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‘Ian F. Grant, Pressing On: A History of New Zealand’s Newspapers, 1921-2000’

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Ian F. Grant, *Pressing On: The Story of New Zealand's Newspapers, 1921-2000* (Fraser Books, in association with Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa, 2024), 670pp+xii. Paperback. NZ\$69.50. ISBN: 978-1-9911-6445-2.

For scholars, and all those interested in the newspaper and periodical presses of the Antipodes, the 2020s are shaping up to be a golden age. Not only has Sally Young given us two mammoth volumes on the Australian newspaper industry (2019's *Paper Emperors* and 2023's *Media Monsters*), but after six years of waiting, Ian F. Grant has given us volume II of his history of the Aotearoa New Zealand newspaper press. *Pressing On: The Story of New Zealand's Newspapers, 1921-2000* joins his 2018 volume *Lasting Impressions: The Story of New Zealand's Newspapers, 1840-1920*, and is a worthy successor to that encyclopedic overview of the foundational Aotearoa New Zealand mass medium. This one, however, charts a much more uncertain history for the newspapers, which were profitable and well-respected in 1920, at the chronological starting point of Grant's study, but by 2000 were already facing the collapse of a public service and business model, and a culture, that had been inextricably linked to democracy and social cohesion.

'Culture' is a crucial word here, because Grant's history is no mere catalogue of newspaper titles, but a full cultural and social (and economic and political) history of the whole phenomenon of newspaper publishing in Aotearoa New Zealand. In roughly chronological order, with some divergence whenever a key individual story or other theme takes precedence, Grant covers developments, people, places, and publications in three major Parts. Part One covers 1921-1945, and commences with an overview of 'The Press in New Zealand, 1921-45', before exploring a geographically-bounded survey of the city press, the North Island Metropolitan Press and South Island City Papers, before delving ever farther into the regions (spanning the North Island Provincials and 'To the South' between chapters 5 and 11) and then returns to a more thematic exploration of the fate of weeklies (Chapter 12), the interplay of politics in the press (Chapter 13), international and transnational connections (Chapter 14), and the reportage of the Second World War (Chapter 15).

The structure of Part One is largely replicated in the two succeeding parts as well: 'The Golden Years' being 1946-1965, and 'Gathering Clouds' between 1966 and 2000. The general overview of the period is followed by the main city newspapers in two or three chapters, then the provincial press is covered in all its variety for another handful, and then broader examinations of politics and international relations follow. While Part One had the war to anchor it, it is Suburbia that rounds-out Part Two (the Golden Age definitely being a bourgeois one), while 'community' newspapers join suburban ones in the course of Part Three, along with the Sunday Press, and the Māori Press.

Already, even this brief survey of the subject-matter indicates a lot about the social and cultural history Grant seeks to chart. The solid middle-class ascendancy of the post-war 'Golden Age' speaks of a spreading suburbia, of certainties about life, faith, and respectability, and a unity asserted in the press that is belied by the real divisions between Māori and Pakeha throughout the period. The 'Gathering Clouds' are those of the late Sixties, the TV ascendancy, and the end of the certainties of mid-century, of

which the invasion of the Sabbath by the Sunday paper, with its sporting focus, can be seen as the standard bearer, culminating in the Internet.

That the Māori Press seems to be worth only a short chapter is not a negative reflection on Grant's priorities, but a key historical point: the Māori languages that supported 40+ newspapers in the period covered by *Lasting Impressions* were in steep decline in the twentieth century, as they were forbidden in schools, and only survived in part thanks to the alliance between the churches and a dedicated anti-colonial Māori cultural movement.

The sheer scope of Grant's achievement with the twin volumes is impossible to quantify in terms of hundreds of pages, thousands of newspapers surveyed and explored, and a cast of hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of individuals who have made Aotearoa New Zealand's newspaper press what it was (and is). True, the online *Paper's Past* project has been a major enabler, but hardly a fraction of the material explored by Grant has yet been digitized (or had been digitized when he set out). This is 'old-fashioned' scholarship of the best kind. And not just in terms of the text and the words – the volume is filled with thumbnail images and marginalia that profile key individuals, characters, and even buildings. In addition to the main narrative found in succeeding chapters, there are 'box-outs' on all manner of topics (e.g. the exclusion of women apprentices, military newspapers, the Chinese press, and more besides). And – of course – the volume is peppered with cartoons – not as mere illustrations, but constituting the same fundamental stuff as the written sources. Hardly surprising for a man who has published not only five histories of Aotearoa New Zealand history in cartoons/histories of Aotearoa New Zealand cartooning, but also founded the New Zealand Cartoon Archive at the Alexander Turnbull Library.

Of course, the Alexander Turnbull Library is a co-publisher of the book, and Fraser Books is Ian F. Grant's own publishing house. Grant has therefore had the luxury of near complete freedom to build and design his own volumes, and it shows – for the better. If you are like me, and you like your multi-volume histories to 'look the part' when slotted expertly into the ever-decreasing space in the relevant section of the home or office library, then the design of the two-volume set will be a delight. The same glossy black softcover, the title in the same font, and even the same physical dimensions (600+ pages of perfectly justified text) means that (like Sally Young's two volumes to date) *Pressing On* will sit perfectly next to its predecessor and give the impression of weightiness and authority in an aesthetic sense, just as it does in a real, scholarly sense, between the covers.

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