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SIR HARRY ATKINSON:

A Political Biography, 1872-1892.

A thesis, presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in History, by Judith Bassett.

UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

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These photographs were lent to me by Mr. H. M. W. Atkinson  
and reproduced by the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



ABBREVIATIONS.

<u>A.J.H.R.</u>	<u>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives.</u>
<u>A.mss.Tu.</u>	Atkinson Papers, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
<u>E.P.</u>	<u>The Evening Post, Wellington.</u>
<u>H. mss.</u>	The Hall Papers, General Assembly Library, Wellington.
<u>H.M.W.A. mss.</u>	Papers in the possession of Mr. H. M. W. Atkinson, Wellington.
<u>H.S.A.N.Z.</u>	<u>Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand.</u>
<u>J.C.P.S.</u>	<u>Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies.</u>
<u>P.D.</u>	<u>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates.</u>
<u>R - A mss.</u>	The Richmond-Atkinson Papers, General Assembly Library, Wellington.
<u>R. mss.</u>	The unsorted Richmond Papers, General Assembly Library, Wellington.
<u>Rn. mss.</u>	The Rolleston Papers, General Assembly Library, Wellington.
<u>T.H.</u>	<u>The Taranaki Herald, New Plymouth.</u>
<u>T.N.</u>	<u>The Taranaki News, New Plymouth.</u>

PREFACE

This thesis attempts to examine in some detail the political career of Sir Harry Atkinson who held Cabinet rank for twelve of the twenty years it covers, and who dominated the Treasury for more than a decade, yet upon whom historians have so far been reluctant to expend very much thought or research. In the earliest histories of nineteenth century New Zealand Atkinson appears briefly as a sinister, equivocal figure, and in the later histories he assumes a bluff, honest aspect. Neither school presents a three-dimensional figure.

The first historical profiles of Atkinson were drawn by W. Gisborne, (New Zealand Rulers and Statesmen, 1840-1885, London, 1886), W. P. Reeves, (The Long White Cloud, London, 1898), and A. Saunders, (History of New Zealand, vol. 2, Wellington, 1899). All of these men had known Atkinson, and all had disagreed with him politically. Gisborne saw Atkinson as a man with "great moral courage", and tremendous versatility based upon "boldness, determination, and energy, combined with great abilities". All of this was marred by "his exceeding love of office", to which he would sacrifice both policies and principles. Saunders's picture is Gisborne's - with the virtues left out. His Atkinson is an untalented, boorish, racially-bigoted caricature of a politician, driven by a megalomaniac lust for power which would have enlivened a Victorian melodrama.

Reeves, however, presented a more sympathetic picture of a man who was "the mainstay" of the "Conservative Party", yet held theories "of a



quasi-socialistic kind"; a "brave and faithful...public servant"; one of the "more broad-minded of the Oligarchs". The Reevesian view is the one most commonly found in twentieth century studies, although R. M. Burdon, (The Life and Times of Sir Julius Vogel, Christchurch, 1948, p. 136), and L. Lipson, (The Politics of Equality, Chicago, 1948, p. 98), contain echoes of Gisborne and Saunders. W. P. Morrell, (New Zealand, London, 1935), and W.H.Oliver, (The Story of New Zealand, London, 1960), endorse Reeves's assertion that Atkinson was honest, and that he had "broad-minded" impulses on social questions. They point out, however, that he was conservative in matters of finance. Most historians have followed Reeves's example and have included Sir Harry among the "Oligarchs" - those who tried to retain political and economic power in the hands of a largely pastoralist minority. T. G. Wilson, (The Rise of the New Zealand Liberal Party, 1880-90, Auckland, 1956), K. Sinclair, (A History of New Zealand, Harmondsworth, 1959), and J. B. Condliffe, (New Zealand In the Making, London, 1959), all accept this view. Lipson carries it to absurd lengths by claiming that Atkinson was a country Conservative because he represented Egmont "in the rich Taranaki farmlands" - this before refrigeration.

All of these accounts, however, are so cursory that none of them provides a satisfactory picture. Recent unpublished theses contain a few shrewd comments here and there: for example A. M. Evans, ("A Study of Canterbury Politics in the Early 1880s", Canterbury, 1959,) and D. A. Hamer ("The Law and the Prophet", Auckland, 1960). A more sophisticated view of Atkinson, but dealing with a short period only,



appears in K. Sinclair's article, "The Significance of 'The Scarecrow Ministry', 1887-1891", (in Studies of a Small Democracy, Auckland, 1963); and the most interesting verbal portrait of Atkinson in old age that I have seen is published in the same author's William Pember Reeves, New Zealand Fabian, Oxford, 1965, p. 91.

The theses and Professor Sinclair's essay, however, suffer from the same limitations as the general histories with regard to Atkinson: they cover either a wide period or a specific subject and have, rightly, little space for detailed biographical analysis. Nevertheless Atkinson loomed so large in his lifetime, and played such an important role at the Treasury during the long depression, that a fuller investigation of the usual picture seems justified. A political biography of Atkinson will fill a gap, if only by adding numerically to the exceedingly small number of biographical monographs, published or unpublished, available to the synthesizers who will write the next batch of general histories.

The years 1872-1892 were chosen because they were the years of Atkinson's major political activity, and a full account of the whole of his career in provincial and central politics, 1857-1892, would extend an M.A. thesis beyond sensible limits. The same disadvantage would have adhered to a "life and times" thesis. Accordingly, Atkinson's political context is sketched only as fully as is necessary to make his actions intelligible, and issues are not introduced, or developed, beyond the limits of Atkinson's interest or activity.



A chronological treatment is followed fairly strictly, except that certain topics receive fuller treatment at times when they were important to Atkinson: for example, there is a fairly long discussion of the principles of land ownership in New Zealand in 1878, because Atkinson began to express an interest in this question at about that time. Atkinson as a political thinker did not, fortunately for his biographer, spring fully armed from the head of John Stuart Mill, but became interested in political issues one at a time. He therefore lends himself with some docility to a chronological topical treatment.

The most useful source material for this thesis proved to be the long, gossipy letters from Sir John Hall to Sir Francis Bell, in the Hall Papers, General Assembly Library. The Atkinson Papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library were disappointing, and so was the vast collection of Richmond-Atkinson Papers in the General Assembly Library, which contained comparatively little material relevant to Sir Harry after 1872. The only one of his letterbooks which survives, (R - A. mss. vol. 43), covers the period 1880-1882, but the last 200 pages are badly worm-eaten, many of them are half consumed and illegible, and the whole book is water-damaged. Such of his letters as are extant, moreover, are - with two or three notable exceptions - short and uncommunicative. Atkinson not only detested writing letters, but, some of his friends suspected, he often neglected to read them as well. Hall warned Rolleston in 1886: "I have asked him [Atkinson] to show you my letter, but as the gallant Major's aversion to writing letters may extend to reading them when they are long winded, my yarn [about

Vogel<sup>7</sup> may never get beyond the Major's pockets". (J. Hall to W. Rolleston, 22 April 1886, Rn. mss., box 7). This may account for the dearth of inwards as well as outwards correspondence in Atkinson's papers. Consequently I have had to rely very heavily upon reports of Atkinson's speeches in newspapers and Parliamentary Debates for information on his political views.

Limited though the material is, however, it has provided a basis for re-considering Reeves's and Saunders's interpretations. The latter was written by an admirer of Hall, who was strongly opposed to Vogel's policy of borrowing for development, (he called Vogel "the arch-founder of the dangerous delusion" vol. I p. 320), and was so embittered by what he considered Atkinson's treachery to the cause of fiscal caution after 1887, that he could never afterwards bring himself to write of Atkinson without venom. This alone, threw doubt upon interpretations which see Atkinson as the mainstay of the "Conservative Party", or even as the leader of the conservatives. He seems to have been, rather, a moderate, who fell foul of both conservatives and radicals, for what is more exasperating to any group of political activists, from either end of the spectrum, than a moderate in power?

Many of the speeches and letters in the text of the thesis retain their nineteenth century spelling - which is similar to modern American usage - for example "honor" and "honorable" for "honour" and "honourable". "D'ont" and "cant", and similar usages, have also been left intact. This, I felt, was preferable to sprinkling the text with unnecessarily frequent "sic."s. Punctuation, or lack of it in Atkinson's case,



is also as it was in the original.

Finally, my thanks are due to my supervisor, Associate-Professor M. P. K. Sorrenson, who has given of his time and interest far more generously than I deserved; to Professor K. Sinclair for his helpful advice; and to Michael, my husband, but for whose patience and consideration I should never have completed the task. Mr. H. M. W. Atkinson kindly lent me many photographs of his grandfather which I had not seen used elsewhere, and some letters which provided valuable information on Sir Harry's later life. Librarians at the Auckland University, Alexander Turnbull, General Assembly, and Auckland Public Libraries have acceded to my requests with patience as did Mr. A. G. Bagnall of National Library Service. Mrs V. Whitlock, who typed this, must be congratulated for bringing some order out of such chaos. The appended typescript I offer not to Clio, but to Sisyphus.

CHAPTER ONE : 1853-1874.

Harry Albert Atkinson was born at Broxton, in Cheshire, on 1 November 1831. His father, John Atkinson, was a stonemason and architect who had inherited his business from his father, also a John Atkinson, in whose time it had been an exceedingly prosperous concern. By the time Harry Albert was born, however, the building boom had passed, and the Atkinsons were moving steadily into the ranks of the anxious classes.<sup>1</sup> John Atkinson and his wife Elizabeth had six sons and at least three daughters<sup>2</sup> and they seem to have taken most of their family with them as they moved about England in search of business. Harry Atkinson's education was therefore somewhat broken but his home compensated for the lack of a lengthy formal education. John Atkinson undertook much of his children's education himself, setting them out on an unconventional course of current novelists and learned periodicals.<sup>3</sup>

But the Atkinsons were not the sort of family to confine themselves to a bookish existence, withdrawing from a future with meagre prospects into a world of genteel philosophical speculation.

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1. G.H. Scholefield, ed., The Richmond-Atkinson Papers, Wellington, 1960, (hereafter: "Papers"), vol.1, p.24; also G.H. Scholefield, ed., A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Wellington, 1940, (hereafter: "Dictionary"), vol.1, pp.22-24.
  2. Emily E. Atkinson, (b.1829), was their third daughter according to Scholefield, Papers, vol.1, p.839 - but there may have been others.
  3. Ibid., p.25; also E. Richmond, ed., "Family Letters of the Richmonds and Atkinsons 1824 to 1862", unpub. typescript, Wellington, 1942, (hereafter: "Family Letters"), p.x.



By the time Harry Atkinson was eighteen, and his brother Arthur sixteen, they had decided that their prospects in England were not bright and had made up their minds to emigrate when their friends the Richmonds<sup>4</sup> were ready to do so. They began to prepare themselves for this venture with thoroughness and enthusiasm. They went to Wales to learn surveying with their oldest brother, John, and having mastered that they returned home and learned the rudiments of several more trades. They acquired some skill as blacksmiths, cobblers and gardeners. Harry made his father a suit of clothes; and the two brothers built a house in the garden of their home which they called "the New Zealand House".<sup>5</sup>

As well as this practical preparation the two boys took care to stock their minds in preparation for the isolation of life in the colonial bush. Harry read philosophy, theology and economics, including Fenelon's The Consolence of a King. Arthur read Latin, French, Greek and German, and compiled a Hebrew alphabet.<sup>6</sup>

Before they were ready to leave, Emily Atkinson, Harry's sister, married C.W. Richmond and their wedding breakfast was held in "the New Zealand house". C.W. Richmond, his brother, his sister Jane Maria, and their mother had decided to join their relatives John and Helen Hursthouse and James and Henry Richmond, who had

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4. The original contact with the Richmonds arose with a meeting between John Atkinson, Harry's brother, and J.C. Richmond in 1849. Scholefield, Papers, vol.1, p.25.

5. "Family Letters", p.ix.

6. Scholefield, Papers, vol.1, p.26.



already emigrated. They had gone to the settlement of New Plymouth which had been founded in 1841 by the Plymouth Company, an offshoot of the New Zealand Company. By 1852 Taranaki was still one of the smallest settlements in New Zealand, but the Hursthouses and the Richmonds returned an encouraging report to their relatives, and the rest of the party decided to sail as soon as possible.<sup>7</sup>

They left England on 28 November 1852 in the Sir Edward Paget and reached Auckland twenty-five weeks later, on 25 May 1853. They did not arrive in New Plymouth until 18 June. Once there, however, they settled into the pioneer community with great zest. "The delight of finding everyone of value is very great" wrote Jane Maria Richmond<sup>8</sup> exultantly, "anyone who will work is sure to get on".<sup>8a</sup> Harry Atkinson was willing to work, and he did get on. His grandfather had given him £150 "for fares to New Zealand" in September 1851<sup>9</sup>, and Atkinson lost no time in finding work to earn more money to buy land. One of his first jobs was making six dozen pairs of boots for the local cobbler.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of 1853 the Richmonds and Atkinsons had bought 400 acres of bush land six and a half miles from New Plymouth, for ten shillings an acre. Harry and Arthur Atkinson owned 200 acres of this and later allowed their sailor brother, William Atkinson, to take a third share in their block. Within a year they had purchased a further

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7. See J. M. Richmond to M. Taylor, 21 June 1850, ibid., p. 61.

8. J. M. Richmond, the sister of C.W. and J.C. Richmond, was the clan's most vivid correspondent. Her great charm and quick mind make her letters an invaluable record of the families' activities. She married Arthur Atkinson, (30 December 1854). In later life she was an ardent feminist and reformer, to the delight of her nephews and nieces. Her husband seems to have encouraged her activities, and the A.S. Atkinsons were probably more sympathetic to Harry Atkinson's radicalism than any of the rest of the clan.

8a. J.M. Richmond to M. Taylor, 27 May 1853, "Family Letters", p. 25.

9. Scholefield, Papers, vol. 1, p. 26.

10. J. M. Richmond to M. Taylor, 27 May 1853, loc. cit.



100 acres for £110, and seventy-five acres for £130. In November 1854 William and Harry Atkinson held 100 acres each, Arthur Atkinson held 125, and fifty were being kept for a friend, Edward Patten. It was all forest land,<sup>10a</sup> but they had built a house on it which they called Hurworth,<sup>10b</sup> and two miles of road to connect Hurworth with the end of the road from New Plymouth.<sup>11</sup>

The whole Richmond-Atkinson block was almost 800 acres by 1854 and was bringing in an income by providing a run for fifty head of cattle, the grazing of which earned the clan a shilling a week for each beast.<sup>12</sup> The two families co-operated closely in their pioneering activities. James Richmond, Harry and Arthur Atkinson, Edward Patten and another man called Brind had formed themselves into a "Bush party" which lived on the block in nikau whares.<sup>13</sup> They had cleared nineteen acres in their first year.<sup>14</sup> By June 1855 "the Mob" was "possessed of 1070 acres in one block".<sup>15</sup> Hurworth was now the centre of a fairly sizeable clan settlement which took the same name. Harry Atkinson was back from the bush party and earning ten pounds a month sawing timber at eight shillings per 100 feet.<sup>16</sup> He was very happy. On 10 November 1854 he had confided to his aunt in a burst of euphoria that "New Plymouth is a most jolly place, and has more than fulfilled my expectations in all respects, and that is saying not a little".<sup>17</sup>

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10a. Some idea of the nature of this land may be obtained from the plates in R.F. Watters, ed., Land and Society in New Zealand, Wellington, 1965 especially 17, 18, 19 and 27.

10b. Named after Hurworth, in Durham, where Harry and Arthur Atkinson spent their early childhood.

11. H.A. Atkinson to Mrs Coster, (an aunt), 10 November 1854, "Family Letters", pp. 273-274.

12. Ibid.

13. J. M. Richmond, "General Letter to Her Friends in England", 27 October 1853, Ibid., pp. 255-256.

14. H. A. Atkinson to Mrs Coster, 10 November 1854, loc. cit.

15. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 13 June 1855, Ibid., p. 284.

16. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 12-14 June 1855, Ibid., p. 275.

17. H. A. Atkinson to Mrs Coster, 10 November 1854, loc. cit.



His health, however, was causing his friends some anxiety. In England he had had "a perpetual cough" which he had never quite lost and in June 1855 he suffered an attack of bronchitis. C.W. Richmond thought his brother-in-law was working too hard.<sup>18</sup> Richmond was still uneasy in November and thought that the hard work in the bush had been too much for Atkinson who had asthmatic tendencies and was "not strong".<sup>19</sup> Henry Richmond had also been watching Atkinson but hoped that when he was married and settled in "a comfortable house" his health would improve.<sup>20</sup>

Atkinson's fiancée, Amelia Jane Skinner, daughter of a Rochester banker, had arrived in Taranaki in December 1855. The Richmonds noticed that she was shy and had "not much to say"<sup>21</sup> but she was very pretty, with a sweet oval face and charming hair which fell in ringlets on both sides of her face. Harry and Jane were married on 25 March 1856 and their eldest son, Dunstan, was born the following year. He was a bouncing, rough, mischievous baby, the subject of his aunt Jane Maria's somewhat nervous admiration. There were soon three more children, a girl and two boys, and Atkinson, whose family affections had always been strong, was fond and proud of his young family.

The clan were all prospering, and Harry Atkinson, apparently recovered from his cough, most of all. In 1856 he had secured a contract for supplying firewood to the troops stationed in Taranaki which brought him about £4,00 a year,<sup>22</sup> a sizeable income.<sup>23</sup> Jane Maria

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18. C.W. Richmond to T. Richmond, 19 June 1855, Scholefield, Papers, Vol. 1, p. 160.  
 19. C.W. Richmond to J.C. Richmond, 6 November 1855, Ibid., p. 181.  
 20. H.R. Richmond to J.C. Richmond, 2 December 1855, Ibid., p. 184.  
 21. Ibid.  
 22. J. M. Atkinson, Diary, 4 June 1856, Ibid., p. 209.  
 23. Jane Maria told Margaret Taylor that "Arthur and I with our land, house, horses and £50 a year feel I think quite as rich as we should in England with four or five hundred a year; we are quite at ease" ("Family Letters", p. 343). Her contentment probably led her to exaggerate, but H.A. Atkinson's £4,00p.a. was a sizeable income by Taranaki standards.



noted in her diary that "he rides about on his pretty grey mare seeing that his carts, bullocks and drivers are in order or doing their duty - in fact is quite a gentleman".<sup>24</sup> In 1857 he could afford to employ two men and two boys and was something of a rural entrepreneur. "He is the Hurworth carter, has bullocks, cows, rears calves, pigs, turkeys, ducks, fowls ... makes butter and is going shortly to begin cheese making".<sup>25</sup> In 1858 Harry and Arthur Atkinson widened their contacts and increased their incomes by securing the contract for carrying the mails between Wellington and New Plymouth.<sup>26</sup> By 1859 Atkinson had a considerable local reputation for cheesemaking.<sup>27</sup>

All this bustling pursuit of prosperity was interrupted in the late 1850s by the first signs of war with the Maoris. The settlement of New Plymouth was desperately short of land, and was surrounded by Maoris who were suspicious and fearful of the grasping white men who were pressing the government to buy the land from the tribes; they therefore refused to sell. The settlers' resentment of this check to their expansion was exacerbated by the passing of time. Taranaki's rate of increase was slower than that of any other settlement, and its 60,000 settlers became hysterical in their lust for new land. In 1859 a careless purchase of the choice lands of the Waitara from Teira, a Maori whose title was not valid, led to war and by March 1860 Taranaki

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24. J. M. Atkinson, *Diary*, 4 June 1856, *loc. cit.*

25. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 15 November 1857, "Family Letters", p. 343.

26. J. M. Atkinson to Mrs C. Richmond, 28 March 1858, *Ibid.*, p. 367.

27. E. E. Richmond to C. W. Richmond, 30 January 1859, *Ibid.*, p. 397.

was a battlefield.<sup>28</sup>

The settlers at first greeted the showdown with some relief, but as the war turned into a depressingly protracted series of guerilla raids and did not end in a speedy victory for Pakeha 'progress' they became jaundiced and querulous. Their farms had had to be abandoned, and their women and children had either been sent away from the province altogether or were incarcerated in unwholesomely crowded conditions in New Plymouth.<sup>29</sup>

Atkinson formed a company of volunteers, which included his brother Arthur, and used them to very good effect, both in conjunction with the regular forces and as a guerilla force whose task was to search the forest for Maori war-parties.<sup>30</sup> His service during the wars made him immensely popular<sup>31</sup> and gave him a reputation for bravery and energy which he never lost.

Atkinson's war service was not only military however; both Christopher and James Richmond were members of the General Assembly and in 1861 Atkinson was prevailed upon to join them as member for the third Taranaki constituency, Grey and Bell. He was reluctant to do so, but no one else who was suitable could be persuaded to stand,<sup>32</sup> and he

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28. For further detail see K. Sinclair, The Origins of the Maori Wars, Wellington, 2nd ed., 1961, pp. 110-135.

29. See Scholefield, Papers, vol. 1, chapter 9, passim.

30. Atkinson's military record has been very fully dealt with in E. Tosswill, "The Life of Harry Albert Atkinson, Pioneer, Soldier, Statesman", unpub. M.A. Thesis, Canterbury, 1923.

31. J.M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 8 September 1865, "Family Letters", p. 546.

32. H.A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 16 June 1861, R-A mss., Vol.5, p. 61.



was duly elected unopposed in 1861. He seems to have spent far more time in the field than in the House,<sup>33</sup> and by 1864 his military reputation was great enough for him to be made Defence Minister in Weld's "Self-Reliant" Ministry. Jane Maria had been uneasy at this sudden elevation. She told her friend, Margaret Taylor, that she did not feel "at all glad" about it because she thought Atkinson was too impulsive and not sufficiently experienced for the post.<sup>34</sup> Her fears do not seem to have been realised, however, for Atkinson received more praise for this period in office than for any other.<sup>35</sup> He seems to have been an efficient and extremely active War Minister, spending a good deal of his time in action. Nevertheless in 1866 he decided not to stand for re-election. His private affairs, he said, demanded his undivided attention.<sup>36</sup>

Amelia Jane Atkinson had died on 22 June 1865 of a growth in her throat,<sup>37</sup> probably cancer. She had been pregnant with their fifth child and had been alone at Wanganui with none of the family near her when she died. The news was broken to Atkinson by his partner, R. Pitcairn,<sup>37a</sup>

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33. See Scholefield, Dictionary, p. 23.

34. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 3 December 1864, "Family Letters", p. 539.

35. See Scholefield, Dictionary, pp. 22-24, where a most disproportionate amount of space is given to the 1860s; G. H. Scholefield, Notable New Zealand Statesmen, New Zealand, n.d., pp. 131-143, has the same fault; so has the Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Christchurch, 1908, Vol. 1, p. 100.

36. J. M. Atkinson to E. E. Richmond, 26 February 1866, Scholefield, Papers, Vol. 2, p. 207.

37. J. M. Atkinson to M. Richmond, 28 June 1865, Ibid., p. 166.

37a. Pitcairn worked for H. R. Richmond before transferring his services to Atkinson. He was with Atkinson at the battle of the Wairoa Stockade.

who travelled to Wellington for the purpose.<sup>38</sup> Atkinson flung himself into political activity<sup>39</sup> and did not confide his feelings to anyone until July when he wrote to Arthur Atkinson.

My loss at times seems almost too much for me while at other times I can scarcely believe that God has really taken dearest Jane from me. But God has been very merciful to me in giving me strength to bear my burden. I am very much inclined to leave politics, but I don't see how I can do so at the present time with honor. I want you to bring me down in addition to the things I mentioned to Pitcairn my old German watch and the Bible Jane and I used to read.<sup>40</sup>

J. C. Richmond's wife, Mary, died shortly afterwards, on 29 October 1865 and Richmond was distraught. His sister-in-law, Annie Smith, came to look after her small nieces and nephews but the arrangement did not turn out to be a happy one. Annie was not robust; she liked to fuss and plan; and she needed constant sympathy and attention. In the casual, philosophical Richmond household she pined for lack of communication.<sup>41</sup> When Harry Atkinson returned to Taranaki in 1866 the two found they had a great deal in common. Both were miserably lonely and Atkinson was anxious to rebuild his home after the double catastrophe of war and bereavement. He and Annie shared a pragmatic, energetic cast of mind as well as a capacity for intense personal devotion, and the match was heartily approved by the clan.<sup>42</sup> They married very quietly in June 1866 and went to live at Hurworth.

The settlement at Hurworth, which had grown into a small village

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38. J. C. Richmond to M. Richmond, 28 June 1865, Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 8 July 1865, Ibid., p. 168.

41. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 30 December 1866, Ibid. p. 224.

42. J. M. Atkinson to E. E. Richmond, 28 May 1866, Ibid., pp. 210-211.



of Richmond and Atkinson farmhouses, had been burned during the wars, but Harry Atkinson's house had not been wholly destroyed. He restored it, and set about repairing the damage done to his desolated farm. His partner, Pitcairn, was in failing health and Atkinson still felt obliged to remain out of politics in 1868.<sup>43</sup> He was very short of money,<sup>44</sup> and was worried about Annie's health. In 1869 he decided to take her to England for an operation. The money for the trip was probably raised by mortgaging Hurworth<sup>45</sup> and spending some of Annie's own money.<sup>46</sup>

They spent two years in England and returned to Taranaki in 1871 with forty pounds in cash,<sup>47</sup> and went back to Hurworth to a far more modest establishment than Atkinson had owned in the fifties.<sup>48</sup> "At present it is rather a struggle, and we can't see far ahead. However, I have long learnt to leave the morrow to take care of itself (where ones own exertions are useless)," Annie Atkinson told J. C. Richmond at about this time.<sup>49</sup>

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43. J. M. Atkinson to E. E. Richmond, 26 February 1866, Ibid., p. 207.

44. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 10 May 1868, Ibid., p. 269.

45. This impression is based on a complaint by Atkinson to his brother Arthur that a Building Society was about to sell up Hurworth. He sent Arthur £1,300 borrowed from the Smiths, and hoped that the money would reach New Plymouth in time to save his property. (H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson and J. C. Richmond, 18 June 1870, R - A mss., vol. 7, p. 2).

46. The Atkinson papers in the Turnbull library contain some rather obscure letters from Annie's father and brother to Atkinson asking him to refrain from drawing on their account. The matter was settled amicably.

47. H. A. Atkinson, "Assets and Liabilities 21 September 1871", R - A mss., 1872/3, box 4. See Appendix.

48. See Appendix and compare with Jane Maria Atkinson's description of the establishment, above.

49. A. Atkinson to J. C. Richmond, 3 April, H.M.W.A. mss.

In 1871-1872, however, export prices, which had been falling sharply since about 1868, suddenly rose to a level which was not equalled until 1910.<sup>49a</sup> With Atkinson's personal attention his farm began to prosper, and within a short time the Atkinsons were comfortable again.

They had been back at Hurworth only a year when the sitting member for Egmont, W. Gisborne, resigned. W. S. Moorhouse, a veteran Canterbury politician, announced his candidature for the tiny electorate<sup>50</sup> and reluctantly Atkinson decided to oppose him. Moorhouse was a follower of William Fox, and Fox had spoken up for Wiremu Kingi during the sixties, an unforgiveable crime in Taranaki eyes and particularly enraging to bush settlers like the Atkinsons.<sup>51</sup> "It would be very difficult for me to leave home now [Fox] any length of time, but I won't see a Foxite get in if I can help it," Atkinson told Stafford.<sup>52</sup>

The election campaign, nevertheless, was not so much concerned with Taranaki's past history as with its future development. While Atkinson had been in England, Julius Vogel had burst upon the colonial scene with his policy of large loans for development. The principle was not new, but the scope of Vogel's scheme was novel enough to fire New Zealand's imagination and the country, suffering an incipient depression in 1868-69, seized upon Vogel's scheme with desperate enthusiasm.

New Zealand politics were dominated in the 19th century by the

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49a. C. G. F. Simkin, The Instability of a Dependent Economy, Oxford, 1951, p. 37.

50. In 1871 it had between 100 and 200 voters, and was one of the three smallest electorates in New Zealand. J. K. Cunningham, "Equality of Electorates in New Zealand 1854-1889", unpub. M.A. thesis, C.U., 1953.

51. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 7 July 1861, Scholefield, Papers, vol. 1, p. 714.

52. H. A. Atkinson to E. Stafford, 29 August 1872, Ibid.<sup>vol. 2</sup>, p. 329.



interaction of violent but tiny groups squabbling over a wide variety of local and personal issues of which the most important was the development of the land.<sup>53</sup> Provincial squads formed up in a series of shifting alliances for the purpose of extracting benefits for their provinces, and Vogel's introduction of large loan expenditure gave added intensity to the struggle. Within the provinces there was intense rivalry between districts for the money which the province had either borrowed on its own responsibility or extracted from the central government. Atkinson had experienced the difficulty of persuading New Plymouth, the provincial centre, to disgorge money for the development of communications with the bush farms when he had been elected to the Provincial Council in 1857 "to speak for the bush".<sup>54</sup> He had also had some experience of colonial politics and knew their devious nature.

In 1872 politicians were agreed upon the necessity for development, but within this broad consensus there were two groups which have been termed "bold" and "cautious" borrowers, the former clustering about Vogel and the latter around Edward Stafford, a Nelson sheepfarmer.<sup>54a</sup> Each of these groups formed a nucleus to which other members attached themselves for reasons which ranged from economic judgment to personal spite, and confusing the whole pattern was the lurking possibility of a

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53. Some of the most useful recent comments on politics in nineteenth century New Zealand are to be found in: A. M. Evans, "A Study of Canterbury Politics in the Early 1880s With Special Reference to the General Election of 1881", unpub. M.A. thesis, Canterbury, 1959. D. G. Horron, "The Structure and Course of New Zealand Politics, 1853-1858", unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Otago, 1959, and K. Sinclair's article, "The Significance of 'the Scarecrow Ministry', 1887-1891", in Studies of a Small Democracy, Auckland, 1963.
54. J. M. Atkinson to M. Taylor, 20 January 1857, Scholefield, Papers, vol. I, pp. 248-249.
- 54a. W. R. Armstrong, "The Politics of Development, 1870-1890", unpub. M.A. thesis, Wellington, 1960, pp. 32-43.

new kind of temporary alignment whenever an important issue of principle should be introduced.<sup>55</sup>

Atkinson's original decision to oppose Moorhouse was strongly motivated by his antagonism to Moorhouse as a Foxite; but like most Taranaki politicians he advocated increasing the authority of the central government at the expense of the provincial councils; (Moorhouse had until recently been a provincialist);<sup>56</sup> and he was opposed to Moorhouse on the public works issue. Moorhouse's very name was evocative of an energetic and imaginative public works policy. In 1861 as Provincial Superintendent of Canterbury he had secured the Lyttelton Tunnel in the teeth of bitter opposition, and throughout the 1872 campaign he stressed his support for Vogel and a vigorous loan policy. He was the most formidable opponent whom Atkinson ever faced in Egmont. Moorhouse constantly accused Atkinson of wanting to slow down Vogel's borrowing and thus, he implied, starve Taranaki of public works, and played with great skill on Taranaki's particularly neurotic mixture of greed, vanity and sense of grievance. One of his advertisements contained these well chosen lines: "For many years I have regarded the Egmont district and its neighbourhood as one of the most valuable, and certainly the most neglected, portions of the Colony, and am anxious that its very great resources should be at once developed..... My past success in promoting one or two rather difficult public works

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55. See Evans, p. 7.

56. A judicious adjustment from prosperous provincialist Canterbury, well provided with land revenue, to the mood of poverty-stricken centralist Taranaki whose lack of local revenue made it heavily dependent upon the central government. For a more detailed account of provincialism and centralism see Herron.



justifies my hoping that...I shall be able to render material service to the Colony in the peaceful settlement and rapid development of this district."<sup>57</sup>

The Taranaki Herald supported Moorhouse strongly and did its best, in editorial after editorial, to connect Atkinson inextricably with Stafford who was then in power.<sup>58</sup> The Stafford Government's 'Cautious' policy was unpopular in Taranaki which was still recovering from the wars and lagging behind the other provinces in production and population. The Taranaki Herald alleged that Atkinson had once denounced Vogel's public works policy as "bad and vicious".<sup>59</sup> It pointed out that the Stafford Ministry contained the Superintendents of Auckland, Wellington and Nelson, and the Provincial Secretary of Otago, and therefore had so many commitments already that Taranaki could gain nothing from supporting it.<sup>60</sup> Further editorials pointed out that Atkinson's election would mean support for Stafford and help to prolong the existence of his unpopular government, while Moorhouse would help to bring it down.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, Moorhouse would be more useful to Taranaki in the scramble for expenditure because he knew more members and could influence more votes.<sup>62</sup>

The Richmonds and Atkinsons had viewed Vogel with suspicion since he first appeared as a major force in New Zealand politics,<sup>63</sup>

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57. T. H., 21 September 1872, p.3.

58. For example: Ibid., 21 September 1872, p.2; 28 September 1872, p.2.

59. Ibid., 14 September 1872, p.2.

60. Ibid., 21 September 1872, p.2.

61. Ibid., 28 September 1872, p.2.

62. For example: Ibid., 21 September 1872, p.2; 2 October 1872, p.2.

63. e.g. J. C. Richmond to A. S. Atkinson, 25 August 1869, E. Richmond, ed., "Family Letters of the Richmonds and Atkinsons and Others", unpub. typescript, Wellington, 1944, p. 39.

but Atkinson dared not denounce Vogelism altogether. His advertisement, which was modest in comparison with Moorhouse's very long one, said simply that he was "strongly in favour of a sound system of Public Works and Immigration".<sup>64</sup> On 26 September 1872 Atkinson was formally nominated as a candidate for Egmont by F. U. Gledhill<sup>65</sup> and Charles Brown.<sup>66</sup> He explained that he stood as an independent candidate, and was not pledged to Stafford; indeed he said that he had telegraphed Stafford to the effect that his government should not count on Atkinson's support if he were elected. Atkinson also mentioned his past services to Taranaki and assured the electors of Egmont that while he disapproved of the shortsighted and inefficient administration of Vogel's policy he was not opposed to loans for development.<sup>67</sup>

The results of the election which took place on 3 October 1872 were as follows:

	<u>Town</u>	<u>Omata</u>	<u>Oakura</u>	<u>Patea</u>	<u>Total</u>
Atkinson	38	14	16	46	114
Moorhouse	34	9	30	17	90
					68.

Clearly Atkinson's personal prestige and the memory of his services during the wars were sufficient to neutralise Moorhouse's carpet

64. T.H., 14 September 1872, p.3.

65. F. U. Gledhill, New Plymouth merchant, represented Taranaki in both central and local politics. Cyclopedia of New Zealand, Christchurch, 1908, vol. 6, p. 44.

66. Charles Brown, arrived in New Plymouth 1841, first Superintendent of Taranaki, merchant. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

67. T.H., Supplement, 28 September 1872.

68. T.H., 5 October 1872, p. 2.



bag, full of public works though it was. Atkinson's highest vote came from Patea where settlers were building farms upon confiscated land. In this area fear of the Maoris and jealousy of the provincial centre was strongest<sup>69</sup> and the settlers found it easy to identify with Major Atkinson, the bush settler. The bitter antagonism to Atkinson displayed by the New Plymouth papers would have done nothing to damage his appeal in Patea, but it may have lost him some New Plymouth votes.

In a frigid editorial the Taranaki Herald acknowledged Atkinson's victory and hoped that expressions of public opinion during the campaign had taught him that it was his duty to join the Opposition and pull down the Stafford Ministry.<sup>70</sup> Atkinson's intentions, however, were based on the conclusions he himself had drawn from his victory which were quite different from those of the Taranaki Herald. In a formal letter of thanks to his constituents dated 11 October 1872 Atkinson said that his election was a sign of their wish that reckless and extravagant expenditure should cease, and that he should oppose any government "which was not prepared to be careful and economical as well as energetic and progressive".<sup>71</sup>

Almost as soon as Atkinson arrived in Wellington - on 11 October - Stafford's Government fell and was replaced by a Government headed by G. M. Waterhouse.<sup>72</sup> Waterhouse's position was precarious, and he offered Atkinson a portfolio in return for his support. Atkinson, who considered Waterhouse a very feeble Premier, declined the

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69. Patea had put forward its own candidate, John Ballance, but he had withdrawn in favour of Atkinson.

70. T.H., 5 October 1872, p. 2.

71. Ibid.

72. G. M. Waterhouse, once a South Australian merchant, in this period a large (20,000 acres) Wairarapa sheep-farmer, whose "significance ... in the political history of New Zealand has not yet been appreciated," according to Scholefield, Dictionary, pp. 467-471.

offer.<sup>73</sup> He had decided to maintain his independence until he had grown accustomed to the political climate in Wellington, and took care to impress his non-aligned status upon the House. He said that he would support any government which was prepared to conduct the affairs of the Colony with economy and justice to districts where votes were not very thick."<sup>74</sup>...I am here as an independent member....my votes will be given upon what I consider good and sufficient grounds, and from conscientious motives".<sup>74</sup>

The double themes of economy and justice were elaborated further in the course of this speech, the only long one that Atkinson delivered in that year. He said that he could discern no important conflict of principle among the various political factions, but like some other perceptive politicians of the period, he thought that there was "a very vital question" to be decided - "whether the money we have to spend is judiciously spent, or whether, as it appears to me, a large amount of it has been wasted, and may still be wasted....What we want and what the country wants, is not only a progressive Government, but also an economical Government...that will really address itself to the requirements of the country, and not merely to the requirements of particular districts...."<sup>75</sup> This was one of the first occasions on which he outlined his belief in financial moderation - a belief which was to find almost constant expression when he became more accustomed to speaking in the House.

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73. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 11 October 1872, Scholefield, Papers, vol. II, p. 329.

74. Atkinson, 15 October 1872, P.D., 13, p. 703.

75. Ibid., p. 704.



This question, the administration of the public works policy, was the first, and only, major question to attract Atkinson's attention in 1872 and 1873. He spoke seldom and continued to stress his independent status in the House.<sup>76</sup> As a former Minister he would have been an acquisition of some value to either the small group of cautious borrowers which had coalesced around Stafford, or to the Government, but he bided his time.

It was rumoured in Taranaki that Atkinson's real goal was the Superintendency and that he had no genuine interest in colonial affairs.<sup>77</sup> A vote of confidence taken at a post-session meeting of Egmont electors in November 1873 resulted in a vote of seven for and six against Atkinson: "one gentleman (not an elector) voting on both sides".<sup>78</sup> The free and independent electors of Egmont were beginning to fret at the slowness with which their member obtained public works. Capacity for extorting loan money from the central government was the main criterion for selection of a Superintendent to replace F. A. Carrington whose term expired in November 1873, and both the New Plymouth papers took a dim view of Atkinson's qualifications in this respect. The three main candidates were Carrington himself, one of Taranaki's most respected pioneers, who had been the chief surveyor of the Plymouth Company; Atkinson, and Charles Brown. Carrington flatly announced that if Atkinson were elected "his style and manner" would prevent the three Taranaki representatives from working as a team to secure the New Plymouth harbour, Taranaki's

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76. For example, see *ibid.* 14, p. 454.

77. *T.N.*, 8 November 1873, p. 2; 27 September 1873, p. 5.

78. *Ibid.*, 8 November 1873, p. 2.

current obsession.<sup>79</sup> His seconder exclaimed at the nomination of candidates in New Plymouth, "Fancy Major Atkinson asking Mr. Vogel for anything".<sup>80</sup>

Brown's appeal was equally unsophisticated. The chairman at one of his election meetings introduced him thus: "Charley Brown, is known to you all. I shall only say, that when he was in office he made the money fly into the right pockets. I hope we shall see those times over again".<sup>81</sup>

The powers of extortion of the three men were duly weighed, and the results of the electors' deliberations were:

	<u>Carrington</u>	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>Brown</u>
Town	203	107	125
Omata	14	10	4
Oakura	28	14	4
Bell Block	16	14	13
Waitara	18	40	13
Hawera	19	43	2
Manutahi	1	46	1
Patea	25	32	10
Total:	324	276	172 <sup>82</sup>

Atkinson, who had a low opinion of Carrington's administrative capacity, had failed to supplant him as Superintendent. He now stood for the Provincial Council and was in due course elected at the

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79. Ibid., p.3.

80. Ibid., 29 October 1873, p.2.

81. Ibid., 13 September 1873, p. 2.

82. Ibid., 12 November 1873, p. 2.



top of the poll. In May 1874, to the surprise of his friends, he accepted Carrington's offer of the Provincial Secretaryship, on the conditions that Carrington was to do nothing without first consulting Atkinson and that Atkinson was to be head of the Provincial Government and leader in Council.<sup>83</sup>

But Harry explained his acceptance of the position to Arthur Atkinson thus: "Some few think we ought to have let Carrington break down - which he could not possibly do more than he has done - as he will now get the credit of what I do. I hate such nonsense as this. There is most important work to be done which I should never have forgiven myself for not doing when I got the chance, [merely] because someone else might get the credit".<sup>84</sup>

This explanation is possibly the fullest that exists for any of Atkinson's political actions. Since it was written to explain himself to the brother, who was closer to him than any of his other relatives, it was almost certainly devoid of conscious misrepresentation, yet while it shows a strong sense of duty and an appetite for administration which became notable political characteristics of Atkinson, it also shows an unwillingness to imagine that anyone but himself could carry out the tasks of public administration honestly or efficiently. The conviction that he was indispensable for efficient administration became so rooted in his mind that it turned into an ingrained personality trait. Sometimes it was justified.

Throughout 1873 and 1874 Atkinson carried out his role of

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83. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 31 May 1874, Scholefield, Papers, vol. II, p. 376.

84. Ibid.

conscientious representative of the Egmont electors, under the critical eyes of the editors of the Taranaki News and the Taranaki Herald. The province's needs were many, and it was the job of its three representatives to satisfy them as rapidly as possible. One specific grievance, which was at the root of many others, was Taranaki's lack of land revenue.

Because large areas of land in the province had been confiscated, they were administered by the Central Government, which also controlled the proceeds of their sale - the resulting shortage of land revenue, made Taranaki short of money for communications, and for education. Although the central government did build roads in the province, these the New Plymouth papers claimed, were simply its fair share of loan expenditure, and the papers constantly impressed upon the Taranaki members the province's desire for a local, responsible Land Board to control all provincial land revenue.<sup>85</sup> But the project about which the Herald in particular and the province in general waxed alternately lyrical and hysterical, was the New Plymouth harbour, or, rather, the absence thereof. Because there was no harbour the future of the province was unnaturally blighted by the loss of settlers with capital who disembarked at provinces better provided with port facilities.<sup>86</sup>

But if the harbour was not forthcoming then the province, which lacked communications of all kinds was prepared to console itself with railways. The cult of the railway had hit New Plymouth with devastating force and deprived many citizens of all reason and most of their good taste as the following effusion shows:

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85. T.H., 5 July 1873, p. 2.

