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**New Zealand's National Archives: An Analysis of Machinery of
Government Reform and Resistance, 1994-1999.**

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the impact of the 1990s new public management reforms in New Zealand on one particular agency, the National Archives. It explores the unique combination of features that enabled this small low-profile agency and its stakeholders to stymie some of the machinery of government reforms that were proposed.

This thesis is a qualitative study that draws on material from primary and secondary sources, with a heavy reliance on official documents. It chronicles the lack of value placed on the archives' administrative, constitutional and heritage functions by successive politicians and senior public servants. The thesis compares the values of the reformers, who had interests that were not specific to the Archives, and the values of the archiving professionals and their stakeholders, whose perspective was agency and policy-specific. The main reform time periods are 1994-2001, and 2005. While the clash between the two sets of values during this time is analysed chronologically, the thesis provides historical background prior to the reform period. The perspectives of various actors are told in their own words, where possible.

This study illustrates the tensions between the need to co-ordinate the wider public sector with the peculiarities of a specific policy area. It also demonstrates the tensions between the highly theoretical and ideological nature of the public sector management reforms in New Zealand from the mid-1980s, and the values of one group of professionals that were not compatible with these reforms. While the policies of the reformers evolved over time, the values of the archivists were more static. These static values contributed to consistency in their preferred model of organisational design and placement within the public sector.

Ironically the outdated legislation archivists complained about for decades and low political priority the policy area received, bestowed crucial protection against public sector management reforms that were contrary to international archival trends. Following a change in political leadership, the stable of professional values of the archive were adopted, removing archives from the policy change agenda.

Preface

This thesis is a case study of policy change involving New Zealand's official archives. In 1999 I heard about a court case (a judicial review) in which the interest group the Archives and Records Association of New Zealand (ARANZ) challenged structural reform of New Zealand's National Archives. Although untrained in archiving or any related disciplines such as records management, librarianship or curation, I had previously worked for ten years in a university archive.¹ This archive was under-funded, under-staffed and, consequently, under-utilised by researchers. My supervisors and I, and staff from the university's other archives, invested considerable energy into lobbying for more resources. At every stage our case was acknowledged, the wasted research opportunities lamented and the desire to provide extra resources expressed. But these did not eventuate. There were other more pressing and higher profile projects vying for shrinking levels of discretionary funding. We managed to bring the funding and future development of the university's archives onto the agenda, but did not succeed in moving it up from the bottom of the spending priority list.

In the mid-1990s, while working in the archive, I started my graduate degree in Political Studies. Some of my coursework and dissertation were concerned with neo-liberal economic reform in New Zealand.² One of the features of the reforms in New Zealand, which began in July 1984, was what has been termed the 'blitzkrieg' approach.³ The reforms were rapid, comprehensive and largely implemented without electoral mandate.⁴ Reforms covered a wide range of policy areas including aspects of the macroeconomy, employment relations, welfare, health, education, transport, energy, government-owned businesses and broadcasting. Stakeholders who objected to the reforms were shut out of the process; they were viewed as self-interested and advocating protections for

¹ The Robert and Noeline Chapman Audio-Visual Archive, University of Auckland.

² Julianne Molineaux, *A Viable Marketplace of Ideas? The 1986 Commerce Act and the New Zealand Daily Newspaper Industry*, unpublished Master of Arts dissertation, University of Auckland, 1997.

³ Brian Easton, 'How Did the Health Reforms Blitzkrieg Fail?', *Political Science*, vol. 46 no. 2, December 1994, pp. 215-233.

⁴ Andrew Sharp, 'The Case for Politics and the State in New Zealand: An Introduction', in Andrew Sharp (ed.), *Leap Into the Dark: The Changing Role of the State in New Zealand Since 1984*, Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1994, p. 2.

themselves at the expense of wider society.⁵ The archiving court case therefore caught my interest on two levels: it involved archives and it involved a challenge to (I presumed) government policy. I became curious about a small, low-profile group taking on aspects of reforms that other policy areas had succumbed to.

This thesis was initiated by curiosity. It is an exploration of how the professional values of archivists clashed in a fundamental way with public sector reforms and how a low-profile policy area managed to stave off reform until the political climate softened, leading to a more pragmatic approach to the design of the public sector.

This thesis is critical of the reform process that it describes, and its underlying philosophies. While my experiences as a university archivist were consistent with those experienced within the profession, it should not be assumed that my opinions are always synonymous with those of the archiving stakeholders.

⁵ Tim Tenbenschel, 'Interest Groups', in Raymond Miller (ed.), *New Zealand Government and Politics*, third edition, Auckland, Oxford University Press, pp. 352-3.

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While this thesis would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of many people, errors, omissions and weaknesses are, of course, mine entirely.

~for my mother, who would have been proud~

Note on the use of personal pronouns in this thesis

When discussing the New Zealand Chief Archivist in a general sense, without referring to a specific person holding that position, I have used the personal pronoun 'she'. This reflects the fact that since 1973, most Chief Archivists in New Zealand, and in particular the Chief Archivist for the period of time under close study, have been female. Where a specific Chief Archivist is referred to, the correct personal pronoun for that person, 'he' or 'she' is used.

I have used the personal pronoun 'he' when writing about the United States Archivist. With the exception of a two year stint by Trudy Huskamp Peterson, this post has been filled by men.

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