported in the last 100 years.

Returning to the birds, there has been nothing so thrilling of its kind in my experience as the call of the bell bird in a quiet corner of the bush at dawn or twilight. These birds are not spectacular to see, being smallish brown creatures, but they pour out liquid bell notes in a simple three note arpeggio, which is

more beautiful than any note made by man or his instruments.

I could go on endlessly about the natural beauty of the country but I am only seeking to give you background and to whet your curiosity.

Coming to the socialistic side of the picture, we have the strange spectacle of a group of conservative Scotchmen seeking to recreate—and doing rather well at it—their homes in the British Isles, and ending up with a socialist republic.

Immigration was planned and developed and towns laid out before leaving England. The two countries are almost an inverted duplicate of England in size and shape and population—with the hardy Scot at the southern tip as in the northern tip of the British Isles. Of course, the population is not as large as in the British Isles, consisting of one million six hundred thousand people, largely contained in the four major cities, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.

In the early years of the history of New Zealand, beginning in the 1890's, only a few years after major immigration had begun, the state commenced its long series of social developments. The laws were passed which have given New Zealand its name for advanced social legislation. Labor conditions were protected by labor administrative machinery and special tribunals provided. In a long series of laws, all of the hazards from the cradle to the grave have been dealt with. There is unemployment relief, hospital and sickness benefit, free medicine, free doctors, universal purchase of all agricultural produce by the state, state ownership of utilities, including railroads, radio, power, etc.

It was not a labor government nor an extreme leftist group that did these things. Most of them were well established before the government came in, in the middle of the depression.

The question is sure to be asked, as I have asked myself, again and again, what caused this trend to go so far in a conservative country with conservative people. I can give no sure answer, but I can give my belief.

These people have been so conservative that they have thought mainly of security and have progressively dealt with all forms of risk that have worried them. Accordingly, it became possible for their politicians and statesmen to offer always new proposals to give new elements of security. The cost of this, has naturally mounted in proportion to the total income of the country, to the point that the current administration, in wartime has reached roughly 90 percent taxation of income over \$12,000 per annum.

It is not difficult to see why risk taking and industrial expansion have slowed down in light of this

taxation, because, as in America and other countries, the enterpriser has the privilege of pocketing his own losses. The advantage of his success is restricted to a very limited small possibility, if he is already prosperous, since new projects are unavoidably hazardous. Accordingly he chooses to leave well enough alone.

There remains the question of how it was worked and here there are two standards which produce entirely different answers.

Coming from America with its vaunted high standards of living, consisting of modern gadgets in large quantity, one is tempted to observe the success of the New Zealand experiment in terms of gadgets. On this basis, the experiment is not notably successful. Few New Zealanders enjoy the things that go with domestic refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, toasters, mixers, etc. Very few homes have central heating. Lighting fixtures and furnishings are simple. Homes are usually small cottages of one story.

Many have automobiles, almost as high a proportion as in the U. S. Likewise, with radios. The state owned radio keeps the air full of classical and popular music, largely devoid of advertising.

Railroads are notoriously small and non-modernized though I personally found them rather pleasant when there was time enough to cover the ground that way. Much travel is in cars that are made up of rooms like our apartments. Dimensions of the track and of the cars are small so that someone like the writer is always bumping his head, but motion is not so swift as to make the jiggling much worse than our good trains.

Food is obtained, largely in the form of "tea", at stops along the way, the meal hours breakfast, "morning tea", "afternoon tea", and "tea" (meaning our dinner hour.) Our Santa Fe Harvey House

type of setup is only different in that their food supplies consist mainly of tea, sandwiches, meat pie and "cakes". The countryside is always lovely, so that one who is not in too great a rush can enjoy their trains.

Modernization along this line is divided in two for the two islands. The Cook straits, 60 miles wide, prevent continuous rail travel throughout the country.

Considerable air travel facilities are available and more will be, of course, postwar.

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