86. Ibid., 27 August 1873, p. 2.



"A SONG FOR THE INAUGURATION OF THE RAILWAY WORKS  
AT NEW PLYMOUTH."

Air - "Brave Old Oak."

....

Hurrah! Hurrah! The railway car,  
Shall roll across the land,  
And commerce smile, upon the isle  
Of gold and iron sand.  
Hurrah! Hurrah! The railway car,  
Shall glide across the land,  
And Maori might be pierced by light,  
From an Anglo-Saxon brand;  
And northern braves, from the ocean waves,  
The rovers of the deep,  
Shall encamp about the hoary mount,  
And golden harvests reap.

Hurrah! Hurrah! etc.

Hurrah! Hurrah! The railway car,  
Shall rush across the land,  
And Britons true, from a feeble few,  
Shall become a mighty band.  
Hurrah! Hurrah! The railway car!  
Let loud-toned trumpets play,  
And a joyful song, let each prolong,  
On this auspicious day.

Hurrah! Hurrah! etc. 87

As member for Egmont, therefore, Atkinson was expected to perform one function above all others - obtaining public works for his district. If he failed in this he could expect to lose his seat forthwith, and the results of the Superintendency elections of 1873 indicated that there was some dissatisfaction with his performance in the first two years of his term. The only political commitment which he himself stressed at this time was to the belief that the public works policy needed to be more carefully administered in the future than it had been in the past; and that more care needed to be taken in planning works so that they contributed to the prosperity of the colony as a whole, rather than secured the transient popularity of some Government members

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with their constituents. His own constituents sympathised with neither of these views, while in the House, the group with which Atkinson had most in common, the Staffordites, were in Opposition; where they looked likely to remain as long as the Vogel boom continued to rain prosperity upon the colony.

Sir Isaac Atkinson 1844-1872.





CHAPTER TWO : 1874-1876.

In July Atkinson thought the 1874 session was "the most dull and uninteresting" that he had seen. There was "no life in anyone", he told Arthur Atkinson.<sup>1</sup> But in August the relative calm of the House was shattered when the long dormant question of provincial changes irrupted into the debates with all the suddenness of a Bulgarian atrocity. On 13 August Vogel told the House that "the provincial system was a hindrance and a disturbance" to "any great and general plan" for colonisation, and went on to say that the provinces' functions of settlement and administration should be carried out by local bodies and the central government.<sup>2</sup>

Taranaki, with its mind upon the fat land funds of the South Island provinces was fervently centralist, and Atkinson was, as member for Egmont, a centralist ex officio. In this case, however, political necessity simply reinforced his own convictions. He felt that when the central government had taken up the task of opening and settling the land to the extent Vogel had done in 1870, the provinces had been made superfluous. He also felt that it was far better to have one authority in charge of these vital and expensive tasks, for multiplication of initiative led to reckless extravagance and careless waste.<sup>3</sup> Moreover he did not equate

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1. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 8 July 1874, E. Richmond, ed., "Family Letters of the Richmonds and Atkinsons and Others", p. 313.
  2. Vogel, 13 August 1874, P.D., 16, p. 572.
  3. Atkinson, 17 August, 1874, Ibid., pp. 645-648.



provincial government with local government, as Grey did.<sup>4</sup> Atkinson considered that the existing system was grossly unfair because it gave the provincial towns too much opportunity to mulct the out-districts of their rightful share of provincial expenditure.<sup>5</sup> He was therefore enthusiastic about Vogel's notion that local administration should be the responsibility of small units whose managing boards would be firmly under the control of the settlers in their districts.<sup>6</sup>

Once the question of changes in the provincial system was brought into the open it quickly superseded all other issues. Some members vainly protested that it was a red herring to distract the House from the real issue of the times - borrowing; and that Vogel was looking for a cheap election cry.<sup>7</sup> The majority had become excited by the issue and were determined to settle it. A new batch of recruits began to be found in the Ministerial lobbies<sup>8</sup> - Atkinson among them. The abolition issue had provided an opportunity for him to move out of independence and had aligned him with the Ministerialists.

Vogel, who had replaced Waterhouse on 3 March 1873, was anxious to fill two vacant portfolios, for which there was a dearth of suitable applicants among his followers.<sup>9</sup> He was prepared to use the chance, which the abolition alignment presented, to recruit men who supported him on abolition even though they might be luke-warm in their support

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4. Grey, 7 September 1875, *Ibid.*, 18, p. 208.

5. This feeling was widespread. See J. M. R. Young, "The Politics of the Auckland Province 1872-1876", unpub. M. A. thesis, Auckland, 1960, pp. 380-385.

6. At this stage Vogel was extremely vague about the form these units of local government would take. He thought "some such plan as...works well in the Timaru district might be introduced". (*P.D.*, 16, p. 577).

7. Reid, 17 August 1874, *Ibid.*, p. 672; Thomson, *Ibid.*, p. 657; Murray, 18 August 1874, *Ibid.*, p. 722.

8. Steward, *Ibid.*, p. 705.

9. Thomson, 17 August 1874, *Ibid.*, p. 657; *E.P.*, 2 September 1874, p. 2.

of his public works policies.<sup>10</sup> The short-lived Stafford Government (10 September 1872 - 11 October 1872) had been evidence of lingering uneasiness about the rapid development policy,<sup>11</sup> and Vogel wanted to allay this if he could. Stafford himself would have served to appease the Opposition; but he had declined to join the Government, ostensibly because he was going back to England. This left Vogel a choice between Atkinson and the Auckland, Reader Wood.<sup>12</sup> Geographically their qualifications were good, for the Vogel Government was strong in the south but lacked North Island support. Atkinson was a more forceful personality than Wood, and he was popular with members. Atkinson's repudiation of the suggestion that he was a Staffordite had not destroyed his claim to the Staffordite virtues of caution in borrowing and care in administration, and if Vogel could not have Stafford he would find Atkinson a fair substitute. The Evening Post<sup>13</sup> thought that "it would not be easy to find a much better man for the position"<sup>14</sup>.

On 2 September 1874 the same paper observed that "a strong flirtation has already been established between Mr Vogel and Major Atkinson".<sup>15</sup> And Atkinson's seduction, achieved on 3 September 1874, did make the anti-Vogel faction a little more cheerful at the prospect of a prolonged Vogel regime.<sup>16</sup>

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10. Ibid.

11. W. R. Armstrong, "The Politics of Development 1870-1890", unpub. M.A. thesis, Wellington, 1960, pp. 102-108.

12. R. M. Burdon, The Life and Times of Sir Julius Vogel, Christchurch, 1948, (hereafter, Vogel), p. 136.

13. The Evening Post was strongly opposed to Vogel.

14. E.P., 18 August 1874, p.2.

15. Ibid., 2 September 1874, p.2.

16. Ibid., 3 September 1874, p.2.



W. R. Armstrong<sup>17</sup> suggests that Atkinson joined Vogel in order to slow down the borrowing policy; and it is tempting to suggest that he joined Vogel, as he had Carrington, to reform the administration from within. But in the case of the Provincial Secretaryship he had a guarantee of power that he did not have from Vogel, and there is no evidence that he knew of Vogel's plans to leave New Zealand in the near future. The parallel is not exact. It is far more likely that Atkinson joined Vogel to help achieve abolition of which he entirely approved.

As Minister of Crown Lands and Immigration, however, he did have some power over the public works policy, and may have hoped to exercise a moderating influence upon the rest of the Cabinet. He had been finding his position of strict independence very tiresome for he was a man who liked authority and had great confidence in his own administrative ability. Moreover his movement towards Vogel greatly increased his popularity in Egmont:<sup>18</sup> and to this particular audience he said that he had joined Vogel "to assist ... in the great work of peopling and opening up the country, and in providing really local self-government for the people".<sup>19</sup>

Atkinson's post-session meeting of 26 September 1874, called to explain his political actions to his constituents,<sup>20</sup> paid far more attention to the question of development, and the related question of abolition, than to anything else. Atkinson's theme was, once again, the need for cautious progress. He promised Taranaki 250 immigrants

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17. Armstrong, p. 147.

18. T.H., 22 December 1875, p. 2.

19. Atkinson, 26 September 1874, Ibid., 30 September 1874, pp. 2-3.

20. For an account of this meeting see Ibid.

every two months, and more than that if the Superintendent could show that work was available. Significantly, he made the flow of immigrants conditional upon Taranaki's capacity to absorb them, being unwilling to commit himself to vague optimistic visions of unlimited progress and indefinite prosperity. Atkinson was at his most reckless in this year, when prices were rising, employment was plentiful, and development was proceeding apace; yet he still feared difficult times ahead and ended his speech upon a warning note: "let all of you be determined to use great care in your expenditure during your prosperity and be prepared to meet bad times if they come...."

In spite of its lowering conclusion his speech was received with "loud and continued cheering". The audience asked questions about the effects of abolition, the land fund, and the state of the economy; and they passed resolutions in favour of the abolition of the provinces and the colonisation of the land fund. Local editorial comment upon the meeting placed heavy emphasis upon Atkinson's membership of the Vogel Ministry as a sign of his endorsement of Vogelism; and completely ignored all Atkinson's reservations about the policy of rapid development, claiming him as a convert to the cult of unlimited progress.<sup>21</sup>

Yet Atkinson's rather equivocal position in 1874 was the unsatisfactory result of his attempt to move with both the major currents of his time. He recognised the need for some such programme as Vogel's to develop New Zealand's resources, and yet he feared that the greed of the localities would force their representatives in Wellington to push the programme beyond New Zealand's fairly limited capacity to pay

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21. Ibid., p. 2.



for it. His attitude to loans at this time was similar to his attitude to drink: both were harmful only when indulged in to excess.

The nineteenth century bred fanatics on both questions but Atkinson joined neither the prohibitionists nor the 'Skinflints',<sup>22</sup> and avoided committing himself either to the brewers or to the Vogelites.<sup>23</sup> In 1874, when loans for development were extraordinarily popular, because export prices were rising, and opportunities for expansion apparently limitless, Atkinson set himself against his contemporaries and tempered his enthusiasm with caution.<sup>24</sup> In 1880, when prices were falling, he mixed his caution with hopefulness.<sup>25</sup> This Cassandra theme continued into the eighties. In 1883 the colony's credit appeared to have been restored, and people were working themselves into the mood that returned Vogel to power in 1884 to dispel depression with confidence: Atkinson said then that if the Government "went in for extravagance in public works the finances of the colony would soon suffer".<sup>26</sup> In 1888 when the 'Skinflints' formed a coherent group in the House bent on defending the indebted class from Atkinson's depredations, and the House howled for retrenchment and an end to borrowing, Atkinson kept stubbornly to the middle of the way. "What was the platform on which I and others stood?" he asked the House. "It was this: needful retrenchment first, and necessary taxation afterwards. It was never <sup>pro</sup> supposed....that retrenchment alone could

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22. A term used in this period to describe those who opposed loans and demanded economy in administration.

23. The parallel breaks down somewhat when applied to the eighties. In 1886, along with Stout, Atkinson became a Vice-President of the New Zealand Alliance. J. Cocker and J. M. Murray, eds, Temperance and Prohibition in New Zealand, London, 1930.

24. T.H., 30 September 1874, pp. 2-3.

25. Atkinson, 8 June 1880, P.D., 35, p. 116.

26. T.H., 2 June 1883, p. 2.

do all that was required to restore the equilibrium in our finance..."<sup>27</sup>

While continually criticising both fanatical borrowers and excessive retrenchers, Atkinson reserved his deepest wrath for those who encouraged waste. Reckless borrowing and speculative finance were alike abominable in his sight, but the worst thing of all was waste. He twice reorganised New Zealand's finances in a war against waste, and he never relaxed his vigilance against it whether it was waste of financial, natural, or human resources.

While Taranaki had seen, because it wished to see, in Vogel's recruiting of Atkinson an indication that Atkinson approved unreservedly of the public works policy, the Parliamentary Opposition was not so complaisant. It pounced on Atkinson as soon as the 1875 session began with charges that he was Stafford's nominee to the Cabinet, and that Atkinson and C. C. Bowen (who had joined the Ministry in December) had attached themselves to the Government without endorsing its policies, and in particular, without being in full agreement with rapid development.<sup>28</sup> Moreover the Opposition charged that the two newest Ministers were about to undermine Vogel's policy from within the Cabinet. Rolleston, one of the more articulate members who took this view, made the further point that

if the present state of things continues, when the members of the Ministry will be taking their places, as in the case of Road Boards, two by two,...there will be none of that check upon the proper working of our institutions which is afforded by one Ministry taking the position of another, and being able to represent, from time to time, the different views that are held by strongly defined parties in the House. The system which has lately prevailed of Ministers joining whose sympathies are

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27. Atkinson, 14 June 1868, *P.D.*, 64, p. 97.

28. Bunny, 28 July 1875, *Ibid.*, 47, p. 83; Wood, *Ibid.*, p. 85.



not, and have not been, in the past with the chief whom they join, - who join with the very best and most patriotic intentions of modifying the actions of their chief...is not a course which is likely to conduce to good government in this country.<sup>29</sup>

Vogel left for England immediately after the 1874 session and Atkinson became Treasurer.<sup>30</sup>

But any members who had been looking for a break with Vogelism were disappointed. Atkinson's 1875 financial statement demonstrated his middle of the road stance perfectly. On the one hand it drew accusations of extravagance from the editor of the Evening Post;<sup>31</sup> and on the other hand, in Taranaki the news "that not a penny of the four million is available for new public works, but will all be required for meeting liabilities already incurred...is...so very unexpected that a feeling is arising that somebody ought to be punished for it".<sup>32</sup> It was too early for political reporters to try to fix Atkinson in a group which held any definite financial dogma; but clearly he was not generally recognised in 1875 as the figure of fiscal retribution that he was to become after his 1879 Budget.

A considerable change in Atkinson's political personality became apparent after his second promotion to Ministerial rank. He seemed to have increased greatly in self-confidence, and with this came a pugnacious self-assertiveness. His reputation for fierce debate dates from about this time. On 3 September, for example, Sir William Fitzherbert, the member for Hutt, advised the House to ignore Atkinson who had been interjecting "in that obstinate spirit for which now he

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29. Rolleston, 23 July 1875, Ibid., p. 60.

30. Burdon, Vogel, pp. 133-135.

31. E.P., 34 July 1875, p. 2; Grey, 10 August 1875, P.D., 17, p. 245.

32. T.N., 4 August 1875, p. 2.

is remarkable".<sup>33</sup> And the Wellington correspondent for the Taranaki Herald reported that "The Opposition do not like the manners of Major Atkinson any more than they did of Sir Julius Vogel. They complain of his over-bearing manner. He is certainly bold and defiant in his tone, and holds his own well, especially when attacked. He is then at his best - prompt and vigorous. He is improving wonderfully as a debater."<sup>34</sup>

But his tactics were more brutal than effective. The feeling persisted that a Ministry containing Atkinson and a number of Vogelites could be nothing but equivocal on the central issue of the rate of public works expenditure. By the end of July rumours were spreading to the effect that the Government was having difficulty in holding its supporters together, and was anxious to be defeated on the abolition issue so that it could go to the country with the cry of abolition, and thus conceal, if it could, the divisions elsewhere in its ranks.<sup>35</sup>

Vogel's abolition proposals were, in any case, so vague in detail that the Evening Post thought his Bill could not possibly pass in 1875.<sup>36</sup> On 31 July a caucus of Government supporters, along with some abolitionist members of the Opposition (forty-six in all), displayed wide differences "on the most important points" of abolition.<sup>37</sup> And then, on 3 August, Grey rose in the House to announce that a new Opposition had been formed, with two intentions, firstly to make strict inquiries into the general financial condition of the colony; and

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33. Fitzherbert, 3 September 1875, P.D., 18, p. 157.

34. T.H., 8 September 1875, p. 3.

35. Ibid., 31 July 1875, p. 2.

36. E.P., 2 August 1875, p. 2.

37. Ibid.



secondly, to oppose the passing of the Abolition Bill until the people had had an opportunity to express their opinion upon the measure.<sup>38</sup>

The seeds of compromise had been sown. If an election preceded abolition Grey would have a chance to use his talents for mob oratory, and the Ministerial party would gain a popular election cry. Nevertheless the Government were slow to rise to the bait. Atkinson proceeded with the second reading of the Abolition of the Provinces Bill in August. His introductory speech was mercifully brief; but he was criticised by his contemporaries for his abruptness.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile the Opposition persevered in its attempt to block the Bill. Rolleston claimed that Pollen's Government<sup>40</sup> was forced to abolish the provinces because it was in financial difficulties and needed "the manipulation of large funds and greater power over the resources of the colony generally".<sup>41</sup> Atkinson himself reinforced this impression when he threatened "that very great financial difficulties must follow if our system of finance is not altered".<sup>42</sup> Certainly he saw abolition as a major battle in his war against waste. He was angered at the dissipation of the great lump sums which were handed over to the provinces and passed beyond the control of the central government, while it was still the central government that bore the ultimate responsibility for repayment.

Stout said that abolition was a plot hatched by "the monopolists and the capitalists" to avoid closer settlement.<sup>43</sup> But he did not

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38. Grey, 3 August 1875, P.D., 17, p. 151.

39. T.H., 11 August 1875, p. 2.

40. Daniel Pollen took over the Premiership from Vogel on 6 July 1875.

41. Rolleston, 17 August 1875, P.D., 17, p. ~~375~~ 375.

42. Atkinson, 27 August 1875, Ibid., p. 705.

43. Stout, Ibid. p. 679.

explain how the plot had been hatched, nor how it was to be carried out. Such an attack nevertheless had an irresistible attraction for Grey who proceeded to discover a nefarious design for establishing "a class government" by the simple expedient of abolishing provincial councils which would "leave the mass of the population in distant places without that political education which they ought to have".<sup>44</sup> Even the patrician Fitzherbert deigned to fling some of the same mud. He coldly regarded the motley crew opposite him and found them "no longer a Government but.....a Company - a monopoly of power for a certain favoured class".<sup>45</sup>

All this crossfire had reduced the House to so disorganised a state that neither the Government nor the Opposition could survive as coherent groups for much longer. Abolition was, after all, peripheral to the main vote-getting issue, that of public works,<sup>46</sup> and members could not be relied upon to preserve alignments which were based on a constitutional, not a developmental issue. Early in September a compromise was reached: the Opposition would allow the Abolition Bill to pass on condition that it would not come into operation until after a new Parliament had been elected. The Opposition - and the Government - would therefore be able to fight an election at the end of 1875 on the abolition issue wherever they found it expedient to do so. This compromise caused further damage to the disintegrating Ministerial party. Forty-seven Government supporters met on 11 September and resolved that they would not agree to any compromise

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44. Grey, 7 September 1875, *Ibid.*, 18, p. 208.

45. Fitzherbert, *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

46. See J. L. Hunt, "The Election of 1875-6 and the Abolition of the Provinces", unpub. M.A. thesis, Auckland, 1961, pp. 23-27.



proposals put forward by Grey - which was tantamount to a vote of want of confidence in their leaders.<sup>47</sup> The rebels held a further meeting on 15 September to devise means of concerted action over the abolition Bill and other questions. To this meeting Ministers were not invited.<sup>48</sup>

The Evening Post pointed out, however, that the nucleus of the irreconcilables consisted of J. E. Brown and seven of his followers. Brown had wanted to visit England at the end of the year, and since someone else would be elected to his seat in his absence, he wanted a pledge that he would be called to the Legislative Council on his return. The Government had refused to commit itself; and the Evening Post said that this probably accounted for the sudden appearance of the new faction.<sup>49</sup> As usual, personal issues were obscuring the larger ones, and desire for personal advantage blurred the political outlines. The Cabinet stood firm in its decision to accept the compromise and the rebel group disintegrated. The Government just managed to stumble through to the end of the session: the compromise Abolition Bill passed with a majority of nineteen votes.

Atkinson went home to the rather harried life of a Taranaki member. His constituents were, as usual, indifferent to political questions like the fate of the Ministry, and they seem to have regarded abolition as an issue upon which Taranaki was so unanimous that discussion was not required. Nor did they become excited about the radical-conservative issues which Grey was trying to stir up.

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47. T.H., 15 September 1875, p. 2.

48. Ibid., 18 September 1875, p. 2.

49. E.P., 16 September 1875, p. 2.

But an excellent indication of the questions that did concern them is to be obtained from examining the report of a deputation which Atkinson received at Waitara on 17 November.<sup>50</sup> The deputation complained that wharf charges were too high. Atkinson promised to intercede with the Minister of Public Works. Would Atkinson see that a wreck which was obstructing the Waitara river was removed? He would do his best. The river bank was being eroded. That was the concern of the provincial government. When would Atkinson obtain a road between Waitara and Urenui? He could not do it at once because of lack of funds. When would the Government call tenders for the extension of the railway to Inglewood? Atkinson had sent a strong telegram. When would the telegraph be laid to Opunake? Next summer. Would it be brought as far as Waitara? Not unless the settlers at Waitara would guarantee to cover its losses. Would Atkinson do his best to get a land endowment for Waitara town? Yes. When would the road to the bridge be opened? Atkinson would ask the Native Minister if this could be done without causing trouble with the Maoris, and the stonework on the bridge would be repaired.

By the time the 1875 election came round the attitude of the Taranaki Herald was markedly different from its attitude three years earlier. Atkinson's success in obtaining immigrants and public works, with the promise of yet more to come and his position in the Ministry which had once been Vogel's, won him the paper's support. Indeed the Taranaki Herald was undecided whether to be sorry or angry that the return of so useful a tool as the Colonial Treasurer should be in any

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50. T.H., 20 November 1875, p. 2.



way obstructed. Thus its references to Atkinson's opponent, Ivess<sup>51</sup> are in a tone of rather querulous indignation. It cannot deny Ivess's right to stand, but cannot see what he is doing it for. Ivess was from Patea, which was backward enough to feel neglected and disgruntled, not so much as in 1872, but still enough to warrant putting up its own candidate - for Atkinson was now approved by the north of the electorate and could be held to be its creature, an identity which had been less obvious three years earlier.

Atkinson's 1875 campaign was only a little more imaginative than his last campaign but he had greatly increased his knowledge of local issues and approached the electorate with more confidence. He did not discuss general political questions with his constituents until 18 December when he faced one of the largest meetings held in Taranaki until that time.<sup>52</sup> To his audience of about four hundred he said that there were two issues, public works, and the constitutional changes. Of the former he said - as he had always said "it seems to me that we must come out right; if we only use common prudence and care in management", and for similar reasons - for the sake of common prudence and care in management - he advocated the end of the provinces. "I believe that until we have abolished Provincial Governments it will be quite impossible to give the people real local self-government". From colonial issues Atkinson moved to local questions, i.e. the development of Taranaki and his own role therein: "because, although

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51. Joseph Ivess was a peripatetic Irishman from Australia, an incorrigible founder of newspapers (26 in New Zealand and 5 in Australia) with "ambitions in public life". See G. H. Scholefield, Newspapers in New Zealand, Wellington, 1958, pp. 17-18.

52. For an account of this meeting see T.H., 22 December 1875, Supplement.

I believe it to be a great mistake for any member to confine himself simply to the consideration of how everything will effect <sup>[sic]</sup> his particular district (hear, hear), still I hold no man as fit to be a member who does not look properly after the district he represents. (hear)".

Roads, bridges and railways were proceeding apace. The electors cheered the news that the harbour would be started soon. The revenue from sales of confiscated land was to be treated as provincial land revenue. Fifteen hundred immigrants had been obtained for Taranaki. Next session the Government would abolish the provinces and introduce local government. Once the provinces were removed from the path of progress, harbour works, main trunk lines and river communications would be pushed ahead. The government would build the central prison - a much coveted public work - at New Plymouth; and the convicts could build the harbour. (Cheers).

While his audience were recovering from their delighted astonishment Atkinson inserted some remarks on education, a matter on which he felt strongly since it was a major weapon for equalising opportunity. Primary education would be brought within the reach of every child and paid for out of the consolidated fund. Moreover Atkinson believed that facilities should be provided so that every child of superior intelligence should have an opportunity of acquiring through scholarships the highest education that could be obtained in the Colony.

At the end of the speech came the careful and unpleasant reminder that all these things must be paid for. Unless New Zealanders curbed their voracity they would be taxed. "I must tell you distinctly



I do not think that any prudent man in this country can expect to pay less taxation than he does for the amount of convenience he derives from the Government". There was implied warning in the comment that the tariff was unlikely to be lowered. He told the electors that any further taxation should be upon property and incomes. And he went on to say: "there is no doubt whatever if pressure is brought to bear upon the Government to push forward the public works and carry them out with undue haste, you will not only have to face increased taxation, but also a financial crisis of a very serious character. There is no doubt that we have been carrying on these works at a greater rate than was prudent, considering the means at our disposal".

This warning, like the others, seems to have been brushed aside. The issue in Egmont was public works, not abolition, nor radical reform, and despite Atkinson's disconcerting pessimism about instant development he was at least a candidate with proven ability to obtain public works.<sup>53</sup> "The honour of having a Minister is not counted for much," said the Taranaki Herald judiciously, "but the convenience of being befriended in the Executive by one who can talk over the distribution of money with his colleagues, over merely having a member of that large committee which is called the Parliament, is very distinctly appreciated".<sup>54</sup> A week later the editor was still harping on this theme: Atkinson had not committed the cardinal sin of neglecting his electorate, and had "by becoming a member of the present

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53. Ivess had tried to accuse Atkinson of neglect, but in reply Atkinson said that he had obtained £75,000 for Taranaki (of which £68,000 was for Egmont), out of a total North Island allocation of £400,000. Ibid., 29 December 1875, p. 2.

54. Ibid., 22 December 1875, p. 2.

Ministry identified himself with a policy which has always received our support". Under the circumstances, Ives's candidature was considered "ill-advised".<sup>55</sup>

The provincialists, led by Grey, Fitzherbert, Rolleston and Macandrew, the Superintendents of the four largest provinces, waged a desperate campaign against abolition. The smaller provinces and the countryside, however, who were thoroughly disgruntled at the provincial councils' administration of the public works policy, hoped to gain a fairer distribution of expenditure through abolishing the provinces. The latter group heavily outnumbered the provincialists and the poll, held early in 1876, returned a majority of Government supporters.<sup>56</sup>

Egmont followed this general trend. Most polling booths returned majorities for Atkinson except on the outskirts of the electorate where no amount of public works expenditure could satisfy men who were laboriously breaking in the land. These expressed their frustration by voting against the sitting member.

	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>Ives</u>
Town	77	5
Onata	24	-
Oakura	31	16
Hawera	48	22
Carlyle	32	27
Manutahi	13	2
Total	<u>225</u>	<u>72</u> 57

Atkinson had re-entered politics at a fortunate time - Taranaki was recovering quickly from the war and depression, and the loan expenditure he obtained for it produced quick results. The Taranaki

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55. Ibid., 29 December 1875, p. 2.

56. Hunt, passim.

57. T.H., 5 January 1876, p. 2.



Herald, looking back at 1875, said, "In every direction the display of energy and industry is evident in the clearing of new land, in cultivations, in buildings, and all those more promising features which distinguish a progressive settlement".<sup>58</sup>

Having satisfied, for a time, his importunate constituents Atkinson could turn his attention once more to colonial affairs. When the House met on 15 June 1876, abolition was a foregone conclusion. It was therefore useless as a means of aligning members, and the House disintegrated, as it usually did after an election, into a series of squads, which were waiting to see what would be offered to them before they committed themselves. Some of Hall's friends believed that the interpretation which Grey was trying to place on abolition would distract the House's attention from the crucial questions of public works and finance. Thomas Russell, for example, warned Hall that "Grey means mischief to the squatters and his line seems to be to set the mob against those who have anything to lose". But he thought Grey would fail - "the great question next session will be that of future finance".<sup>59</sup>

The Government was in no position to give members a strong lead. It was short of Ministers again, and was able to hold on to the Treasury benches mainly because the Opposition was extremely divided and bereft of an acceptable leader.<sup>60</sup> Ormond refused to join the Ministry unless Vogel<sup>61</sup> promised to carry out retrenchment and promote

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58. Ibid., 1 January 1876, p. 2.

59. T. Russell to J. Hall, 9 March 1876, H. mss., box 14.

60. J. D. Ormond to Sir D. McLean, 6 April 1876, McLean mss., 330.

61. Vogel had resumed the Premiership on 15 February 1876.

closer settlement.<sup>62</sup> On 5 May Rolleston was offered an Undersecretaryship worth £900 a year, and was assured "that the Grey-Macandrew party is not one with which you will like to be associated".<sup>63</sup> But he was bitterly opposed to abolition and ignored the offer.

Vogel began clumsily by making the Piako Swamp transaction<sup>64</sup> a confidence measure. The preliminary division showed twenty-nine on each side,<sup>65</sup> but there were thirty-nine members at a Government caucus on 20 June, and only twenty at Grey's caucus.<sup>66</sup> Indeed the Piako division was merely a preliminary skirmish; the House was waiting as usual for the financial and public works statements before committing itself. But on 14 July, before either of these statements had been produced, the death of I.E. Featherston, the Agent-General, was announced to the House, and aroused a ferment of speculation about his successor. The Agent-Generalship was the most valuable and most prized office in the Government's gift. Its fortunate possessor obtained not only a generous salary with the likelihood of a pension when he retired, but also a position which was reputed to be of some consequence in London social and political circles. It is not surprising that it dazzled the parvenu colonial politician. Vogel had intended to return to England at the end of the session in any case, "induced as he alleges partly by ill health partly that eternal want of pence",<sup>67</sup> and the

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62. J. D. Ormond to Sir D. McLean, 6 April 1876, loc. cit.

63. (illegible signature) to W. Rolleston, 5 May 1876, Kn. mss., box 2.

64. Members were debating the propriety of the sale of the Piako Swamp (some 80,000 acres) to Thomas Russell and his friends for 5s. an acre. P.D., 20, passim.

65. Ibid., p. 21.

66. T.H., 24 June 1876, p. 2.

67. A. S. Atkinson to E. E. Richmond, 18 September 1876, R - A mss., 1876/35, box 5.



vacancy was a splendid chance for him to do so at the colony's expense. He may also have been motivated by a desire to use the Agent-Generalship to lend credit to the activities of a group of land speculators who had decided to float a company in London to sell the rabbit-infested Waimea Plains to unsuspecting English buyers. However, the initial date of Vogel's inclusion in this group is not known, and D. A. Hamer<sup>68</sup> implies that Vogel did not become connected with it until after he had secured the Agent-Generalship.

Vogel could not appoint himself to be Agent-General, and thus he needed to have enough influence with the Premier who followed him to ensure that he would be appointed by his successor. Ormond was asked to take over the Premiership and recoiled from the task. So did Stafford. "I have no ambition for the position under present circumstances", Ormond explained to his friend Sir Donald McLean, "...whoever takes the helm at this crisis will have a most fearfully difficult position - bricks will have to be made without straw and I am not prepared to attempt it - Stafford has just the same feeling and his unwillingness to take office is based on the knowledge that it is almost certain political ruin to who ever attempts it".<sup>69</sup>

The Evening Post, was delighted at the prospect of getting Vogel out of New Zealand - although it was apprehensive of the dangers involved in allowing one so reckless to be Agent-General. Nevertheless it hoped that the prudent Stafford would follow Vogel, in which case there would be some prospect of retrenchment being carried out and economical

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68. See D. A. Hamer, "The Agricultural Company and New Zealand Politics, 1877-1886", H.A.A.N.Z., vol. 10, No. 38.

69. J. D. Ormond to Sir D. McLean, 4 August 1876, McLean ms., 330.

administration practised.<sup>70</sup> On 26 August it reported that the most likely Premier was Fitzherbert;<sup>71</sup> but he had just been given the Speakership and it was felt impolitic to disturb him.<sup>72</sup> The Evening Post of 29 August said, "apparently Ministers have great difficulty in their work of reconstruction, and are driven to desperate shifts, in order to devise a scheme by which Sir Julius may obtain the Agent-Generalship".<sup>73</sup> But Vogel had not quite exhausted the list of possible Premiers: from Fitzherbert his attention moved to Atkinson. Negotiations must have taken place in the last week of August 1876, and this time Vogel found someone who was ready to take office. Atkinson had agreed to be the next Premier.

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70. E.P., 25 August 1876, p. 2.

71. Ibid., 26 August 1876, p. 2.

72. A. S. Atkinson to E. B. Richmond, 18 September 1876, loc. cit.

73. E.P., 29 August 1876, p. 2.



CHAPTER THREE : 1876-1877.

Atkinson had won the Premiership by default. Ormond had refused it; so had Stafford and Fitzherbert, thus forcing the Ministerialists to turn to the second rank of politicians for a leader. "The only remaining course - unless the rest of the Ministry intended to 'funk out of political strife' altogether, was for them to pick out their most promising man (though 'promising' perhaps is a little equivocal as a term of commendation in the political world) let him get the best team together he could and then fight it out - upon this view it was agreed....that Harry was the man," Arthur Atkinson explained to his sister Emily.<sup>1</sup> Arthur also thought that after a heavy dose of the devious Vogel, members would welcome Harry Atkinson's candour: "ordinary people can calculate his orbit pretty exactly, but of our late comet-like Premier no one could say from his previous motions what point of space at any given point of time he would occupy..."<sup>2</sup>

The replacement of Vogel by a more prudent Premier fitted in well with the mood of the House. Both Stafford and Ormond favoured slowing down the development policy, and Atkinson's appointment was approved by them, while at the same time he was accepted by the Vogelites because he was Vogel's chosen successor. The Evening Post thought that Atkinson, "an honest, straightforward man...incapable of that tergiversation which was the chief characteristic of his predecessor," was "a decided improvement" upon Vogel; but then, in a long muddled editorial, it juxtaposed Vogelism and retrenchment

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1. A. A. Atkinson to E. E. Richmond, 18 September 1876, R-A ms., 1876/35, box 5.  
2. Ibid.

in a fashion which probably reflected the confused mood of the electorate: "If the new Ministry adopt the main features of the programme of their predecessors, and at the same time earnestly address themselves to the task of meeting impending financial difficulties by careful and prudent measures, including the adoption of a rigid system of retrenchment, then they will not only deserve but receive a large amount of sympathy and support"<sup>3</sup>

All New Zealand was in a state of perplexity. The recession of the late sixties had been conjured away by Vogel, but his policy of loans for development was beginning to lose its efficacy by 1876.<sup>4</sup> Export prices had been falling since 1873, and between 1874 and 1876 the value of exports per head of population declined sharply. Imports fell by twenty per cent in the same period; loan expenditure and credit expansion slackened.<sup>5</sup> With prosperity faltering the enormous public debt - £6,397,000 in 1870, £12,409,000 in 1873, and £17,388,000 in 1875 - frightened some people into calling for retrenchment. Big landowners who had mortgaged themselves heavily during the land boom of the early seventies, and smaller farmers struggling to break in their land, were afraid of the taxation spectre which Atkinson had aroused with his New Plymouth speech of 18 December 1875. Just before the 1876 session began, the Taranaki Herald speaking for a farming province, replaced its usual exhortation to the Taranaki members to be relentless in their pursuit of public works, with a nervous suggestion that "we can have too much even of a good thing, and, therefore, can have too much of borrowed

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3. E.P., 1 September 1876, p. 2.

4. W. B. Sutch, "The Long Depression 1865-95", paper presented to the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science, 24 January 1957, p. 15.

5. Sinakin, The Instability of a Dependent Economy, p. 159.



money if special and heavy taxation has to be resorted to to pay interest and sinking fund."<sup>6</sup> The Evening Post said at the same time, "even at the price of temporary unpopularity, it would be far better to economise and pull up than to press forward on the road to financial disaster".<sup>7</sup>

On 4 September, less than a week after he had accepted the Premiership, Atkinson rose in the House to pay a tribute to Vogel,<sup>8</sup> and to announce a new £2,000,000 loan for main trunk lines. But his speech was notable chiefly because it announced an immediate slackening of the rate of public works. Speaking of projected railways, Atkinson said that it would be necessary to build them at a slower rate than they had been built for some years past, and that the Government was asking the House to co-operate with it by not allowing such works to be forced ahead - "as far as I can see, there is really only one policy open to the country at the present time - on the one hand, a steady perseverance without break in public works, within our means; and, on the other, prudence and efficient administration".<sup>9</sup>

In earlier speeches Atkinson had emphasised the need to eliminate waste. He had also stressed the need for efficient distribution and effective use of loan money when it was raised. From 1876 he was to demand that the rate of borrowing be checked. And for fifteen years he continued to insist that development policies should bear some relation to their economic context - for example he insisted that heavy loans and falling export prices were incompatible. At this stage,

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6. T. H., 10 June 1876, p. 2.

7. E. P., 17 July 1876, p. 2.

8. Vogel was Agent-General from 9 September 1876, although his appointment was not gazetted until 19 October: New Zealand Gazette, 1876, p. 721.

9. Atkinson, 4 September 1876, P. D., 22, pp. 10-12.

however, Atkinson was still concentrating on preventive measures, hoping to keep the taxation bogey at bay. He did not admit the need for higher taxation as a complement to retrenchment until 1879 when Government revenue fell sharply.

While the general response to his financial measures was one of cautious approval, the initially favourable image of Atkinson's Government was soon marred by the new Premier's political ineptitude. He had appointed seven Ministers - Daniel Pollen to be Colonial Secretary, F. Whitaker to be Attorney General, Sir Donald McLean to be Native Minister, G. F. Richardson to be Minister of Justice and Commissioner of Stamp Duties, J. D. Ormond to be Secretary for Crown Lands and Minister of Immigration, and G. McLean to be Commissioner of Customs and Postmaster-General. Atkinson himself held the Premiership and the Treasury. The legality of these appointments was instantly questioned because the appropriations left by Vogel were sufficient to pay only six Ministers apart from the Premier. The House proceeded to waste more than two weeks on constitutional discussion, first of the legality of the appointment of Ministers without pay, and when this ended in the ignominious reconstruction of Atkinson's Ministry,<sup>10</sup> the House debated whether or not it would pass an Indemnity Bill to cover the period when the oversized Cabinet had been in Office.<sup>11</sup>

Once this preliminary skirmish had been won, the Government seemed to be in a fairly strong position. Atkinson had collected a talented group of colleagues, and his policies had wide, if unenthusiastic support.

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10. Atkinson dropped Ormond, taking Lands and Immigration himself, Whitaker took the Postmaster-Generalship from G. McLean, and the Attorney-Generalship was left vacant.

11. Ibid., pp. 319-342.



The reduced rate of borrowing was regarded as a necessary measure, but members expected the ensuing decline in public works expenditure to have an adverse effect on their electorates. Thus, Atkinson's support was essentially temporary, and there was a strong likelihood that it would be withdrawn as soon as a more attractive policy turned up. Jane Maria Atkinson told C. W. Richmond in September 1876 that, "Arthur says tho' the Ministerial majority are numerically strong, they are inert and supine, there seems a total want of healthy vitality in the body politic."<sup>11a</sup>

Vogel had left the task of carrying out the abolition of the provinces and creating workable substitutes for the provincial councils to his successor. In September 1876 Atkinson replaced the provincial councils with a series of local administrative boards and municipal councils, hoping that this diverse system would mean a fairer distribution of money to the localities, and give the settlers in the backblocks more control over expenditure. "For more than twenty years we have tried Provincialism," he told the House, "and the fact cannot be gainsaid, that during that time we have never been able to apply the revenues of the colony to the wants of the people evenly throughout the land".<sup>12</sup>

The reduction of expenditure had made the problem of equitable distribution an urgent one. Atkinson had personally experienced the frustrations of the representative of an outlying area when he had been living at Hurworth and trying to wring money out of the provincial council. He identified strongly with pioneer farmers who were in this

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11a. J. M. Atkinson to C. W. Richmond, 19 September 1876, R - A mss., 1876/36, box 5.

12. Atkinson, 19 September 1876, P.D., 22, p. 376.

predicament, and intended that the control of local affairs which the Counties Act would give them, would complete the work of the Abolition Act by protecting them from exploitation by the provincial towns and would help them to acquire necessary public works more quickly. Accordingly, the Counties Act centralised the raising of money and the responsibility for repayment, but decentralised expenditure.

It failed to reduce pressure upon the central government for money because the localities pressed even more eagerly upon their representatives in Wellington once the provincial councils were no longer available as alternative victims of extortion. And it by no means settled the local government question. No sooner were the initial problems of administration overcome, the boards set up and their functions more or less understood, than the long depression began to spread over the country and the loan money which was to have oiled their administrative wheels began to dry up. All through the eighties demands for the reform of local government were made; but very little was done to satisfy those who complained. Atkinson, for one, felt that administrative reform was useless when the basic complaint was paucity of funds. "The local bodies have not as much money as they would like, and people are fidgetty under the feeling that there is no means of obtaining money unless they tax themselves, and they seem to think that if the system was changed by Parliament money would come from somewhere. We must, however, recognise this fact that if money is to be spent upon public works it means taxation...until we have recognised that we cannot obtain money without taxation we shall not be content with any form of local government"

13. Atkinson at New Plymouth, n.d. (clipping), New Zealand Times 12 April 1881, R. mss. unsorted; also J. Hall to F.D. Bell, 18 June 1881, H. mss., vol. 50, p. 80.



Having set up institutions of local government to lighten the difficulties of the "working settlers", Atkinson turned his attention to the would-be settlers. People brought to New Zealand under the immigration schemes were not going on to the land quickly enough, mainly because land prices kept moving out of their reach. Grey's facile assumption that settlement schemes failed through lack of land,<sup>14</sup> was not shared by Atkinson. Grey tended to blame land monopolists for the colony's ills; if Atkinson blamed anyone he turned against the urban moneylender, but more often he looked to the state for palliative action. In this case he saw that the main barrier to settlement was the small man's lack of capital, and introduced a Waste Lands Bill containing provisions for the sale of land on deferred payment throughout New Zealand. The extension of the deferred payment system would reduce the amount of initial capital needed to take up land and would, Atkinson hoped, encourage men to move out of the towns and break in the country.

He told the House that he thought "the time has arrived when it is necessary that we should...render the land easily acquirable by persons who have not sufficient capital...to purchase the land and to commence cultivating<sup>it</sup>/at once....The Government will be very desirous of considering any amendments which may be proposed, with the view of rendering the Waste Lands Bill as acceptable as possible to the class for whom it is intended, the great object of the Government being to get persons to occupy and settle upon the land." <sup>15</sup>

Deferred payment had been included, however, at the cost of making concessions to other rural interests. The Waste Lands Bill contained

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14. J. Rutherford, Sir George Grey, London, 1961, p. 593.

