

**ANOTHER NEW ZEALAND EXPERIMENT:
A CODE OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY**
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In 1998 the New Zealand government announced that it was going to introduce a “Code of Social Responsibility”. The aim of the Code was to clarify the relationship between the state and its citizens, particularly in relation to the welfare system, which was facing mounting economic and social pressures. The then Minister of Social Policy, Roger Sowry, claimed the Code would change the future direction of social policy. Opposition spokesperson Steve Maharey suggested the Code signalled the end of the welfare state and government backing out of its social responsibilities.

What followed was intense public debate about the respective responsibilities, and rights, of government, communities, families and individuals. At the centre of this debate was a discussion booklet on which a consultation process was based. Over 1 million booklets were posted to households and box-holders, eliciting 94,303 responses.

Another New Zealand Experiment: A Code of Social and Family Responsibility makes a case study of the Code as a social policy initiative. It examines the content of the Code and the ideas behind it, as well as the processes used to develop it. The foreword correctly describes *Another New Zealand Experiment* as “an important contribution to both the debate on the role of government in influencing family interactions and to the history of public policy in New Zealand”.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part Judith Davey describes the development of the Code chronologically in an interesting and informed way. The reader is systematically led through the Code’s antecedents, its development and content, the debate surrounding it and responses to that debate, and the outcomes of the exercise. Very useful contextual comment is also provided about recent social policy trends, such as the notion of the “third way”, increased focus on social responsibility and reciprocity, and changes in the role of government. The Code is presented as both a stand-alone initiative and as part of wider social policy development.

The second part of the book is divided into four chapters, each with a different author. In chapter seven John Angus examines the Code as a family policy initiative and considers how it might help to define the relationship between the role of the state, family responsibilities and good parenting. In his role as senior policy manager at the Ministry of Social Policy he provided advice on the Code and managed the analysis of

responses to the discussion document. His insight into its development is a useful counterbalance to the academic analysis of the other authors.

Continuing the theme in chapter nine, Jonathon Boston outlines relevant philosophical developments, focusing in particular on the changing structure of the family, the role of the state and the degree of reciprocity or conditionality that might be expected with the provision of social services. He regrets the lack of systematic analysis of these issues as part of the Code debate. Instead, he suggests the exercise distracted from finding solutions to social ills.

In the intervening chapter Derek Wallace examines the Code through a rhetorical lens. This involves looking closely at the text of the documents associated with the Code and considering this in light of the sociopolitical environment. Wallace uses his analysis to present the Code as a policy compromise between political desires to impose a moral order on New Zealand society and reluctance to intrude on people's lives.

Finally, in chapter ten Colin James considers the politics of the Code, including the influence of the various political personalities at the time. He suggests the Code exercise, like other policies, was a product of three main drivers: developments that require a policy response (international, fiscal and social); bureaucratic analysis, value sets and professionalism; and the values and experience of politicians. He concludes that the Code and the debate surrounding it reflect a political battle to define the "policy centre of gravity".

Overall, *Another New Zealand Experiment* provides an in-depth, methodical and critical analysis of the Code as a social policy initiative. The information drawn together by Davey and her analysis provide a solid foundation for the remaining chapters, and the ideas she introduces are developed well by the other authors. That is not to say that *Another New Zealand Experiment* asserts a united view of the reasons for and consequences of the Code exercise. For example, Davey suggests that New Zealand First softened the National Party policy on the Code. Colin James argues that the Code was very much in keeping with Winston Peters' values and politics. He supported the Code, and therefore so did New Zealand First.

Having a range of viewpoints within the publication highlights the many different ways in which the Code can be considered and understood. This could be a little frustrating for those wanting "answers" about the Code. However, it is inevitable that academics, social policy makers and commentators will all bring a different perspective to exercises like the Code, and having them drawn together in one publication gives the reader an opportunity to consider the wide range of issues associated with the Code and draw their own conclusions.

Four years later the exercise still has the potential for sparking public debate because of the issues and concerns underpinning it. What role should the state play in supporting and shaping families? What value sets and philosophies are influencing social policy development? Are policy development processes conducive to good policy outcomes? Davey's book is a good starting point and a useful contribution to such a debate. I would recommend it to policy makers, students and all those with an interest in social policy issues.