

The Domestic Politics of International Relations: Cases from Australia, New Zealand and Oceania, by Roderic Alley. Aldershot, Hampshire, UK, and Burlington, Vermont, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000. ISBN 1-84014-759-8; xii + 275 pages, tables, figures, maps, index, bibliographies. US\$69.95.

This book is about the interaction between foreign policy and domestic politics in Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific, and it focuses on a number of regional case studies. First is the New Zealand World Court Project. Then come studies of Australia's policy on climate change; the settlement of the Bougainville conflict in 1997 and 1998; decolonization in New Caledonia, East Timor, and West Papua; the issue of indigenous rights in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji; public sector reform in the South Pacific; and environmental policy in the South Pacific.

As it happens, New Zealand emerges rather well from the analysis. This is the country that took a strongly antinuclear stand in the 1980s. The New Zealand government was open enough to a sustained, informed, and intelligent lobbying campaign to take an important antinuclear case to the International Court of Justice in the 1990s. Not only that, New Zealand won the case. The Judges declared even the threatened use of nuclear weapons to be contrary to the United Nations Charter, and the world supposedly moved on toward institutionalizing the abolition of nuclear weapons. The whole episode shows how "New Zealand social activism" was able to "place international institu-

tions like the World court at the service of the world's people" (48).

Australia, on the other hand, is depicted as stuck in the old groove of protecting national interest. Alley tells the sorry story of Australia's climate change policy. Australia bullied the Pacific Island nations at the South Pacific Forum meeting in 1997 into endorsing a weak position on reducing greenhouse gas reductions, then went to the Kyoto climate change conference determined to give away as little as possible, threatening to walk out if it did not get its way and emerging with a promise not to reduce emissions but to increase them. And all because Australia depends so much on burning and exporting fossil fuels.

According to Alley, Australia was not much better on the Bougainville conflict. Australia backed Papua New Guinea in the secessionist war and was therefore compromised in initiating moves toward peace. Enter New Zealand, a country with a better record of treating indigenous people, and progress became possible, not least because of the culturally sensitive way in which the New Zealanders organized the truce negotiations at Burnham military camp. Alley quotes approvingly from comments made by Joseph Kabui, one of the Bougainville rebel leaders, on New Zealand's "human touch," and shows how the process set in train by New Zealand ended with the historic Lincoln Agreement of January 1998 and achievement of a cease-fire a few months later. On East Timor, Australia was one of those "western power strategic interests" who accepted Indonesia's takeover and "helped shut down the self-determination option" (138), at

least until the East Timorese themselves forced the issue by voting decisively for independence in August 1999.

As for the Pacific Islands, they are not as good as New Zealand either. Alley reports that their governments tend to be ineffective, corrupt, and poor at caring for the environment, the resources of which are more likely to be sold off to the highest bidder rather than conserved for the common good. In two interesting chapters, Alley traces the fate of “good governance” and environmental protection in the Island states.

To be fair to Alley, most of these assessments are justified. New Zealand has an impressive foreign policy record on nuclear issues and on Bougainville, though Alley probably overstates New Zealand’s centrality in Bougainville’s peacemaking. Australia’s policies on climate change, East Timor, and aboriginal rights all deserve criticism, and Pacific Island governments are, unfortunately, much as he describes them.

To be even fairer, Alley did not set out to write a book of foreign policy comparisons designed to put his own country in a good light. The book is rather meant to illustrate the interactions between domestic politics and international relations. And on this issue he makes some excellent points: what made East Timor different from West Papua, as he argues, is that the United Nations regarded East Timor as a case of incomplete decolonization while accepting that West Papua legally became part of Indonesia by virtue of the “Act of Free Choice” in 1969. As an independence issue, East Timor therefore had, and still has,

much greater purchase than West Papua in international forums. (The first letter in the acronym of West Papua’s independence movement, the OPM, incidentally, stands not for “Operasi” [129] but for “Organisasi.”)

Alley’s choice of case studies nevertheless points relentlessly to New Zealand’s moral superiority in foreign policy, and will be read in this light, I suspect, by the mainly New Zealand readership the book will attract.

Another choice of case studies might have pointed in another direction: why not examine Australia’s role in peacemaking in Cambodia or the formulation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, for example? Why not emphasize the risks that some Bougainvilleans themselves took in reaching peace in their own island, or mention the role of Fiji in UN peacekeeping? In any case, New Zealand, for special geographical and political reasons, is in a position to “do good” in ways denied to states that are in different circumstances.

A hint of Kiwi provincialism, then, is the first problem with this book. The second is the way the author has written it. Groaning under the weight of too many concepts and too few people, too many nouns and too few verbs, his writing style stands as a barrier between him and the reader. At a time when university students in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands desperately need a book of this kind, Roderic Alley has produced one that some of them will have difficulty reading.

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