15. Atkinson, 8 September 1876, P.D., 22, p. 134.

in the midst of its many clauses one providing for the renewal of the leases of the Canterbury runholders.<sup>16</sup> The Opposition seized upon this and tried to stop the Bill, but it managed to reach the Legislative Council in spite of the Greyites' efforts. In the Legislative Council the clauses making colony-wide provision for deferred payment were struck out, although after considerable haggling the Upper House was persuaded to leave intact existing provincial laws for sale of land on deferred payment and for special settlements.<sup>17</sup> The Lower House expressed its deep disappointment at the Legislative Council's action, but had to rest content with the mutilated Bill because members were anxious to leave Wellington as soon as they could.<sup>18</sup>

In spite of Atkinson's redirection of financial policy, his realisation of abolition, and his rather unsuccessful attempt to introduce deferred payment, his first session as Premier did not arouse much comment. Like most other sessions it closed with members scuttling home followed by editorial abuse, since no Ministry could please all the colony. The 1876 session had "been one of much useless talk and little good work. Long before its close... [it] had become 'a weariness to the flesh', alike to the members and the Colony at large, while the prevailing sentiment in the minds of all men today is one of devout thankfulness that it has at length come to a close," said one paper.<sup>19</sup>

As soon as Parliament ended, Atkinson reshuffled his Cabinet. On 4 September he had told members that Sir Donald McLean, Pollen, and Richardson would leave the Ministry at the end of the session.<sup>20</sup>

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16. See Stout, *Ibid.*, p. 140.

17. *Ibid.*, 23, p. 744.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 747-748.

19. *E.P.*, 1 November 1876, p. 2.

20. Atkinson, 4 September 1876, *P.D.*, 22, p. 11.



Pollen had meanwhile been prevailed upon to stay,<sup>20a</sup> but McLean, whose health was precarious,<sup>21</sup> left for his station in Hawke's Bay and was replaced by his friend J. D. Ormond. Ormond's return to Ministerial rank<sup>22</sup> was popular, but he took office very reluctantly. "I would give a great deal to escape taking office - it is most inconvenient to me", he wrote to McLean, "and nothing but my regard for Atkinson and desire to loyally carry out my promise to him would induce me to go in".<sup>23</sup> Donald Reid, a radical land reformer from Otago,<sup>24</sup> replaced G. F. Richardson; and portfolios were redistributed among the Ministers. Pollen was now the only Minister who had been in the Cabinet that introduced Vogel's public works policy; and this disquieted observers whose greed for public works was greater than their fear of taxation.<sup>25</sup> Atkinson, however, was extremely pleased with his work of reconstruction which gave him a set of colleagues who supported his moderate land and public works policies. "I have a strong team now," he told his brother Arthur.<sup>26</sup>

The session's work had exhausted Atkinson, and he retired to Hurworth for a rest.<sup>27</sup> Except for the usual importunate deputations<sup>28</sup> which had to be received, his first major political exertion in 1877 was

20a. Cf. Armstrong, "The Politics of Development", p. 154.

21. He died in January 1877.

22. Ormond had been in the Fox Ministry 1871-72, and the Waterhouse Ministry 1872.

23. J. D. Ormond to Sir D. McLean, 25 November 1876, McLean mss., 330.

24. Donald Reid, a former gold-miner, had been active in the Otago Provincial Council where he took especial interest in education affairs and in land reform. He was responsible for securing Otago's deferred payment regulations. In 1878 he retired from political life to take up a large stock and station agency. (Otago Daily Times, 8 February 1919, p. 10.)

25. e.g. T.H., 9 September 1876, p. 2.

26. H.A. Atkinson to A.S. Atkinson, 24 December 1876, R-A mss., vol. 7, p. 28.

27. C. W. Richmond to S. Smith, 7 April 1877, R. mss. unsorted.

28. See T.H., 31 January 1872, p. 2; 25 April 1877, p. 2.

a speech delivered at a banquet in New Plymouth on 26 April. In this speech he reiterated the views he had put forward the year before about the dual need for progress in settlement and prudence in borrowing. He stressed the need for closer settlement "by a yeoman population" and promised that legislation to "provide the utmost possible facilities for the acquisition of land by farmers of small capital" would be forthcoming that year. In conclusion he told his constituents that all settlers must be "ready to assist the Government in their determination to proceed with public works at a moderate rate, such as prudent men, dealing with their own estates, and having to provide means out of them, would adopt".<sup>29</sup> He was, in effect, spelling out one of his criteria for sound colonial finance: a good Colonial Treasurer, Atkinson believed, was one who would run New Zealand as if it were a private estate and embark upon a system of colonial housekeeping rather than a scheme of national finance.

The strangely intimate tones which he used when discussing New Zealand's finances were used again in the financial statement of 31 July 1877. Here he continually referred to New Zealand as if it were a financial invalid. "For the immediate future, the Government believe that the need of the country is political rest. Time is needed for the completion and development of our public works; quiet is needed for the consolidation of the social results without which a scheme of immigration and railways in any new country would be a failure: time and rest...."<sup>30</sup> In short, the colonial intellect should not be

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29. *Ibid.*, 28 April 1877, p. 2.

30. Atkinson, 31 July 1877, *P.D.*, 24, p. 127.



overheated by reform of the taxation system until the body politic had recovered from the over-excitement of the public works programme.

But in this period political alignments were carefully calculated so that the stand taken by each member would return the maximum profit to his electorate, and the attitude adopted by Atkinson's Government in 1877 was to prove fatal to its existence. Not only had it announced its intention to economise in administration, but it had declared a reduction in public works expenditure on all but arterial projects, and these had less purchasing power when it came to buying votes than did smaller, more scattered, works which influenced a greater number of people. Moreover the declaration of legislative rest reduced any hopes of purely political distractions which could, in extremis, be used to rally members around the Ministry.

Challenges to the Government became more direct as its determination to stand still became more apparent. On 3 August Charles Woolcock, the independent member for Grey Valley, moved that the incidence of taxation be reformed.<sup>31</sup> His motion was a direct challenge to Atkinson's policy of colonial convalescence, and startled the disintegrating Government ranks into further disarray. They were reported to be in "a pitiable condition", and there was talk of pulling them together by holding an election over Woolcock's motion.<sup>32</sup> The Government began to lose divisions, but had not suffered a defeat on a want of confidence motion. This fate seemed unlikely to befall it at this stage because the opposition was united only in a desire to humiliate the Government, and was thought to be unable to form a stable group for a direct assault.

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31. Woolcock, 3 August 1877, Ibid., p. 227.

32. E.P., 11 August 1877, p. 2.

33. T.H., 15 August 1877, p. 2.; E.P., 16 August 1877, p. 2.

On 17 August C. C. Bowen, Atkinson's Minister of Justice, proposed that Woolcock's motion be amended so that it committed the Government to reform taxation in 1878, putting off the problem for a year.<sup>34</sup> He said that the Ministry's primary duty in the current session was "to make both ends meet". Nevertheless the debate which followed his amendment showed that there was very wide dissatisfaction with the existing system of taxation. Grey focussed attention upon the tariff by proposing an amendment which would have bound Atkinson to an immediate reduction of customs duties, and the imposition of a property and income tax. He lost this by ten votes.<sup>35</sup>

Atkinson, who had taken over Bowen's amendment, reacted sharply to Grey's interference in his domain. He was extremely suspicious of any property tax proposed by Grey, fearing that it would be simply an attempt to make landowners contribute more to the revenue than town dwellers. He reminded the House that a property tax must be calculated so that it taxed all property, not land alone, and announced firmly that:

the country has not arrived, by very many years, at the stage when the occupation of land can be regarded in the light of a monopoly. I admit that it is possible that the time may come when it will be the duty of the country to see how the land is being occupied; that the State may then find it necessary, if it appears that the land is held by a few persons to the detriment of the State, to take steps to remedy that. But the necessity for so doing has not yet arisen; and to put any special tax upon land would...be a very great mistake, because it is absolutely certain that land at the present time yields a far less return for capital than does almost any other investment.<sup>36</sup>

Eventually the House accepted Atkinson's amendment and the Ministry was saved, but the rebuke was unmistakable: political rest did not

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34. Bowen, 17 August 1877, P.D., 24, p. 492.

35. Ibid., pp. 600-601.

36. Atkinson, 17 August 1877, Ibid., p. 510.



appeal to the House at all, especially when combined with fiscal circumspection. Members wanted leadership from the Government. About three quarters of the House had shown in their speeches that they would support some change in the incidence of taxation.<sup>36a.</sup> In most cases this meant that they wanted customs duties lowered and direct taxation correspondingly increased.

During the debate on Woolcock's motion it had become obvious that the Ministry could not control the House. "Major Atkinson does not make a good leader in the House," complained the Hawke's Bay Herald. "He is good and honest, and thoroughly trustworthy, and works tremendously hard, but he lacks firmness in dealing with the House. He shows great want of tact. He does not 'fill' the part of Premier... [he] slaves at his task of economising expenditure, but he does not strive to personally influence members and to study the peculiarities of the House."<sup>37</sup>

Since the Government was losing ground rapidly by the end of August 1877, and at this stage there appeared to be no one in the Opposition ranks capable of forming a Ministry, a small group began separating out of both sides and coalescing in the centre ready to turn Atkinson out if an alternative Premier presented himself. The Middle Party's leaders were W. Montgomery, W. Gisborne and James Macandrew,<sup>38</sup> all experienced performers in the ritual dance of transition between Ministries. They were all prepared to take office but were unwilling to do so under Grey, at least not unless they could see a reasonable chance of controlling him. Within a few days they had twenty-one followers, but Grey retained seventeen, and continued to be nominal leader of the Opposition. It

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36a. E.P., 20 August 1877, p. 2.

37. cit. T.H., 23 August 1877, p. 3.

38. E.P., 5 September 1877, p. 2.

seemed that the Opposition was dissolving into chaos and that Atkinson's chances of lasting out the session were improving.

But Ministerial stocks fell again almost immediately when a row began over Maori land purchases in Hawke's Bay.<sup>40</sup> W. L. Rees and Grey became embroiled with Ormond in a series of unedifying charges and counter-charges<sup>40a</sup> in which Atkinson took little part. By 12 September lobby gossip predicted a no-confidence motion, either on the twelfth or thirteenth, which both Government and Opposition said they were confident of carrying.<sup>41</sup> The Middle Party, having lost its first chance to assert itself when Grey failed to collapse, had become discouraged and had almost disappeared. Its former members were no longer acting as components of a possible third party.

In September Atkinson brought down a Land Bill and a Settlement Works Advances Bill for their second readings, and the Government's reputation for inertia began to fade. Donald Reid, who had fought hard for Otago's deferred payment regulations and had supported Atkinson's Waste Lands Bill of 1876, carried on the fight from the Treasury Benches with his 1877 Land Bill. This was a codifying measure to remove any confusion which the abolition of the provinces might have caused. It divided New Zealand into twelve districts where the former provincial land regulations were to remain valid. Existing Waste Lands Boards were to remain in office, but would be liable for re-election every three years in case members should "fall behind the spirit of the age". These district boards would be supplemented by local boards for the

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40. P.D., 25, p. 298, et seq.

40a. See W.P.K. Sorrenson, "The Politics of Land", J.G.A. Pocock, ed, The Maori and New Zealand Politics, Auckland, 1965, pp. 40-42.

41. P.D., 12 September 1877, p. 2.



added convenience of intending settlers. The Governor was empowered to proclaim districts anywhere in New Zealand where deferred payment should apply; and a terminal date, 1890, was fixed to the rights of the Canterbury runholders.<sup>42</sup>

The Settlement Works Advances Bill made provision for roading inaccessible land before settlement, with the cost of such roads to be added to the price of the land. Thus it would ultimately be repaid by the settlers. Reid hoped that this would make backblocks land more attractive to settlers, and thus would not only hasten the process of settlement, but also check speculation as settlers crowded out speculators at the auctions.<sup>43</sup>

The Government failed to infect the House with its zeal to increase the yeoman population of New Zealand; political manoeuvring, as such, had never been Atkinson's strong point, and the session had begun so badly that political cohesion seemed almost impossible to rebuild. At the end of September the Taranaki Herald reported "no rapid development of new organisations of the political species - the Assembly ball for the time-being overshadows party intrigues".<sup>44</sup>

The Government was far less active than the Opposition, and on 2 October it had to face a virtual want of confidence division on its polemical use of the Waka Maori, the official Maori language newspaper.<sup>45</sup> Atkinson survived the division by forty-two votes to thirty-three, but rumour-mongers were beginning to credit him with being tenacious of office at the expense of principle.<sup>46</sup>

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42. P.D., 25, pp. 250-253.

43. Ibid., p. 603.

44. T.H., 19 September 1877, p. 2.

45. P.D., 26, p. 118.

46. e.g. E.P., 2 October 1877, p. 2; 5 October 1877, p. 2.

Ultimately, the fate of the Ministry was decided by extra-political considerations. A ring of Otago speculators, headed by W.J.M. Larnach, member for Dunedin City, urgently needed to sell land on the Waimca Plains to London buyers who would be unaware that it was ruinously infested with rabbits. The London market was, however, temporarily suspicious of overseas investments; and the vendors needed the co-operation of the New Zealand Government to lend credit to their operations. Accordingly, at the end of September 1877 Stout, Larnach's solicitor, and Ballance, Stout's friend, both moved out of Atkinson's following<sup>47</sup> and began to gather support for replacing the Atkinson Government.<sup>48</sup> By 5 October lobby gossip predicted that the Ministry could no longer survive a direct want of confidence motion.

A story got about that Ballance would form a Ministry which would contain Atkinson and Reid.<sup>49</sup> But on 8 October the political correspondents were given a respite from their feverish speculations; the want of confidence motion appeared at last, moved by Larnach himself. He based his attack not upon Atkinson's policy but upon his administration. The first ground for complaint was the Government's inability to get Bill through the House. Only one important measure had been passed in three months, and that one, (the Education Bill), had not been opposed. Larnach also served as the mouthpiece for strong South Island discontent with Atkinson's immediate financial plans, which included plundering the Canterbury and Otago land funds and made the usual charges of waste, neglect, and localised extravagance. (the areas in which he accused

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47. Ballance to Atkinson, 30 October 1877, Ballance mss., 1, no. 4.

48. See D. A. Hamer, "The Agricultural Company and New Zealand Politics, 1877-1886", *Historical Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 38, for a full account of this ring's activities.

49. *T.H.*, 5 October 1877, p. 2.



the Government of especial profligacy were Taranaki, Thames and Hawke's Bay).<sup>50</sup>

The squabble that followed Larnach's motion indicated members' utter confusion about the bases of their political alignments; and revealed that they considered these alignments to be essentially conditional. It was quite clear that the concept of parties voting consistently together on all political questions, while it might have been an ideal for some, was anathema to others. Sir Donald McLean for example, in reply to Larnach's charge that Opposition assistance had been needed for the Education Bill, demanded hotly "I would like to know what Bill would not unfavourably influence the opinions of some Government supporters, and win the approval of others on the Opposition side of the House who would assist in passing it. For myself, I should be sorry to see any Bill block-voted for in this House by the Government and its supporters on the one side, or by the Opposition and their supporters on the other..."<sup>51</sup>

Members voted for the Government for as long as its policy continued to attract them. When its attraction was gone, they left. Atkinson's "political rest" lost him the Treasury benches as soon as a group like Larnach's appeared with the firm determination of unseating him.

Woolcock, from Grey Valley, summed up the situation far more coolly than most of his contemporaries. He said that no parties existed in the House, as far as he could see. He customarily framed his own policy and then voted with whichever faction seemed most compatible

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50. Larnach, 8 October 1877, P.D., 26, pp. 267-269.

51. McLean, Ibid., p. 269.

with his views. His policy was a liberal one for 1877<sup>52</sup> and he believed "that the present Ministry are not so exceedingly conservative as they are stated to be". He praised their Land Bill and their Settlement Works Advances Bill. Atkinson had promised reform of taxation in 1878. And Woolcock thought Atkinson's public works policy was cautious and wise. In contrast "We have in the Opposition the most incongruous elements to be found in any number of people whatsoever". They were split on the land fund issue, for example, and furthermore they included in their ranks both notorious free traders and rabid protectionists. "Of course, according to the laws of evolution, it is impossible to say what this combination may evolve; but I want to know what they are going to evolve before I join them," he said shrewdly.<sup>53</sup>

Most of the other members felt that anything was better than the chaotic condition of the House during the past few weeks, and, with their usual optimism, felt that a new Ministry might turn up with something. There was even a half-hearted attempt to wave pale liberal and conservative banners, although both sides claimed possession of the former and tried to foist the less popular conservative standard upon their enemies. Sir Donald McLean, shrewder than most, said that Larnach and the rest of the Otago members were notorious land sharks and were brazenly trying to oust Atkinson before he could pass his Land Bill which was too liberal for them. Of Grey's faction he said disgustedly "we find the party which over and over again has denounced the land-sharks, as they call them, supporting a squatter on a want-of-confidence

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52. He advocated taxation reform, bonuses to encourage local industries, closer settlement, colonisation of the land fund, manhood suffrage with a residential qualification, and electoral reform.

53. Woolcock, *Ibid.*, pp. 281-283.



motion".<sup>54</sup>

Atkinson lost the division by thirty-eight votes to forty-two.<sup>55</sup> The demise of his Ministry was not regretted. "Their sins of omission and commission have been such as would have sufficed to defeat any Ministry long ago in a House possessing a properly organised Opposition", said the Evening Post. But it doubted at the same time, whether any Government formed from the existing membership of the House would be any better. A new Ministry would simply be more of the "continuous Ministry".<sup>56</sup> This use of the term "continuous Ministry" shows that that label was not, in 1877, applied exclusively to the Atkinson, Hall, Whitaker group<sup>57</sup> but was a general term of abuse for most contemporary governments.

The political malaise existing in a country where political alternatives appeared to be lacking, and where there was no easily discernible difference of principle among the major political factions, led to stultification and a queasy dissatisfaction with all politicians. Dissatisfaction was complemented by an unreasoning, but endemic, hopefulness that something would turn up. Editorial behaviour was symptomatic of these trends. Editors would greet a new Ministry, a reconstruction of a Ministry, or a new session, with hopefulness; then disillusionment would set in, and the papers would call for a dissolution. They hoped that new members would be elected, or at least that some new members would appear to leaven the existing lump. The acute

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54. McLean, *Ibid.*, p. 271.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

56. *H.P.*, 9 October 1877, p. 2.

57. *Ibid.*

shortage of members fit and willing to take office made the task of forming governments very much harder. Few men were prepared to leave their land or their business for long periods, unless some advantage could be obtained from Ministerial rank. Not until 1890 when the country was desperate after almost eleven years of depression, did two reasonably clear political alternatives emerge in some parts of the country. Yet even then, significantly enough, the response of men used to the earlier confusion was often as muddled as it had been at any time in the preceding twenty years.

This pattern of malaise tempered with spasmodic optimism was clear in the seventies when public works expenditure flowed fairly freely. It was to be even more marked in the eighties. In 1877 the Evening Post greeted the prospect of a new Ministry formed from the old House with gloomy exasperation. "Of the 'continuous Ministry' of the past seven years and the repeated changes in its personnel, the Colony has had more than enough. It wants no fresh shuffling of the old cards. The time has come when a new set of men altogether is urgently required".<sup>57a</sup> The existing House had provided three Ministries.<sup>58</sup> Many therefore felt that the contents of the hat should be changed before any more names were drawn out.

In Taranaki Atkinson's defeat was interpreted as a victory of the 'outs' over the 'ins'. The Taranaki Herald did not expect new political principles from Iarnach, but it did fear for its local public works now that Taranaki had lost its Premier-protector.<sup>59</sup>

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57a. E.P., 9 October 1877, p. 2.

58. Vogel's (15 February 1876-1 September 1876); Atkinson's (1 September 1876-13 September 1876); Atkinson's (13 September 1876 - 13 October 1877).

59. T.H., 11 October 1877, p. 2.



The Taranaki News was even more explicit "It is not easy to predict what effect the change will have upon this district, but we fear it will be unfavourable, as it will give increased power to the Southern members, and one of Mr. Larnach's charges against the Ministry was that they had been spending money in harbor works at Taranaki and Hawke's Bay!"<sup>60</sup>

On 9 October 1877 Atkinson resigned. He advised the Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, to send for Larnach. The most favoured candidates for portfolios were Fitzherbert, Reader Wood, Oswald Curtis, Sheehan, W. T. L. Travers, and Macandrew. The Taranaki Herald's political correspondent thought that Rees, Ballance, Stout, Lusk, Rolleston and Grey would be left out.<sup>61</sup> Grey was widely believed to be too unpopular to be a suitable Premier. Larnach was expected to form a Ministry of Auckland investors and Dunedin businessmen which would lean towards the urban sector of the population. It would replace a Taranaki, Hawkes Bay, Canterbury Government which had been predominantly rural in its sympathies.

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60. T.N., 13 October 1877, p. 8.

61. T.H., 10 October 1877, p. 2.

CHAPTER FOUR : 1877-1879.

On 15 October 1877 the House met its new Premier who proved to be not Larnach, but Sir George Grey. Grey had twice been Governor of New Zealand and had come out of retirement at Kawau in 1874 to defend the provinces.<sup>1</sup> He made the usual promises of retrenchment and administrative reform, promised to continue public works, and said that he would proceed with Atkinson's Land Bill. The Settlement Works Advances Bill, and a Bill to suspend direct sale of Maori land to Europeans were dropped<sup>1a</sup> - decisions which helped land speculators and money-lenders to continue their operations in fields where they made quick profits. Significantly, Grey had failed to fill all his portfolios, and the men responsible for the policy of 15 October were Grey, Larnach, James Macandrew, J. Sheehan, and J. T. Fisher.<sup>2</sup> The strongest of these were Larnach and Macandrew, both from Otago, the former a squatter<sup>3</sup> and the latter a wealthy merchant. Sheehan, a bibulous Auckland lawyer, and Grey, declaimed in the foreground while the others managed the Ministry.<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of this Government, a combination of Auckland and Otago interests, under an unstable head, exacerbated the confusion in the House.<sup>5</sup> Atkinson's successor had not been clearly foreseen when his Government had been overthrown, and now members recoiled from Grey

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1. See J. Rutherford, Sir George Grey, London, 1961, pp. 588-590.

1a. Grey, 15 October 1877, P.D., 26, pp. 290-293.

2. P.D., 26, p. iii.

3. The Evening Post, (30 October 1877, p. 2), said Larnach was "possibly the largest landowner in the colony".

4. See D. A. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet: A Political Biography of Sir Robert Stout. (1846-1930)", unpub. M.A. thesis, Auckland, 1960, pp. 31-34.

5. E.P., 15 October 1877, p. 2; T.H., 16 October 1877, p. 2.



in astonishment<sup>6</sup> and tried desperately to decide whether or not they should bring Atkinson back.<sup>7</sup> Canterbury members were said to be appalled at the new Premier and to be intriguing for "a Ministry of gentlemen of the true blue sort".<sup>8</sup> Rumours of no-confidence motions began to circulate at once, and were countered by Greyite rumours that unprecedented corruption on the part of the Atkinson Government had been discovered, and Grey must be left in office until Larnach, the new Colonial Treasurer, had made his report.

On 23 October, Atkinson gave notice of a motion of want of confidence based upon dissatisfaction with Grey's dilatoriness in producing the financial statement, and also on the grounds that Grey's promises of a liberal Land Bill were empty because his followers would not allow such a Bill to be passed.<sup>9</sup> Sheehan angrily threw this charge back again: "the late Government was a squatting Government from beginning to end. The honorable gentleman talks about a liberal land law. Well, I believe he himself is in favour of such a thing, but he could no more guide the stream in that direction than I could".<sup>10</sup> So there was a stalemate. The leaders of each side claimed that the other's leaders had liberal intentions but that these were bound to be thwarted by their implacably conservative followers.

Being supplanted by Grey seems to have shaken Atkinson into activity. While in office he had neglected political manoeuvre for work on the country's finances, but now that political action was needed to get the

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6. e.g. Gisborne, 26 October 1877, P.D., 26, p. 493.
  7. C. W. Richmond to Sam Smith, 20 October 1877, R-A MSS., vol. 41.
  8. T.H., 16 October 1877, p. 2.
  9. Atkinson, 23 October 1877, P.D., 26, p. 432.
  10. Sheehan, Ibid., p. 433.

Treasury back from Larnach and go on with financial reconstruction, he set about it with vigour. "We find him at every corner", said Sheehan, "taking honorable members by the shoulder, and leading them into private rooms. I can say this: that I have done a bit of lobbying...but I yield the palm to him. He has been preaching a new dispensation in the lobbies for the last four or five days".<sup>11</sup> An Opposition caucus, called by Atkinson, on 22 October consisted of thirty-three present and five accounted for. Some of the former Middle Party attended and Atkinson hoped to win over more of these and bring Grey down.<sup>12</sup>

On 26 October Atkinson charged that Grey's Premiership did not have the sanction of the House. Moreover, Grey had accused the late Atkinson Government of maladministration, and had promised reform both in the Treasury and in the Ministry of Works; yet both offices had been entrusted to Larnach who said he would proceed with Atkinson's estimates. Two portfolios were still vacant, and nobody had shown how the speeches of Grey, the leader in the Lower House, and Whitmore,<sup>13</sup> the leader in the Upper House, might be reconciled. Grey had professed radical opinions and promised reforms. Whitmore, who said on 18 October that he "was quite unaware of the whole of their Ministers' policy until mid-day today", had promised drastic retrenchment, and had gone on to assure the Legislative Council that Grey's policy was "a conservative policy, abstaining from all alteration in the existing state of things in the more important questions of State...We consider ourselves to be a Committee

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11. Sheehan, *Ibid.*, pp. 432-433.

12. *T.H.*, 23 October 1877, p. 2.

13. G. S. Whitmore, a Hawkes Bay Squatter, joined Grey 18 October 1877.



of Public Safety".<sup>14</sup> Atkinson wanted to know what the Government's policy was, and when Grey intended to fill the vacant portfolios.<sup>15</sup>

Grey's reply was full of emotional rant. He clearly saw himself in the position of a prophet who had been belatedly recognised and brought out of the wilderness. Beelzebub's forces, led by Atkinson, were not to wreck his Ministry before it had begun its work. He said that he and his followers were the party of progress, and Atkinson represented only the squatters who were concerned with "a conservation of place and power - of privileges which they have usurped against the interests of their fellow-subjects in this colony...[and] the maintenance of the undue right of acquiring place, and land, and wealth".<sup>16</sup> A confused debate followed. Members clearly felt unhappy on the new ground which Grey had selected for political combat. Their ideas of what was Liberal and what Conservative came mostly from British politics, and there was a confused realisation that alignments on the British pattern were not necessarily relevant in New Zealand.

The most significant point which emerged was the reluctance of both sides to accept the Conservative label, and their corresponding eagerness to pin it on to their opponents. This probably arose from a conviction that what New Zealand wanted was 'progress' - which in colonial terms meant public works. No one was willing to stand still. New Zealanders did not feel they had prospered sufficiently by 1877 to stop accumulating and conserve their existing gains. There was very little

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14. Whitmore, 18 October 1877, P.D., 26, pp. 357-358. The E.P., (1 November 1877, p. 2.), found this juxtaposition "absolutely confounding".

15. Atkinson, 26 October 1877, P.D., 26, pp. 485-487.

16. Grey, Ibid., p. 489.

evidence of any philosophical attraction to liberalism or any intellectual revulsion from conservatism. Grey himself said that in Britain Conservatism was an admirable thing. "There it is a time-honoured institution, the growth indeed of centuries, meant to uphold and to conserve principles and traditions which are potent elements in a great monarchical country".<sup>17</sup> But the New Zealanders had travelled twelve thousand miles to build a better Britain. They did not want to stand still and contemplate the past, and it was the "progressive" part of the liberal image which attracted them to the word, and led them to use it in contradictory ways, meaning, usually, the sort of policies which would benefit the New Zealanders with whom they identified themselves. Thus to Atkinson 'liberalism' meant encouraging the growth of a prosperous farming population. To Stout it meant programmes which would benefit the urban middle classes. Some politicians (notably Grey and Stout) saw 'liberalism' as a preventive policy also, directed against the growth in New Zealand of a landless peasantry and an urban proletariat - classes whose existence they had deplored in England.

Some members rejected the use of the terms 'liberal' and 'conservative' to describe political factions in New Zealand. Bowen, for example, felt that the introduction of class politics would be a deleterious step. "There is no such thing as class in this country, and I am very sorry indeed to hear a classing [sic.] set up".<sup>18</sup> This attitude did not really conflict with the attitudes previously described. Grey and Stout were thinking in terms of English conditions which they were trying to stave off from New Zealand. Most other members were

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17. Grey, Ibid., pp. 796-797.

18. Bowen, 30 October 1877, Ibid., p. 590.



willing to call themselves 'liberals' and they tried to attach the 'conservative' label to members who represented different economic sectors or different geographical localities from themselves, in the hope of discrediting their rivals and depriving them of the vote-winning progressive image. Hence townsmen tended to call rural members 'conservative' and disgruntled backblocks candidates tried to do the same to candidates from more settled districts.<sup>18a.</sup>

On 6 November 1877 Atkinson lost his want of confidence motion by forty votes to thirty-nine.<sup>19</sup> The decisive vote was the Speaker's casting voice. Three of Atkinson's followers were absent and he immediately proposed the further motion "That this House expresses its opinion that, as the Government has not a majority, it should immediately resign".<sup>20</sup> Grey refused to suspend the Standing Orders to allow the new motion to be put. He remained adamant on 8 November, and again on the ninth.<sup>21</sup> It thereupon became submerged in the Order Papers and never reappeared. "Such a thing was never heard of" wrote C. W. Richmond indignantly, "- but Sir G. Grey implicitly relies on the political ignorance of the public".<sup>22</sup>

Baffled in his attempts to oust Grey's Ministry, Atkinson persevered in his efforts to goad Larnach into a blunder. He was smarting under the dark rumours of corruption and maladministration which the Greyites were unscrupulously spreading, and met them with furious demands for substantiation. To compound the insult, Larnach was copying Atkinson's own financial policies. He proposed to go on

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18a. The 1877 Egmont election is an excellent example of the latter case. See below, pp. 87-89.

19. *Ibid.*, 27, p. 22.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 72; p. 102.

22. C. W. Richmond to Sam Smith, 9 November 1877, R - A, mss. vol. 41.

with Atkinson's estimates, accepted all Atkinson's figures as correct, promised retrenchment, and echoed Atkinson's pledge of taxation reform for 1878. There was to be a new four million loan. But there was no disclosure of any corruption in Atkinson's administration.<sup>23</sup>

Atkinson was outraged,<sup>24</sup> but by the end of November attacks on the Government had become fruitless. The financial statement was generally acceptable and the country was tired of raids or rumours of raids upon the Treasury benches. "This continuous factious struggling for office on the part of Major Atkinson and his followers is exciting a feeling of the most intense disgust all over the colony," warned the Evening Post. "The struggle has lasted too long and there has been too much of it. Moreover the lust for office has been so glaringly and shamelessly displayed that the spectacle has become repulsive".<sup>25</sup>

By early December Grey was secure enough in the Premiership for the Evening Post, which had very consistently opposed him, and had often launched virulent personal attacks on him, to make some attempt to placate him. And it warned other Wellington organs to do the same lest Grey "become indifferent - if not antagonistic - to Wellington interests".<sup>26</sup> Atkinson, too, realised by December that Grey had dug himself in and he relaxed his offensive. On 5 December he "congratulated the honorable member at the head of the Government on at last accepting this Consolidated Stock Bill, which was the only remnant of the policy of the late Government that the present Ministry had not accepted and given effect to".<sup>27</sup> On 6 December he made a plea for continuing at least a small amount of free

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23. P.D., 27, pp. 252-259.

24. Atkinson, 20 November 1877, Ibid., pp. 276-277; p. 642.

25. E.P., 22 November 1877, p. 2.

26. Ibid., 6 December 1877, p. 2.

27. Atkinson, 5 December 1877, P.D., 27, p. 697.



immigration,<sup>28</sup> but this was almost all that he said in the House, except for an outburst during the Appropriation Debate which closed the session.

In this debate Grey had once again spoken of Liberals and Conservatives as if he led one party and Atkinson the other. Atkinson thought all this quite irrelevant:

I differ from him [Grey] entirely in thinking that by any measures he is going to introduce into this House he will be able to produce two well-defined parties in the country. There are no great questions, as far as I can see, at present waiting solution that can possibly divide the country into two distinct and well-defined parties... Therefore I can only hope that we shall continue to govern the country much as we have done during the last few years, making the best of parties as they are until that time arrives when we shall be divided into two distinct parties.<sup>29</sup>

Atkinson did not envisage the rise of parties representing sectional interests, presenting coherent policies which tended to benefit those interests, therefore was impatient with Grey's theorising - "I wish, instead of giving us those very pleasant disquisitions upon things in general, and <sup>those</sup> allusions to the human race, and to what posterity will think of us, he would give us some figures which would indicate how he intends to meet our requirements for the next year".<sup>30</sup>

By the time the 1877 session ended the usual quantity of rumours was circulating. This time it included one to the effect that Atkinson's acerbity was too much for some of his followers and that the Opposition would find someone else to lead them in 1878.<sup>31</sup> Others criticised him for not attacking Grey vigorously enough. Lord Normanby was one of these, according to C. W. Richmond, who told Atkinson that the Governor was "fidgety" about Grey.

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28. Atkinson, 6 December 1877, *Ibid.*, p. 750.

29. Atkinson, 8 December 1877, *Ibid.*, p. 798.

30. Atkinson, *Ibid.*, p. 801.

31. *T.H.*, 7 December 1877, p. 2.



He is evidently anxious that you should speak out, as far as possible, on the principles, at least, of taxation; and not let it be supposed that Grey is the only person to whom the people can look for a fair taxation of property. Lord Normanby's own opinion is (as no doubt you know) that the large capitalists do really get off too easily at present. I said that of course it was known that your sympathies were with the working settler - the yeoman of the colony - and that you could hardly be mistaken at N.P. [New Plymouth] for the supporter (through thick and thin) of the great holders. It ought to be pointed out that these great holders are not a numerous class, and that the most prominent members have risen from the ranks...Working men ought to be able to see the impolicy of depriving members of their own class of the rewards of superior industry, prudence, and business-ability; and above all the impolicy of doing injustice to any one.<sup>32</sup>

Richmond went on to say that Normanby was suspicious of Grey's mob-oratory. This was the year that Gladstone launched his campaign against Disraeli's Middle Eastern policy and Richmond and Normanby may have had Gladstone's tactics in mind. The Governor was "a little afraid that the sensible people amongst us are too easy-going in politics, and are about to let this political lunatic (if he be not indeed a lunatic simpliciter) get the better of them for a time, and do irreparable mischief before the stupid gullible populace finds him out".<sup>33</sup>

As far as Taranaki was concerned, the Grey Government did not prove as disastrous as some had feared. Kelly had piloted the New Plymouth Harbour Bill through the House; Atkinson had secured £17,000 for the Mountain Road; and Carrington, too ill for any spectacular personal achievement, had nevertheless given the other two Taranaki members help in their coups.<sup>34</sup> Secure in the approval of his province, Atkinson went back to Hurworth to rest. He "is greatly improved in health, but Annie considers he has never quite got over the effects of his over-work

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32. C. W. Richmond to H. A. Atkinson, 27 December 1877, R-A, mss. 1877/23, box 5.

33. Ibid.

34. T.H., 12 December 1877, p. 2.



in politics," wrote C. W. Richmond.<sup>35</sup> Atkinson had bought a new farm, of between three and four hundred acres, at Waitara, about two hours' ride from Hurworth, and here he had a new American reaper and binder,<sup>36</sup> which greatly fascinated his brother-in-law when he saw it.<sup>37</sup>

Atkinson buried himself in Taranaki, completely immersed himself in farming, wrote no political letters, and answered none. This behaviour in a leader of the Opposition proved exceedingly frustrating to his former colleagues, making their desire for a new leader a matter of urgency. "I wrote to him two or three times but got no reply and can't [sic.] understand what he means - unless it is that he has retired," Ormond (himself an indefatigable correspondent), complained to Rolleston, "- of course if that be so he ought to have told his friends for to leave the party as it now is without organisation throughout the recess is not playing the game at all -".<sup>38</sup> Ormond tried to persuade Rolleston to lead the Opposition in 1878. Wellington members wanted Fitzherbert, but both George McLean and Ormond preferred Rolleston. Pollen was willing for a change to be made, but he would recommend no one specifically.<sup>39</sup>

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35. C. W. Richmond to E. E. Richmond, 29 January 1878, R - A mss., 1878/3, box 5.

36. He was a progressive and enthusiastic farmer, eager to make use of new techniques. In 1878 he told an Agricultural Society dinner in New Plymouth that "it was quite certain that if farming was to pay in the province they must have more machinery. Owing to their exceedingly favourable climate they had been tempted to jog on very quietly, but if they were to compete with other districts they must act in a different manner". T.H., 6 December 1878, p. 2.

37. C. W. Richmond to E. E. Richmond, 29 January 1878, loc. cit.

38. J. D. Ormond to W. Rolleston, 12 April 1878, Rn. mss., box 2.

39. Ibid.



Another contender was Edward Wakefield who had "apparently given up drinking".<sup>40</sup> None of these, however, gained wide enough approval to oust Atkinson who carried on into 1878.

He followed much the same lines as he had done in 1877. At first he said very little, but he could quickly be roused to scornful anger by Grey, especially when the latter over-played his role of protector of the working classes. It was easy to get Grey to believe that he was helping the helpless, while the rest of his ministers governed in their own interests. One such case was the 1878 Electoral Bill, hailed by Grey as a step towards "a great charter of rights in the future for all the inhabitants of New Zealand", which would enfranchise about 70,000 people "the pith and marrow of New Zealand".<sup>41</sup>

Atkinson pointed out that the real beneficiaries of Grey's Bill would be men of wealth, for while the property qualification had been halved, plural voting was retained. Thus the voting power of men willing to buy up qualifications was doubled. Moreover, under the new Bill all householders who were eligible to vote were to be automatically enrolled by the clerks of the various local bodies to which they paid rates. At the same time, Atkinson said, "the pith and marrow of the country... - those unfortunates, the 70,000 - is to be left to take care of itself. That is to say, all those persons who find great difficulty in registering themselves, who are not used to writing their names, ... are to have no assistance whatever, and not only that, they

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40. E. C. J. Stevens to E. Stafford, 3 December 1878, <sup>E. Bohan</sup>cit./"The General Election of 1879 in Canterbury", unpub. M.A. thesis, Canterbury, 1958, p. 18.

41. Grey, 13 August 1878, P.D. 28, pp. 193-194.



are obliged to sign their names: that is to say, upon them alone is to be imposed an educational qualification." He attacked Grey's liberal pretensions vigorously. "The interests which the honorable gentleman has considered in this Bill are those of the property-holders of the country. The "pith and marrow" of the country, which was to be its saviour, has been entirely forgotten. It has only been heard of in the stumping speeches of the Premier during the recess."<sup>42</sup>

The financial statement of 1878 was delivered by John Ballance who had replaced Larnach as Colonial Treasurer, and, unlike Larnach, had not been content to drift along in Atkinson's wake. He was obliged by the resolutions of 1877<sup>43</sup> to undertake the redistribution of taxation, and, accordingly, he reduced customs duties and introduced a land tax of a half-penny in the pound on all land over the value of five hundred pounds. "We believe," said Ballance, "that no form of wealth is more legitimately called upon to contribute a portion of the public revenue of the colony than the value of land minus improvements...as no other commodity increases so rapidly in value from the increase of population and the natural progress of a country". The escape of this wealth from the taxation net had implanted "a strong sense of injustice in the minds of the wages class."<sup>44</sup>

The imposition of such a tax may have mollified the wages class, but it implanted a strong sense of injustice in the minds of the farming class. Atkinson, a representative of the rural middle-class, whose land was worth more than five hundred pounds, but was not a great

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42. Atkinson, 20 August 1878, Ibid., p. 354.

43. See above, pp. 55-57.

44. Ballance, 6 August 1878, P.D., 28, pp. 88-90.

estate,<sup>45</sup> nor held for speculative purposes, rose to express the resentment of the countryside at this measure brought in by a government of townsmen. It provoked him into a persistent attack on the Grey Government's taxation policy which kept up all through September and on into October, and in the course of which he did some hard thinking about the problems of taxation and land ownership in New Zealand. The conclusions he reached provided a foundation for his own taxation proposals when he returned to power in 1879.<sup>46</sup>

On 3 September Atkinson began by pointing out that a land tax would discourage investment in land and, by making that form of investment more burdensome than other forms, would slow up the process of settlement. He said that he would prefer a universal property and income tax, and explained that most landowners who had taken up land for cultivation rather than speculation were heavily mortgaged. These paid Ballance's tax on the unimproved value of their land, and the mortgagor escaped altogether. A general tax would catch mortgagor as well as mortgagee.<sup>47</sup>

Moving on to the Government's tariff proposals Atkinson denounced the beer duty as the thin end of the excise duty wedge. Local industries, he said, should be encouraged, not taxed. While in Opposition Grey had said that duties on tea, sugar, coffee, treacle, molasses, rice, cotton goods, and drapery could and should be abolished without loss to the revenue. "Therefore," said Atkinson sarcastically, "my feeling of regret is very great when I see, after all that could so easily be done....that

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45. He did not figure in the returns of property/<sup>tax</sup>paid on large estates, see A.J.H.R., 1890, B. 15. In 1862 he held 791 acres valued for property-tax purposes at £5,870, see The Freeholders of New Zealand, Wellington, 1884.

46. See below, pp. 96-97.

47. Atkinson, 3 September 1878, P.D., 29, pp. 28-34.



we have only a miserable 1d taken off sugar and 2d off tea". In conclusion he told the House that although he had been a free-trader "since I was born", yet he thought that to lift the grain duty as Ballance had done was "merely a free-trade fad".<sup>48</sup>

The idea that town and country were alternative areas of investment in a new country, that colonial industries must be encouraged, and that changes in taxation should be carried out with cautious empiricism, were all present in rather inchoate form in the speech of 3 September. By the 'eighties Atkinson had developed them into a coherent theory of taxation to which he adhered, so far as circumstances permitted.

