

New Directions in the South Pacific: A Message for Australia. Edited by Muriel Brookfield and R. Gerald Ward. Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, 1988.

In compiling the publication under review, Brookfield and Ward set out to broadly represent proceedings at a Canberra workshop organized in June 1986 by the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia and the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University. The workshop was established with the aim of exploring social, economic, political and strategic issues relevant to the future development of smaller island nations in the South Pacific. Its secondary aim was to examine how those issues might affect relations between the island nations and Australia.

The editors make it clear that without committing workshop participants to fixed conclusions, their publication is designed to provide a record of workshop discussions with the intention of airing a broad range of islander's development issues. To that end, the editors have produced a brief though useful primer devoting chapters to the following subjects: strategic and defence issues in the South Pacific; trade and economic relations; population and migration; rural development and social change; and aid. The editors relay the workshop's considerations in a clear accessible style appropriate to a publication designed to promote further thought on such matters.

The first point of note, as the editors acknowledge, is that between the time of the workshop in 1986 and the publication of its deliberations in 1988, political events in the South Pacific, and developments in the Australian approach to the region, particularly as expressed through Australian defence policy, had moved so quickly as to cast doubt on the relevance of any "new directions" mooted by the workshop for the region, as well as those "messages" which might have been directed to Australian policy-makers. One important measure of the publication's worth, therefore, lies in the extent to which its essential findings have remained valid, despite these changes, both for island nations concerned with future development strategies and for Australians still coming to terms with the aspirations, perceptions and interests of the Pacific island nations.

To establish an authentic base for the discussion of regional issues from the islanders' perspective, the 1986 workshop drew on papers and discussion by Pacific island contributors. In strategic and defence terms, this approach served to highlight the islanders' concern to maintain national sovereignty and independent foreign policies, to avoid large-power confrontation in the region, and to focus on the importance of economic, as opposed to military, security. From subsequent chapters we gain insight

into the islanders' economic predicament. Various possibilities are raised for the improvement of the islanders' international economic performance. The social and economic problems caused by levels of emigration, urbanization and population growth, and in some cases potential islander resources are also examined. The impact of development programmes on past social patterns, including the emergence of public service and political élites, are seen as causes of additional social friction. The unsatisfactory performance and negative impact of past foreign aid programmes are seen to have resulted in the general preference among islanders for trade and trade-enhancing forms of assistance as the means to break previous dependency relations with aid donors.

As they stand, the concerns raised by workshop participants remain important and for the most part have yet to be successfully addressed. As observed by some islander participants, much of the responsibility for their current problems lie with their former colonial patrons. However, with that point registered, the editors fail to provide a balanced picture, for example, when discussing regional strategic issues.

The editors properly note that in the past, Western nations determined their strategic policies towards the region with reference first to bipolar issues. The West also engaged in practices which damaged the islanders' economic security and regional stability even as it warned of the dangers of the islanders exploring commercial and political contacts beyond their traditional pro-Western sphere.

The editors fail, however, to acknowledge Australia's past attempts to address these shortcomings, on occasion in direct conflict with arguably more powerful extra-regional actors. This is particularly disappointing when the editors inform us that the workshop decided to include in the publication some background on the issues raised. The editors fail to mention Australia's positive role, for example, in criticizing French policy towards New Caledonia, and encouraging policy changes by Paris more attuned to indigenous interests. Australia's longstanding opposition to French nuclear tests at Moruroa Atoll, in concert with the majority of Pacific island nations, is ignored, as is Australia's leading role in the promotion of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, and its assistance to island nations attempting to end the destruction of their fisheries resources by extra-regional fishing fleets. In short, it would have been helpful when sending "messages" to Australia for editors intent on promoting constructive dialogue to have indicated those areas of Australian action which could be deemed appropriate from the islanders' perspective.

The editors' cursory dealings with strategic issues lead to additional problems when discussing an appropriate regional defence ethos. By concentrating on the truism that the islands' size and general lack of

defence infrastructure result in their strategic vulnerability, and by highlighting the islanders' desire to pursue self-interest in their political and economic dealings, avoiding exclusive dependence on a single nation or group of politically aligned nations, the editors gloss over the worth of extant Australian defence co-operation activities with the Pacific island countries — activities which focus on the surveillance and protection of the islands' vital fisheries resources, and which are driven in large part by input from the islanders themselves as to their requirements. The editors also question Australia's commitment to the physical defence of the islands in an era of sophisticated weaponry, and enquire on behalf of the workshop whether rim countries such as Australia "would not do better to support a zone of peace and neutrality in the South Pacific as a means of preventing threats of force which are beyond the capacity for effective action by individual states" (p. 10). The effect is to downplay practical and valued forms of defence co-operation operating between Australia and the island nations, while flagging the notion of regional neutrality, backed by the nebulous concept of a surveillance force under islander control (p. 10). The proposal lacks adequate discussion of the practicality of such a scheme in terms of its cost, source of expertise, or acceptability to island nations, among whom conflicting perceptions, interests and suspicions persist despite past attempts to promote a regional approach to common security problems. Contrary to the editors' intention not to express a final conclusion, an unambiguous "message" based on superficial coverage of strategic issues is sent to Australia. The presentation of this particular message is less than convincing.

Throughout the remainder of their work, however, the editors build a compelling case for increased islander and Australian efforts to improve the quality of research into the social and economic impact of development, as well as strategies for the relief of current problems. The primary message for Australia across most issues raised is summarized with the still pertinent warning that without such efforts neither the island governments nor extra-regional actors will be adequately prepared to deal with future instability in the region which could result from the types of socio-economic change the editors predict for island societies.

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