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**‘A Toaster with Pictures’:
The Deregulation of
Broadcasting in New Zealand.**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Studies,
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Abstract.

'A toaster with pictures' was the characterisation of television by the former chairman of the United States Federal Communications Commission and advocate of broadcasting deregulation, Mark Fowler. It encapsulates the view of the neo-liberal reformers who set about to deregulate broadcasting as part of the wide-ranging economic attack on the structures of state regulation. Broadcasting was a consumer industry like any other. It conformed to the rules of economic behaviour and performed at its optimum in an environment of a free market.

This thesis traces the deregulation of broadcasting in New Zealand from its theoretical origins, to its adoption by policy advisors of the New Zealand Treasury, and its legislative enactment by the Government in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But the account also traverses wider than those narrow boundaries. It is argued that in order to understand why this country undertook such a thoroughgoing reform of the broadcasting sector it is necessary to look at its history and account for the apparent wholesale rejection of the previous structures which were portrayed as regulated public service broadcasting.

It is also essential to the story of broadcasting deregulation in New Zealand to determine why this country was a pathfinder of reform. The essential conditions which enabled the speedy implementation of the policy whilst in other nations the reform process in broadcasting was stalled, only partially implemented, or rejected. The comparative overview also brings into focus the arguments of the opponents of deregulating this 'particular' or 'peculiar' industry with its social and cultural role in society.

As New Zealand was the first nation deliberately to enact the deregulation of broadcasting, the final sections of the thesis look at the 'model' and assess its impact. The reforms have led to a new marketplace of broadcasting in which the audience is viewed as consumers rather than citizens. The dismantling of the social contract in broadcasting between the state and citizens and its replacement by supposedly individual contracts between broadcasters and consumers is, it is suggested, dysfunctional for democratic civil society.

For Tara.

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Ruth Butterworth, for encouragement and supervisory overlordship. Diana Gardner, for reading the chapter proofs and offering kind words. To fellow S.O.D.S.(and Claire), for group support and friendship. To others:

'For your own good' is a persuasive argument that will eventually make a man agree to his own destruction.

Janet Frame, *Faces in the Water*.

On the Research Task.

On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. It becomes a pleasure.

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

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