Soon after delivering his speech of 3 September Atkinson "had a sudden fit of illness due...to the disordered state of his nervous system thro' the over strain of last session".<sup>49</sup> But he was nevertheless settling down cheerfully on the Opposition benches. "On political affairs he is always jolly, greatly enjoying the freedom of Opposition. He says the Ministry have no friends - but his own party are anxious not to give them any excuse for a dissolution until they have plainly shown to the country the emptiness of their pretensions".<sup>50</sup> He was wary of stirring up another storm such as he had faced in November 1877 when his siege of the Treasury benches had given him the reputation of being so ambitious for office that he was shameless and unprincipled in pursuit of it.

On 3 October Atkinson resumed his attack on the land tax, concentrating this time on the nature of land ownership in New Zealand:

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48. Atkinson, Ibid.

49. C. W. Richmond to E. E. Richmond, 13 September 1878, Scholefield, Papers, vol. 2., p. 455.

50. Ibid.



It seems to me that those who support this tax have deduced all their arguments from the position of land in an old country, where, undoubtedly, it may be considered a special commodity having special duties attaching to it, because it is not an ordinary article of commerce, and is there held for other reasons than simply to make a profit from it. Here, on the contrary, it is held, and, as far as I can see, will be held for many years to come, to make a profit out of it, just like any other property in the country.<sup>51</sup>

Atkinson said that no land shortage existed while the state held twenty-six million acres of unsold land; nor did he agree with those Grayites who said that a land tax would check land speculation. No tax of a halfpenny in the pound would deter a land speculator, said Atkinson scornfully, nor would it deter those who had capital, or credit, and who were building great estates. It would most affect the man who farmed his own land and was trying to achieve a moderate degree of prosperity.<sup>52</sup>

In this speech Atkinson had hit upon one of the fundamental differences between himself and Grey. In the first place, Atkinson had come to New Zealand and created for himself, from his own earnings and exertions, a prosperous farm. He had suffered setbacks, but had surmounted them, and was firmly ensconced in the agrarian middle-class, a group whose virtues he exaggerated and admired, and whose resilience and industry he respected. This, in his view, was the life which men had come to New Zealand to build. His land was an investment.<sup>53</sup> He had sunk his capital into his farm and its value had appreciated, both as the result of his own efforts and those of his family, and because the Government had brought out immigrants which increased the value of his

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51. Atkinson, 3 October 1878, P.D., 29, pp. 537-558.

52. Atkinson, Ibid.

53. In 1804 he was prepared to sell Hurworth for £2,000, even though it was the only one of <sup>the</sup> original farms which had come through the wars relatively intact, and had been the first to be established. (H.A. Atkinson to H. D. Atkinson, 14 August 1884, R - A, mss 1884/6, box 6).



property by competition for land, and also because of the public works policy which had built communications between his land and his market.

Atkinson saw no difference between his form of enterprise and that of a townsman who invested his money in a factory and whose business increased in value both through his own business acumen and hard work, and through government action. The immigration policy augmented the businessman's market and tariffs protected it. Both rural and urban entrepreneurs owed something to the State, and should be taxed in proportion to the benefit received.

Grey was a different kind of landowner. He had bought himself an island, nearly 5,000 acres, which had cost him £3,500 in 1862. Here he build himself a mansion, on which he spent a further £5,000, and proceeded to convert the island into a botanical and zoological garden. He grew jacarandas, gums, firs, cork trees, walnuts, oleanders, spider lilies and bougainvillea. He imported peacocks, kookaburra and chinese pheasants; emus, wild ducks, geese and turkeys; guinea fowl and quail; antelopes, deer and monkeys; zebras, kangaroos, wallabies and sheep. "In a democratic country where servants were scarcely to be had even then, Grey gathered round him a staff of devoted men and women to manage his farms and orchards, tend his cattle and sheep, and minister to his domestic needs. He built substantial homes for them and their families, treated them generously and with respect, won their affection, and ruled them like a feudal patriarch."<sup>54</sup> Kawau was a far cry from Hurworth.

Grey himself was conscious of his responsibilities to his retainers,

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54. Rutherford, pp. 585-587.

but he feared that other great landowners might not be. Moreover his experiences in Ireland made him fear the growth of an ignorant landless proletariat.<sup>55</sup> His political activity in the seventies and eighties was a premature attempt to stave off from New Zealand the conditions he had seen in Ireland,<sup>56</sup> but his emotional reaction against these had been so intense that he was not always realistic in his attempts to check the tendency in New Zealand towards land monopoly. The land tax of 1878 was symbolic of his anxiety to hurt the irresponsible landowner; to keep the Irish spectre out. He always tended to see the land question in eschatological terms. Land ownership was a privilege, almost a grace, to be earned by good works. Many New Zealand landowners failed to recognise their responsibilities, they were blinded by greed and they would let in the Irish spectre. They must therefore undergo purgative and penitential taxation.

This last conviction provided common ground between Grey and Stout and other urban-oriented reformers who called themselves 'Liberals'. They too felt that landownership was a form of property-holding which carried with it its own peculiar privileges and duties, an idea which most of them derived directly or indirectly from John Stuart Mill. The class with which they identified was the urban middle-class, and they saw the countryside as an ideal place to put the urban poor, to relieve the drain of rates. If the land was to be wholly taken up, there would be nowhere to put the unemployed. "Believing that landlessness was a prime cause of pauperism and disaffection, he [Stout] wanted the state to retain its lands in order to have a perpetual reserve for use

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55. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

56. e.g. Grey, 29 July 1879, *P.D.*, 31, p. 322.



in times of urban unemployment and distress... His hatred of 'monopolistic' runholders arose from his fear that they were forcing the towns to keep and subsidise the poor and unemployed".<sup>57</sup>

The Land-Tax Bill was passed on 3 October 1878 by forty-two votes to nineteen. Atkinson was absent from the House, but he had paired against it<sup>58</sup>. On 9 October Atkinson reminded the Government that they had not yet made any kind of provision for building roads in the back country,<sup>59</sup> and thereafter kept very quiet until the end of the month. Then he rose in wrath once more to complain of Ballance's haphazard administration at the Treasury. A Railways Bill had been produced very suddenly, which provided for the expenditure of ten million pounds on railways but did not explain precisely where the money was to come from. Ballance expected a surplus of three and a half million pounds over five years, and thought he could borrow the rest. But he made no mention of increasing taxation to pay the interest that would fall due, nor did he bring in a Loan Bill for the House to consider before it committed itself to spending the ten millions.<sup>60</sup> Atkinson also criticised Macandrew's plans for building new railways on deferred payment, saying that small men with little capital would not be able to afford to tender under such conditions. He said that Macandrew's policy would create "a ring, backed up by large capitalists, who will have the whole control of the expenditure of six millions of the country's money, and who must thereby become an enormous political power."<sup>61</sup>

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57. D. A. Harner, "Sir Robert Stout and the Labour Question, 1870-1893", Studies of a Small Democracy, (ed. R. Chapman and K. Sinclair), Auckland, 1963, p. 89.

58. P.D., 29, pp. 549-550.

59. Atkinson, 9 October 1878, Ibid., p. 679.

60. Atkinson, 24 October 1878, Ibid., 30, pp. 1058-1059.

61. Atkinson, Ibid.; 3 September 1878, Ibid., 29, p. 32.



Altogether Atkinson thought the financial policies of the Grey Government were unrealistic to the point of dishonesty, and its promises of administrative reform had not been fulfilled. He became positively exasperated with Grey, who had proclaimed that with the greatest of ease Atkinson's 1877 Estimates could have been reduced by £100,000 without New Zealand noticing any straitening of its circumstances,<sup>62</sup> and yet had asked in 1878 for £39,000 more than Atkinson had requested. "So much for the economies of the Government," snapped Atkinson.<sup>63</sup>

Warming to his subject he began a detailed comparison between Grey's words in Opposition in 1877, and Grey's record as Premier a year later.

He said there was something like £345,000 paid by the working-classes of this country in the way of taxes upon necessities of life, which, under any sound system of finance, ought to be taken off those classes and placed upon the classes which were able to pay it, and which ought in fairness to pay it....I want to know... why has he not fulfilled his promise? Has he proposed to fulfil it? Has he attempted to fulfil it?...certainly the miserable Land-tax Bill, the abortive Companies Bill, and the Beer Bill cannot be described as an attempt at dealing with the subject...He has brought down these abortions - and abortions they are, when viewed beside the great scheme he<sup>then</sup> sketched out.<sup>64</sup>

Atkinson had been told very often that he was the tool of a particular class. Now he flung some of this Victorian vitriol back at Grey.

The farmers "have to pay the tax for the moneyed class, whom the Premier really represents - that moneyed class who have their money invested in mortgages and other speculations, and who do not put it into land for the purpose of working and improving that land".<sup>65</sup> This particular accusation was a useful one in the colonial context where many voters were extremely

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62. Grey, 17 August 1877, *Ibid.*, 24, p. 502.

63. Atkinson, 30 October 1878, *Ibid.*, 30, p. 1248.

64. Atkinson, *Ibid.*

65. Atkinson, *Ibid.*, pp. 1249-1250.



afraid that classes would appear in the new country. A significant proportion of the colonial middle class had come to New Zealand expressly to escape class conflict with its concomitant disturbance and expense. Thus one of the gravest charges that could be hurled at any politician in New Zealand was that he was attempting to stir up one class against another.

A session which had begun with Atkinson feeling politically lethargic and in danger of being ousted from the leadership for lack of vigour, had developed in a way that presented him with political challenges. He had been forced to think out an attitude towards taxation in a new country, a problem which he had tried to avoid while in office. Indirectly, in the course of the debates on taxation, the land question had obtruded itself and Atkinson had been confronted by the problem of land ownership in the new world. And finally, he had been faced with a political creed which Grey called liberalism, the coherence of which he doubted, the relevance of which he questioned but which expressed, sometimes, his own ideals.

The Grey Government had only one full session in office - that of 1878. This had shown that, while freer with loan money, it was not a more effective administration than Atkinson's had been. Grey's talk sounded impressive, but he had failed to retrench as he had promised, and he had failed to lift the slump which was already affecting some of the more vulnerable provincial economies and threatening others. The Opposition began to hope that with a more popular leader than Atkinson they could win back enough supporters to force Grey to an early dissolution.

In 1879 E.C.J. Stevens told Stafford that "neither House nor party

will stand Atkinson as chief again",<sup>65a</sup> and the Opposition renewed its search for another leader. J. D. Ormond was letterwriting again. He was looking for someone who would not only be acceptable to a wide section of the House, but would prove popular throughout the country if Grey dissolved the House and held a general election. Auckland's candidate was Whitaker, but he was unpopular elsewhere. Sir John Hall, of Canterbury, although more generally acceptable, was reluctant to accept the position. So was Rolleston who suggested a former Premier, Sir William Fox; but Ormond felt that "his unfortunate craze on the liquor question" rendered the prohibitionist Fox unsuitable.

Ormond had meanwhile written to both Pollen and Atkinson about the leadership - "Pollen will follow anyone the Party as a whole will accept - he wd gladly take you /Rolleston/ - or he wd agree to Hall - Atkinson only says he will do what the party wishes - I told him very plainly that in my opinion the Leader to be successful must be chosen from outside the late govt - I have written the same to both Bowen and Stevens and also to several others".<sup>66</sup>

The leadership finally devolved upon Fox, who moved a want of confidence amendment to the Address in Reply as soon as Parliament reassembled on 15 July 1879.<sup>66a</sup> His amendment was carried by forty-seven votes to thirty-three after a debate which dragged on until 29 July.<sup>67</sup> On the thirtieth Grey told members that he had been granted a dissolution, a small amount of necessary business was hurried through the House, and Parliament rose on 11 August.

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65a. E. C. J. Stevens to E. Stafford, 9 January 1879, cit. Bohan, p. 19.

66. J. D. Ormond to W. Rolleston, 9 June 1879, Rn. mss., box 2.

66a. See T. G. Wilson, The Grey Government, 1877-9, Auckland, 1954, p. 41.

67. P.D., 31, p. 304.



The Address in Reply debate had been full of bitter recrimination<sup>68</sup> and a tone of moral controversy had entered into it which carried over into the 1879 election. Grey tried very hard to impose a conservative - radical alignment upon New Zealand politics, but he failed to distract the voters from the main administrative issue.<sup>69</sup> His Ministry had been ineffectual, inefficient and extravagant; its land tax had become extremely unpopular, not only with great landowners but with farmers and would-be farmers. In South Taranaki Sheehan's bungled efforts to open up land at Parihaka had aroused anxiety among the settlers at the thought of renewed conflict with the Maoris.

In Egmont the immediacy of these issues completely obliterated Grey's preaching of a new ideological dispensation. Taranaki's representatives would be expected to obtain at least as much public works expenditure as usual, if not more, and would be expected to work towards removing the threat of a new Maori war.

With this threat in the background Atkinson found himself in a strong position, although he had less time for campaigning than his opponent because Parliament did not end until 11 August, and the election was held early in September. He opposed the land tax vigorously, and thus won the wholehearted support of his predominantly farming constituency which was not at all attracted by Grey's abstract radicalism. The outskirts of the Egmont electorate were, as usual, less satisfied than the northerly core. In Carlyle, for instance, there

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68. e.g. Rees, 29 July 1879, Ibid., p. 307; Hodgkinson, 22 July 1879, Ibid., p. 139.

69. This point has been made often enough now to render detailed repetition pointless. See Bohan, pp. 281-293 and passim, for a full exposition.



was some indecision among the leading citizens - "Personal prejudice rules in some cases, but most only desire to vote on the winning side; those latter are strongly favourable to the local candidate, and yet, unless a certain majority can be assured, do not like to set their backs up against Atkinson, for fear that he, if victorious, would remember them for it", said the Carlyle correspondent of the Taranaki Herald.<sup>70</sup>

Atkinson's opponent, a man called Sherwood, came from Patea. He complained that Atkinson had not represented Patea "faithfully". He had been slow to get money for the Mountain road, and for railways, and for the new prison. His attitude to public works was, in short, too "colonial": the settlers of Egmont "had been sacrificed on the altar of political eminence"; they did not want political rest. But they did want material progress: and this was what Sherwood considered "true Liberalism". He opposed manhood suffrage,<sup>and</sup> thought land for railways should be taken from the Maoris by force if necessary. Maoris, he said, should be compelled to learn English and then the Native Department, which was extravagant and pusillanimous, could be abolished.

Sherwood did favour one aspect of Grey's programme. He wanted triennial Parliaments. This may well have been because elections every three years would increase voters' control over members and enable pressure for public works to be stepped up.<sup>71</sup> This was at the bottom of Sherwood's appeal. His area needed to be developed more rapidly, the settlers were anxious that the Maoris should be put in their place, cheaply. The outdistricts and the small towns were intensely jealous

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70. T.H., 16 August 1879, p. 2.

71. Atkinson thought so too, and therefore opposed triennial Parliaments, although he agreed to vote for them if his constituents wanted them.



of the Provincial centre. "There were actually two parties, and New Plymouth was hydra-headed in its Conservative principles. He [Sherwood] thought it was essential to have true Liberalism in New Zealand; he would not bind himself to any leader; he did not recognise Sir George Grey or Sir W. Fox as leaders (hear, hear). Neither would he recognise Major Atkinson as leader".<sup>72</sup>

The frustration of the back-country was apparent in Sherwood's speech.<sup>73</sup> But as usual it was unable to achieve anything in the face of Atkinson's very general popularity. The results of the election were published on 6 September:

	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>Sherwood</u>
Omata Toll-gate	92	13
Omata School-house	21	-
Oakura	39	1
Carlyle	64	64
Hawera	56	24
Manutahi	15	2
Normanby	15	6
Stratford	6	-
Kakaramea	<u>14</u>	<u>8</u>
	322	118
	<u>322</u>	<u>118</u>

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The general results of the 1879 election were not clear until the House assembled. Government and Opposition factions were nearly equal in size, and the fate of the Grey Government therefore rested with the uncommitted members.<sup>75</sup> Fox, the new leader of the Opposition had, however, been defeated, and the leadership had passed to Sir John Hall - "a colourless little man, good at managing business and administration,

72. Ibid., 2 September 1879, p. 2.

73. Bolan, (p. 283), describes similar conditions in Canterbury and concludes: "if Grey was the symbol of anything it seems likely that he was the symbol of localism rather than liberalism...most of the more intense provincialists and 'local interest' candidates looked to Grey".

74. T.H., 6 September 1879, p. 2.

75. Wilson, p. 50.

a 'blue book in breeches' ".<sup>76</sup> On 30 September he moved want of confidence in the Grey Government. The Ministry had support from the centres of population in the North, while Hall led a rural and South Island phalanx. The agricultural and commercial sectors had more or less separated out.<sup>77</sup> Hall accused Grey's Government of extravagance - the cost of the Civil Service had risen by £15,000 since 1877, and the Native Department had exceeded its estimates by £20,000. He promised to do away with the land tax: while conceding that direct taxation would have to be increased, he said that "the sacrifices should not be made by one kind of property only".

Hall was not going to repeat Atkinson's tactical errors of 1877. He realised that New Zealand was in a state of unease, its prosperity threatened, its population swollen, and fear of social dislocation was widely prevalent, especially among the middle classes. Therefore he proposed the opposite of Atkinson's 1877 policy. "We should not look forward to anything like rest in our legislation," he said.<sup>78</sup> He did not, however, lose sight of the basic question - the desire for cheap and efficient government. "While I believe that a variety of measures of social reform and political reform urgently call for our attention, I believe there is a still greater need, and it is, that the laws we have got shall be capably, diligently, energetically, and honestly administered; and because I believe that that will never be the case so long as those gentlemen occupy the Government benches, I earnestly hope the House will adopt the amendment...."<sup>79</sup>

Grey lost the division by forty-one votes to forty-three,<sup>80</sup> and an

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76. Bohen, p. 89.

77. Hall, 30 September 1879, P.D., 32, p. 31.

78. Hall, Ibid., pp. 32-40.

79. Hall, Ibid.

80. Ibid., pp. 162-163.



Address in Reply was drawn up by a committee composed of Hall, Atkinson, Colonel Trimble the new member for Grey and Bell, and Albert Pitt, representing the City of Nelson. They promised that the House would give careful consideration to the proposals for Parliamentary reform, the sale of small, cheap, rural allotments would be stepped up, peace was to be secured on the West Coast, and that the incoming Government would follow a vigorous public works policy, and encourage local industries.<sup>81</sup>

No sooner had Hall's Ministry been formed, however, than V. Pyke and D. Stewart left his camp, placing him in a minority. He was saved, however, by Reader Wood who led W. J. Hurst, W. Swanson and Captain Colbeck across the House to join the Government ranks. The four members were all Aucklanders and "were all intimately connected with business circles or schemes to expand public works".<sup>82</sup> They joined Hall on condition that he carried on Grey's 'liberal' measures; did not disturb the Education Act; and guaranteed Auckland a fair share of the public works fund.<sup>83</sup> These conditions reflected not only their concern that their province should obtain as much public works expenditure as possible, but also their feeling that a new factor, called 'Liberalism', was entering into New Zealand politics. Their insistence upon 'liberal' measures probably meant simply that Hall was to persevere with an active policy of reform and public works. He should not, like Atkinson, stand still and concentrate upon administration, nor, like Grey, stand still and talk about posterity.<sup>84</sup>

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81. Ibid.

82. Wilson, pp. 53-55.

83. Lyttleton Times, 2 December 1905, Hall's clipping book H.mss., vol. 42, p. 147c.

84. Rutherford, (p. 623), attributes the failure of the Grey Government to carry out its programme largely to Grey himself.

This condition was given urgency by the colony's economic plight: in the winter of 1877 the interrupted depression had been resumed.<sup>85</sup> Members were demanding that governments should take action to end the depression, or at least to mitigate its effects.

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85. W. B. Sutch, "The Long Depression 1865-95", p. 17.



CHAPTER FIVE : 1879-1880.

The Government which was formed in 1879 consisted of Hall, Whitaker, Atkinson, Rolleston, R. Oliver<sup>1</sup> and John Bryce. By taking the Premiership Hall freed Atkinson of much of the political load which had oppressed him in 1876 when he had held the Premiership as well as the Treasury, and enabled him to devote himself almost exclusively to an analysis of New Zealand's financial position.

Atkinson seized this chance and twice reorganised the finances, first to prevent waste, to make the money at his disposal go as far as possible; the second time to reduce demands for public works money from the central government. The theories of taxation which he had begun to express in 1877 and 1878 when goaded into doing so by Grey were further developed and put into practice. The depression made closer settlement a matter of social and economic urgency, and awareness of this crisis situation turned Atkinson into a radical on the land question. The steady worsening of conditions as the depression spread and would not lift drove him to draw up a scheme for a kind of social security system. The years 1879-1884 saw Atkinson's greatest political activity - he developed rapidly from a Minister who was interested almost exclusively in finance to one who interested himself in social questions and the way in which the social structure of New Zealand was developing. The more he thought about the issues thrown up in the late 1870's and made urgent in the 1880s by the depression, the more radical he became, but - while he did not grow conservative with age - his health broke before the end of the 1880s, and by the time he returned to power in 1887 he was virtually incapable of

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1. Oliver was a shareholder in the Waimea Plains Railway Co.

using his power to realise his vision of what New Zealand ought to be.

On 14 October 1879 Atkinson made an interim financial report. He had delivered one dire financial statement already, in 1875, but that of 1879<sup>2</sup> made a far deeper impression; so that from this time dates Atkinson's reputation as a figure of fiscal ill omen.

He told a silent House that although the Grey Government had begun with a balance in hand of £116,844; it had left behind it a total deficit estimated at £663,858. But this was not all. Atkinson doubted that Grey's revenue estimates would be met, and if they were not he expected a total deficit of at least £911,958. Ballance had spent the £2,056,000 credit in the public works account, and had appropriated in advance £2,160,103 of the new £5,000,000 loan which was yet to be raised. Atkinson had stressed from the time of his first Treasurership that meticulous planning of the expenditure for a whole financial year was a basic requirement of prudent and honest administration. He was aghast at Ballance's profligacy. On 10 October Macandrew had proposed a want of confidence motion<sup>3</sup> to check Atkinson, but Hall took a lesson in tactics from Grey and he managed to keep the motion well down on the order paper until it lapsed on 28 October. The Hall Ministry was therefore still in power on 17 November when Atkinson rose to make his formal financial statement.<sup>4</sup>

By this time Atkinson had decided to change New Zealand's methods of financial administration. The existing machinery for raising and distributing revenue and sharing out the benefits and responsibilities

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2. P.D., 32, pp. 222-231.

3. Ibid., p. 178.

4. Ibid., <sup>33</sup>pp. 294-302.



of Government loans was wasteful and inefficient. There were too many opportunities for Treasurers to spend money which they had no chance of getting out of ordinary revenue, and then raising loans to cover their irresponsibly incurred debts. Atkinson said that New Zealand's finances could not be put upon a sound administrative footing until the machinery of both general and local finance had been completely remodelled, until Ministers were prepared to give careful attention to administrative detail, and until the whole community was prepared to exercise thrift and self denial.

The deficit, according to the figures available to Atkinson in November 1879, would be £951,000, not £911,000 as he had predicted in October. He promised to economise, but warned the 'skinflints' - who preferred retrenchment to taxation - that "Competent and well-paid officers [of the Civil Service] are absolutely essential to good government, while a large staff of underpaid Civil servants is not only costly, but is in its very nature fatal to efficient administration".

Atkinson's most urgent problem was not the cost of government, but rather the way in which the estimates were compiled. Under the system as it stood in 1879 the Treasurer relied upon about £900,000 a year nett revenue from land sales to augment the Consolidated Fund. Reckless or optimistic Treasurers were tempted to estimate land sales revenue on a lavish scale: yet this type of income was unreliable; it was the item most likely to unbalance a Budget. Atkinson proposed a new method of bookkeeping to remove both the threat and the temptation provided by mingling land revenue with the Consolidated Fund. The proceeds of land sales would be paid into a separate account, the nett proceeds of



which would be applied to public works and immigration. This procedure would also reduce the temptation to dissipate New Zealand's land resources by selling land to raise revenue. In future, said Atkinson, land should be sold only for settlement.

The sudden withdrawal of land sales revenue left a deficit in the Consolidated Fund which Atkinson proposed to fill by levying a property tax, raising the tariff, and releasing some of the Sinking Fund for immediate use. Grey's land tax had forced Atkinson to produce his alternatives. He rejected the idea of an income-tax which he said was "inquisitorial and unavoidably open to great inequalities." He reiterated his opposition to a land tax: although he admitted that a special tax on unused land would be justifiable, he said it was not practicable. In the end, he told the House, he had decided to impose a general property tax "to affirm the principle that realised wealth, in whatever form, shall bear its fair share of the burdens of the State". Debts and a £300 exemption were to be allowed, the rest of a man's property was to be taxed at the rate of a penny in the pound. Minor adjustments were made to the customs duties, and death duties at the higher ranks of the graduated scale were increased.

Atkinson expected criticism from the Greyites for repealing the land tax, and since he expected them to accuse him of being the tool of land monopolists, he put his views on land-holding in New Zealand formally on record. He said that he heartily disapproved of land being held for speculative purposes and of land being held in large blocks which formed an obstacle to closer settlement. Yet while he agreed that there were large estates in New Zealand which he "would be glad to see occupied by



small freeholders" he believed that economic trends favoured the disintegration, not the accumulation, of such estates, and that these trends, rather than legislation, would break them up. In his opinion the State should legislate against speculation only in the last resort, when the problem had palpably reached "an injurious extent". This, he said, it had not done in 1879: meanwhile a tax such as Grey's, on cultivated land as well as land held unused for speculation, would discourage small settlers. His own taxes, Atkinson said, were designed to encourage more intensive land use.<sup>5</sup>

Economic history seems to have vindicated Atkinson in the long run. He was wrong about the trend of the 'eighties being towards disintegration, but when the big estates broke up they did so because the increased feasibility of highly profitable small farming forced land prices up; not because of ineffectual legislative attempts to force big landowners to subdivide.<sup>6</sup>

The 1879 financial statement shocked even a province as greedy as Taranaki into agreeing that financial policies should be changed. The Taranaki Herald said angrily that "If the financial affairs of the Colony were as readily understood by the people as are the advantages for which prudence is so often thrown overboard, the Legislature would not have the power to go on year after year involving the country in debt". And having got this notion firmly fixed among his rather limited stock of ideas, the editor then proceeded to write a stream of editorials to the effect that reductions in expenditure had become a "stern necessity".

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5. See also H. A. Atkinson to J. C. Sharland, 9 February 1881, R-A mss., vol. 43, p. 310.

6. J. B. Condliffe, New Zealand in the Making, 2nd ed., London, 1959, p. 203.



The Colony realised in 1879 that prosperity based on loans was faltering, that retrenchment had become obligatory, and that heavy taxation was a necessary complement to a vigorous borrowing policy. Nevertheless, at least one politician, Richmond Hursthouse<sup>7</sup>, observed that in Parliament there was no deeply rooted conviction that the borrowing policy needed rethinking. Members had unanimously supported the last five million loan and soon they would all be voting for another. The urge to borrow was temporarily quiescent, but when it returned no member would oppose it lest his locality be punished when the loan was distributed: if he failed to get public works for them his constituents would be sure to reject him at the polls as soon as they could.

Before the end of 1879 the Hall Government was beginning to be alarmed by the financial crisis. Hall seems to have supported Atkinson's measures although he was bewildered by the complexity of the task before the Ministry, and he remained in office very reluctantly.<sup>8</sup> Cabinet vacancies were worrying him in February 1880. He held too many portfolios himself<sup>9</sup> and was frantic for relief.<sup>10</sup> In February, too, Atkinson injured a knee<sup>11</sup> and was incapacitated for three weeks so that a larger part of responsibility fell on to Hall.

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7. Hursthouse, 15 December 1879, P.D., 34, p. 988. His family was related to the Richmonds by marriage. See above, p. 2.
  8. J. Hall to Elliott, 25 December 1879, H. mss.
  9. Premier, Colonial Secretary, Postmaster-General and Commissioner of Telegraphs.
  10. J. Hall to Fulton, 17 February 1880; to W. Rolleston, 23 February 1880; to F. Whitaker, 27 February 1880, all in H. mss.
  11. Until this accident Atkinson had led a very active life, but "the doctors say his lawn tennis days are over", Hall told F. D. Bell on 25 February 1880. (H. mss., vol. 8, p. 168). With lack of exercise Atkinson grew very heavy and his heart soon began to feel the strain.



The depression had returned in 1877 and by 1880 was causing obvious distress.<sup>12</sup> Wherever possible the Government tried to provide temporary work for the unemployed near land on which they could settle, but the scale of operations was too limited to deal adequately with the problem. In Wellington alone 900 men were out of work, and when the harvest ended these numbers would be greatly increased. Hall dreaded the arrival of immigrant ships and blamed Grey for not stopping the influx in 1879.<sup>13</sup> To make matters worse, Atkinson's estimates were found to be over-optimistic.<sup>14</sup> He was not going to be able to balance the 1880 Budget. By March 1880 Hall was becoming concerned at the cost of providing relief works. "So long as we keep them on the railway works near town, they will loaf about Wellington and never settle on land," he confided to Sir William Fox, "- the hope is that once in the Country Districts, they will find work....and not return on our hands. Atkinson is sanguine as to the result. The wages are so low as to afford every inducement to leave the Government service - Applications for employment on the same terms are pouring in from the Middle Island, which we are steadily refusing - The coming winter will be a time of severe trial".<sup>15</sup>

The unemployed were not Hall's only worry. Local bodies were foundering under the strain of high debts and falling revenues. Atkinson, solicitous for all aspects of the colonial credit, wanted to keep local bodies solvent as long as possible. Here there was a difference of opinion in the Cabinet between Atkinson, Richard Oliver and Thomas Dick

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12. See Sutch, "The Long Depression 1865-95", p. 17.

13. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 26 February 1880, H. mss.

14. Ibid.

15. J. Hall to W. Fox, 3 March 1880, Ibid.



who felt that local bodies should be buttressed, and Hall and Whitaker who felt that such bankruptcies were inevitable and must be endured.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, Ministers clung to the notion, cherished by everybody else, that the depression would soon lift. Hall wrote to a new settler on 11 May 1880 telling him that he believed New Zealand's condition was beginning to improve, and that the change would be obvious within a few months.<sup>17</sup> Therefore the Government did not see any necessity for drawing up comprehensive or long-term plans. They intended to call Parliament together in May, but they expected that most of the session would be taken up with a discussion of the finances and were planning as little political activity as possible. Bryce, Atkinson and Hall met in February 1880 and decided that they "could not avoid" introducing the Electoral Bills left over from 1879, a Redistribution Bill, a Licensing Bill, and a Bill to deal with hospitals and charitable aid.<sup>18</sup>

Hall realised glumly that he would probably remain on the Treasury benches throughout 1880: so long as Grey was in the House his presence alone would probably prevent the Opposition from coalescing<sup>19</sup>, and accordingly Hall recognised that Grey was the Government's main asset. But no one could be quite sure that an Opposition strong enough to eject Hall would not organise itself in opposition to Atkinson's financial proposals. The 1880 Budget, therefore, was awaited with great anxiety by all factions.

On 8 June Atkinson delivered his Budget.<sup>20</sup> It was even gloomier

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16. J. Hall to H. A. Atkinson, 9 March 1880, Ibid.  
17. J. Hall to R. Dilligan, 11 May 1880, Ibid.  
18. J. Hall to F. Whitaker, 29 February 1880, Ibid.  
19. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 27 March 1880, Ibid.  
20. P.D., 35, pp. 115-126.



than that of 1879. Atkinson reiterated his belief that the depression was temporary, yet because it showed no sign of lifting the need for retrenchment had become clearer and more pressing. He was plainly anxious. A year before he had reorganised the finances so that spending in anticipation of land sales revenue would be stopped; this time he tried to separate local and general expenditure to ease the pressure of the localities upon the central government. He had already warned local bodies that their subsidies could not continue unless the Consolidated Fund was augmented by higher taxation. Now he threw them upon their own resources.

Subsidies to localities from the Consolidated Fund were stopped, and local bodies were given authority to levy rates of up to two shillings in the pound, and to raise loans in New Zealand under certain safeguards.<sup>21</sup> "If our local bodies are to be really useful, they must be made independent and responsible. The one precaution to be taken is to see that the rate-payers spend their own money and not the money of other people," said Atkinson sturdily. A Public Works Board would be set up, to be financed from the land fund. Its main functions would be building main roads and advancing funds to local bodies to build district roads. Atkinson was proud of this scheme, which he held to be soundly based upon two principles already accepted by the House; firstly, that the proceeds of land sales should be applied to opening up and settling the country, and secondly,

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21. This scheme was later dropped and half the subsidies were paid instead. See below, p. 107.

that the landowners would in the future find the means to maintain most of the colony's roads. And it had, he said, the added advantage of allowing him to complete the separation of general and local finance.

The rest of the Budget was comparatively uninteresting. Personal effects were exempted from the property tax, and a beer tax<sup>22</sup> of sixpence a gallon was restored; death duties were increased.

In concluding Atkinson said that it was "evident" that "some" borrowing would continue to be necessary, but he hoped that the House would agree to borrow only moderate sums for specific purposes; and he made it quite clear that he saw direct taxation in the form of the property-tax as a needful accompaniment to loans; a form of moral pressure directed at undue greed. Gladstone, whom the Richmonds and Atkinsons admired, had had a similar idea in 1854. When the Crimean War began he doubled the income tax, raising it from sevenpence to one and twopence in the pound, saying "The expenses of war are a moral check which it has pleased the Almighty to impose upon the ambition and lust of conquest that are inherent in so many nations".<sup>23</sup> In 1880 Atkinson said:

We ought to connect, far more closely than we have ever yet done, the idea of additional taxation with further borrowing. As soon as it is actually realised by the people of the colony not only that each new loan has to be repaid, but that until repaid it imposes a yearly burden, which must be met, if not by the increase of the tax-paying population, then by the increase of taxation itself - as soon as this is fully realised...fresh loans will be less often called for, and much more carefully spent.<sup>24</sup>

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22. Atkinson had opposed Grey's 1878 beer tax and he revived it unwillingly because "the financial position of the country is such as to compel us to resort to taxes which in more favourable times we should not have supported". P.D., 35, p. 125.

23. C. Hibbert, The Destruction of Lord Raglan, Hammondsworth, 1963, p. 33.

24. Atkinson, 8 June 1880, P.D., 35, p. 126.



The 1880 financial statement throws a good deal of light on Atkinson's ideas of depression finance, especially his desire to spread both loan money and responsibility for expenditure as widely as possible. The localities would be expected to raise for themselves the money they required, and the role of the general government would be confined to keeping arterial projects alive. The connection between expenditure and direct taxation was heavily emphasised so that the cost of development would be impressed upon those who so avidly demanded it. Atkinson held that self-reliance and self-sufficiency were the weapons to fight depression, and it was his predecessors' neglect of these that had put New Zealand into such a poor position to face the fall in her exports receipts. He never explicitly blamed borrowing for causing the depression, but he did blame New Zealand's unduly heavy financial commitments for her lack of resilience when faced with a prolonged slump; and he believed that the years of using borrowed money for ordinary expenditure were largely responsible for undermining the colonists' morale. The period of heavy borrowing had induced expectations of lavish expenditure that were out of place in a land whose resources were comparatively limited. Atkinson, himself a farmer, was fully aware of the dangers of over-investment in land and soaring land values,<sup>25</sup> and this awareness reinforced his caution in financial matters. So did his fiscal orthodoxy, his strong sense of honesty and a conscientious desire to avoid over-committing the colony, so that the national estate should not be mortgaged, as were so many

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25. For a full description see I. W. Horsfield, "The Struggle for Economic Viability, A study in the development of the New Zealand economy in the nineteenth century", unpub. M.A. thesis, Wellington, 1960, pp. 73-74.

private estates, for several times its value.<sup>26</sup> To Atkinson and his late Victorian contemporaries, cast in the mould of Gladstone, a bankruptcy was not only a financial and personal disaster: it was dishonourable evidence of moral turpitude. A national default was correspondingly more disastrous and more dishonourable, and never under any circumstances to be risked. Deficit finance he thought tantamount to defalcation and to be avoided wherever possible.

While these convictions made Atkinson a worthy man, they were almost disastrous in a depression Treasurer. The plight of the unemployed during the long depression was appalling in a land which had been settled by people who had emigrated to escape the evils of European industrialism. Almost as desperate was the situation of heavily-mortgaged property-owners, and among these it was the smaller properties which collapsed first: the banks and lending-agencies shored up as many of the heavily indebted as they could since they could not afford to face their collapse.<sup>27</sup> Amidst this chaos Atkinson continued to balance his Budgets. His policies were designed to confront the depression rather than to fight it. His reluctance to experiment was reinforced by the circumstance that he usually had to tidy up the debris after another Treasurer's experiments and thus the identification of experimentation with crisis was rooted in his mind. Such an attitude may be understood, and even excused, although it is hard to praise it; errors of omission are not politically more venial offences than errors of commission.

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26. K. Sinclair and W. F. Mandle, Open Account. A History of the Bank of New South Wales 1861-1961, Wellington, 1961, pp. 37-39.

27. Ibid., p. 87.



Vogel also realised that the great need of an underdeveloped country was capital to develop communications and bring more land into production. Moreover, he saw loans and government expenditure as an antidote to depression, and it has been suggested<sup>28</sup> that Vogel envisaged a flow of money for development creating a perpetual artificial gold rush. For a short time he almost achieved it. Banks and lending-agencies struggled ferociously to peg out their claims in the money market,<sup>29</sup> and land prices soared as dizzily as if all the land in the country were auriferous. Vogel's financial policies, writes Sinclair, "were extensions of that greedy and sanguine nature which was revealed in his inveterate gluttony and gambling. He suffered from gout as well as gold-fever."<sup>30</sup> This was the weakness of Vogelism: the idea was appropriate, but its benefits were exaggerated and, since its author had not the slightest interest in administrative details, his schemes were usually carelessly executed. Moreover, while state-stimulated prosperity was heartily welcomed<sup>31</sup> the controls needed to regulate its flow could not be effectively imposed at a time when most New Zealanders paid conscientious lip-service to the ideals of individualism and laissez-faire. Vogel's attempt to establish land reserves to support his scheme was rejected,<sup>32</sup> and he did not try again to make loans dependent upon controls. The furthest Atkinson went in this direction was to put into practice as widely as possible the principle that those who spent should pay, in the hope that this would be conducive to self-control. For the most part he relied upon regulating

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28. K. Sinclair, A History of New Zealand, Harmondsworth, 1959, pp. 150-151; Burdon, Vogel, pp. 37-38.

29. Sinclair and Mandle, chapter V.

30. Sinclair, History of N.Z., p. 151.

31. W. H. Oliver, The Story of New Zealand, London, 1960, p. 130.

32. Burdon, Vogel, pp. 59-60.

loan expenditure by choking the loans gradually at their source: so New Zealand's nineteenth century economy lurched in manic depression from one extreme to another according to the optimism or panic engendered in the House by economic conditions outside it.<sup>33</sup> One can only conclude that while Vogelism was imaginative it was, in its uncontrolled state, dangerous; and that Atkinson's agonisingly cautious administration provided a stabler basis for future development.

In 1880 fear of increased taxation surpassed greed for expenditure.<sup>34</sup> The want of confidence debate initiated by Grey quickly developed into a consideration of whether or not members were prepared to support Atkinson's economic measures. The Ministry won it on 1 July 1880 by forty-five votes to thirty.<sup>35</sup> Hall was only half pleased. He attributed his strong position to Grey's presence in the House and members' anxiety to avoid a second Grey Government, not to genuine approval of his Government's policies.<sup>36</sup> He was growing eager to retire from political life.<sup>37</sup> In July he wrote lugubriously to Vogel:

The session is getting on but slowly. There seems but little prospect of our being relieved. It would be an intense relief to me to get back to my farm at Hororata, but one cannot creditably leave a ship in a storm...I wish you had the job of financing for the Colony just now, and getting the people to put up with reduced administrative expenditure, enormously reduced Public Works expenditure and increased taxation - you would appreciate the difference between the palmy days from 1870-79, when money was abundant and the public appetite for expenditure reasonable, & these latter days when that appetite has become a disease & there is nothing to satisfy it with...<sup>38</sup>

With very little action on the development front politics seemed unwontedly dull.<sup>39</sup> The Public Works statement which Oliver delivered

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33. Armstrong, "The Politics of Development", *passim*.

34. There was some dissent, e.g. Southland Daily News, 10 June 1880, p. 2.

35. P.D., 35, p. 678.

36. J. Hall to Clifford, 10 December 1880, H. mss., vol. 7, pp. 358-359.

37. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 20 June 1880, H. mss.

38. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 17 July 1880, Ibid.

39. T.H., 27 July 1880, p. 2.



on 6 August had failed to arouse the expectant interest with which such statements were usually awaited. When it was presented it did not put members into a good humour, but instead dashed widespread hopes of public works and stirred up bitter recriminations.<sup>40</sup> The Government were so impatient to dismiss the House that Atkinson's Local Body Rating Bills, which were necessary to set up the new system of administration that he had expounded so hopefully in June, were dropped. Atkinson had to pay local bodies half their usual subsidies to tide them over the recess.<sup>41</sup> There is no evidence to suggest why he agreed to drop the Bills. Possibly he felt that the sacrifice was justified if it meant that Parliament would be disposed of more quickly, leaving him free to settle down to administration, a task which he always considered more important than legislation. Certainly Hall was anxious to get away and may have put pressure on his colleagues. They had no clear heir to Hall and feared the political consequences of his resignation. They were also hard pressed by the emergency situation brewing up in Southern Taranaki, and were eager to dissolve Parliament in order to concentrate on this.<sup>42</sup>

Except for Atkinson's financial plans, which had not been fully implemented, the 1880 session was barren of productive work.<sup>43</sup> The Ministry was succumbing to a creeping political paralysis which unpleasantly resembled the economic malaise spreading over the land.<sup>44</sup> Hall fussed over lingering problems: Vogel still held both his Land Company directorship and the Agent Generalship. By September the Government's patience with him was exhausted and Hall told Atkinson to send him a blunt

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40. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 14 August 1880, H. msa.

