TWO TACTICS FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN NEW ZEALAND

Reviewed by Mike Donaldson

This book concerns the questions of nationalism and Maori sovereignty in New Zealand, and provides an excellent summary of the current positions on these issues adopted by left parties and progressives in New Zealand.

The debate was triggered by a number of articles by Donna Awatere, prominent Maori activist and feminist, in the NZ feminist journal Broadsheet in 1982 and 1983. In these, Awatere argued that Aotearoa belonged to the Maori and launched a vitriolic attack on the “spiritual impoverishment” of white New Zealand culture, which can offer only the technological fix and which “as a social corpus is sick and destructive.” It is not surprising, then, that Awatere’s critique should be sympathetically heard by some sections of the women’s movement, although Awatere herself explicitly attacks whites who claim a solidarity of oppression with the Maori, be they trade unionists, the left or feminists.

Quayle summarises comments by Bruce Jesson and Peter Lee which appeared in The Republican, a quite long-standing and reasonably widely read journal on the NZ left. Jesson and Lee attack Awatere and argue for a synthetic nationalism, a unique national character resulting from a Polynesian and white anti-British fusion. This is followed in Two Tactics by a succinct account of the positions of the Communist Party of New Zealand, the Socialist Unity Party, Workers’ Communist League and the Socialist Action League. These all, Quayle points out, with a quiet chuckle, owe more to Luxemburg than Lenin, except for the trotskyist SAI, which owes little to either.

In outlining Awatere’s position and in discussing the responses to it, Quayle neatly and accurately summarises the positions of Marx, Engels and Lenin on the national question, provides an insight into the historical and changing nature of Maori nationalism itself and touches on the question of political union with Australia. All this, plus his own recommendations, based on a careful reading of Lenin and refreshingly down to earth, in less than sixty pages. This book deserves far more attention than it will receive, and could usefully be read by all with an interest in New Zealand, and/or in questions of black nationalism, sovereignty and self-determination. Why is the book called Two Tactics for Social Democracy? Because Quayle has a delightful sense of humour.

THE LOBBYISTS: USING THEM IN CANBERRA by Peter Sekulless. Published by George Allen and Unwin, 1984, $14.95, paperback, 145 pages.

Reviewed by Mike Donaldson

Peter Sekulless, former public relations director of the Whitlam government’s Department of Urban and Regional Development, and Jonathan Gaul, press secretary to Billys McMahon and Snedden, make up Canberra Liaison Ltd., once described by the National Times as a “small and idiosyncratic” lobbying firm.

In his book, Sekulless argues that lobbyists are useful people who help the democratic process. The effective lobbyist puts “people in touch with people”; resolves problems at the departmental level thus improving government efficiency by minimising unnecessary demands on ministers; saves companies megabucks (it would cost $100,000 per annum minimum to keep a suitable executive stationed in Canberra); and fills the gap created by a huge and complex bureaucracy which cannot communicate effectively.

Most of the 200 professional lobbyists in Canberra spend most of their time monitoring government, advising clients on strategy, preparing presentations and arranging contacts. They can do this because they know, or know how to find out, how and when and by whom decisions are made. They sell this information to a client, and they “would mould information supplied by the client, into an acceptable form and recommend to whom and when it should be disseminated to achieve optimum results”.

As well as insights into the political process itself, Sekulless provides a useful intro to the “tools of the trade” — Commonwealth Government Directory, Ministerial Staff Directory and the Parliamentary Handbook: a guide to the Cabinet Committee Structure; the procedures followed for the consideration of cabinet submissions; rules for lobbying ministers; an introduction to the structure of the public service; and a breakdown of federal departments and their areas of concern. It would be rather useful if these things could find their way into a smaller, cheaper activists’ handbook. Until then, if your community organisation, social movement, union, or party branch is interested in pursuing modest reforms through the parliamentary process, then the 17 pages in the book devoted to those things just mentioned are well worth a read.