41. P.D., 37, p. 547.

42. See below, pp. 108 et. seq.

43. T.H., 1 September 1880, p. 2.

44. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 7 September 1880, H. msa.

dismissal.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless Vogel continued to pour forth buoyant letters from London which enraged the Cabinet in Wellington. Hall showed this fairly plainly in his October letter to London. " - If you think that permanent prosperity can be assured to us by any scheme other than hard living, and hard working to increase our produce of various kinds" he told Vogel, "I must say, with the kindest feeling towards yourself, that I am glad you are not here to lead us into an experiment that would end in disaster." <sup>46</sup>

In December 1880 Hall was still trying to persuade Vogel of the need for circumspection. Their outlooks were very different: Hall was a runholder and although he was very much richer<sup>47</sup> than Atkinson they were both representative of the rural point of view, while Vogel was an urban speculator with a taste for fiscal adventure.<sup>48</sup> In his December letter Hall implied that there was a division between rural and urban investors on the question of development, a difference which D. A. Hamer has clarified.<sup>49</sup> City investors wanted outlets for further investment to recoup their depression losses, while their rural counterparts, whose money was tied up in land, were casting about for ways to reduce their commitments. The dialogue which Hall and Vogel carried on in tones of polite exasperation illustrated this dichotomy.<sup>50</sup>

By the end of 1880 both Hall and Atkinson were preoccupied with the Parihaka crisis, which they had inherited from the Grey Government. In September 1865 a tract of land from Wanganui to White Cliffs (forty

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45. J. Hall to H. A. Atkinson, 27 September 1880, *Ibid.*, vol. 7, pp. 5-6.

46. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 8 October 1880, *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

47. In 1890 he owned over 10,000 acres, valued for property tax purposes at £91,927. *A.J.H.R.* 1890 B. 15.

48. See D. Monroe to W. Rolleston, 3 September 1873, *Rn. mss.*, box 2.

49. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 184-185.

50. e.g. J. Hall to J. Vogel, 6 December 1880, *H. mss.*, vol. 7, pp. 284-285.



miles north of New Plymouth) had been confiscated under the New Zealand Settlements Acts. The Maori occupants were allowed to remain; but in 1868 the Chief Titokowaru rebelled and, after terrorising the area between Waitotara and the Waingongoro River, fled to the Ngatimaru tribe whose lands lay beyond the Waitara. Two other tribes, the Pakakohi and Ngarauru were driven off their lands at this time but when they returned in 1869 they were given reserves and settled down. In 1871 Titokowaru's rebel tribe began to return to the Waingongoro area in small parties, and in 1872 Titokowaru himself returned.<sup>51</sup>

For five years the area was peaceful and then, in 1877 Grey, who was short of revenue, decided to yield to the pressure of land-hungry West Coast settlers and open up the territory between the Waingongoro and Stoney rivers.<sup>52</sup> The very careless programme of surveying and roadmaking, however, offered gratuitous insults to both the important chiefs in the area, Te Whiti at Parihaka and Titokowaru on the Waimate Plains. More importantly John Sheehan, the Native Minister, did nothing to publicise or define the reserves which were to be made for the Maoris. After surveying had been in progress for some time Te Whiti became alarmed,<sup>53</sup> and sent ploughmen on to land sold to Europeans, presumably hoping to force a test case on to the Government to discover whether land could be sold before reserves had been fixed. By July 1879 many of Te Whiti's ploughmen had been imprisoned and the Maori Prisoners Act of that year

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51. For further details see the second report of the West Coast Commission, 14 July 1880, A.J.H.R., 1880, G.2. Rutherford, Sir George Grey, pp. 618-619 has a brief account also.

52. See map, A.J.H.R., 1880, G. 2.

53. Especially since some earlier promises to set aside reserves under the 1863 Act had not been fulfilled.

their trials to be put off indefinitely for three months at a time. Therefore when Hall took over the administration in September 1879 "all the elements of the Parihaka crisis had come into play".<sup>54</sup>

The lands in question were on the fringe of the Egmont electorate and Atkinson was naturally concerned. He had been expecting trouble since early in 1879,<sup>55</sup> when he apparently shared the dangerous tendency among Taranaki settlers to equate the new obstacle to settlement with the Waitara crisis. The more perceptive of them conceded that Te Whiti's personal intentions were pacific, but doubted whether his mana would suffice to restrain the more warlike elements. C. W. Richmond said "the cause of Maori resistance now in 1879 is identical with that of the war twenty years ago in 1859, and every disturbance between European and Maori since the islands were discovered - the desire of the natives to retain their mana over the land. Wiremu Kingi fought us for the right of opening Waitara to settlement in the early days - Te Manu and Tito Kowaru [sic.] will fight us now for the right of occupying Waimate unless Te Whiti's influence is sufficient drag on them to prevent war." <sup>56</sup>

The settlers were busily preparing for war <sup>57</sup> and Atkinson was willing to be their mouthpiece in the House. He sympathised with the the small farmers in the vicinity of the confiscated lands and was concerned by the plight of those who were waiting to take up the land that Grey had sold.<sup>58</sup> Consequently he supported Grey's ninety days detention legislation and said that if the Maori ploughmen were tried "and if,

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54. Except where otherwise indicated, this account is based on D. K. Fieldhouse, "Sir Arthur Gordon and the Parihaka Crisis", H.S.A.N.Z. vol. 10, no. 37.

55. H.A. Atkinson to A.S. Atkinson, 26 March 1879, Scholefield, Papers, vol. 2, p. 464.

56. Memo in C.W. Richmond's handwriting, R-A mss., vol. 8, p. 49

57. e.g. T.H., 6 June 1879, p. 2.

58. Atkinson, 8 August 1879, P.D., 31, p. 529.



through a failure to convict, they returned to their district, war would be quite certain there".<sup>59</sup> Far less sensible was Atkinson's insinuation that Te Whiti was another Te Ua. "The movement is really national," he told members on 9 August 1879, "and springs from the belief that Te Whiti is a supernatural power, and will again establish the Maoris as the dominant race".<sup>60</sup>

However, a stronger sense of responsibility seems to have come by September 1879 when Atkinson found himself obliged to help Hall and Bryce frame government policy. They decided to try to save face by proceeding with the survey, while at the same time trying to conciliate Te Whiti and Titokowaru by a public investigation of Maori claims to reserves. On 20 December they decided that Bryce should send roadmakers across the Waingongoro in the first week of January 1880, and then, if the Maoris did not interfere, surveyors were to be sent. The Maoris were to be warned of these steps.<sup>61</sup> The next day the same three Ministers agreed "after much discussion" to appoint a Royal Commission to investigate Maori land claims in the area.<sup>62</sup> Atkinson told the West Coast Commissioners that

Te Whiti must be convinced of our power and our fairness and be able to tell his followers that the reserves are ample. The only possible mode of convincing him of our power with the least chance of bloodshed is by making the road through Taranaki land from Stoney River to Opunake. Of our fairness he must be convinced by the immediate reservation and marking on the ground of ample reserves as ample as you like so long as other Natives are not made jealous... I have great hope now that the question will be settled without bloodshed which will be a great mercy. And also, although one ought hardly to speak of it in the same breath for considerable relief to the Treasury not by sale of land but by reduction in

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59. Ibid.

60. Atkinson, 9 August 1879, Ibid., p. 557.

61. Cabinet Minute, 20 December 1879, H. nss.

62. Ibid., 21 December 1879.

the A.C. [armed constabulary] and other forces.<sup>63</sup>

The West Coast Commission's first report was made in March 1880.<sup>64</sup> The Commissioners warned that "the Plains will never be occupied in peace until proper reserves are made and marked out upon the ground".<sup>65</sup> They recommended that all former grants and promises be honoured and that, in addition, Te Whiti and Titokowaru should each be granted a block of 25,000 acres. A map was immediately printed showing these reserves and the other grants. Meanwhile the survey went on as unobtrusively as possible,<sup>66</sup> so that the Maoris should know that the Government was determined to open up the block as well as to grant reserves.

Troops were poured into the area: Taranaki's normal strength of armed constabulary was forty-seven, but by February 1880 there were 740 constables in the area.<sup>67</sup> On 4 July 1880 Cabinet agreed to bring in another Bill authorising the detention of Maori prisoners for as long as the Government thought the public safety required. It was to include power to arrest persons obstructing Government work or authority, or resisting the occupation of the confiscated lands, and would apply to the area between the Waitahou river and White Cliffs. It would remain in force until the end of the 1881 session.<sup>68</sup> The Bill was introduced

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63. H. A. Atkinson to West Coast Commissioners, 18 March 1880, R - A mss., vol. 43, pp. 45-46. This does not read like the work of a fanatic such as G. W. Rusden (*History of New Zealand*, London, 1883, vol. 3, pp. 323-4) spitefully made Atkinson out to be.
64. A.J.H.R. 1880, G.2. The second report was presented on 14 July 1880 (*Ibid.*), and the third report on 5 August 1880. They reported again 17 June 1881 (A.J.H.R., 1881, G. 5.).
65. First report, 15 March 1880, *Ibid.*, 1880, G.2.
66. "It will not do to be hurried into scattering more survey parties over the country than are necessary to show [sic.] that we are going steadily on..." H.A. Atkinson to J. Hall, 5 April 1880, R-A mss., vol. 43, p. 74.
67. A.J.H.R., 1881, H. 10.
68. Cabinet Minute, 4 July 1880, H. mss.



immediately and was ready for use by the end of September 1880.<sup>69</sup> Thus before the end of 1880 the Government was fully equipped to carry out both halves of the policy which Hall, Atkinson and Bryce had devised in December 1879.

No evidence exists to suggest which of the three played the major role in framing this compromise policy. D. K. Fieldhouse probably gives too much of the credit for moderation to Hall, although Atkinson's part is obscure. His emotions were involved in the crisis, while Hall's were not. On 16 July 1880 for instance, he said in reply to criticism from Sheehan;

Does he [Sheehan] know that the sowing of seed by the whole European population was stopped for that season? Does he know that we have been twice burnt out of our homes? Does he know that we have seen those Maoris, many of them armed, going about declaring that the whole of the land had been given to them by Te Whiti? Does he know that Te Whiti claimed to have special revelations from Heaven; and that he declared he had the power at any time to annihilate the Europeans,...that the day was fixed when we should all be driven into the sea? <sup>70</sup>

The Hall papers, in comparison, emphasize Hall's worry about the expense of the business. Atkinson supported the policy heartily once it had been decided and believed in its justice and effectiveness. The question was directly connected with his electorate; it concerned the farmers who had always been the main objects of his political solicitude and it was connected with his first area of major political experience - his term as Weld's Defence Minister during the Maori Wars. With all these claims to be heard, as well as his key position in the Cabinet as Colonial Treasurer, Atkinson was too experienced and too important to be ignored

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69. Te Whiti had protested in vain at the damage done to his cultivations by cattle straying off the unfenced roads, and at last he began to fence across the roads himself. By November 1880, 216 of Te Whiti's fencers were in prison with no prospect of trial, under the Maori Prisoners Detention Act of September 1880.

70. Atkinson, 16 July 1880, P.D., 36, p. 307. NB the transition from third to second person plural.

and may well have had at least as large a part as Hall in devising the policy which they and Bryce carried out.

On 16 July Atkinson expressed his impatience with those who wanted to abandon the Parihaka survey. "I cannot understand how anybody with a knowledge of history, with a knowledge of the feelings of a semi-barbarous people, can for a moment suppose that you can stop on the ground that it will not pay, and abandon any country to them which they will look upon as conquered from you". On the other hand he agreed that generous reserves should be granted: "I do not care how liberal I am," he told the House, "as long as I do not impress the Natives with an idea that I am weak".<sup>71</sup>

He strongly supported the retention of the Armed Constabulary on the West Coast, because he was not prepared to believe that Te Whiti was sane enough to be thoroughly relied upon, or that the prophet would always be able to restrain some of his more violent followers. Here were all the usual prejudices of a middle-class outback farmer who believed fervently in the Christian religion and the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race, when confronted by a Maori prophet who was resisting the opening up of land. It was a measure of Atkinson's character that he never became quite rabid on the issue and always strove to retain his conscientious sense of what was due to the Maoris as well as to the settlers.

In September 1880 there was serious disagreement between Bryce and the rest of the Cabinet over the length of time Te Whiti should be allowed for consideration of the Government's proposals. Bryce wanted to force immediate acquiescence; he was impatient that the initiative had passed from Wellington to Parihaka. The rest of the Cabinet seem to have

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71. Ibid.



perceived that Te Whiti's mana was involved, and that he should be persuaded to agree to their proposals in a manner which would save him as much face as possible. Bryce wrote a letter of resignation on 22 September in which he claimed that the constant differences of opinion which had existed between him and his colleagues over the conduct of West Coast policy necessitated his resignation.<sup>72</sup> His colleagues persuaded him to remain in office for at least one more month while they persevered with their policy of conciliation and persuasion.

On 14 October, for example, Cabinet made arrangements for clarifying the issues to Te Whiti, who had been pleading complete ignorance of Government intentions.<sup>73</sup> Both threats and promises were to be employed: "Cabinet agree that such steps should now be taken for the purpose of communicating to Te Whiti the recommendations of the WC [West Coast] Commrs, the provisions of the WC Act, & the intentions of the Govt, as will render unnecessary any further commr to Te Whiti if it should hereafter be deemed advisable to arrest him".<sup>74</sup>

Hall was showing signs of strain: "the persistent opposition of the Parihaka magnate & his deluded followers, after they know what is intended to be done for them, is very embarrassing. The expense of keeping up our present force is ruinous, & there seems no prospect of its coming to an end".<sup>75</sup> Parris's mission failed and on 2 November Cabinet sent him back to make another attempt. They also agreed to go on with the survey of the Parihaka block.<sup>76</sup> "If we were not spending £600 a day on the armed force, we could afford to go more gradually to

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72. J. Bryce to J. Hall, 22 September 1880, H. mss., vol. 36, p. 97.

73. J. Hall to W. Fox, 16 October 1880, Ibid., vol. 7, p. 85.

74. Cabinet Minute, 14 October 1880, H. mss.

75. J. Hall to W. Fox, 16 October 1880, loc. cit.

76. Cabinet Minute, 2 November 1880, H. mss.

work, but Parliament will not stand another 12 months of this standing army; and in fact where is the money to come from?" Hall glumly demanded of Bell.<sup>77</sup> He hoped that the survey of Te Whiti's own bailiwick might "bring matters to a decisive issue one way or the other".<sup>78</sup> It did not do so.<sup>79</sup>

As Te Whiti's silence persisted Bryce felt his position in the Ministry becoming more equivocal. On 4 December 1880 Cabinet decided that if by January 1881 a majority of ministers continued to favour the cautious policy, Bryce should be allowed to resign and dissociate himself from the moderates.<sup>80</sup> Rolleston was Bryce's heir apparent, and from December he began to take a more active role in policy making. On 20 December Hall, Bryce, Atkinson and Rolleston decided to write to Te Whiti suggesting that the Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, visit Parihaka to explain Government proposals.<sup>81</sup> Gordon was widely reputed to be sympathetic to Te Whiti and his relations with the Hall Government were acrimonious.<sup>82</sup> It seems that they decided to send him to Parihaka in the hope that the Queen's Representative might persuade Te Whiti of Ministerial good faith. This project also failed, and the direction of further attempts seems to have fallen upon Atkinson.<sup>83</sup>

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77. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 2 November 1880, *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 149.

78. J. Hall to W. Fox, 3 November 1880, *Ibid.*, pp. 163-165.

79. There is an irresistible comparison here with Lord Granville, who said, also in 1882, that the bombardment of Alexandria would "clear the air and accelerate a solution of some sort or other".

80. Cabinet Minute, 4 December 1880, H. *mss.*

81. Cabinet Minute, 20 December 1880, *Ibid.*

82. Fieldhouse makes this very clear: see *H.S.A.N.Z.*, vol. 10, no. 37, p. 37.

83. J. Hall to H. A. Atkinson, 29 December 1880, H. *mss.*, vol. 7, p. 408.



Bryce duly resigned in January 1881.<sup>84</sup> Hall offered him another portfolio, but, after consideration, Bryce declined it. Rolleston became Native Minister, and Hall expected to take some time over the search for a new Cabinet member.<sup>85</sup> Atkinson, Rolleston and Hall now had most of the responsibility for coping with Te Whiti. Atkinson told Whitaker that they had decided on "a more patient policy" than Bryce's, following the recommendations of the West Coast Commission and hoping to avoid any open disturbance.<sup>86</sup> They persevered with this policy until September 1881. By then the Ministry was losing ground in Parliament and an election was imminent. They had resisted public opinion, which favoured the forceful subjection of Te Whiti, up until this point, but when Te Whiti's men recommenced ploughing, the Ministry felt obliged to act.<sup>87</sup>

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84. A.J.H.R., 1881, A.1.

85. J. Hall to R. Oliver, 8 January 1881, H. mss., vol. 7, p. 385.

86. H. A. Atkinson to F. Whitaker, 11 January 1881, R - A mss., vol. 43, p. 280.

87. See below, pp. 126-134.

CHAPTER SIX : 1880-1882.

The early months of 1881 were full of anxious negotiations to find a replacement for Bryce. The Cabinet wanted W. R. Russell, of Hawke's Bay, but they felt obliged to consult J. D. Ormond first. Rolleston went to Napier in January; but Ormond was virtually incommunicado at his station.<sup>1</sup> Atkinson's determination to collect both instalments of the property tax before the end of the financial year so as to avoid a "very undesirable" deficit,<sup>2</sup> had contributed to Ormond's unhelpfulness. Hall told F. D. Bell that "Ormond is desperately sully, as the time for the payment of Property Tax draws near, and would kill us tomorrow if he could".<sup>3</sup> In February Atkinson suggested Edward Wakefield, the member for Geraldine, but since there were already two Canterbury men in the Ministry, Hall decided to persevere in his attempts to find an eligible North Islander.<sup>4</sup> Richard Oliver was pressing Hall hard for an offer to Reader Wood, and this seems to have been made, without success, early in March. On 8 March Hall told Whitaker that W. W. Johnston of Manawatu had been induced to join as Postmaster-General.<sup>5</sup>

No sooner had this problem been overcome than there was a clash between Hall and Atkinson. Atkinson, still preoccupied with his recent innovations in financial administration and with Parihaka, was uninterested in anything else and seems to have been demanding from Hall a session so short as to amount to a return to the policy of political rest. Hall was too reluctant a Premier to face opposition from his

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1. J. Hall to H. A. Atkinson, 28 January 1881, H. mss., vol. 8, p. 26.
  2. H. A. Atkinson to J. Hall, 24 January 1881, R - A mss., vol. 43, pp. 289-290.
  3. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 28 January 1881, H. mss., vol. 8, p. 41.
  4. J. Hall to F. Whitaker, 6 February 1881, Ibid., vol. 50, p. 40.
  5. J. Hall to F. Whitaker, 8 March 1881, Ibid., vol. 8, p. 202.



colleagues calmly. He met Atkinson's pressure with the threat of resignation and said that his health would not permit him to go on if he had to cope with Cabinet disagreements.<sup>6</sup>

The difference was smoothed over at once. Atkinson persuaded Hall to stay, and he agreed to do so until a replacement could be found.<sup>7</sup> Atkinson however, was not subdued: in April he met his constituents at New Plymouth and told them that he believed the depression was almost over, and that New Zealand had learned valuable lessons from the crisis. He then went on to imply that political over-activity was almost as perilous as over-spending. "With regard to the coming session, I would repeat what I have been laughed at for saying three or four years ago, when I said that the country required careful administration and political rest. I am proud of that saying...I believe that is what we want now - breathing time, which is quite a different thing from stagnation...The Government want time to attend to administration....The main attention of the House should be devoted to finance".<sup>8</sup>

Atkinson was not alone in thinking that finance would be the major issue of 1881, but he was almost alone in contemplating with equanimity a financial prospect barren of lavish expenditure, new loans, or lower taxation. Hall was haunted by rumours that Vogel was hatching schemes in London for "dosing the Colony with another lot of stimulants", and told Bell that he would "die on the floor of the House," before he agreed to any such scheme. He guessed that Larnach and Macandrew would give Vogel an enthusiastic welcome, and feared that if Grey's followers joined

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6. J. Hall to H. A. Atkinson, 12 March 1881, A mss. Tu, 13A.

7. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 19 April 1881, H. mss., vol 10, pp. 120-136.

8. New Zealand Times, n.d., clipping in unsorted R. mss.



the Vogelite phalanx their joint forces might be able "to do a lot of mischief with the mob that has neither money nor credit to lose"; although he did console himself with the reflection that the country members would stand firm against a Vogel-Grey alliance of urban radicals and city business.<sup>9</sup>

Unease at the state of politics was not confined to Ministerial circles. Ballance wrote a long letter to Stout on 23 May 1881 in which he deplored the prevailing state of political stagnation, which he did not think would be dispersed by any of the rather arid crusades which were being waged in various quarters - Macandrew's proposal to print paper money in quantity to pay for public works, the perennial Bible in schools agitation, and the cry against the property tax that proposed no alternative. "We sadly want a programme, broad liberal & bold that will lift the party from the dead level where no one can discover who's who," concluded Ballance.<sup>10</sup>

But he could think of few planks which were of urgent relevance to New Zealanders in the early eighties, and while he saw the need for presenting the electorates with some political choice, neither he nor they were so desperate that they were capable of breaking with the amorphous politics of the seventies. Yet, at the same time, there were increasing signs of frustration. The projection of politics of affluence into a time of recession proved confusing to politicians who began to express their bewilderment in their letters and speeches. It commonly took the form of a complaint from Ministers at the lack of

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9. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 18 April 1881, H. mss., vol. 8, p. 287.  
10. J. Ballance to R. Stout, 23 May 1881, Stout mss., 13.



an organised Opposition which would either frighten Governments into positive action, or frighten members into reasonably clear alignments. Another variant was the belief of both Government and Opposition leaders that it was the fear of Grey alone which prevented the House from turning Hall out of office.<sup>11</sup>

Oliver left the Ministry in June and this brought back the old bother about suitable recruits. Hall was confident that he could find three or four Canterbury men who were fit for Ministerial rank, but dared not seem to be favouring his home province at the expense of Auckland and Otago; but these two provinces suffered from a grievous dearth of respectable talent.<sup>12</sup> Hall was sure that his Government would fall as soon as the Opposition found a leader. The House was full of small, discontented, furiously squabbling groups: "What will come of it all, goodness only knows," wrote the Premier, "but I don't think it will end in my getting back to my pigs & potatoes at Horarata - I wish to Heavens it would -".<sup>13</sup>

Atkinson had not finished his financial statement until a month after the House had met. Once again, the effort and worry involved was upsetting his precarious state of health. "Uncle Harry is I fear done up with his statement," J. C. Richmond informed his daughter, Anneliz, "but if he is wise he will get the debate on it adjourned for a few days & take his ease. His every day administrative work is not very hard".<sup>14</sup>

Atkinson delivered the statement, with which he was very pleased, on 6 July 1881.<sup>15</sup> He was able to report a surplus in the Consolidated

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11. e.g.: T.H., 4 June 1881, p. 2; J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 15 July 1881, H. mss., vol. 50, pp. 87-88; Southland Times, 27 September 1881, p. 2.

12. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 18 June 1881, H. mss., vol. 50, p. 78.

13. Ibid.

14. J. C. Richmond to A. E. Richmond, July 1881, H.M.W.A. mss.

15. Atkinson, 6 July 1881, P.D., 38, pp. 328-337.

Fund of £26,706 and a balance in the Public Works Account of more than a million pounds. These results, he said, upheld his conviction that New Zealand's finances were basically sound, and required only reasonable self sacrifice and care, combined with prudent management to restore prosperity to the Colony.

Local finance was still a problem, "chiefly because of the restless pushing energy which still demands more local works to open up the country". This force met with a grudging sympathy, for Atkinson was really rather proud of the zeal for development shown by the backblocks. He worked out a scheme for roading blocks of land before sale, with the cost to be added to the price of the land, in accordance with his belief that landowners should be responsible for their local roads. He promised a three-to-one subsidy from the Public Works Board for main roads; and said that he would permit districts to borrow limited sums from a Roads Construction Board for district roads. He hoped the new system would provide roads as rapidly as colonial finances would permit; and that it would also relieve both Parliament and Ministers from pressure to supply local wants. He knew the Government could not ignore local needs if settlement was to be advanced, but he felt they should not be dealt with directly by the House.

Construction of the main trunk lines under the public works scheme would not be stopped; but it would proceed more slowly than in the seventies. Taxes would be cautiously reduced; some customs duties on essential articles would be abolished, and other duties reduced. The property tax would be cut to a halfpenny in the pound for the second half of the year.



The public works scheme had been in existence spasmodically for a decade, and Atkinson, in review, thought it had been "fairly successful". Looking forward he waxed almost lyrical about New Zealand's prospects. He saw immigrants flocking to the Antipodes, existing manufactures prospering, and others springing up "of themselves"; and all this natural expansion producing enough revenue to pay for the steady continuance of public works, with no increase in taxation rates. He hinted at the vast development of rural industries in the future, "under the advantages which our daily-improving system of communication affords, and by means of the capital which continually flows to our land by an attraction as certain as that of gravitation itself".

Then he pulled himself together: he was not a man who courted praise, but he did feel proud of the role he had played in restoring stability to New Zealand's economy so that the country would be able to take full advantage of her future prospects. "The circumstances of the times have not permitted me to offer proposals which can excite much enthusiasm," he said gruffly, "but I believe they are of a practical nature, resting upon a solid basis, and such as will reassure the country and enable it to look forward to the future with sober confidence".

The colony was not grateful. Atkinson's balancing the 1881 Budget was simply taken as evidence that the crisis of 1880 had not existed and that the unpopular measures of that year had not been warranted; a new demand for public works arose as soon as the colonists saw even a little light ahead.<sup>16</sup> "If a little stimulant was now given to the public works,

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16. Cycle described in detail by Armstrong, "The Politics of Development", passim.

and immigration to the Colony was encouraged, our prosperity would be even greater in the future than it has been during the past decade," said the Taranaki Herald; and it went on to slight Atkinson by implication: "The most successful politicians are those who conceive great policies, and have the ability as well as the courage to carry them out".<sup>17</sup> By August 1881 public opinion had become disgusted with the Hall Government, as it had with most of its predecessors after they had been <sup>a session</sup> in office. In 1881 the situation was gloomier than usual because there was no viable alternative in the House, and a demand for the election of a new set of members became steadily more insistent.<sup>18</sup> Hall himself was reasonably sanguine: "We have still a few pounds to put people in a good humour for the Elections," he told Bell; and he said that he hoped to reach the end of 1882 before more loans were required.<sup>19</sup>

A further source of irritation was the particularism which manifested itself whenever members saw local interests in conflict with general policies: such an occasion was always presented by a Representation Bill. Grey's "liberal" electoral legislation had been eagerly awaited since the recess of 1877-1878 when he had promised manhood suffrage, triennial Parliaments and redistribution of seats. But the Bill which Stout introduced in 1878 had been "a rather tame and hesitant affair".<sup>20</sup> It did not provide for manhood suffrage, which had to be proposed (in vain) from the Opposition benches by Whitaker, who also proposed the redistribution of seats after each quinquennial census. Dr. Wallis, an independent member, brought in a Triennial Parliaments Bill.<sup>21</sup> The Opposition did

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17. T.H., 15 July 1881, p. 2.

18. e.g. Ibid., 5 August 1881, p. 2.

19. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 13 August 1881, H. mss., vol. 50, p. 95.

20. Wilson, The Grey Government 1877-79, p. 29.

21. Rutherford, Sir George Grey, p. 614.



not oppose Stout's original measure, which retained plural voting, and the Legislative Council had been prepared to pass it after rejecting its provision for allowing Maoris to vote in European as well as Maori electorates. Grey had refused to accept this deletion and the measure had been lost.<sup>22</sup>

Hall's Government were obliged to bring in another Bill, similar to Grey's. They had intended to do so in 1880 but had procrastinated until too late in the session. The 1881 Representation Act introduced the radical principle of representation by population, modified by an eighteen per cent country quota.<sup>23</sup> Hall said of the measure that "the Residential vote, Triennial Parliaments, & other changes which had to be made to keep out Grey, have given ignorance and demagoguery a lift. But I still think they were the lesser evil of the two - We had better have them without Grey, than with him to work them -".<sup>24</sup>

The Representation Act had disrupted the shaky political alignments built up in 1879 and 1880 and left Hall dependent on Otago members from the other side of the House. He had taken a seat from Nelson and had therefore been deserted by his Nelson supporters who were so incensed that they would have overturned his Ministry if they could.<sup>25</sup> Ormond was also very bitter, and ready to "assassinate if possible". Politics had become so unsatisfactory and so disorganised that Hall thought "we have arrived at a time when the old forms are no longer sufficient to ensure the orderly & proper transaction of business and a revision must

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22. Wilson, pp. 33-34, Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", p. 39.

23. See Cunningham, "Equality of Electorates in N.Z.", vol. 1, pp. 61-64; L. Lipson, The Politics of Equality, Chicago, 1948, pp. 28-31 gives a very brief account.

24. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 12 August 1882, H. ms., vol. 10, p. 209.

25. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 10 September 1881, H. ms., vol. 50, pp. 118-119.



be undertaken next session".<sup>26</sup> Atkinson shared the general malaise, but he suggested no remedy; indeed he probably welcomed it because it freed him from political distractions and left him <sup>free</sup> to concentrate on administration. On 17 September 1881 he said that he knew of "no great question for the country to decide at the present time"; nor did he perceive any clear-cut parties in the House; and he said, with great satisfaction, that he thought Grey and his friends would have great difficulty "in manufacturing a political cry for the general elections".<sup>27</sup>

Just at this time the Parihaka dispute came back into the centre of public attention. After Bryce's departure in January 1881 the Cabinet had been quite confident that their peaceful policy of gradually surveying and settling all the land around Parihaka except for the published and marked<sup>28</sup> reserves would achieve a de facto solution; making Te Whiti's explicit acquiescence unnecessary. Atkinson seems to have shared his colleagues' optimism, with some lingering reluctance to trust Te Whiti.<sup>29</sup> At the end of March 1881, Riemenschneider, of the Wanganui Native Department, saw Te Whiti who said that he was glad that Bryce had resigned and welcomed Rolleston's appointment. He promised to keep the peace, and assured Riemenschneider that his mana was strong enough for him to do this.<sup>30</sup>

But in September 1881 the crisis flared up again. Maoris had begun ploughing land outside the declared reserves in August, in a

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26. Ibid.

27. Atkinson, 17 September 1881, P.D., 40, p. 697.

28. The West Coast Commission reported on 17 June 1881: "the cardinal point of the case - the indication on the ground of a large continuous reserve - was accomplished, with considerable regard for the wants and wishes of the resident Natives". On the Waimato Plains, Fox had seen Titokowaru who said that he was satisfied with his reserves. A.J.H.R., 1881, G.5.

29. H.A. Atkinson to G.B. Anderson, 9 February 1881, R-A mss., vol. 43, p. 308.

30. Riemenschneider's Report, 11 April 1881, Rn mss., box 3.



reversion to the policy of 1879. On 17 September Te Whiti made his usual monthly speech to his followers, but this time he appeared to be inciting his swollen following<sup>31</sup> to use force to prevent the occupation of the recently surveyed land now ready to be sold.<sup>32</sup> Immediately militant hostility to Te Whiti revived. In Southland a pro-Government paper called for the end of tolerance and announced that Te Whiti's action had "completely discredited" the Government's policy of moderation.<sup>33</sup> In Taranaki the settlers became dangerously excited: they demanded arms, and began sending sheaves of violent telegrams to Wellington. Atkinson's response was equivocal: he armed the settlers and then begged them to be calm. Under the circumstances, arming men who were on the verge of hysteria was irresponsible, and was at least as likely to provoke a war as any action of Te Whiti's. On the other hand, Atkinson had been a frontier settler himself during the Maori Wars and had an instinctive sympathy with his constituents' fears: to him it was unthinkable that every adult male in the area should not be given arms to defend his farm and his family.<sup>34</sup>

On 24 September he wired his frantic constituents: "Shall send up by Stella [the Government steamer] on Monday sufficient arms to arm all settlers...Important to avoid everything likely to produce panic".<sup>35</sup> By 27 September, however, he was becoming alarmed at the frenzy in

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31. According to Fieldhouse, Maoris had been moving to Parihaka since June 1881.

32. Fieldhouse, *H.S.A.N.Z.*, vol. 10, no. 37, p. 40.

33. *Southland Times*, 21 September 1881, p. 2.

34. The farmers seem to have been quieter than the people of New Plymouth. Rolleston said that all the panic was in New Plymouth. See below, p. 128-129.

35. H. A. Atkinson to A. Standish and Others, 24 September 1881, R - A mss., vol. 43, pp. 477-478.

New Plymouth and telegraphed Henry Richmond:<sup>36</sup> "Do your best to allay excitement. Am satisfied no reasonable probability of natives making immediate hostile movement. We are increasing the Constabulary by about 300 men and shall I hope in a few days have settlers on both North and South fairly organised. Very important not to give our enemies an opportunity of saying that Taranaki people are creating a scare or fomenting a disturbance for sake of expenditure which I am sorry to say there are only too many people willing to believe".<sup>37</sup> On the same day he sent another telegram to some of his constituents, assuring them that there was no likelihood of immediate hostilities and asking them to do their best to allay "the natural excitement among settlers".<sup>38</sup>

At the same time Atkinson was badgering Rolleston for action. Hall had obtained £100,000 for military expenses on 24 September, and Atkinson wanted to know what Rolleston was going to do with it. Rolleston took a more jaundiced view of the Taranaki populace than Atkinson and was unwilling to arm them. Atkinson assured him: "there is no panic impulse that I know of but natural uneasiness which can only be removed by satisfying the men among these settlers who know as well as you or I what ought to be done that we are really providing for any contingency & not only talking about it - ".<sup>39</sup> Rolleston reported from Parihaka "There is no panic on the spot. One settler only a new chum sent in his furniture & wife yesterday quite unnecessarily - The newspapers & New Plymouth people making quite a scare - I am satisfied that there

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36. H. R. Richmond: brother of J. C. and C. W. Schoolteacher of considerable local consequence in New Plymouth. His second wife, whom he married in 1871, was a daughter of Robert Parris.

37. H.A. Atkinson to H.R. Richmond, 27 September 1881, Ibid., p. 483.

38. H.A. Atkinson to J. Davidson, A. Standish and Others, 27 September 1881, Ibid., p. 481.

39. H.A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, September 1881, Rn. mss., box 4.



is no preparation among the Maoris for fighting. They are very busy cultivating which does not look like war - ".<sup>40</sup> Indeed Rolleston was rapidly becoming impatient with Atkinson and the New Plymouth people. He telegraphed Hall to say "The idea that I am talking & not doing as expressed euphemistically in Atkinson's telegram is incorrect - I am not going to be driven into foolish movements to please New Plymouth & its newspapers - ".<sup>41</sup>

Rolleston, Hall and Atkinson were by now treading heavily on one another's toes. Rolleston and Atkinson were increasingly at loggerheads, and both were appealing to Hall. "Surely some confidence must be placed in me here with much better means of knowing than can be in Wellington,..." Rolleston telegraphed furiously on 23 September. "I did not know that Atkinson was acting Defence Minister & do not think that while I am in this district there should be any orders given or correspondence go on of which I am not cognizant. Finally if you share the want of confidence which you say Atkinson feels you have only to say the word & be relieved at once - ".<sup>42</sup>

Hall and Atkinson met Rolleston at Opunake on 30 September. All Fieldhouse says of this meeting is that they met "to define the terms to be offered to Te Whiti".<sup>43</sup> Hall's account carries a different implication -

At a meeting at Opunake between the Premier, Rolleston & Atkinson it was agreed that Te Whiti and Tohu must be arrested unless they agreed to submit to the Govt, that troops sufficient for the purpose must be collected, that, if necessary, Parihaka must be surrounded, & everything be got ready for a short &

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40. W. Rolleston to H. A. Atkinson, 27 September 1881, Ibid.

41. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 27 September 1881, Ibid.

42. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 28 September 1881, Ibid.

43. Fieldhouse, H.S.A.N.Z., vol. 10, no. 37, p.



sharp campaign if unfortunately hostilities should ensue - Rolleston was allowed to make one last personal effort to bring the prophet to reason, but meantime the increase of the Constabulary & the invitations to the Volunteers was proceeded with - Sometime after this Bryce was asked to rejoin, as the most suitable man to carry out these plans, & he proved himself to be so; but if he had never existed the plans would have been carried out all the same.<sup>44</sup>

The three had clearly decided that this was to be Te Whiti's last chance. For almost a year he had spurned the Government's overtures, and the Ministry had moved towards a settlement without his consent. If the meeting planned for 8 October between Te Whiti and Rolleston failed, as Ministers obviously expected it would, then Rolleston would relinquish Native Affairs to Bryce. This had been settled on 24 September, and they knew that Bryce's return was tantamount to a declaration of war.<sup>45</sup>

On 8 October Te Whiti refused to admit that the Government had title to any of the land in question, nor would he recognise the West Coast Commission.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, he did not seem to want open war and appeared to be about to go stubbornly ahead with his old tactics of non-violent resistance. Atkinson and Rolleston were nonplussed. "I think you are quite right in thinking Te Whiti does not want war and that we shall have to arrest fencers to bring matters to a head", telegraphed Atkinson, "but it seems certain judging from Te Whiti's tone to you that they will arrest some of our people if we make arrests and then war or something very like it will be inevitable". He thought they should warn Te Whiti that his fencers would be arrested

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44. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 17 June 1881, H. mss., vol. 10, pp. 161-162.

45. Fieldhouse, H.S.A.N.Z., vol. 10, no. 37.

46. Ibid.



so that he could not accuse them of treachery when the arrests were made.<sup>47</sup>

An end to the crisis had become a matter of political urgency. The Hall Government had gambled on a moderate policy and lost; no nineteenth century New Zealand Government dared incur the stigma of cowardly behaviour towards the Maoris, because the hysteria which had possessed Taranaki could spread elsewhere if it were not checked.<sup>48</sup>

Bryce was already weeping crocodile tears for Atkinson. He expressed worry at the Government's procrastination to Rolleston, who was chiefly responsible for it: "I feel particularly anxious on Atkinson's account as I feel that a failure to secure his election would be a calamity to the Government the House and the country."<sup>49</sup>

The whole Cabinet was called to Wellington where, between 14 and 18 October 1881 they decided on definite steps to subdue Te Whiti. When the devious and unco-operative Sir Arthur Gordon returned unexpectedly<sup>50</sup> from Fiji on 19 October he was presented with a fait accompli. Te Whiti was to accept the reserves recommended by the West Coast Commission within two weeks; if he refused he would be arrested. Ministers hoped and expected that Te Whiti would refuse. On 25 October Cabinet instructed Hall to find out from Bryce, who had already gone to Parihaka, under what circumstances Te Whiti's arrest might be necessary, so that the

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47. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 9 October 1881, Rn. mss., box 5.

48. See N. McMaster, "Te Whiti and the Parihaka Incident", unpub. M.A. thesis, Wellington, 1959, passim. This is an emotional and biased account, but it conveys a fair impression of the widespread eagerness to see Te Whiti suppressed by force, pressure which the Cabinet resisted until October 1881. e.g. the New Zealand Herald, 1 October 1881: "It matters not what may be Te Whiti's intentions, or how pacific they may be. He is a living threat and nuisance and it is lawful and just to suppress him". cit., Ibid., p. 100.

49. J. Bryce to W. Rolleston, 12 October 1881, Rn. mss., box 5.

50. For a full account of Sir Arthur Gordon's return and its circumstances see Fieldhouse, H.S.A.N.Z., vol. 10, no. 37.

opinion of the Crown Law Officers could be obtained.<sup>51</sup> An indication of the popularity of the new coercive policy was that only at this point did the Taranaki Herald decide to endorse Government policy. "The natives appear as troublesome as ever", it said on 27 October, "but they now are dealt with by a firm hand...There is no argument so potent with natives as force to give effect to declared intentions".<sup>52</sup>

Hall "jotted down an idea formed at a distance" for Bryce's guidance, which indicated the new frame of mind in Wellington.

1. When once you have proceeded to Parihaka don't leave it - Reestablish a camp & if necessary a redoubt there - At once take possession of all arms & ammunition you can find.
2. If no active resistance offered, be content with arrest of Te Whiti and as many [one word illegible here] men as possible.  
Order all strangers to go to their homes, and if necessary make them go; they are trespassing on Crown Lands - Prevent them from returning.
3. If actual hostilities commence you know better how to carry these on than I can tell you. But I would send warning that all Natives found out of certain defined localities after a certain date will be considered as in arms against the Govt, & treated accordingly - Then set to clear the whole forest across to the Railway, and destroy the cultivations at Parihaka.
4. In any case pull down all the fences recently erected on the seaward side of the road, & burn the material. This will give the volunteers<sup>53</sup> something to do -

On 5 November 1881 in the middle of the Egmont election campaign Te Whiti's fourteen days were up. Bryce marched into Parihaka with

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51. Cabinet Minute, 25 October 1881, H. mss.

52. T.H., 27 October 1881, p. 2.

53. 1000 armed men were recruited in little more than a week, and the Armed Constabulary was doubled "without any difficulty". Hall told Bell that these forces were needed against 800 Maoris "for humanity's sake. We are anxious to make such a display of force as will convince these poor infatuated people of the utter hopelessness of resistance and so avert a collision" - J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 3 November 1881, H. mss., vol. 9, p. 240.

54. J. Hall to J. Bryce, 2 November 1881, Ibid., pp. 210-211.



1,700 men, read the Riot Act, and arrested Te Whiti, Tohu and Hiroki; 14,00 other Maoris were arrested or dispersed; Parihaka was destroyed. Bryce and Atkinson acted highhandedly and probably illegally as they charged about the area confiscating weapons and destroying cultivations.<sup>55</sup> By meeting Bryce's force on 5 November with active co-operation, and by welcoming them to Parihaka, Te Whiti made the Government look ridiculous; so that "what should have been the successful climax of the Parihaka crisis became a farce".<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the arrests of Te Whiti's followers and the rest of Bryce's actions were rendered illegal since he had not been obstructed by the Maoris. Neither Te Whiti nor Tohu was ever tried. They were taken to the South Island, whence they were allowed to return in 1883; the other prisoners were released in May 1882. The Government were fairly magnanimous about punishment: public opinion would have supported far more drastic measures than those recommended by the West Coast Commission, but the Ministry had conspicuously failed to follow public opinion over the Parihaka incident, even to the extent of letting Bryce go at a time when Cabinet vacancies were embarrassingly hard to fill. They did not yield to the public at this point. As the Commission had suggested, each of the two major reserves was reduced by 500 acres for non-compliance. "I don't know the particulars but am quite clear as to the principle I should go to work on -" wrote A. S. Atkinson, "that is, to make the deductions from the Reserves & the re-confiscation as nearly nominal as I could...the very least that would be accounted a taking at all - and even that I would see was mere property - not any

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55. See McMaster, pp. 119-120.

56. Fieldhouse, H.S.A.N.Z., vol. 10, no. 37, p. 45.

bit precious to them from its associations - they know they are beaten, & now you want them to settle down contented".<sup>57</sup>

This is more or less what happened. When he returned from the South Island in 1883 Te Whiti rebuilt Parihaka as a European-style village, and further trouble in the area existed mainly in the imaginings of the settlers. On 4 June 1885, for example, Atkinson met some of his constituents near Parihaka, who complained of minor provocations at the hands of Maori farmers and professed to see in these incidents signs of future trouble. Atkinson gave them no encouragement. He promised that he would see that there were enough police in the area to give both Maoris and Pakehas the protection of the law, but he advised the latter "as good settlers" to be as forbearing as possible. In the case of small annoyances, he said, "the feeling ought to be the same as with a white neighbour, except that you should extend more consideration".<sup>58</sup>

The 1881 session had finished on 24 September and members went home to fight a general election. Hall was momentarily afraid that the vacuum caused by the lack of political issues would be filled by Grey's brand of radicalism. He told Bell on 5 November that while Grey was personally very unpopular, even in the Auckland area, and was expected to come back to Wellington with a much reduced following, "the seed he has sown is bearing fruit - in the Towns ultra-radicalism is rampant - & as New Zealand has now got everything there is to give, in the shape of 'liberalism' except Confiscation of property, candidates for popular favour are now going in for that, in the shape of a 'progressive Land Tax.' up to a shilling in the Pound on the value to sell, which is

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57. A. S. Atkinson to H. A. Atkinson, 21 January 1882, A.mss. Tu., 13B.

58. T.H., 4 June 1885, p. 2.



simply more than the land will produce. In the country districts rather more soberness will prevail - but it is a black look out -".<sup>59</sup> But he had ceased to think so by December: in the letter he wrote to Bell on 1 December he was expecting a majority of members to be returned as Government supporters, and gloated over predictions that Grey's utter collapse would be the most striking feature of the results.<sup>60</sup>

In Egmont the issues were the Government's handling of the Parihaka dispute, and public works. Atkinson pandered to the taste of the electorate as far as he could,<sup>61</sup> and it was particularly necessary to do so because a significant number of voters felt that the Government had been too patient with the Maoris. On 1 December Atkinson held a meeting of electors at Opunake where the vote of confidence in him was lost. But he was never in any real danger. Most of the voters probably agreed with the Taranaki Herald when it appealed for the return of the sitting members, who were known in the House, and begged the electorate not to allow small grievances to rob the province of power in Wellington.<sup>63</sup> When the Egmont votes were counted Atkinson was found to have almost two thirds of them, and his excited supporters hauled his buggy through New Plymouth in triumph.<sup>64</sup> The results were as follows:

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59. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 5 November 1881, H. mss., vol. 50, pp. 149-150.  
 60. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 1 December 1881, Ibid., vol. 9, pp. 289-291.  
 61. e.g. at Carlyle, 3 November 1881: "Whatever the consequences [of marching on Parihaka] were, the present condition of affairs could not be permitted to continue. (Cheers). The Government having the Colony at its back, would enforce law and order. (Cheers). As to Public Works, the Government would prosecute them with as much vigor as the finances would permit, and he hoped before many years to see the railway carried through to Auckland. (Hear, hear.)" - T.H., 8 November 1881, p. 3.  
 62. Ibid., 2 December 1881, p. 2.  
 63. Ibid., 7 December 1881, p. 2.  
 64. Ibid., 10 December 1881, p. 2.

	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>Hutchison</u>
Hawera	193	82
Carlyle	153	103
Normanby	37	46
Kakaramea	14	28
Woodville	7	2
Manutahi	29	15
Manaia	61	35
Opunake	23	30
Stratford	38	18
Omata	112	2
Oakura	27	8
Otato	47	9
Mangawhero	<u>16</u>	<u>8</u>
	<u>757</u>	<u>386</u>

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Both the other sitting members in Taranaki, Kelly and Trimble, were returned, each with about the same proportion of the votes as Atkinson.

The Ministerialists were returned with an adequate majority; and among the Opposition the Auckland faction which supported Grey was reduced, while the number of South Island Opposition members increased. Thus Grey's position was weakened, and he lost <sup>the</sup> leadership of the Opposition to W. Montgomery. Hall summed up the overall results on 29 December:

Except in Otago they have turned out well. There the antisquatters cry of the Stout element has done us a good deal of harm -...On a close examination it the result is not quite so decided - There are too many railsitters to make matters pleasant, but upon a very moderate estimate, and you know I am none of your sanguine partisans, I think the following is correct at present -

Ministerial supporters	46
Probable do.	3
Opposition members	35
Probable do	2
Independent	<u>8</u>
	94
Speaker	<u>1</u>
	<u>95</u>



...The remarkable part of the story is the diminution of Grey's influence, and the disappearance of the so-called Middle or Ormond party - The absence of Ormond - Reader Wood - Ballance - Wakefield and one or two other would be leaders in a new combination will make such a combination difficult; and so Grey still poses as leader of the opposition, the chances of a capsize are not great. Still, the position is too evenly balanced to be good for the country, and makes it difficult for me to leave my Post, as I am most anxious to do. <sup>66</sup>

In spite of Grey's efforts, and Hall's spasmodic, self-conscious timidity, there was not much evidence that "the mob" was indeed ready to be incited against those "with something to lose", especially at a time when the depression seemed to be lifting, and the Treasurer was promising lower taxes and good times ahead. Hall's Deputation Book recorded deputations which he received at this time and bears evidence of the continued preoccupation of the country with purely mundane matters. On 26 January 1882 he was at New Plymouth where he met a deputation of citizens led by Mr. Kelly, who wanted the line between New Plymouth and Auckland to be surveyed and a Maori Land Court opened at the Mokau; the Waste Lands Board came, and asked for £3,000; Mr. Kelly returned with some more citizens who wanted a railway station built for New Plymouth; a Mr. Standish complained that insufficient horseboxes were provided on railways. On 19 February 1882 Hall was in Auckland where some citizens from Hunua asked that slips be cleared; a Mr. Hirst petitioned for a road to open up his land; and Onehunga citizens wanted money for road maintenance. In February, on a visit to Northland, Hall received the Mongonui County Council who asked, among other things, for a new road and a registry of births, deaths and

marriages at Kaitaia; some citizens of Kaitaia wanted £600 for a road; the chief Te Pohipi wanted employment for his son; John Williams asked about reburial of the dead from the Northern War; and the Whangarei railway committee wanted more railway.<sup>67</sup>

This relative calm was rudely shattered in April 1882 by Hall's resignation. Both Hall and Atkinson left accounts of the crisis,<sup>68</sup> and their versions substantially agree, except that Hall's, contained in a very long letter to the sympathetic F. D. Bell, is copiously detailed, while Atkinson's is comparatively brief. Hall had asked his colleagues to let him resign for reasons of health in 1881; but they had persuaded him to stay, first until after the elections, and then for some time after them "as there was no knowing what Sir Arthur Gordon might do".<sup>69</sup> Hall's doctor had told him that he would be able to carry on as Premier until the end of the 1882 session, but only if there were no worrying Cabinet quarrels. Hall told this to Atkinson, who went to Auckland to consult Rolleston, Bryce and Whitaker. He saw the three, and Whitaker telegraphed to Hall that they had no differences which would be likely to disturb the Cabinet.<sup>70</sup> "but it so happened that very recently Bryce had, in several instances, taken action in important questions without that consultation with his colleagues which I [Hall] thought ought to have taken place. In allusion to this in telegraphing to Whitaker in Auckland I mentioned to him that I 'was not sanguine

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67. Hall's Deputation Book, H. mss.

68. Hall's in: J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 19 April 1882, Ibid., vol. 10, pp. 120-136, Atkinson's in: H. A. Atkinson to E. Wakefield, 11 April 1882, R - A mss., vol. 43, n.p.

69. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 19 April 1882, loc. cit.

70. H. A. Atkinson to E. Wakefield, 11 April 1882, loc. cit.



serious differences might not arise unless Bryce turned over a new leaf.<sup>71</sup> This tactless reply to Whitaker's telegram, which was meant for him privately, arrived while the four were at dinner, and Bryce, who finished first, translated it from cipher. He flew into a rage and immediately telegraphed his resignation.<sup>72</sup> Rolleston also sent a message which Hall interpreted as a resignation, but which he was told later, had not been so intended.<sup>73</sup>

Hall himself felt that if he had been willing to continue as Premier, he would have allowed Bryce to resign, as he had in January 1881, and could easily have mollified Rolleston.<sup>74</sup> He may have been exaggerating his own powers of persuasion, but in any case, at this stage he had no intention of making any attempt to hold the Cabinet together. He added his own resignation to the two received, the rest of the Cabinet followed suit; and Hall forwarded the whole batch of them to Christchurch to the Governor, who was delighted to receive them.<sup>75</sup>

Atkinson travelled post haste to Wellington, sweeping up his eldest son, Dunstan, on the way. "They both burst in upon a supper party at Uncle Arthur's<sup>76</sup> and made great excitement," reported Anneliz Richmond. "After they had eaten a great deal and told how bad weather had prevented their getting along Dunstan was despatched to us for the night - Father,<sup>77</sup> Uncles Arthur & Harry talked politics till 1 o'clock..."<sup>78</sup> On 8 April

71. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 19 April 1882, loc. cit.

72. H. A. Atkinson to E. Wakefield, 11 April 1882, loc. cit.

73. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 19 April 1882, loc. cit.

74. Ibid.

75. H. A. Atkinson to F. Whitaker, 15 April 1882, R - A mss., vol. 43, n.p. carries this implication. D. K. Fieldhouse, however, disagrees. See "Autochthonous Elements in the Evolution of Dominion Status: The Case of New Zealand", J.C.P.S., vol. 1, 1961-1963, p. 105.

76. A. S. Atkinson.

77. J. C. Richmond.

78. A. E. Richmond to [unknown], 11 April 1882, H.M.W.A. mss.

Atkinson telegraphed Bryce, who was waiting in Auckland. He said that he had found Hall very much shaken by the contretemps. He had telegraphed the news of the Cabinet's resignations to Sir Arthur Gordon and asked the Governor to return to Wellington; but Gordon refused to move during Holy Week and Hall felt too ill to travel to Christchurch, so he had sent the formal resignations down by telegraph.<sup>79</sup>

Atkinson and Hall then advised Gordon to send for Whitaker<sup>80</sup> "as a provisional arrangement pending such action by our party as would determine who their permanent Chief was to be".<sup>81</sup> On 9 April, nevertheless, the Governor telegraphed Hall to say that he had sent for Grey. Fox's advice was also sought. Grey left Kawan as soon as he received Gordon's invitation; he arrived in Auckland on 9 April: "The steamer for the South left the next day, but he took precious good care to miss it," said Hall maliciously.<sup>82</sup> Grey was trying to assemble a party which would allow him to form a viable Ministry, and while he desperately canvassed for support, the Governor, who had finally arrived in Wellington, waited for him.

As soon as he landed in Wellington Gordon had visited Hall and had tried to extract from him some reason other than ill-health for his resignation; but Hall would give none. The Governor, by calling for Grey against Hall's advice to send for Whitaker, had landed himself in a constitutional quagmire. His relations with the Hall Ministry and

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79. H. A. Atkinson to J. Bryce, 8 April 1882, R - A mss., vol. 43, n.p.  
80. Fieldhouse, in J.C.P.S., vol. 1, differs from Atkinson here. He says that the resignations were formally presented by W. Johnston and T. Dick and that they advised Gordon to send for Whitaker.  
81. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 19 April 1882, H. mss., vol. 10, pp. 120-136.  
82. Ibid.



with Bryce in particular had been bad since April or May 1881;<sup>83</sup> and when Ministers' resignations arrived Gordon abandoned caution. Instead of sending for Whitaker who, he knew, would have re-formed the Hall Ministry, complete with Bryce but omitting Hall, Gordon sent for Grey, hoping to get an entirely new Cabinet.<sup>84</sup>

As soon as the news that Grey had been sent for leaked out a public outcry arose,<sup>85</sup> led by the Government newspapers, and Gordon began to reconsider the wisdom of his action. He visited Hall again and tried to smooth things over, assuring Hall that Grey had simply been called to give information, not to be invited to form a Government. "He said that with a new Parliament in which each side claimed to have a majority, he felt bound to hear each side".<sup>86</sup> Hall would give him no help. He pointed out that his, (Hall's) party was united, while the Opposition was not; and that it was common knowledge that the Opposition had been trying for some time to rid themselves of Grey's leadership. Gordon admitted the truth of all this, but disagreed when Hall asserted that as the party in power, his faction had a constitutional right to the first invitation to form a Government.<sup>87</sup>

Grey saw Gordon, and then the Governor returned to Hall with the news that he had decided not to call upon Grey to form a Ministry. They then haggled over whether the invitation should be extended to

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83. See Fieldhouse, R.S.A.N.Z., vol. 10, no. 37, p. 37.

84. H. A. Atkinson to F. Whitaker, 15 April 1882, R - A mss., vol. 43, n.p. cf. Fieldhouse in J.C.P.S. vol. 1, p. 106.

85. "When this was first reported out of doors it was considered to be a hoax", wrote Hall spitefully - J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 19 April 1882, H. mss., vol. 10, pp. 120-136.

86. Ibid.

87. Ibid.

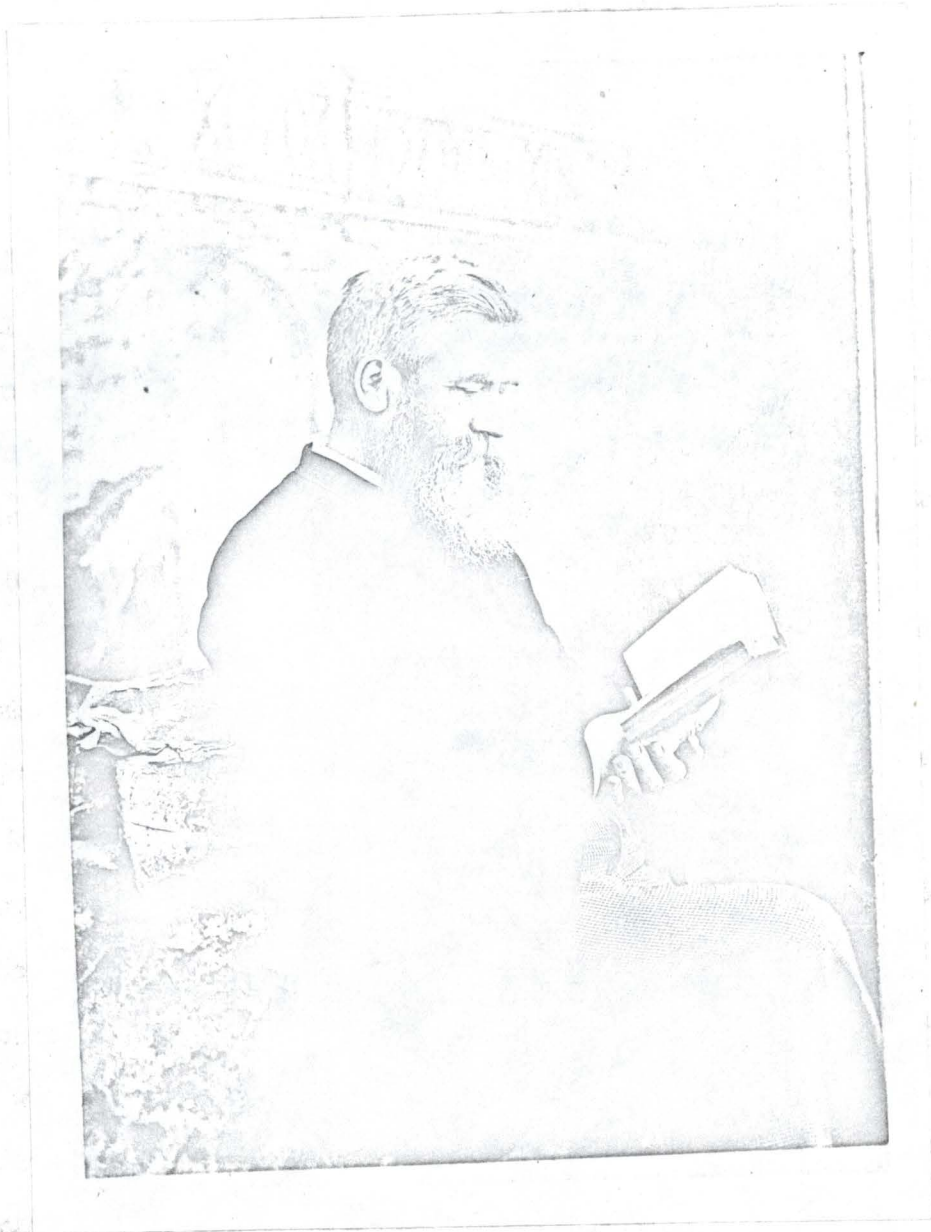
Atkinson or Whitaker; Hall insisted on his original advice being accepted, and with nice symbolism the Government steamer "left the same night for Manakau to bring.../Whitaker/ down and take up Grey".<sup>88</sup>

"I have done my best to keep Sir Arthur Gordon out of rows, and to get him out of them, but now I have done with him....There cannot fail to be a nice shindig when the House meets," wrote Hall in pleased anticipation.<sup>89</sup>

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88. Ibid.  
89. Ibid.





Sir Harry Atkinson in middle age

CHAPTER SEVEN : 1882-1884.

The unusually large numbers of uncommitted members, or "railers", who came to Wellington for the 1882 session<sup>1</sup> reflected widespread dissatisfaction with the stolid, parsimonious Hall Ministry. But political prophecies were non-committal because while Whitaker's Government was expected to proceed along the same careful lines as its predecessor, Grey was still in Parliament and it was not clear until the House met how many members would follow him. It seemed improbable, in view of the contretemps in April 1882<sup>2</sup> that he could turn the Ministry out; but it also seemed unlikely that he was weak enough to be dislodged from the nominal leadership of the Opposition - or that if the House refused to accept Whitaker, another Cabinet could be formed without Grey.

There were not enough men in the House who were sufficiently desperate for office in 1882<sup>3</sup> to try to turn Whitaker out until they could see a chance of getting in without Grey.<sup>4</sup> Yet Whitaker was not greeted with enthusiasm, especially since Atkinson would have to lead the Ministry in the Lower House. Whitaker was a Legislative Councillor, but in any case he could seldom be induced to leave his Auckland law firm to come to Wellington.<sup>5</sup> Hall expected "a good deal of in and out work" before members resigned themselves to Whitaker's rule.<sup>6</sup>

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1. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 6 October 1882, H. mss., vol. 10, p. 254.

2. See above, pp. 138-142.

3. Although J. Sheehan tried hard. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 6 October 1882, loc. cit.

4. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 20 April 1882, H. mss., vol. 10, p. 150.

5. A comment on Whitaker's reluctant acceptance of the Premiership is made in: E. C. J. Stevens to E. Stafford, 1 May 1882, cit. A.M. Evans, "A Study of Canterbury Politics in the Early 1880s With Special Reference to the General Election of 1884", unpub. M.A. thesis, Canterbury, 1959, p. 218.

6. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 20 April 1882, loc. cit.



When Parliament met on 9 May 1882 it was regaled with an unusually optimistic Speech from the Throne.<sup>7</sup> The Governor spoke of "the renewed and well-founded confidence which exists as to the commercial prospects of the Colony,...the disappearance of distress among the working-classes, and...the general increase of the revenue". Renewed prosperity justified a more energetic public works policy, settlement would be advanced by using leasehold tenure, and legal and judicial reforms would be introduced. It looked very much as if Whitaker was prepared to respond to the Colony's mood and push ahead with an active policy, conscious that if he did not do so he might be dismissed.

On 17 May Atkinson asked his brother Arthur to come over from Nelson to help with the financial statement.<sup>8</sup> But in June, despite Arthur's help, Atkinson had made himself ill by over-work. "I am slowly recovering, but the Dr will not allow me to deliver the Financial Statement as I proposed, much to my regret," he wrote on 13 June.<sup>9</sup> When he did deliver it, on 16 June 1882, he was still unwell. "I was very queer once or [twice] but pulled through and was no worse I am nearly right now", he reported on the twentieth.<sup>10</sup>

He was highly pleased with the statement itself.<sup>11</sup> Savings on estimated expenditure for the year 1881-1882 were £49,759; excess revenue was £190,520; there was a credit in the land fund of £11,360. £935,508 had been spent on public works, yet there was enough money left in the public works account to go on at the 1881-1882 rate for almost

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7. P.D., 41, pp. 4-6.

8. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 17 May 1882, R - A mss., vol. 7, p. 43.

9. H. A. Atkinson to J. L. Coster, 13 June 1882, Ibid., vol. 43, n.p.

10. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 20 June 1882, Ibid., vol. 7, p. 43.

11. See P.D., 41, p. 5.

another year. Savings bank and life insurance receipts had risen and the total surplus was over £200,000. All this seemed to Atkinson to vindicate his belief, expressed in 1879, that both the depression and deficit of that year were "temporary and remediable"; and he was convinced that the 1882 surplus demonstrated the efficacy of his prescription of rigid economy and sufficient taxation which had restored the colonial finances "in a remarkably short time to a thoroughly sound condition".

Atkinson halved the property tax and said that even with the tax at a halfpenny in the pound he expected a surplus of £100,000 in 1883. He had inquired into the incidence of direct and indirect taxation and was convinced that it bore fairly upon the whole community. In order to make this clear to the House he divided the total population into three groups: 312,346 wage-earners paying an average of 16/6d p.a. per family in indirect taxation, but no direct tax, with higher amounts for single men (£1.0.9d) and single women (19/4½d). Then there was an intermediate group who did not call themselves wage-earners in the census, but who did not pay property-tax; these paid about £2.13.3d a head. The third group, 68,445 people paid the property tax as well as indirect taxation. Their taxes came to about £6.8.6d each. To the end of his taxing career Atkinson remained convinced that "the public burdens are borne with as much ease as their extent will permit" through a combination of tariff and property tax.

Atkinson concluded the financial statement with the welcome news that he intended to borrow £3,000,000 over the next three years. He saw this new loan as part of the policy he had pursued since 1879, not



as a departure from it: "and as prudence and economy, and a cautious and well-considered advance in public works as funds became available, was our rule then and has been since, so it should be now and in the future".

This Budget was probably the most popular that Atkinson ever delivered. Hall praised it,<sup>12</sup> and even greedy Taranaki was pleased with its member. The Taranaki Herald congratulated him on his "pleasant and interesting Financial Statement".<sup>13</sup> Atkinson told his brother that the statement "had been very well received and my speech afterward in which I talked to Grey and company appears to have given more satisfaction than any I have delivered for years. The House and especially new members, were very much taken with it it is said to have strengthened us a good deal".<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless the Budget could not by itself make the Whitaker Government secure. The danger of the Opposition coalescing remained, and was heightened because the Ministerialist ranks had not solidified, and would not do so until the Government explained where the new loan was to be spent. But on the whole, the £3,000,000 had a mellowing effect<sup>15</sup>

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12. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 17 June 1882, H. ms., vol. 10, pp. 185-186.

13. T.H., 19 June 1882, p. 2.

14. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 20 June 1882, R - A ms., vol. 7, p. 43.

15. "We are in a very placid mood - The news of Vogel's being on his way out has created wonderfully little comment - People ask what he is coming for & are generally told that it is about his Land Company affairs, which are considered to be in a bad way - Probably he thinks the time opportune for making Financial & Public Works proposals, after pushing his own claims". J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 17 June 1882, H. ms., vol. 10, pp. 186-188.

and for the rest of the month members abandoned themselves to the traditional colonial pastime of courting the Minister of Public Works.

On 10 July 1882, while members were still awaiting the public works statement, Atkinson explained his national insurance scheme to the House. In June he had told members that private charity would fail to make adequate provision for the care of the sick and the indigent, and that the responsibility of caring for its citizens fell upon the State. This, he said, was "one of the great problems of the age...which, though happily not so urgently pressing upon us as upon older communities, where the distribution of wealth is at present much more unequal, is still one it behoves us as the founders of a nation to grapple with, and to the best of our ability to solve without delay".<sup>16</sup>

The origins of his ideas cannot be traced very precisely, but he seems to have read Henry George, Malthus, and Musgrave's theory of the middle man.<sup>17</sup> He was also aware of American political economists. At the end of 1881 he ordered eight books, mostly from the Harvard press, including works on tariff policy, currency management, and the systems of land tenure.<sup>18</sup> In introducing his national insurance scheme, Atkinson said that it was based upon an idea put forward by the Reverend Mr. Blackley, a Hampshire clergyman, which Atkinson had modified. F. W. Frankland, a journalist on the staff of the New Zealand Times probably helped draft the proposals of 10 July 1882.<sup>19</sup> The long speech<sup>20</sup> in which Atkinson propounded his solution to the problem of

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16. Atkinson, 16 June 1882, P.D., 41, p. 533.

17. Atkinson, 10 July 1882, Ibid., 42, pp. 183-184.

18. R - A. mss., vol. 43, pp. 575-576.

19. F. W. Frankland to H. A. Atkinson, 18 July 1882, Scholefield Papers, vol. 2, p. 512.

20. Atkinson, 10 July 1882, P.D., 42, pp. 183-189.



poverty was the most emotional he ever delivered, and of all his projects this was the most radical and the worst received.

The recession, which he thought had passed by 1882, had revealed an appalling amount of want, and a serious lack of resources to cope with it. The root of the problem, Atkinson explained, was uneven distribution of wealth which enabled comparatively few families to take adequate precautions against economic disaster; and even in prosperous times there was a need to provide for the sick, the indigent and the aged. In England the levying of a poor rate had by no means solved the problem, and it had thrown the heaviest burden upon the middle classes. Atkinson believed he had devised a more efficient, more dignified, and less expensive system for New Zealand. The principles on which he based his proposals were similar to those on which he based his taxation: there was to be a close connection between benefits and expenses, and the cost was to be borne by all those who would benefit in proportion to their ability to pay. This, to Atkinson, was individuality and independence, and the fact that in a new country where few immigrants brought very much capital with them, only the State could run such a scheme, did not deprive it of these attributes.

He saw forces at work in late nineteenth century society which were too strong for individuals to oppose unaided, and he had no qualms about using the State to advance the prosperity of individuals to rescue them from squalor. In his 10 July speech he said:

We see malign influences and agencies at work in all old countries which seem to be producing more and more destitution as the nation advances in material prosperity. In other words, as the aggregate of wealth increases so does the unevenness of its distribution....After very carefully watching this matter it seems to me that these agencies are gradually extending their

baneful influence over this colony, and that the state of things which I have described is present here, and increasing in intensity....The only effectual remedy against pauperism seems...to be not private thrift or saving, but co-operative thrift or insurance, and that to be thoroughly successful... must be national and compulsory.

Benevolent institutions, hospitals, and the existing system of government-subsidised charitable aid were, Atkinson said, "temporary palliatives", and workmen's benevolent societies, while admirable, reached too few people.

As a substitute for the laissez faire panacea, private thrift, Atkinson proposed a compulsory levy to be collected by employers. For this he had constructed complex scales to extract from every working man and woman about sixty-six pounds from the age of sixteen until they reached their middle twenties when payments would normally slacken off as other responsibilities took over. Benefits would be paid according to need; these too were based upon a complex scale: - sickness benefit for single people between eighteen and sixty-five, fifteen shillings weekly; for a married man, one pound, two and six; for a widow with one child, fifteen shillings, increasing according to the number of children under fifteen to a maximum of thirty shillings. Orphans were to receive an allowance of ten shillings weekly until they were three years old, and then six shillings until they were fifteen. (Atkinson said this was because babies required more care than children.) The old would receive ten shillings weekly from the age of sixty-five.

Atkinson envisaged the use of land rents from his leasehold schemes to help support widows and orphans - using the radical notion of the land as a national endowment. The State would pay the contribu-



tions due from the poor, the disabled and the insane, unless their relatives and friends were willing to contribute on their behalf. One other class was likely to cause difficulty, the genteel poor, who could barely maintain themselves "in the station they think they should occupy", and who would be unable to pay national insurance premiums without "going into trade". Atkinson gave the last group summary treatment: "For these persons I think this House can feel no sympathy whatever. I think one of the great banes of our race is the idea that honest trade is degradation. We, as a Legislature, should give no encouragement to such a class notion; and the sooner people of this class, if they are not able to pay, turn their hands to something useful and profitable, the better for themselves and for the country".

His national insurance proposals involved Atkinson in an explanation of his view of the role of the State in a new country:

I entirely disagree with writers of the Herbert Spencer class<sup>21</sup> who would confine the functions of Government simply to police duties. I would ask, what is the meaning of civilisation but combination;<sup>22</sup> and what is the meaning of a State but that we all band together to do certain things and promote certain ends that we desire? In this country the Government has already done many things which fifty years ago the greatest Radical would probably have declared quite beyond the functions of Government. We have State railways, State telegraph, State post office savings-bank, and...State education, all of which in their turn have been declared entirely beyond the proper functions of Government, and ruinous to the independence of the people who adopt them. But I will point out this fact: that nothing can be done nowadays without combination....if we can promote the well-being of the people, - if we can really strike a fatal blow at pauperism, - then this matter is clearly within the proper functions of Government.

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21. See R. Hofstadter, Social Dominism in American Thought, Boston, 1955, pp. 40-42 for a brief account of Spencer's theories. J. C. Richmond is clearly a Spencerian.
22. cf. Stout. See Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 170-176.

Thus Atkinson held that the ideal legislative criterion was the public good. Constitutionally, such action could have dangerous repercussions, but Atkinson, in what came to be an indigenous political tradition, thought that if a job needed to be done then it should be done. The significance of the action taken to do it, he left for philosophers and historians to puzzle over.

National insurance met with a chilly reception. Members were waiting for the public works statement, and did not intend to be distracted by Atkinson. They appear to have thought that the sooner his scheme was out of the way the better. W. Montgomery complained that sickness benefits would create a nation of malingerers, and that any benefits at all would "sap the principle of self-reliance among the people".<sup>23</sup> Sir George Grey first detected a conservative plot among land-owners to free themselves from the poor-rate, and then, becoming excited, moved from conservative conspiracies to communist plots. National insurance, he said, was "a blow at Christianity itself. It is a blow at the family. It is a plot to make every single individual a part of a great communistic society...the worst Communist in France <sup>24</sup> never came forward with a proposal of this nature".<sup>25</sup>

Colonel Trimble approved of national insurance in principle but thought payments and benefits were unrealistically high.<sup>26</sup> F. J. Moss, a Greyite, said that Atkinson's scheme was designed to levy enormous sums from the poor which should be raised, instead, through a land tax.<sup>27</sup>

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23. Montgomery, 10 July 1882, P.D., 42, p. 191.

24. 1882 was the year of the Paris Commune.

25. Grey, Ibid., pp. 192-196.

26. Trimble, Ibid., pp. 197-199.

27. Moss, Ibid., pp. 199-200.



Richmond Hursthouse, Atkinson's nephew, but not a Ministerial supporter, applauded the scheme.<sup>28</sup> W. Hutchison feared it would make New Zealanders into "political invertebrates, without backbone and without vigour" and reminded members that man does not live by bread alone.<sup>29</sup> J. Sheehan feared an influx of immigrant paupers as soon as the scheme was set up.<sup>30</sup> R. Turnbull believed it a device "to relieve property of its rightful burdens".<sup>31</sup>

Newspapers were not very fulsome either. The Taranaki Herald pretended to be "extensively bored" by Atkinson's "lecture", and did not print a summary of his speech.<sup>32</sup> F. W. Frankland saw to it that the New Zealand Times published some articles; but he was pessimistic about their impact. He told Atkinson, "I fear the feeling in various sections of the community is likely to be bitterly opposed to the whole plan, especially with the bait held out by Sir George Grey, Mr Moss etc. of charging the landlords with the maintenance of the poor".<sup>33</sup>

Atkinson's friends regarded national insurance with sceptical tolerance. They thought the notion too radical ever to be realised. Hall told Bell that the 10 July speech was "worth your reading & I should very much like to know what you think of it - Here the prevailing opinion seems to me [be?], that the scheme would be a very good one - if you could carry it out -".<sup>34</sup> Atkinson received a few letters, mostly critical. "The principal object I have in view is to secure the

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28. Hursthouse, Ibid., pp. 290-292.

29. Hutchison, Ibid., pp. 292-293.

30. Sheehan, Ibid., pp. 293-296.

31. Turnbull, Ibid., pp. 296-297.

32. T.H., 11 July 1882, p. 2.

33. F. W. Frankland to H. A. Atkinson, 18 July 1882, A. mss. Tu, 14.

34. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 15 July 1882, H. mss., vol. 10, pp. 194-196.

independence and improve the condition of the working classes and so to extinguish pauperism," he explained to one correspondent. "... nothing is further from my intention than to drive anyone from the Colony or to demand a premium from the wage earning class which cannot be paid".<sup>35</sup>

More sensational than Atkinson's speech was the scene at the end of it when both Grey and Montgomery rose in response to the invitation to the "leader of the Opposition" to reply. They were called to order by the Speaker, and eventually Montgomery<sup>36</sup> took precedence. Grey's speech, when it came, was full of abuse not only of Atkinson, but also of Montgomery. Hall was cheered by this spectacle, which he thought augured well for Whitaker's Government. He told F. D. Bell that "the two sections [of the Opposition] hate each other more & more every day, & at present it is said neither would support a reduction [sic.] moved by the other - What a position for old politicians to occupy! -"<sup>37</sup>

Discipline within the Ministerialist ranks, however, was not firm. Hall suspected internal divisions in the Cabinet were persisting. The House was hostile to Bryce, and it resented Whitaker's absence.<sup>38</sup> Atkinson, also, was disquieted by the fissiparity of his following - but he blamed the instability of Government ranks upon the lack of a belligerent Opposition: "it is the...absolute want of order, backbone, and courage in the Opposition - which has rendered Government...very difficult, if not almost impossible".<sup>39</sup>

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35. H. A. Atkinson to J. Armitage, 17 July 1882, R - A mss., vol. 43, n.p.

36. He had been elected leader of the Opposition three or four times, but Grey did not recognise him. See J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 15 July 1882, loc. cit.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Atkinson, 1 August 1882, P.D., 43, p. 322.



The public works statement, delivered on 11 July did not satisfy everybody, but it distributed discontent impartially enough to avert the danger of shattering the government group along provincial lines.<sup>40</sup> In August 1882 the Opposition tried to revive the radical-conservative cries which had failed to attract the electorate's attention in 1879. It accused Atkinson of taxing the poor for the relief of the rich. This approach never failed to enrage him, especially when it was couched in general terms and no alternative proposals were suggested. On 2 August he said "anybody who knows anything about the habits of the working classes knows that throughout the colony, in the various suburbs, everywhere, they are gradually acquiring small freeholds, gradually acquiring property and raising themselves up to the position of that despicable class, the property class; and anybody who looks at it will see that it is going on all over the colony, and it is a matter for great rejoicing. But, as to the representation that this class is suffering undue taxation, I say there is no foundation for it".<sup>41</sup>

The Ministry was, nevertheless, losing ground, if not because of particularist excesses, nor indolence, then because of its reformist preoccupations. On 7 August the Taranaki Herald demanded a "bold, vigorous, progressive" policy: "we can only look on and regret that men cannot find something more profitable to occupy themselves with than the discussion of 'fads' over which so much time every session is wasted".<sup>42</sup>

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40. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 15 July 1882, H. mss., vol 10, p. 194.

41. Atkinson, 2 August 1882, P.D., 43, p. 89.

42. T.H., 7 August 1882, p. 2.

The paper was referring to the national insurance proposals of 10 July and Rolleston's Land Bill of 7 July. The latter contained provision for selling land on perpetual lease with periodic revaluations. Debate on it raged from 14 July until 12 September. The Lower House passed it on 28 August; but it was held up in the Legislative Council which consented to pass it only when clauses to provide leaseholders with a right of purchase had been added.

Rolleston had favoured leasehold, a tenure which would slow down the alienation of land and preserve the colonial resources, for years. Atkinson was a recent, but enthusiastic, convert.<sup>43</sup> During his Premiership Hall had successfully held leasehold at bay<sup>44</sup>, but his erstwhile lieutenants persuaded Whitaker to agree to it as soon as Hall resigned.<sup>45</sup> In the early seventies Atkinson saw no need for the State to interfere in the land question, but in 1878 he conceded that settlement was retarded by lack of capital. At that stage he saw deferred payment as a remedial measure. By 1882 he was prepared to go further and supported leasehold as an alternative to the freehold. Leasehold, like deferred payment, enabled a man to set up a farm without a large initial expenditure, but the original 1832 Bill went further than this when it provided for the State to perpetually retain its title to the land.

After four years of depression Atkinson was anxious to share out New Zealand's resources. The leasehold was essentially a preventive

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43. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 6 October 1882, H. ms., vol. 10, p. 259.

44. Montgomery, 23 May 1882, P.D., 41, p. 21.

45. Atkinson, Ibid., p. 23.



measure - to get men on to the land before they were ground down by the return of bad times. In 1862 the frontier seemed to be contracting, opportunity to achieve personal prosperity was not as obvious as it had been a decade earlier, for instance. Moreover the revenue raised through leasing land meant that some profit from the land percolated back to the whole community. Atkinson is a poor example of a rabid leaseholder: he did not make long speeches about the land as a national endowment, or about land nationalisation as a social panacea, but he did see the 1882 Bill as a necessary palliative measure and fought fiercely for it in Cabinet and in the House.

Rolleston, the didactic Canterbury squatter, and Atkinson, the Taranaki farmer, may have seemed unlikely allies, but in fact they had many similarities. Both held themselves aloof from the busy intrigue of politics: Rolleston because he was<sup>3</sup> rather arrogant intellectual of cultivated tastes/who allowed his contempt for the bread and butter bargaining of New Zealand politics to be unpopularity obvious;<sup>46</sup> and Atkinson because he was preoccupied with administrative detail and with working out his own solutions to the social questions which concerned him. They shared a loathing for wordy political theorising which was exacerbated by their common scorn for Grey. Each took pains to emphasize his pragmatic attitude to government. Rolleston told the Papanui electors in 1879 that he "felt that administration was the first, the second, and the third requirement of good government, and to be

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46. Bohan, "The General Election of 1879", p. 105.

preferred far before the preaching of policies".<sup>47</sup> This view was very close to Atkinson's.

Rolleston and Atkinson had not always been allies. Rolleston, a past Superintendent of Canterbury, had been a zealous provincialist, and his splenetic opposition to the 1876-1877 Atkinson Government<sup>48</sup> was because it had abolished the provinces. Bitterness over abolition, however, was surpassed by mistrust of the Grey Government. Rolleston remained in opposition 1877-1879, where he became reconciled to Atkinson.<sup>49</sup> They were both landowners who managed their farms personally, and they identified with the working settler rather than the gentleman squatter. At a meeting in Lyttleton on 24 August 1879 Grey alleged that the Opposition wished to legislate only for the benefit of the "ruling class" to which they all belonged. Amidst a tremendous din Rolleston stood up in the body of the hall and gave Grey the lie. He said that he himself was no land monopolist: "he owned a bit of land and worked it, and...it was not a very profitable undertaking...were public men political loafers because they were poor men? What was wanted was honesty". And he singled out Atkinson also as another who should not be a victim of Grey's attack.<sup>50</sup>

E. Bohan states that there were no criteria which placed Greyites on one side in the land question and the Opposition on the other during the 1879 election.<sup>51</sup> But, while party divisions were too inchoate to appear, even at elections, in a coherent form, there were radical

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47. Lyttleton Times, 20 August 1879, cit., Ibid., p. 107.

48. He voted with Iarnach to bring Atkinson down on 8 October 1877.

49. Bohan, p. 5.

50. Lyttleton Times, 26 August 1879, cit., Ibid., pp. 109-111.

51. Ibid., p. 293.



and conservative members of both Houses. Hall, for example, habitually drew a distinction between "the mob" with their spokesmen, Grey, Sheehan and others, and "those who have something to lose".<sup>52</sup> Hall, Stevens, Ormond and others saw themselves as spokesmen for the latter group. Many politicians oscillated between the two extremes. Rolleston did so, for example, and so did Whitaker. Atkinson seems to have been considered a reliable spokesman for rural, if not explicitly conservative interests, in the seventies; but by 1882, at the latest, his erstwhile friends had come to distrust him as too much on the side of "the mob"<sup>53</sup>. Many conservatives rejected him in 1882 after the national insurance and leasehold proposals. The rest did so in 1888 when he raised the tariff as an accompaniment to retrenchment.<sup>54</sup> He was, indeed, a radical rural Liberal, too early to be compatible with the younger men who came to power in 1890; too radical for his own rural contemporaries; and cut off from his radical urban contemporaries by mutual suspicion and antagonism.

Hall, Atkinson's former colleague, was appalled by the 1882 Land Bill and spoke against it.<sup>55</sup> J. C. Richmond, Atkinson's brother-in-law, wrote to Rolleston about the Bill:

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52. e.g. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 18 April 1881, H. mss., vol. 8, p. 287.  
53. See J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 6 October 1882, Ibid., vol. 2, p. 259.  
54. See K. Sinclair, "The Significance of 'the Scarecrow Ministry', 1887-1891", R. Chapman and K. Sinclair, eds, Studies of a Small Democracy, Auckland, 1963, pp. 102-126.  
55. Hall said that the leasehold provisions of the Bill were opposed "by 5/6ths of the Govt supporters, and 3/4ths of the House - ... I d'ont believe that even Ministers themselves except Rolleston & Atkinson are really in favour of the proposal". J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 15 July 1882, H. mss., vol. 10, p. 197.

I agree heartily in your aims so far as I - and perhaps you - understand them and have thought much on the land question... as affecting the condition of the less fortunate part of mankind, and only differ in the more limited expectation I am able to arrive at of good to be obtained by direct Government interference which seems to me to be as hopeful as wattle dams in the bed of the Rakaia or Waimakariri; the remedy for the ills we all see being very slow and including a moral revolution which false hopes translated into hasty action will only postpone to a more distant date.<sup>56</sup>

Parties coalesced to some extent over the Land Bill, since it was treated as a party question. But the Opposition remained irreparably divided into Greyites and Montgomeryites. They would not combine to present a no confidence motion, but they both did their utmost to obstruct legislation. Atkinson met these tactics by refusing to bring in contentious Bills. Parliament virtually stagnated from the end of August and into September. Even public works were dull since the £3,000,000 loan was to be raised in three annual gobbets of £1,000,000 at a time. Hall told Bell that "coming on the market often & in dribblets may be a disadvantage but it is worth it to be able to say to clamorous supporters 'We hav'nt got any money & c'ant get any -'".<sup>57</sup>

The Government was relieved when Grey left Wellington before the end of the session.<sup>58</sup> Atkinson rushed his financial legislation through with unseemly haste. "It has always been Atkinson's theory that, to carry Bills, you should keep them back as long as possible - ", complained Hall. "He has carried this too far this year - Fancy the Pub Works Estimates, amounting to £1,798,000, received from the

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56. J. C. Richmond to W. Rolleston, 5 September 1882, Rn mss., box 6.

57. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 12 August 1882, H. mss., vol. 10, p. 204.

58. For a summary of the scurrilous rumours about Grey's sudden departure see J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 10 September 1882, Ibid., p. 214.



Governor yesterday afternoon, & passed through the same evening."<sup>59</sup>

Atkinson was prepared to treat the House in this way because he believed that self-government was best exercised through local administrative units such as road boards, where quite direct influence could be brought to bear on local affairs by individual citizens.<sup>60</sup> The House of Representatives was, he thought, so subject to particularist pressures that no estimates presented there could be considered impartially. Every alignment in an appropriations debate was a complex and delicate compound of quid pro quo agreements. Believing, therefore, that under these circumstances debate would simply facilitate obstruction, Atkinson preferred to impose his estimates, which he was convinced were fair to the Colony as a whole, upon the House.

The 1882 estimates were fairly lavish, and alarmed Atkinson's former friends. Hall feared that "Atkinson curious compound that he is is the last man to actually curtail expenses";<sup>61</sup> and he thought that the change in public opinion towards increased expenditure was being catered for too freely. The fear of higher taxation, as the price of increased spending, was beginning to rouse more conservative members in 1882, although they did not act until 1888. Hall estimated that "a large proportion of the Govt Supporters"<sup>62</sup> are very dissatisfied at the present course of events - & especially at the lavish Estimates - but at present they have no remedy."<sup>63</sup>

By the end of 1882 the Ministry had fallen foul of almost everyone

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59. Ibid., p. 216.

60. See above, p. 25.

61. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 10 September 1882, H.mss., vol. 10, pp.217-218.

62. This feeling was present even within the Cabinet, R. Oliver to J. Hall, 14 February 1883, Ibid., box 19.

63. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 10 September 1882, Ibid., vol 10, pp. 217-218.



of importance. The financial and public works statements had not been generous enough to inspire continuing loyalty, while experiments in social reform had alarmed many of the Ministry's supporters, most notably Hall. "I used to tell.../[Atkinson] he was got by Grey out of Vogel; looking to this year's expenditure there must be a cross of Macandrew in him".<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Atkinson, Rolleston and Bryce, all leading Ministers, were unpopular in the House; and all three preferred to neglect the personal and political manoeuvres so essential to the management of nineteenth century New Zealand Parliaments, with their high proportion of independent members. Should a popular leader emerge from Opposition ranks the Ministry's prospects would be bleak.

In November, E. G. Wright, the member for Ashburton, an advocate of cautious expenditure,<sup>65</sup> was passed over as Minister of Justice in favour of E. T. Conolly from Pictou. Whitaker realised that Canterbury would bear a grudge for Wright's sake and proposed to call the 1883 session together late in the year, so that Canterbury would have time to cool down, and to reduce Canterbury freight rates immediately before Parliament assembled.<sup>66</sup>

In March 1883 Atkinson stumped the country on behalf of national insurance. The tour was a resounding disaster. Until 1882 he had been known only as a Treasurer, with a severely practical bent, and

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64. J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 6 October 1882, *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 259.

65. Hall said Wright's appointment would have "comforted" uneasy supporters "by assuring them that the expenditure wd be more prudent than the appropriations". J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 2 November 1882, *Ibid.*, vol. 10, p. 296.

66. F. Whitaker to H. A. Atkinson, 22 January 1883, A. mss. Tu, 16.



his incursion into the field of social reform was viewed with dark suspicion. The Christchurch Telegraph said "had we not known that the speaker was a practical politician of many years' standing, we should have thought that we were listening to a doctrinaire. As it is we can only look upon his speech as a red herring drawn across the track of practical politics".<sup>67</sup> The Dunedin Herald,<sup>68</sup> and the Hawke's Bay Herald<sup>69</sup> reached the same conclusion. Ballance's paper, the Wanganui Herald said of Atkinson's proposals "as well might we expect the quack's rhubarb at the fair to cure the numerous ills to which the flesh is heir".<sup>70</sup> The Evening Post thought national insurance was dangerously revolutionary, but this was "perhaps not surprising when it is recollected that the Cabinet includes Mr. Whitaker as well as Major Atkinson, those two gentlemen being about the most through-going [sic.] Radicals in all New Zealand".<sup>71</sup> The Christchurch Press was one of the few papers to express lukewarm interest, but this was probably as much to spite the Lyttleton Times as for any other reason.

Atkinson's raids upon the Canterbury land fund had made him personally unpopular in the South Island, and he was persona non grata in Auckland, the Greyite stronghold. His gruff, straightforward political personality, and his preference, when speaking, for the particular rather than the general, was not well suited to mass political meetings. The Taranaki Herald summed up the tour as follows: "we have no doubt the people of the Colony will obtain a

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67. cit., T.H., 26 March 1883, p. 2.  
68. Ibid.  
69. Ibid.  
70. Ibid.  
71. Ibid. Hall, also, thought Whitaker a radical. Lyttleton Times, 2 December 1905, H. mss., vol. 42, p. 147e.



better knowledge of Major Atkinson, and appreciate him as a careful financier and the utterer of well-ascertained facts; but as a popular agitator, or as one likely to arouse people on great questions, he will not succeed. ...He is not emotional, nor very excitable, except in the excitement produced by antagonism, which is more pugnacious than poetic".<sup>72</sup>

Atkinson made another attempt to revive national insurance on 10 July 1883. He became very angry when his speech was received with scant attention and ribald laughter. Vainly he tried to reduce members to silence by scolding them. "Honorable members may laugh at me as much as they like. I am serious in the matter, and I am going, I hope, by means of a definite proposal, to get the people and the House to discuss one of the greatest questions of the age. The poor of the land have got to be dealt with, and the difficulty of the present inequalities in the distribution of wealth. Let honorable members laugh as they will, those questions must be dealt with seriously..."<sup>73</sup> As an attempt to educate public opinion the speech was a fiasco.

In March and April 1883, a flagrant case of dummyism occurred in Otago. The culprits were the Cargill family. They had obtained their licenses legally, and Rolleston although sure that they were infringing the spirit of the law, was perplexed about how to deal with them. Atkinson felt no such doubt. He had a thorough-going pragmatist's scorn for the principles and precedents that could be created by arbitrary extra-legal action in a just cause; and he urged

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72. T.H., 28 March 1883, p. 2.

73. Atkinson, 10 July 1883, P.D., 44, p. 434.



Rolleston to stop the Cargills' licenses. "I quite see the difficulty of proving the case," he telegraphed to Rolleston, "but I do not think for a moment that this should prevent us taking decided action".<sup>74</sup>

In April he repeated his plea.<sup>75</sup> But Rolleston was not to be lured from constitutional procedure. On 8 April he telegraphed, "issue of Licenses rests with Board by Law - I do [not] see how Govt can properly go outside the Law. It would be a monstrous precedent to exercise an arbitrary power on mere suspicion - such a power might be wielded to do acts of grossest oppression";<sup>76</sup> and there the correspondence ended.

Atkinson returned to Taranaki in May and met his constituents in New Plymouth on 1 June 1883.<sup>77</sup> He told them that he had "very little to reveal" about forthcoming Government policies, but promised that Ministers "would continue to work on the liberal and progressive lines hitherto pursued by them". The work done in the forthcoming session, he said, would depend on the nature of the Opposition. "Until it was known what course Sir G. Grey would take, it was impossible to predict what shape the work of the session would take". These remarks carried an ominous implication. The Ministry seemed to hope that Grey would drive members across the House into Ministerial ranks, rather than that the Government would win them by presenting an energetic programme.

Anxious observers were further mystified by a more than usually uncommunicative Speech from the Throne on 14 June 1883.<sup>78</sup> On 27 June Atkinson delivered his financial statement.<sup>79</sup> Revenue had

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74. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 3 March 1883, Rn. mss., box 6.

75. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 7 April 1883, Ibid.

76. W. Rolleston to H. A. Atkinson, 8 April 1883, Ibid.

77. The meeting is reported in T.H., 2 June 1883, p. 2.

78. P.D., 44, pp. 1 - 3.

79. Ibid., pp. 213-224.



exceeded his 1882 estimates, and expenditure had been kept below them, so that there was a surplus of more than £30,000. Atkinson had raised the first instalment of the new loan more cheaply than any previous loan, and took great pleasure in such evidence of London's confidence. "So long as our finance is prudently managed, and the affairs of the colony are so conducted as to promote settlement on its lands and the development of local industries, there is no reason to doubt that our credit will be well maintained, and that we shall be able to obtain from time to time, upon reasonable terms, such moneys [sic.] as may be required to carry on our public works". He was pleased, also, to announce an increase in the number of small savings bank accounts and insurance policies - "a very fair criterion of the continued improvement which is taking place in the cultivation of habits of economy and prudence amongst the people".

Atkinson went on to express concern at the restricted range of New Zealand's exports. Gold was a declining staple, and the pastoral industry, while valuable, was not adequately filling the gap. Other exports had been steadily increasing, but their value was negligible in comparison with the two major staples.<sup>80</sup> Equally disquieting was the declining value of total exports per head. In 1868-1872 it had been £55.2.5; in 1873-1877 it was £52.13.9; and in 1879-1883 only £45.11.5. A third of total exports receipts went to pay interest on loans. And the gap between imports and exports had widened appreciably since 1880:

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80. The value of exports (per male adult) other than wool and gold was:  
1868-72 - £8.10.2. 1873-77 - £9.5.7. 1879-83 - £14.6.8.



	<u>1880</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1882</u>
exports:	£6,352,692	£6,060,866	£6,658,008
imports:	£6,162,011	£7,457,045	£8,609,270

Atkinson asked for self-restraint on the part of importers until the gap had closed, reckoning that the depression would not lift until a trade balance was achieved.

The property tax would be increased by a farthing in the pound in 1883. Atkinson hoped for another £30,000 surplus and impressed upon the House that it would have to be extremely careful of expenditure since the margin allowed for extra spending was so small. Such circumspection was unpopular. In his home province one newspaper thought the Government was "a drag on the progress of the country" and wondered "whether timidity is not more dangerous than boldness".<sup>81</sup> On 6 July it greeted the public works statement with similar queries.<sup>82</sup> Others attacked Atkinson for framing estimates which required increased taxation to meet them.<sup>83</sup>

On 31 July members settled down to their more or less annual feast of corruption charges. The 1883 charges were presented by J. M. Dargaville, member for Auckland West, who accused Atkinson of being "a willing tool" in the hands of Whitaker and a ring of Auckland speculators, centred on the Bank of New Zealand, which directed colonial financial policies for its own benefit.<sup>84</sup> Since Whitaker was in the Legislative Council, the task of replying to Dargaville devolved upon

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81. T.H., 29 June 1883, p. 2.

82. Ibid., 6 July 1883, p. 2.

83. e.g. Turnbull, 31 July 1883, P.D., 45, p. 198.

84. Dargaville, Ibid., pp. 194-197.



Atkinson. He refuted Dargaville's specific charges, but considered the matter serious enough to warrant the forming of a select committee to inquire into the allegations.<sup>85</sup>

Atkinson was extremely angry. The late nineteenth century was full of stories of mysterious "rings" who were alleged to be making vast profits. Further research is needed to establish whether or not these profits were in fact made, and to trace the ramifications of the organisations concerned. It may well be that such research will show that many charges of corruption were based upon extraordinarily slight evidence and arose out of the foetid, gossipy atmosphere of the little cities of depressed Victorian New Zealand.<sup>86</sup> The constant rumours of corruption in high places, however, had a bad effect on the Colony's reputation abroad. Thus Atkinson was justifiably wroth when forced to sit through a performance like Dargaville's. He suggested that allegations should always be investigated,<sup>87</sup> hoping that the need to produce evidence would act as a deterrent to irresponsible slander-mongers.

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85. Atkinson, 3 August 1883, *Ibid.*, p. 304.

86. Some work in this direction has already been done by H. J. Hanham and D. A. Hamer. A more detailed study (of Auckland investors) is at present being undertaken by R. C. J. Stone which seems to suggest that "ring" was a cant phrase, and a convenient political stick with which to beat one's opponents. The composition of these "rings", the extent of their members' financial involvement, and the reasons why the partners operated as a group, were rarely known. Certainly by 1882 they were often motivated not so much by expectations of great profits, as by the possibility of escape from the unpleasant financial consequences of earlier rash investments.

87. Atkinson, 7 August 1883, *P.D.*, 45, p. 351.



Meanwhile, as members talked, the country at large was impatient for a return to "practical politics". On 16 July the Taranaki Herald said that "the public is sick of the incessant senseless chatter of the members".<sup>88</sup> It said so again on 7 August.<sup>89</sup> The Legislative Council had been starved of Bills early in the session, and feared a deluge at the end, as in 1882. J. C. Richmond complained to his daughter that there was "not method enough in the Government".<sup>90</sup>

During the 1883 session both Government and Opposition had acted timidly, fearing that a tactical error might give Grey the chance to slip into office.<sup>91</sup> The House had received innovations with distaste, and as it became more and more confident that prosperity was at last returning, public works returned to centre stage.<sup>92</sup> As they did so, a confused anger at the unsatisfying slowness of development grew into a political factor of steadily increasing significance. The country was tired of the Ministry, and tired of the House.

Whitaker had taken the Premiership unwillingly in 1882, on the understanding that he should remain for only one session, or until the Ministry was strong enough to do without him. On 15 September, hoping that the latter condition was fulfilled, he gave up his post to Atkinson and went home to Auckland to see to his own affairs. He detested living in Wellington and had found the Premiership tiresome.<sup>93</sup> Atkinson, as was his habit, immersed himself in administrative detail during the recess.

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88. T.H., 16 July 1883, p. 2.

89. Ibid., 7 August 1883, p. 2.

90. J. C. Richmond to A. E. Atkinson, 3 September 1883, H.M.W.A. mss.

91. T.H., 8 September 1883, p. 2.

92. "The House is a disorganized Scramble for money" - J. Hall to W. Rolleston, 24 March 1883, Rn. mss., box 6.

93. F. Whitaker to J. Hall, 7 February 1884, H. mss., box 20.



He embarked upon his second <sup>94</sup> term as Premier with more anxiety than enthusiasm. The problem of finding an Auckland to replace Whitaker was refractory; he saw "many rocks ahead"; and wished, once more, for a strong Opposition to bring energy back into a dispirited and disorganised House.<sup>95</sup> The unemployed still worried the Ministry. "They are a nice lot the result of Vogel's order to Featherston in 1873, 'Send 10,000 immigrants at once'", Rolleston told Bell. "The difficulty of immigration is increased by the selfish niggardly money grubbing determination of the large holders to have no married people and no cottages and by them refusing accommodation to swaggers. However another halfpenny on the property tax will liven them up..."<sup>96</sup> Cabinet was also conscious that it had failed to satisfy demands for expenditure, and was expecting to be forced to dissolve Parliament after a short, unproductive session in 1884.<sup>97</sup>

"We are in terrible hot water all round," Rolleston wrote in April 1884.<sup>98</sup> Dunedin was incensed at a delay in building its railway bridge. An increase in the grain duty had ruined whatever shreds of Canterbury support Hall's departure had left to his successors. The East Coast was bitter at the loss of a railway through to the West Coast.<sup>99</sup> Nelson nursed a grievance over the 1881 Representation Act.

Atkinson toured the South Island in April 1884 in an attempt to repair some of the damage, but his personal unpopularity there was so

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94. Technically, it was his third, if the two 1876 Ministries are counted, but for convenience I have combined them as one, thus making the 1883-1884 term Atkinson's second Premiership.

95. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 21 October 1883, R - A mss., vol. 7, p. 44.

96. W. Rolleston to F. D. Bell, 1 November 1883, Rn. mss., box 6.

97. W. Rolleston to F. D. Bell, 29 March 1884, Ibid.

98. W. Rolleston to F. D. Bell, 8 April 1884, Ibid.

99. Ibid.



intense that he would have been wiser had he remained in Wellington.<sup>100</sup> He refused to tell the South what it wanted to hear, but instead forced it to listen to what he thought it should know. "I went boldly amongst the people, and expressed my views, and told them home truths they had not heard for many a year".<sup>101</sup> Predictably, the tour was a disaster. Atkinson was at his worst when faced by a hostile audience: he became bellicose, and his meetings grew violent. At Christchurch, for example, he held a meeting "consisting of uproarious dissent, alternated by hand to hand encounters between the speaker and individuals amongst the audience. The bandying of taunts and replies of anything but a soothing character were continuous throughout the meeting which terminated in an uproar".<sup>102</sup>

Parliament met on 6 June 1884, but Atkinson was not present. He had a serious attack of bronchitis, following a period of severe insomnia caused by overwork and nervous exhaustion. When he took his seat on 10 June his voice was inaudible and he was visibly weak.<sup>103</sup> W. J. Steward<sup>104</sup> led the attack on the Government. He poured scorn on Ministerial "fads", notably the leasehold, and accused Atkinson of keeping himself unjustifiably in power by sowing dissension among the Opposition. Steward admitted that the Opposition could not form a government if invited to do so, and called for a dissolution.<sup>105</sup>

H. A. Levestam, of Nelson, supported Steward. Richmond Hursthouse

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100. E. C. J. Stevens to J. Hall, 21 April 1884, H. mss., box 19.

101. Atkinson, 29 August 1884, P.D., 48, p. 80.

102. T.H., 12 May 1884, p. 2.

103. Ibid., 9 June 1884, p. 2.

104. Ballance's candidate, who defeated Rolleston for the Speakership in 1891.

105. Steward, 10 June 1884, P.D., 47, pp. 30-35.



pointed out that since the constituencies elected members for purely particularist reasons, an appeal to them was unlikely to produce a markedly different collection of members.<sup>106</sup> His sardonic speech was received coldly. Atkinson could not go on; Grey could not; nor could Montgomery. Steward's amendment to the Address in Reply was carried by thirty-two votes to forty-one,<sup>107</sup> but a vote on a dissolution was lost by seven to sixty-seven.<sup>108</sup> The debate dragged on.

On 12 June Atkinson rose to defend the record of the Hall-Whitaker-Atkinson Government. He told the House that 3,000 people had been settled on the land in 1883, more than in any previous year. Hall had reformed Parliamentary representation in 1881, Atkinson had continued to press Britain for an active policy in the Pacific.<sup>109</sup> Then he scathingly invited the Opposition to say "who it is they wish to be Prime Minister". They were silent. He then said that his Government's main fault was holding office in a time of low export prices, and protested that those who had left the Ministerialist ranks could not be claimed by either wing of the Opposition. F. Sutton was still a property-taxer; Joseph Petrie had left without saying why; G.B. Morris was an independent; F. A. Whitaker, Sir Frederick's son, had left because he opposed the Native Land Bill; three Canterbury members had left because of the increased grain rate, but they still voted with the Government.<sup>110</sup> Therefore while Atkinson conceded that he had lost his

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106. Hursthouse, 11 June 1884, Ibid., p. 61.

107. Ibid., p. 85.

108. Ibid., pp. 126-127.

109. See below, pp. 245-247.

110. Atkinson, 12 June 1884, P.D., 47, pp. 111-116.



majority, he refused to admit that anyone from the other side of the House could form a Government.

On 17 June he announced that Parliament would be dissolved as soon as Supply had been granted, and asked for three more days to prepare a financial statement. "Honourable gentlemen know that I have not been in a condition to do my work, and indeed I ought not to be in the House at the present moment".<sup>111</sup>

The interim Budget was presented on 20 June. It was a cautiously sanguine document. There was a small deficit of £152,112, but the second instalment of the £3,000,000 loan had sold well, and £800,000 had yet to be spent. Atkinson blamed the depression upon extravagant habits fostered during thirteen years of prosperity; and upon a disproportionate growth of distributors and middlemen in relation to the producing and consuming sectors; and, finally, upon extraordinarily low prices for wool and grain. All these weaknesses had been exacerbated by a general lack of confidence in the economy and by the slackening of loan expenditure since 1880.

None of this was very new, but Atkinson proposed remedies which were more constructive than his previous injunctions to practise self-restraint. He suggested that self-restraint should be reinforced by policies to promote closer settlement, more for the purpose of increasing the colony's productive capacity than for the more negative purpose of easing unemployment. He proposed to encourage local industries and urged people to use local products. Public works which would yield

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111. Atkinson, 17 June 1884, Ibid., p. 158.



immediate returns in revenue or productivity should be advanced rapidly. He promised that the depression would be conquered and pointed out that in some respects it had been beneficial. It provided an opportunity for colonial stock-taking, for improving the organisation of industry, and of the government agencies. "If the country and Legislature are capable of profiting by 'the uses of adversity,' our future progress as a people will more than compensate in its increased stability for whatever it may sacrifice in swiftness".<sup>112</sup>

Supplies were voted on 23 June and Parliament closed the following day. Very few expected Atkinson to return to the Treasury benches. He had administered conscientiously, but had shown a propensity for "fads", and had failed to conquer the depression.

The *Otago Daily Mail* wrote to the *Parasit* on 1 July hoping that Atkinson would join Vogel as he had done in 1877. The paper itself was torn between enthusiasm for Vogel and its old belief that an experienced member like Atkinson, whatever his political opinions, was more used than a stranger when it came to investigating every the appropriations. On 18 July and 21 July the *Parasit* heralded that Atkinson would win in Lyttelton, and on 24 July it was graciously anticipating a Vogel victory in the colony.

Atkinson was opposed by one Panther, from Canterbury, who drew most of his votes from Canterbury people who had settled on the coast.

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1. See Dr. A. H. Fisher, "The New Zealand Parliament", pp. 20-21. He noted that the vote was 10-9 in favour of Vogel.

112. Atkinson, 20 June 1884, *Ibid.*, pp. 200-206.

1. *Parasit*, 1 July 1884, p. 2.



CHAPTER EIGHT : 1884-1887.

The demise of the Atkinson Ministry was taken for granted. No one expected it to return to the Treasury benches after the election; indeed members were already guessing who would be the next Premier before they left Wellington. The most popular candidate was Vogel, who had decided for reasons of his own <sup>1</sup> to re-enter New Zealand politics. In Atkinson's own province newspapers began to contrast Vogel's "sound practical common sense views" with "the 'theoretical fads' which the 'Continuous Ministry' have of late been trying to induce the people to believe in".<sup>2</sup> On 23 June 1884 the same paper demanded a new Government "with someone at its head who is able and capable of reversing the present state of affairs".<sup>3</sup>

"An Old Settler" wrote to the Taranaki Herald on 1 July hoping that Atkinson would join Vogel as he had done in 1874.<sup>4</sup> The paper itself was torn between enthusiasm for Vogel and its old belief that an experienced member like Atkinson, whatever his political opinions, was more use than a newcomer when it came to in-fighting over the appropriations. On 18 July and 21 July the Taranaki Herald hoped that Atkinson would win in Egmont, and on 24 July it was greedily anticipating a Vogel victory in the Colony.

Atkinson was opposed by one Pantham, from Canterbury, who won most of his votes from Canterbury people who had settled on the West

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1. See D. A. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 24-97. He needed to rescue the New Zealand Agricultural Company which owed almost £8,000 in railway rates to the Waimea Plains Railway Co.
  2. T.H., 20 June 1884, p. 2.
  3. Ibid., 23 June 1884, p. 2.
  4. Ibid., 1 July 1884, p. 2.



Coast, on the lands opened up in the vicinity of Parihaka.<sup>5</sup> But even in this region Atkinson polled heavily, and won two-thirds of the total vote.

	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>Fantham</u>
Hawera	222	75
Pungarehu	11	2
Maniaia	55	44
Patea	85	65
Normanby	54	19
Stratford	78	23
Kakaramea	18	11
Otakeho	35	10
Opunake	71	53
Okaiawa	31	16
Mangawhero	20	11
Manutahi	34	19
Omata	99	8
Okato	18	22
Rahotu	14	5
Oakura	22	11
Woodville	7	9
	<u>874</u>	<u>403</u>

Colonel Trimble was re-elected for Taranaki, but the Town of New Plymouth rejected Thomas Kelly in favour of Oliver Samuel, a staunch Social Darwinist denouncer of "fads".<sup>7</sup>

The depression was, by this time, affecting the investing classes. An Inspector of the Bank of New South Wales said in February 1883, that "people of reputed good position are tumbling down on all sides".<sup>8</sup> Auckland traders were uneasy. The price of grain fell sharply at the beginning of 1884,<sup>9</sup> and men who had invested heavily in Canterbury land became desperate for new avenues of profit.<sup>10</sup> Vogel had promised to

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5. Ibid., 21 July 1884, p. 2.
  6. Ibid., 24 July 1884, p. 2.
  7. Ibid., 12 April 1884, p. 2.
  8. Sinclair and Mandle, Open Account, p. 100.
  9. Simkin, Instability of a Dependent Economy, p. 30.
  10. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 98-102.



rescue them, to banish depression with "confidence". He stood for Christchurch North and "made Canterbury believe that its interests were safe in his hands".<sup>11</sup> Atkinson's caution paled before Vogel's optimism and he could claim only thirty-two reliable followers in the new House. Taranaki, like the rest of the country, looked forward to "strong practical Government" and "sound progress" under Vogel.<sup>12</sup>

Atkinson himself estimated that his personal following in the House exceeded Vogel's by ten members, but two thirds of the House opposed the Government. Therefore he proposed to resign and await developments. Vogel was disappointed at the size of his 'tail' and had been talking of coalition with Atkinson. This, Atkinson was determined to avoid, preferring watchful opposition to unwilling co-operation. He told Arthur Atkinson that it would "require a great deal of pressure from our side to induce me to have anything to do with a Vogel Govt. after the hopes he has raised and the promises he has made. Why not come over...and have a finger in the pie?..."<sup>13</sup>

The pie was indeed interesting. On 7 August Parliament met, but was immediately adjourned until the eighth when Atkinson announced his resignation.<sup>14</sup> The House then adjourned until 14 August, and then until the nineteenth. The lack of a want of confidence division to clarify parties made the task of forming a new Ministry extremely complicated. Atkinson had deliberately placed his successors in this position and was decidedly pleased with his manoeuvre. The Atkinsonites,

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11. W. H. Scotter, A History of Canterbury. Volume III: 1876-1950, Christchurch, 1965, pp. 175-178.

12. T.H., 28 July 1884, p. 2.

13. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 27 July 1884, R - A. mss., vol. 7, p. 46.

14. P.D., 48, p. 4.



in combination with the Greyites expected to overturn the new Ministry on the Address in Reply. Atkinson told his son, Dunstan, that he would have welcomed a term in opposition for the sake of his health. He felt, too, that allowing Vogel to take the Treasury would be good for his own prestige, since he fully expected Vogel's Treasurership to be catastrophic. Nevertheless, he expected to be back in power before the end of the 1884 session.<sup>15</sup>

Vogel announced the names of his colleagues on 19 August. They were:- Sir Robert Stout, G. F. Richardson, James Macandrew, W. Montgomery, John Ballance, G. B. Morris and G. S. Whitmore. They were, said Vogel, "entirely agreed" upon all questions "within the range of practical politics" - a statement which was greeted with blank incredulity.<sup>16</sup> Moreover the House was enraged by the heavy preponderance of South Islanders in the new Government and defeated it by fifty-two votes to thirty-three on 20 August.<sup>17</sup> The Government resigned on 21 August, and Parliament was adjourned until the twenty-sixth.

On 21 and 22 August J. W. Thomson, member for Clutha, tried unsuccessfully to form a Ministry; then the Governor sent for Grey. He asked Atkinson to help him form a coalition Government in which all the work would be done by large committees. Atkinson refused: he knew that at least half his supporters would repudiate any arrangement with Grey, and he thought Grey's task was hopeless. Stout's followers

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15. H. A. Atkinson to H. D. Atkinson, 14 August 1884, R - A ms., 1884/6, box 6.

16. See D. A. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 107-108; pp. 114-116 for further details of their apparent incompatibility.

17. P.D., 48, p. 38.



would never join Grey, and he could not hope to win over more than eighteen members under any circumstances.<sup>18</sup> By 26 August Grey admitted defeat.

Atkinson was the next to be sent for. His main problem was Vogel's return to politics which had raised such high hopes<sup>19</sup> that Vogel could not be left out of any Ministry which hoped to retain power. The Atkinsonites were too few to sustain a Ministry, yet numbers of them would refuse to agree to a coalition with Vogel. The Stout-Vogel contingent, however, would accept no Cabinet which did not contain the latter as Colonial Treasurer.<sup>20</sup> After an abortive attempt to detach Stout from Vogel and form an Atkinson-Stout coalition,<sup>21</sup> Atkinson rather despondently announced a Vogel-less Cabinet to the House on 28 August. It lasted six days. The Greyites voted with the Stout-Vogel group to oust it by forty-three votes to thirty-five in revenge for Atkinson's refusal to co-operate with them on the twenty-third. Parliament adjourned until 3 September.

On 3 September Vogel announced another Stout-Vogel Government, containing a somewhat wider selection of members. It was expected to be all things to all men. Speculators looked to Vogel for relief. Radicals expected reforms from Stout. Conservatives hoped for "practical politics" and an end to "fads". Everyone wanted public works expenditure, renewed prosperity, reduced taxation and cheaper administration.<sup>22</sup> Vogel accordingly produced a financial statement

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18. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 25 August 1884, R - A. mss., vol. 7, p. 46.

19. See Burdon, Vogel, p. 167.

20. Atkinson, 3 November 1887, P.D., 58, p. 139.

21. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 25 August 1884, R - A. mss., vol. 7, p. 46.

22. See T.H., 4 September 1884, p. 2, which coolly listed these demands.



designed "to make things pleasant all round".<sup>23</sup> The property tax was halved<sup>24</sup> and would soon, Vogel promised, be abolished. Public works would be rapidly extended.

Atkinson could only expostulate vainly at such sweeping measures.<sup>25</sup> The country was entranced with Vogel's Budget. In Taranaki one paper said that Vogel was the ablest Treasurer New Zealand had ever had, and added that this financial statement had completely exposed Atkinson's financial ignorance.<sup>26</sup> J. C. Richmond mourned "the hideous demoralisation of the Assembly"<sup>27</sup> but he could find very few to join him.

Nevertheless, the mood of frenetic confidence was very fragile. By 21 October members were still waiting for the public works statement and some settlers, including those in Taranaki, began to fear that when public works came to be distributed, their district would be left out.<sup>28</sup>

Atkinson was busy at this time with family concerns. Annie Atkinson had been ill again and had returned to England for a visit. She would be away for the summer, and Atkinson, for the first time in four years, would not be tied in Wellington by Ministerial duties during the recess. After some hesitation,<sup>29</sup> he decided to go to Hurworth to be with his son Dunstan; and the largest body of his extant letters on any one subject<sup>30</sup> relates to the plans to redecorate Hurworth in readiness for the summer. Atkinson became absorbed in the problem of whether the dining room should be papered, and then,

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23. Atkinson's phrase. 19 September 1884, P.D., 48, p. 452.

24. Because Vogel and Mayne, the manager of the N.Z. Agricultural Company thought it affected land values, Hamer, "N.Z. Agricultural Company", H.S.A.N.Z., vol. 10, no. 38, p. 156.

25. Atkinson, 19 September 1884, P.D., 48, pp. 461-462.

26. T.H., 22 September 1884, p. 2.

27. J. C. Richmond to D. K. Richmond, 22 October 1884, H.M.W.A. mss.

28. T.H., 24 October 1884, p. 2.

29. H.A. Atkinson to H.D. Atkinson, 14 August 1884, R-A mss., 1884/6, box 6.

30. Except, possibly, those written during the Maori wars.



having decided that it should, in choosing the paper. He twice asked Dunstan for the dimensions of the oven so that he could take new baking tins when he went home; and new furniture was chosen with great care. "Have the corners of the table top well rounded off," he told his son, "some of the new dining tables have the corners very prettily rounded the whole end is a flat sweep the sides coming well up. Do the best you can but have the corners nicely rounded".<sup>31</sup>

In November 1884 Atkinson began to attack the social and moral evils which he considered were inherent in Vogel's policies. He protested at Vogel's arbitrary reduction of the property tax. This had upset the whole pattern of taxation arranged by Atkinson to distribute burdens evenly. He had imposed the property tax as a special tax upon the richer section of the community "with the view of equalising taxation on the various classes in the colony". By easing this imposition alone Vogel had freed one sector at the expense of the others.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, Vogel was neglecting the problem of poverty. Worse, he was encouraging others to do so, by claiming that public works would solve social problems by increasing prosperity. "This House should recognise," said Atkinson, "that our social laws are not satisfactory, and that our social state is not satisfactory; and that this great question has not only to be faced, but to be dealt with. To say that a vigorous public works policy is going to get us over these difficulties is to tell us what we shall find out, to our great grief and sorrow...

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31. H. A. Atkinson to H. D. Atkinson, 24 October 1884, Ibid., 1884/18.

32. Atkinson, 1 November 1884, P.D., 50, p. 327.



is not at all in accordance with fact".<sup>33</sup> Atkinson believed that Vogel's excessive optimism was morally and economically unhealthy. He raised extravagant hopes, and led New Zealanders to believe that they could overcome their difficulties without hard work and thrift.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from this onslaught in early November Atkinson had been fairly quiet. The negotiations of August and September had convinced him that the Stout-Vogel Government could not be replaced from the existing House; and thus the best policy for the Opposition was to leave it in power until Stout could be forced to dissolve the House. Also, he wanted to give Vogel no chance to claim that his policies had been obstructed by the Opposition. Atkinson wanted the Ministry discredited by its own acts as well as defeated. He must have derived wry amusement from reading the Taranaki Herald's praise of his "statesmanlike" conduct in Opposition, which had so greatly contributed to the success of an "exciting" and "remarkable" session. The editor concluded with the hope that Atkinson would carry his statesmanship to its logical conclusion by joining Vogel as soon as possible.<sup>35</sup>

The summer at Hurworth benefited Atkinson greatly. Colonel Trimble saw him in April 1885 and thought him "greatly improved" in health. He was quite unlike the rapidly ageing man he had been during the session. He told Trimble that he intended to continue his policy of watchful, but not obstructive, opposition. And he would be particularly alert for any sign of a split between Stout and Vogel which would offer him a chance to join with Stout against Vogel. He planned to oppose

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33. Atkinson, 8 November 1884, Ibid., p. 502.

34. Atkinson, Ibid., pp. 503-4.

35. T.H., 11 November 1884, p. 2.



individual measures, but did not envisage a direct attack upon the Treasury benches.<sup>36</sup>

The 1885 financial statement<sup>37</sup> was a tacit acknowledgement of Vogel's failure to restore prosperity. He returned to increased taxation, severe retrenchment, and talk about the need for prudence in development. The ebullient Vogelism of the seventies had worked itself out. Yet Atkinson neglected this opportunity to attack the Government. He spoke scarcely at all at the beginning of the session; indeed he was so quiet that he was alleged to be about to join the Ministry.<sup>38</sup> When he began to assert that, while free trade was the ideal system, a limited tariff nationalism was essential for new countries, he was closer to the protectionist Vogel than to some of his own followers.<sup>39</sup> His equivocal position was rendered even more interesting by rumours of an impending break between Stout and Vogel.<sup>40</sup> In 1886 Atkinson made a determined attempt to annex Stout,<sup>41</sup> and his conciliatory demeanour in 1885 may have been dictated by a fear of antagonising his prey.

On 27 August 1885, however, Atkinson abandoned this tactic and launched a direct offensive. At the beginning of the session the Government had been numerically strong, but its extreme feebleness as the session progressed had alienated a significant number of its supporters. Neither J. D. Ormond nor W. Montgomery<sup>42</sup> would attempt to turn the Ministry out, and so the duty of submitting the Opposition's

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36. Col. Trimble to W. Rolleston, 14 April 1885, Rn. mss., box 7.

37. P.D., 54, pp. 68-84.

38. T. W. Hall to J. Hall, 7 July 1885, H. mss., box 22.

39. T. Dick to W. Rolleston, 20 July 1885, Rn. mss., box 7.

40. T.H., 14 August 1885, p. 2.

41. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 144-145.

42. leading members of a middle faction. Ibid., p. 132.



policy to the House had devolved upon Atkinson.<sup>43</sup>

Having once decided to attack, Atkinson did so vigorously. On 9 September he objected to Vogel's assuming the role of the workingman's friend - he was the protector of the money-lending class.<sup>44</sup> He jeered at the Ministry's panic-stricken avoidance of want of confidence confrontations.<sup>45</sup> Vogel, said Atkinson, had not restored prosperity; nor reduced taxation. His attempt to raise the tariff had been thwarted by the House. He had increased stamp duties. His "most vicious" Local Bodies Finance and Powers Bill, intended to give unlimited borrowing power to local bodies, had been so altered in committee that it was unrecognisable. An attempt to reform the Legislative Council had failed.

Stout's record had been even worse. "He has been very busy helping all the other Ministers to do nothing, and very well he has done it; for whenever he was in a difficulty the honourable gentleman, in order to emphasize the doing of nothing, called for a division, and there was always a large majority against him, so that there should be no mistake".<sup>46</sup> Atkinson's efforts were quite unavailing. Stout and Vogel had no intention of quitting the Treasury benches until the Waimea Plains speculators had been rescued, no matter how many no confidence motions were carried against them.<sup>47</sup>

Atkinson did not tour the main centres again in the 1885-1886 recess, considering it "worse than useless". Family concerns were uppermost

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43. Atkinson, 27 August 1885, P.D., 53, pp. 270-275.

44. Atkinson, 9 September 1885, Ibid., p. 658. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", p. 98, called the Ministry a "speculators' government".

45. Atkinson, 21 September 1885, P.D., 53, p. 954.

46. Atkinson, Ibid., p. 560.

47. See Hamer "N.Z. Agricultural Company", H.S.A.N.Z., vol. 10, no. 38, pp. 154-158.



once more: he was worried about his eldest daughter, Frances Govett who had puerperal fever in February 1886. Atkinson had been asked to speak in Auckland but he would not leave Taranaki while she remained in critical health.<sup>48</sup>

Later in the year, however, he was able to speak in Auckland. He had given Rolleston a brief sketch of what he intended to say: "I certainly shall not go in for a rabid protection policy or extravagant P.Ws. [public works] I am afraid much cannot be done in the way of retrenchment I wish it could but I am looking carefully into the finance to see if it is not possible....to carry on P Ws at about £1,000,000 a year without any fuller taxation".<sup>49</sup> These views were almost indistinguishable from Stout's, a fact which did not escape the Taranaki Herald. The paper praised Atkinson's return to "practical politics" and hinted that he might well join the Government.<sup>50</sup>

In his 1886 financial statement Vogel made a desperate gesture in the direction of 1884. He remitted part of the property tax and achieved a surplus by charging some ordinary expenditure against loan money and diverting some of the sinking fund to the Consolidated Account. Desperate areas like Taranaki were still prepared to make a feeble response to Vogelism. Taranaki had been given no public works at all, but then, said the Taranaki Herald, that could only be expected when two of the province's three members were in opposition.<sup>51</sup>

The Government's performance in 1886 was no better than in 1885.

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48. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 4 March 1886, Rn. mss., box 7.

49. Ibid.

50. T.H., 13 April 1886, p. 2.

51. Ibid., 5 June 1886, p. 2.



On 13 August Stout's Representation Bill, which Atkinson cordially supported,<sup>52</sup> was lost because three Ministers voted against it. Yet Atkinson's appeals to Ministerial pride were quite useless.<sup>53</sup> Unless Stout and Vogel left office voluntarily they could not be dislodged because too few members believed that the Opposition could form a better Ministry. Coalition between Stout and Atkinson, or even Vogel and Atkinson, seemed an obvious solution. Either of these would have seemed more stable to contemporary observers than the Stout-Vogel combination. Atkinson tried very hard to lure Stout away from Vogel, but he had no success.<sup>54</sup> The House preferred the Stout-Vogel coalition to a Government which contained neither.

The 1886 session exhausted Atkinson, who continued to be depressed by his wife's ill-health.<sup>55</sup> "I have not been very well or lively," he told his son in September, "but I am now gradually coming round".<sup>56</sup> Illness increased his dislike of political organisation, and he left letterwriting during the recess to others. A. K. Newman wrote to Hall in November, welcoming him back to politics. He said that Atkinson was strong in the North Island, where he expected an overwhelming majority in 1887, but had almost no following in the South Island. Newman asked Hall to throw his prestige behind Atkinson, try to split the Canterbury vote, and win some of the Otago vote for Atkinson. He hoped that an Atkinson-Hall combination would prove fatal to Stout and Vogel. The depression had by this time broken most of the familiar political

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52. P.D., 56, p. 569.

53. Atkinson, 13 August 1886, *Ibid.*, p. 732.

54. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 147-150.

55. A. K. Newman to J. Hall, 8 November 1886, H. mss., box. 24.

56. H. A. Atkinson to H. D. Atkinson, 5 September 1886, R - A. mss., 1886/11, box 6.



patterns. In prosperous times even members who professed independence tended to be attracted into the government orbit by the hope of expenditure for their districts. When loan money was scarce these benefits were not so readily available, and the 'independents' tended to drift into opposition where they were held by their resentment at Ministerial parsimony.<sup>57</sup> Bicephalous governments had not been unknown in nineteenth century New Zealand politics, but during the mid-eighties they became almost obligatory, as politicians tried to spread the bases of political attachment as widely as possible. Members who would not follow Hall or Atkinson singly, would follow the two together.<sup>58</sup>

The Atkinsonites were extremely exasperated by their leader's inactivity in 1886.<sup>59</sup> Their dissatisfaction with Atkinson was increased by his radical tendencies, which had become more marked, not less so, with age. For some of his former supporters this increasingly articulate radicalism was his greatest disadvantage.<sup>60</sup> They therefore wanted Hall to compensate for Atkinson's shortcomings. Hall's caution would temper Atkinson's radicalism; Hall's prudence would curb Atkinson's alleged extravagance.<sup>61</sup> Atkinson's political strength in the North would complement Hall's Southern following. They hoped that a judicious combination of Atkinson and Hall would attract the wary political loyalty

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57. "This one in & that one out means a job or no job as the case may be, in this or that view of the high art of locality. How mean and degraded a politics". Col. Trimble to W. Rolleston, 18 February 1887, Rn. mss., box 7. The same trend is mentioned in J. Hall to F. D. Bell, 18 June 1881, H. mss., vol 50, p. 80.

58. A. K. Newman to J. Hall, 8 November 1886, Ibid., box 24.

59. Ibid.

60. S. M. Grace to J. Hall, 15 November 1886, Ibid.

61. M. Holmes to J. Hall, 21 December 1886, Ibid., G. M. Waterhouse to J. Hall, 21 January 1887, Ibid., box 25.



of enough members to put them on the Treasury benches and keep them there. Atkinson told Rolleston that he was pleased Hall had decided to re-enter political life and would be "willing and glad" to accept him as his chief.<sup>62</sup> On 3 January he told Hall that he was looking forward to the defeat of the Stout-Vogel Government in 1887.<sup>63</sup>

Vogel made a dismal beginning to the 1887 session when he spoke of tapering off borrowing and setting about retrenchment.<sup>64</sup> Even the Taranaki Herald was shaken by this. It had already resumed its cry for "new men...who have no 'fads' to develop or 'axes to grind'... practical and business-like men".<sup>65</sup> From this category it excluded Atkinson who had spoken to the Hawera electors in favour of federation with Australia and women's suffrage, proving himself to be "as full of 'fads' as ever".<sup>66</sup> The confusion of the House was worse than in 1886. On 27 May 1887 the Customs Duties Bill was rejected on its second reading. More important, the District Railways Purchasing Bill, which would relieve the New Zealand Agricultural Company of railway rates, had been passed in August 1886 and Stout and Vogel were ready to leave the Government benches.<sup>67</sup>

On 31 May Stout announced that he had been granted a dissolution. "The confusion in the H. of R. exceeds anything I have ever seen," wrote J. C. Richmond. "Every one is talking to his constituents or venting his wrath on his favourite political aversions. Vogel the other night in the lobby said in his soft manner holding his hands one on each side

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62. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 25 November 1886, Ibid.

63. H. A. Atkinson to J. Hall, 3 January 1887, H. mss., box 25.

64. Vogel, 10 May 1887, P.D., 57, pp. 172-187.

65. T.H., 14 April 1887, p. 2.

66. Ibid., 25 April 1887, p. 2.

67. D. A. Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 150-155.



of his mouth 'The House - the house is demoralised'".<sup>68</sup> The session ended on 10 June.

A. K. Newman, one of the Opposition's chief organisers for the 1887 election, intended to fight a fairly negative campaign, heavily emphasizing the errors of the Stout-Vogel Government. He was concerned to prevent Atkinson from framing "a flaming programme which might excite hostility".<sup>69</sup> In Egmont Atkinson faced stiffer competition than usual in the person of Felix McGuire J.P., a store-keeper from Hawera. On 15 July, at a Hawera election meeting, which lasted until after midnight, a vote of no confidence in Atkinson was carried by sixty-four votes to fifty-four.<sup>70</sup> At none of his meetings was the vote of thanks carried by more than a small majority. The Taranaki Herald explained this by a decline in Atkinson's personal popularity, exacerbated by a feeling of neglect in the province as a whole. The paper was inclined to blame Atkinson for the fact that Taranaki had had almost no public works since the fall of his Government in 1884.<sup>71</sup>

In apparent contradiction to the desire for expenditure, but in fact complementary to it, was fear of higher taxation, expressed in pressure for retrenchment.<sup>72</sup> McGuire's proposals for retrenchment were far more sweeping than Atkinson's. They included abolishing State aid to secondary schools and universities, a plank very much stressed by the Taranaki Herald.<sup>73</sup> The southern end of the electorate was incensed at

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68. J. C. Richmond to D. K. Richmond, 9 June 1887, H.M.W.A. mss.

69. A. K. Newman to J. Hall, 17 July 1887, H. mss., box 24.

70. clipping. no reference. A. mss. Tu, 247.

71. T.H., 23 July 1887, p. 2.

72. Ibid., 29 August 1887, p. 2.

73. Ibid., 2 August 1887, p. 2.

the imposition of a harbour rate, due to be collected at about election time.<sup>74</sup> McGuire blamed Atkinson for the rate,<sup>75</sup> and Atkinson feared that this would cost him the election.<sup>76</sup> McGuire's stocks fell in September when he made a poor showing at the nomination ceremony;<sup>77</sup> but the contest was still the closest Egmont had seen for many years.<sup>78</sup>

It was also a very dirty campaign, in which McGuire seemed to be getting the better of Atkinson. One of Atkinson's supporters wrote to him on 26 September offering to "show that man [McGuire] up properly". He set down for Atkinson's information a catalogue of his opponent's past and present misdemeanours. During the Maori wars McGuire was alleged to have supplied the Troops with "weevly biscuits...and grog like kerosene"; he had profiteered to the extent of £4,000; he was a notorious drunkard; he kept a mistress. "This Sir is the man who has the audacity to set up against you," wrote Atkinson's admirer sanctimoniously.<sup>79</sup> McGuire, whatever his imperfections, almost won. He trimmed Atkinson's majority to 108 votes, the narrowest margin since 1872.

	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>McGuire</u>	
Hawera	221	164	
Manaia	106	78	
Opunake	56	74	
Eltham	65	46	
Kakaramea	66	36	
Manutahi	27	23	
Normanby	67	71	
Pihama	21	26	
Okaiawa	30	31	
Otakeho	51	42	
Kaponga	20	12	
Woodville	10	19	80
	<u>740</u>	<u>632</u>	

74. H.A. Atkinson to H.D. Atkinson, 6 September 1887, R-A.mss., 1887/7, box 6.  
75. T.H., 14 September 1887, p. 2.  
76. H.A. Atkinson to A.S. Atkinson, 7 September 1887, R-A.mss., vol.7, p.50.  
77. T.H., 27 September 1887, p. 2.  
78. Ibid., 23 September 1887, p. 2.  
79. G. W. Kelly to H.A. Atkinson, 26 September 1887, A.mss. Tu, 20.  
80. T.H., 27 September 1887, p. 2.



Throughout New Zealand as a whole the election results were confused. The Stout-Vogel Government was discredited by its failure to fulfil any of the promises it had made in 1884. The depression had not been dispelled: it was far worse. Hitherto it had not affected the whole colony, some districts had escaped, but by 1887 it finally covered the whole country and was beginning to intensify. There was no district where settlers were not desperate, nor any town where unemployment was not growing serious.<sup>81</sup> Vogelism had failed to cure the economic ills of the country and thorough retrenchment was urged as a last resort.

The 1887 election was therefore generally fought on the question of retrenchment. The Taranaki Herald said in August that, "in the past the candidate who could promise to get the most money spent in his district was the favourite; but now he who promises to go in for the largest reductions is the most popular".<sup>82</sup> In the towns tariff policy was as important an issue as retrenchment, and the majority of urban members returned had pledged themselves to protection of local industries.<sup>83</sup> In Canterbury two rival political organisations were set up, one, the Canterbury Electors Association to press for retrenchment and tariff revision,<sup>84</sup> and a Political Reform Association which demanded the "absolute cessation" of borrowing and severe economies in administration.<sup>85</sup> Political Reform Associations in other centres had been set up to press for retrenchment severe enough to obviate any need for increased taxation.

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81. Sinclair and Mandle, pp. 102-106.

82. T.H., 29 August 1887, p. 2.

83. See C. Whitehead, "The 1887 General Election in Canterbury", unpub. M.A. thesis, Canterbury, 1961, pp. 9-23 for an account of the election issues in Canterbury.

84. Ibid., pp. 25-29.

85. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

The interests of social and economic sectors had moved further apart as the depression intensified, and in Canterbury, at least, in 1887 it was possible to discern "the interplay of personal, local, regional and political factors in conjunction with the beginnings of party politics".<sup>86</sup> This development, which became more marked in 1890, also accounted for, and was intensified by, the return of more young, radical, urban members and the decline of politicians of the "local notable" type.<sup>87</sup>

John Halliday and 2,000 had lost their seats and Halliday's absence, in particular, discouraged Atkinson. "What amuse me is to see what are the signs of /1887/. He has been as good as he was the year before. That Halliday was, suspicion of Atkinson was stronger than ever. His former followers considered him a failure. During the 1887 election campaign they had scornfully called him a 'chick' and his lack of success. York said that fewer than a dozen supporters had persisted in being Atkinsonites, and only one of these had accepted Atkinson's policies. York was the only one who had persisted in being a Atkinsonite and had to go to a distance to find a supporter of Atkinson. W. F. Weaver claimed that Atkinson's popularity, especially in the South, was political and not personal.

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86. Ibid., p. 165. See W. F. Weaver, 27 September 1887, ibid., p. 17. 87. Ibid., p. 178. See W. F. Weaver, 7 October 1887, ibid.

88. Ibid., 10 October 1887, ibid., p. 18.



CHAPTER NINE: 1887-1890.

Although he had been returned to Parliament in 1887 Atkinson's political future was uncertain. The Ministerialists had been decimated and Stout had lost his seat <sup>1</sup> - but when the Stout-Vogel Government resigned on 30 September its successor was not apparent. The Governor, Sir William Jervois, sent for Atkinson but Atkinson did not promise at this point to form a government. He told His Excellency that considering "the very peculiar circumstances of the colony", he would have to ascertain his chances of winning the votes of members who had been returned as opponents of the late Government.<sup>2</sup>

Both Rolleston and Bryce had lost their seats and Rolleston's absence, in particular, discouraged Atkinson. "Cant express deep regret feel what are we going to do", he telegraphed as soon as he heard the news.<sup>3</sup> With Rolleston gone, suspicion of Atkinson was stronger than ever. His former followers considered him a "socialist" and during the 1887 election campaign they had conspicuously failed to claim him as their leader.<sup>4</sup> Vogel said that fewer than a dozen candidates had admitted to being Atkinsonites, and only one of these had expressed approval of Atkinson's policies - "what was the consequence? he was considered to be a lunatic and had to go to a doctor to obtain a certificate of sanity".<sup>5</sup> W. P. Reeves claimed that supporting Atkinson, especially in the South, was political suicide, so that men

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1. Vogel, 6 October 1887, P.D., 58, p. 4.

2. Atkinson, Ibid.

3. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 27 September 1887, Rn. mss., box 7.

4. Col. Trimble to W. Rolleston, 7 October 1887, Ibid.

5. Vogel, 13 October 1887, P.D., 58, p. 28.

who wanted to be elected dared not mention him at all.<sup>6</sup> His tendency towards 'fads' was not the only reason for his unpopularity: some suspected that he would not retrench as thoroughly as they wanted him to,<sup>7</sup> because he was known to prefer a combination of retrenchment and taxation to retrenchment alone. While other politicians agreed with him here, Atkinson had, as usual, been blunter than most. Consequently, the business community, which had never approved of him, distrusted him more than ever. The rural interests, too, had come to suspect him by this time because of his refusal to adopt a free trade platform, and his adherence to the policy he had first proposed in 1879 - tariffs for revenue and for the protection of local industries. His tariff policy, however, won the limited support of some businessmen, so that while no group supported all his policies, a very wide cross-section of voters demanded root and branch retrenchment, and the towns supported an increased tariff. Most members, nevertheless, would have preferred to have these policies carried out by someone else.

The Opposition had been looking for a new leader since the beginning of 1887. Its first choice, Bryce, had lost his seat, and now the hunt was resumed, with the Political Reform Associations displaying particular energy.<sup>8</sup> These associations had been formed to pursue the cause of retrenchment without taxation. Atkinson said of them that "the zeal of these gentlemen cannot be disputed for a moment; but...it is a zeal without much knowledge".<sup>9</sup> Although the 'Skinflints'

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6. Reeves, 14 October 1887, Ibid., p. 75.

7. G. M. Waterhouse to J. Hall, 21 January 1887, H. mss., box 25; T.H., 10 October 1887, p. 2.

8. Sinclair, "The Significance of the 'Scarecrow Ministry'", Studies of a Small Democracy, pp. 145-147.

9. Atkinson, 29 June 1888, P.D., 61, p. 397.



failed to find an alternative to Atkinson, the lack of support for him was striking. Some members thought he would attempt a coalition with Stout, who would be given a seat in the Legislative Council and the Attorney-Generalship,<sup>10</sup> or that he would turn to the Vogelite remnant. Even Rolleston suspected that Atkinson might move towards Vogel as he had in 1884.<sup>11</sup> Atkinson himself had already rejected this possibility, thus winning the support of the rump of the Greyites; but he was very gloomy about his chances of forming a viable administration.<sup>12</sup>

When he saw the Governor on 30 September or 1 October 1887, he did not seem to be considering the Premiership for himself. He told him that the lack of a widely acceptable Premier was the greatest obstacle to the construction of a strong Cabinet.<sup>13</sup> He telegraphed the news of his interview to E. Mitchelson, George McLean, J. D. Ormond, E. Richardson, and Sir John Hall,<sup>14</sup> aware that they did not trust him, and added for McLean's benefit an explicit undertaking that he would not "repeat what occurred in 1884".<sup>15</sup>

Early in October Atkinson set about the task of gathering supporters. He held a series of meetings, inviting members of the Opposition and members who were pledged to retrenchment, laboriously building up a new following while he patched the rifts between himself and some of his old followers.<sup>16</sup> It was a disheartening and complicated operation, during which Vogel murmured glycerine sympathy for Atkinson's "most undignified position".<sup>17</sup> On 11 October Atkinson announced his

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10. See V. Pyke's question and Atkinson's reply, 3 November 1887, *Ibid.*, 58, p. 139.

11. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 30 September 1887, H. *mss.*, box 25.

12. H. A. Atkinson to E. Mitchelson, 10 October 1887, A. *mss.* Tu, 37.

13. H. A. Atkinson to J. Hall, 1 October 1887, H. *mss.*, box 26.

14. All these telegrams in A. *mss.* Tu, 37

15. H. A. Atkinson to G. McLean, 1 October 1887, *Ibid.*

16. Atkinson, 11 October 1887, P.D., 58, p. 5.

17. Vogel, 13 October 1887, *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Government. It consisted of himself, E. Mitchelson (Eden), T.W. Hislop (Oamaru), G. F. Fisher (Wellington East), G. F. Richardson (Mataura), and Sir Frederick Whitaker and E. C. J. Stevens from the Legislative Council.

Only Mitchelson, who had been in the 1883 Cabinet, and Whitaker, had served with Atkinson before. The others were doubtfully reliable retainers. On 24 September, for example, Hislop had allegedly told an election meeting that Atkinson was unfit to be Premier because he was vacillating and communistic. Fisher's views on education were at variance with his chief's. Fisher wanted drastic retrenchment but while Atkinson wanted some economies, such as raising the entrance age to six years, he would oppose any structural changes. The lobbies were full of rumours that Ministers' allegiance was strictly limited. Mitchelson was said to have agreed to take office only until the end of the 1887 session, or at two weeks' notice. Stevens was another who was loosely attached to his office.<sup>18</sup> The makeshift collection of Ministers was promptly labelled the "Scarecrow Ministry" and was attacked with considerable viciousness and political dexterity. But attempts to destroy the Government at this point failed because there was no clear alternative. The House awaited the financial statement with cautious hostility.

Until 1887 the depression had been regional in its impact, but now it affected the whole Colony equally, and 1887-1888 were the worst years of all.<sup>19</sup> Those who could afford to do so were leaving "in swarms,

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18. Vogel, Ibid., pp. 27-32.

19. See Sinclair and Mandle, Open Account, pp. 104-115.



like migratory rats".<sup>20</sup> The frozen meat market, which had provided one small outlet for the pastoral industry, collapsed; and this frightened investors away from the refrigeration industries, which were desperately in need of investment capital. Private capital, indeed, began to leave the Colony, and the flow of people and funds away from instead of into the new land was a sour reversal of the hopes of its pioneers.

#### Movement of private capital.

	£ million	+ inflow - outflow
1876-80	+ 2.2	
1881-85	+ 2.3	
1886-90	- 3.8	
1891-95	- 6.5	

21

On 1 November Atkinson delivered the Budget.<sup>22</sup> There was a deficit of £389,305. Alterations to the tariff were postponed until 1888 on the grounds that sudden changes were bad for trade; but the expected retrenchment was forthcoming. Atkinson outlined a four point policy to cope with the economic crisis: the immensely popular pruning knife would be applied with its concomitant unsparing hand; waste of revenue and loan money would cease; land settlement, especially of those whose farms would later be large enough to employ others, would be pushed ahead; and local industries, especially the export trades, would be encouraged.

Salary cuts would begin with the Governor who would lose an expenses allowance of about £2,500. Ministers would lose nearly half

20. J. Drummond, Life of Seddon, cit. Sutch, "The Long Depression", p. 22.

21. Sutch, Ibid.

22. P.D., 58, pp. 90-101.

spare than pay for, of making such money as we spend produce the best possible result, and of increasing and encouraging the wealth-producers of the colony".

The House gave Atkinson's Budget a mixed reception. The strong free trade, retrenchment without taxation group was relieved that Atkinson had not raised taxes, but was incensed at the idea of further borrowing.<sup>24</sup> Members who represented other than purely rural constituencies were bitterly disappointed at the postponement of tariff revision. They interpreted this as a shallow subterfuge by which Atkinson hoped to hold his following together until the recess. Dr. Fitchett, the member for Dunedin Central, went so far as to deny that retrenchment had been an election issue at all, it had been so universally popular - the issue which had interested the voters was protection.<sup>25</sup> Atkinson's attempt to fob the House off with retrenchment therefore met with an irate reception from an important section of the House.

The dissatisfied group consisted of Grey's depleted following, some remnants of the Stout-Vogel Government's urban supporters, and more junior members like S. Fish, W. P. Reeves, R. J. Seddon and J. Ward who were to reappear in Ballance's party of 1890.<sup>27</sup> These last were often advocates of thorough reform of the financial system, an end to borrowing, review of the incidence of taxation, and the overt use of fiscal policies to achieve social ends. They considered Atkinson's Budget very old-

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24. Macarthur, 18 November 1887, Ibid., 58, p. 512; D. McMillan to J. Hall, 25 November 1887, M. mss., box 26; P. Cunningham to J. Hall, 5 November 1887, Ibid.

25. Fitchett, 13 October 1887, P.D., 58, p. 49.

26. Taylor, 9 November 1887, Ibid., p. 288.

27. Sinclair, "Significance of the Scarecrow Ministry", Studies of a Small Democracy, pp. 124-126.



fashioned. "Honourable members are perhaps aware," said W. P. Reeves, "of what the usual fare at up-country stations is - damper, mutton, and tea; tea, and damper, and mutton; mutton, and damper, and tea; So it is with the policy of the honourable gentleman: there is the same charming variety - Treasury bills, loans, and promises; promises, and loans, and Treasury bills; loans, and Treasury bills, and promises".<sup>28</sup>

To the timorous, who had feared they knew not what from Atkinson, the financial statement was reassuring. The Taranaki Herald was delighted with its "business-like and sensible" tone. It rejoiced that it contained "no theoretical fads; no flaunting of a flashy or showy policy for the sake of pandering to the larger centres; no embodiment of the crotchets of any particular party".<sup>29</sup>

Atkinson managed to get his limited 1887 programme through the House without arousing an opposition which was cohesive enough to turn him out. His personal unpopularity increased during the session. He was extremely worried by the financial crisis which Vogel had bequeathed to him, and clearly impatient of political activity.<sup>30</sup> His hectoring manner was becoming notorious, and his ability to control himself when angry was noticeably deteriorating.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless his tenure of the Treasury benches became surer as the impossibility of replacing him without a dissolution was made manifest. The Government's majorities were usually obtained with the help of at least one of the three irreconcilable Opposition factions,<sup>32</sup> and underlying its apparent

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28. Reeves, P.D., 58, p. 275.

29. T.H., 2 November 1887, p. 2.

30. e.g. Atkinson, 10 November 1887, P.D., 58, pp. 311-312.

31. T.H., 29 November 1887, p. 2. Also see a particularly vicious attack upon Grey, 6 December 1887, P.D., 59, pp. 394-395.

32. G. F. Richardson to W. Rolleston, 14 January 1888, Rn. mss., box 7.

control of the House was the suspicion that unless economic conditions improved, the measures required in 1888 would include higher taxation. Many members thought that as soon as Atkinson raised taxation rates his following would split and his Government would fall. "What a splendid battlefield an Opposition has if led with ordinary skill," Ballance confided to Stout.<sup>33</sup>

Before the 1888 session began it was doubtful whether Atkinson could continue to be Premier. In January 1888 he was given the K.C.M.G., and Bryce, for one, interpreted this as ceremonial preparation for an early promotion to the Agent Generalship.<sup>34</sup> Atkinson was diffident about accepting the knighthood and wrote to Arthur Atkinson for advice. When the reply came, it was less helpful than usual. "My notion about the K.C.M.G. was (1) that it was mainly a matter of title but (2) a title has probably a real effect on the popular imagination & so is perhaps of some political value. There is also a certain suitability in you having it when several of your not not [sic.] more worthy peers have it - but the worst of it is that you can't get rid of it again when you are tired of it".<sup>35</sup> Atkinson's diffidence was still obvious on 15 May when he rose to make an embarrassed reply to the House's congratulations. He began by questioning the suitability of titles to democracies, and concluded that he did not think the K.C.M.G. was "a good thing, or in accordance with the spirit of the times". He said that he would sooner have been made a Privy Councillor of the Empire, an honour which was worthier and more appropriate for a colonial Premier.<sup>36</sup>

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33. J. Ballance to R. Stout, 3 January 1888, Stout mss., 19.

34. J. Bryce to H. A. Atkinson, 30 January 1888, A. mss., Tu, 21.

35. A. S. Atkinson to H. A. Atkinson, 24 January 1888, Ibid.

36. Atkinson, 15 May 1888, P.D., 60, p. 26.



Atkinson needed any political prestige which his knighthood might have brought him. Grumbling over the new loans went on throughout the recess. Atkinson's former friend, Colonel Trimble, told Rolleston that he was glad he had lost his seat for this saved him the embarrassment of voting against the Government with "Vogel, Reeves, Seddon & etc". Trimble could not bring himself to vote for the Ministry - he thought Atkinson's public works policy "simply atrocious [sic.]".<sup>37</sup> The Taranaki Herald clamoured for a cut in the education vote. It urged its readers to consider the "extremely bad" effects "of massing together young children of either sex, without adequate superintendence", and earnestly demanded that the entrance age be raised.<sup>38</sup> The same paper had already urged the dismissal of civil servants, on the grounds that this would be a character-building experience: "the Civil Service only tends to destroy their independence and energy. Thrown on their own resources they will strike out in a new line, which although at first may be somewhat uphill, will in the long [run], if they have anything in them, lead to independence."<sup>39</sup>

In April 1888 Atkinson travelled through the colony to inspect economic conditions in the main centres. George McLean thought that the Premier should see the universal misery of the indebted class so that he could be convinced of the impossibility of higher taxation.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile F. D. Bell was writing gloomy letters from London about the state of New Zealand's credit in "these dark & dismal days".<sup>41</sup>

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37. Col. Trimble to W. Rolleston, 21 March 1888, Rn. mss., box 7.

38. T.H., 14 March 1888, p. 2.

39. Ibid., 25 January 1888, p. 2.

40. G. McLean to J. Hall, 10 April 1888, H. mss., box 27.

41. F. D. Bell to H. A. Atkinson, 21 April 1888, A. mss. Tu, 25A.

Parliament opened on 10 May 1888. The Governor's Speech discoursed at great length in tones of tepid encouragement; promised few important measures; and did its best to muffle the news that the tariff would be raised with verbose references to the state of trade and the correction of anomalies.<sup>42</sup> It satisfied nobody. The ever vigilant Taranaki Herald called it "mere political clap trap" and lugubriously predicted a return to "the rubbishy political scientific fads with which the colony was dosed when Sir Harry Atkinson was in power with his Rollestonian colleagues."<sup>43</sup> There was no debate on the Address in Reply. Members were apparently conserving their energies for other matters, such as heavier restrictions on Chinese immigration which took up a great deal of debating time in May and June.

Atkinson had first shown a direct interest in the question of Chinese immigration in June 1881, when he had introduced a Bill to impose a £10 poll tax upon all Chinese immigrants as soon as the number of Chinese in New Zealand reached one per cent of the population.<sup>44</sup> He defended the measure "upon the broad ground of our right as a community to protect our present form of civilization...and also to protect our wage-earning class from competition with foreigners who have a very much lower standard of living".<sup>45</sup> Sir William Fox opposed the Bill, passionately defending the equality of men of all races; R. Turnbull, W. A. Murray and J. Fulton agreed with Fox.<sup>46</sup> But Atkinson's attitude was very moderate in comparison with that of some members. Grey called the Bill "an

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42. P.D., 60, pp. 1-3.

43. T.H., 11 May 1888, p. 2.

44. For further details see N. Harrison, "The Formation of the White New Zealand Immigration Policy Between the Years 1890 and 1907", unpub. M.A. thesis, Wellington, 1955, pp. 15-24.

45. Atkinson, 15 June 1881, P.D., 38, pp. 68-69.



absolute necessity". J. Shephard, W. Hutchison, S. P. Andrews and W. Swanson complained that it was not severe enough.<sup>47</sup> Hall embarked upon a lurid description of "the horrors of the Chinese haunts in the places where they are in large numbers...That is a kind of thing it is out duty to keep out of this country, and I...shall do my very best to keep it out".<sup>48</sup>

In November 1887 R. H. J. Reeves asked Atkinson to prohibit Chinese living in New Zealand from becoming naturalised. Atkinson refused to do this. The Government "did not want to treat with hardship persons who had been in the colony for many years - all that was wanted was to protect our civilisation from that of the Chinese".<sup>49</sup> Pressure was resumed in 1888 by W. P. Reeves, and Atkinson responded by raising the poll tax to £100 and increasing the penalties for evasion accordingly. On 15 May he urged caution upon the House, hoping that it "would not be led into any panic legislation or to enact anything with regard to Chinamen which is not justifiable".<sup>50</sup> By 1 June he was prepared to ask the British Government for permission to impose a twenty year ban on Chinese immigration, while insisting that Chinese already in New Zealand should "be treated exactly as any other foreigner".<sup>51</sup>

Atkinson's loan Bill passed on 17 May with little overt opposition, and on 29 May 1888 he made his financial statement.<sup>52</sup> Prices for farm products had fallen since 1887 and the condition of the Colony was

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47. Ibid., pp. 70-75.

48. Hall, 15 June 1881, Ibid., p. 74. Not an uncommon attitude. See Harrison, pp. 1-15.

49. Atkinson, 8 November 1887, P.D., 58, p. 220.

50. Atkinson, 15 May 1888, Ibid., 60, p. 31.

51. Atkinson, 1 June 1888, Ibid., p. 418.

52. Ibid., pp. 309-318.



no better in 1888 as J. W. Mollwraith's figures show.

Year	Prices. all Commodities	Farm Products	index numbers based on standard period 1890-99.
1875	148	148	
1880	130	126	
1883	118	121	
1885	111	107	
1886	108	108	
1887	103	100	
1888	103	96	
1889	111	118	
1890	107	100	
1894	98	98	

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financial statement  
The/emanated dogged perseverance. Atkinson was following a policy of decreasing expenditure from the Consolidated Fund, cutting down on loan money for public works, and transferring as many charges as possible from loans to consolidated revenue. In 1887-8 he had reduced expenditure by £233,097 and further economies were projected, most notably the abolition of the Public Works Department. This step would "be strong and satisfactory evidence to the people of the colony and the outside world that we are really bringing our large borrowing policy to an end when the department which has been...its organ and symbol, finally disappears". A new tax on tea would be used to free loan expenditure from local body subsidies. More important, about £207,000 would be raised from increases in most customs duties.

Atkinson expected opposition to the increased duties. He therefore wrapped the proposal in mellifluous phrases and distracting details,

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53. Based on a table compiled by J. Mollwraith, The Course of Prices in N.Z., cit., Sutch, p. 31.



concluding by asking members to look at the question from neither a free-trade nor a protectionist standpoint, but to consider the urgent need for more revenue. He assured them that New Zealand's economy was basically sound and could be kept so "by adhering firmly at whatever present inconvenience, to the sober financial policy of last session".

The statement was accepted without debate, as the House intended to make its opposition felt by detailed criticism of the tariff legislation. This was brought down on 1 June and debated throughout June and into July. Atkinson tried to protect himself from the Political Reform Associations by insisting that the tariff was solely a revenue measure and not an experiment in "scientific finance". He said that the Government contained a majority of free-traders who had been driven to this resort by the lack of politically viable alternatives.<sup>54</sup>

The attempt to dissociate himself from economic theory failed to save him from the anger of the retrenchment-free trade faction: its members' objection to the new tariff was no more doctrinaire than Atkinson's reason for imposing it. They opposed higher tariffs because this was a radical measure which would help the towns at the expense of the propertied and indebted classes.<sup>55</sup> Those of Atkinson's former following who had begun to dislike his radicalism in 1882, and had abandoned him during 1886 and 1887 because they considered him equivocal on the tariff issue, and had timidly accepted him as a protector against Vogel after the 1887 election, now left him finally over the 1888 tariff.<sup>56</sup>

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54. Atkinson, 1 June 1888, P.D., 58, p. 625.

55. Sinclair, "Significance of the Scarecrow Ministry", Studies of a Small Democracy, p. 113.

56. See P.D., 61, p. 558.



Men such as W. Barron, G. Beetham, E. Hamlin and J. D. Ormond who had stomached even the 1887 loan, would not vote for the tariff. Barron demanded such retrenchment as would make tariff increases unnecessary.<sup>57</sup> Ormond found himself unable to "congratulate" Atkinson on the company he would find in the government lobby when the division was taken.<sup>58</sup>

The Bill passed on 5 July 1888 by forty-five votes to twenty-two.<sup>59</sup> Ballance told Stout that it was "a great victory and it has completely disintegrated the Ministerial party".<sup>60</sup> The rump of the Atkinsonites was assisted by some Vogelites, the Greyite remnant, and most of the younger, radical, urban members. The country members deserted the Government, although Ormond hinted that rather than see any of the "Stout-Vogel-Ballance" group in office, some of them would return if their votes were needed to save the Ministry from outright defeat.<sup>61</sup> Ballance estimated that Atkinson had about thirty reliable followers, the Opposition could count on thirty-nine, and the "Freetraders" of indeterminate allegiance numbered twenty-five. Of the twenty-five, he thought fifteen were hopelessly separated from the Government and would be willing to help to turn it out.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless nobody did try to bring the Government down. Members were content to snipe at its policies. On 17 July E. Withy, who had been a foundation member of the English National Liberal Club,<sup>63</sup> wanted

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57. Barron, 14 June 1888, Ibid., pp. 94-96.

58. Ormond, 13 June 1888, Ibid.

59. Ibid., p. 558.

60. J. Ballance to R. Stout, 7 July 1888, Stout mss., 19.

61. See P.D., 61, p. 50.

62. J. Ballance to R. Stout, 7 July 1888, loc. cit.

63. Sinclair, "Significance of the Soarecrow Ministry", Studies of a Small Democracy, p. 114.



further retrenchment of £100,000 a year. Atkinson said that this could not be done without making further inroads upon the education vote, which he refused to do. The other alternative would be to lower civil servants' wages still more. This was also rejected. "I have never been in favour of reducing wages to anything like starvation-point."<sup>64</sup>

By 1888 Atkinson had become more quarrelsome than ever in the House,<sup>65</sup> and was baited by younger members as he had once baited Grey.<sup>66</sup> "The truth is that Atkinson - good fellow as he is - does not elevate politics or even keep them on a fair level," Rolleston wrote. "The 'Quest' of 'the popular mandate' is a lowering ideal".<sup>67</sup>

Atkinson himself was sickened by the task that lay before him.<sup>68</sup> He had had no significant following since the session began, but he pushed doggedly ahead with the measures he considered necessary, accepting whatever support was offered and ready to face defeat whenever it should come.<sup>69</sup> With his fiscal preoccupations, he saw retrenchment as his primary duty; yet he was unable to avoid knowledge of the social consequences of his policy. His April tour had ensured this. He did his best to spread the effects of retrenchment as widely as possible and to avoid unfairness wherever he could; but it was all rather hopeless and he, the pragmatist, was forced to fall back upon laissez faire theories and protest that it was not the State's responsibility to see that its citizens were employed. In November 1887 he had denied a charge that the railways were replacing men with youths and assured members

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64. Atkinson, 17 July 1888, P.D., 62, p. 54.

65. R. Lechie to R. Stout, 6 June 1888, Stout mss., 19.

66. Sinclair, Reeves, p. 91.

67. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 15 September 1888, H. mss., box 27.

68. "no one who had to do the sort of work that the Government had had to do during the past few months could have had any other feeling than pain and distaste for the whole thing". Atkinson, 14 August 1888, P.D., 63, p. 42.

69. Atkinson, 14 June 1888, Ibid., 61, p. 99.



that "the Government were just as much the friends of the working-man as anybody else,...but they were not going to conduct the department simply in the interest of working-men, as against the interest of the public, or to make billets for anyone".<sup>70</sup>

The urban unemployed presented the biggest problem, and Atkinson continued the practice of setting up relief work camps at uncomfortable distances from the towns, so that in the first place a large number would be deterred from going to them, but also so that those who did go there would relieve the dangerous numbers of unemployed in the towns.<sup>71</sup> He confessed that he had reservations about the 1888 tariff because while it encouraged local industries, it held men in the unhealthy congestion of the towns; and he put forward the radical suggestion that if, in future, factories became established with the Government's protection and support, then the Government had a right and a duty to regulate them. He suggested that owners might be compelled to see that their employees were decently housed, and that, in time, governments should go even further and direct the factories to move into the country "and be surrounded with a sufficient quantity of land to secure free air and sufficient gardens for the hands, so that we may not be raising up a population of diminutive stature, such as exists in other places where large manufactures are carried on."<sup>72</sup>

While he did not recognise that the Government should provide jobs, because even in 1889 he refused to believe that people could starve

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70. Atkinson, 17 November 1887, *Ibid.*, 58, p. 437.

71. Atkinson, 18 November 1887, *Ibid.*, p. 485.

72. Atkinson, 5 July 1888, *Ibid.*, 61, p. 554.



in New Zealand,<sup>73</sup> he did concede the importance of the Government's role in helping employers to provide jobs. One of his objections to free trade was that it would put men out of work in New Zealand - there were "higher duties than the production of wealth".<sup>74</sup> He also thought that governments should regulate conditions of work so that those who were employed should not be exploited. Accordingly to draw attention to this issue a number of regulatory Bills were introduced in 1888. None passed. The Legislative Council rejected a Fair Rent Bill by twenty-two votes to five. A Special Settlers Relief Bill was dropped after its first reading. The Shop-hours Bill suffered the same fate.

The only important legislation passed in 1888 apart from finance Bills was an Act to facilitate the purchase of Maori lands. The Government tried to avert the usual consequences of such Acts by inserting a clause compelling Maori vendors to retain enough land to support their families so that they would not become a charge upon private charity. Atkinson said, rather optimistically, "the whole object of my life has been to get small settlements; and...this [Bill] will produce settlement in the North Island in a way which has never been done heretofore. I agree with...[Ballance] that the Government can more readily than private individuals settle persons on lands: but unfortunately the Government cannot go on buying land, they are not in a position to do so".<sup>75</sup>

Atkinson did not intend to continue or extend Ballance's village settlements. These had been set up in an attempt to move the unemployed

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73. Atkinson, 28 June 1889, Ibid., 64, p. 106, also Ibid., 61, p. 554.

74. Atkinson, 14 June 1888, Ibid., p. 101.

75. Atkinson, 28 August 1888, Ibid., 63, p. 507.



out of the towns on to small subsistence plots in the country.<sup>76</sup>

Atkinson disapproved of this scheme, which tended to establish a rural proletariat dependent on nearby public works employment. Where work was lacking, the village settlers eked out an existence which was worse than that of their fellows in the towns. Atkinson believed that "bona fide settlers" should be given enough land to ensure their economic viability and, eventually, to provide a chance of them becoming prosperous.<sup>77</sup>

Settlement had two purposes, in his view, to benefit the settler and his family, and to increase the nation's productivity. Village settlements provided too small an area of land per family to achieve the first; and, before refrigeration became established, did not attempt to fulfil the second. Ten thousand pounds for establishing labour settlements was expunged from the estimates by an economy-minded House; and the Ministry preferred to encourage labourers to acquire their own land by extending loans to intending farmers.<sup>78</sup>

In his final speech for 1888 Atkinson blamed the lack of an organised Opposition for the negative character of the session, and finished with gracious words of apology for his rough treatment of members in debate. "If I have said hard things, or things I ought not to have said, I shall be very happy if honourable gentlemen will accept my apology. I know I do occasionally say very hard things, but I can only ask honourable members to recollect that I never object to having hard things said about me".<sup>79</sup> On 28 October he wrote a charming

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76. See Condliffe, New Zealand In the Making, pp. 124-125.

77. See Atkinson, 19 July 1889, P.D., 64, p. 560 for a discrimination between village and "bona fide" settlers.

78. Richardson, 25 July 1888, Ibid., 58, p. 241.

79. Atkinson, 28 August 1888, Ibid., pp. 507-508.



letter to Stout offering him a judgeship, sincerely anxious for him to accept.<sup>80</sup> Atkinson was probably making his farewells. He knew that his personal political power was waning, that his policies were unpopular, and that he could not rely even upon his colleagues for consistent support. There were rumours that J. C. Brown, member for Tuapeka, would soon be bankrupt and forced to resign, allowing Stout to take his seat. If this happened gossip predicted that Atkinson would relinquish the Premiership to Stout.<sup>81</sup> The possibility of Atkinson becoming Agent-General also persisted.

In February 1889 Atkinson went to Tasmania. He hoped that a holiday would restore his health which had almost completely broken down and was causing anxiety to the Cabinet.<sup>82</sup> The trip was not long enough to be of value, and Atkinson returned to the frustrations of Wellington. His exasperated daughter-in-law, Ameliz Atkinson, wrote in April, "Lady Onslow has written to Uncle Harry to have the beds [at Government House] well aired for Lord Cranley & the other children - so I suppose he & the Ministry will be seeing about it soon...".<sup>83</sup>

Atkinson delivered his 1889 financial statement on 25 June.<sup>84</sup> The policy of 1888 had achieved a small surplus - "not...a very large one, but it is a surplus" - and the economy was recovering. More "bona fide settlers" had taken up Crown lands than in any year since 1881: 355 had settled on 55,188 acres on deferred payment; 765 families took up 204,642 acres on perpetual lease; and 653 had bought 70,987 acres outright.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless emigration continued. Atkinson told members

80. H. A. Atkinson to R. Stout, 28 October 1888, Stout mss.

81. G. M. Waterhouse to J. Hall, 3 February 1889, H. mss., box 29.

82. E. Mitchelson to H.A. Atkinson, 13 and 18 February 1889, A.mss. Tu, 2

83. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, 7 April 1889, H.M.W.A. mss.

84. P.D., 64, pp. 25-34.

85. See table in Condcliffe, p. 207, for corroboration.



that it could be stopped only by stepping up public works spending. Neither he nor they were prepared to do this; accordingly they must face the loss of population with equanimity.

Statistically, conditions had improved since 1838. All exports except wool had risen in volume and value; friendly societies' membership had expanded; the number of small savings bank accounts had risen by 2,800, and the increase in Government Life Insurance policies bore heartening testimony to the "prudent care and forethought" of many colonists. Atkinson told the House that prosperity was built by private productivity plus public economy and it should not expect a new flow of expenditure simply because good times seemed to be returning. These last remarks were no doubt what provoked the Taranaki Herald into saying that "a more bald, uninteresting, non-progressive, impotent Budget has never before been produced by a Colonial Treasurer".<sup>86</sup>

Rolleston, who had become as distrustful as the rest of his Canterbury friends of Atkinson's no-borrowing pledge, was equally suspicious of his retrenchment policy. He told Hall that Atkinson was "only playing with economy to suit the popular whim" and would "shout with the biggest  
/mob when the time comes for another burst".<sup>87</sup> At the same time Rolleston had no more idea than Atkinson about what could be done. The state of politics appalled him. It was in a transitional phase and seemed to Rolleston to consist only of disintegration and demoralisation. He had been more comfortable in the early eighties when he had been able to be radical without fear of the social consequences. Now he found

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86. T.H., 26 June 1889, p. 2.

87. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 28 June 1889, H. mss., box 29.



himself driven by dislike of the radicals who had emerged since 1887 into an unwilling alignment with the conservative wing. "It seems to me that our only tie as a Party is a kind of spurious class respectability - My whole soul revolts against the creation of a Party which rests upon such a basis - It will break down certainly & leave a residue of class hatred which will help forward all the worst features of socialism - ".<sup>88</sup>

Atkinson who perceived that new movements were afoot amidst the debris of the old political structure, was less alarmed by them. He made another attempt to introduce for discussion the regulatory legislation that had been lost in 1888. An Eight Hours Bill got as far as the committee stage but no further. The Shop-hours Bill was submerged during its second reading. A Hospitals and Charitable Aid Bill, a Workmen's Wages Bill, and a Bankruptcy Bill all stuck at their first reading. The Legislative Council dismissed a Bill for its own reform, and Rolleston hoped that Atkinson would seize this chance to make appointments to the Upper House.<sup>89</sup>

Almost the only thing that the 1889 session was remembered for, apart from its stillborn legislation, was the Representation Bill which abolished plural voting. Grey moved the clause in Committee and it was passed with the cooperation of Ballance and Atkinson, a nice conjunction.<sup>90</sup> The Act also included a twenty-five per cent country quota. J. Allen, member for Dunedin East, had had the temerity to suggest eighteen and a

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88. W. Rolleston to R. Oliver, 2 July 1889, Rn. mss., box 7.

89. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 8 July 1889, H. mss., box 30.

90. T. J. Young, "The Political Career of John Ballance, 1875-1890", unpub. M.A. thesis, Wellington, 1964, p. 154.



half per cent. This dragged Atkinson to his feet to defend his beloved farmers. "It is the man who will take off his coat and turn up his sleeves and face the wilderness, and spend his life there in clearing the face of the country - those are the true progressive men, who are the making of the country: not those who come into the towns for every convenience, and cannot go outside for a day's work".<sup>91</sup> Eventually Atkinson compromised by fixing the country quota at twenty eight per cent, between the rural demand for thirty three and a third, and the urban pressure for a lower figure.<sup>92</sup>

In September T. W. Hislop was censured by the Legislative Council for misusing his authority for the benefit of his friends, and resigned.<sup>93</sup> He was the second Minister to do so, for George Fisher had left in a cloud of opprobrium at the beginning of the year.<sup>94</sup> The Cabinet was disintegrating and Atkinson was conserving his frail energies for administration. He was visibly ill and seldom able to attend the House. His chances of being able to continue for another session were slim, and he remained in office because no one could be found to take his place.<sup>95</sup> Under these circumstances his old craving for legislative rest suddenly returned at the end of the session. He scolded the House for its "mania for passing measures", and said that members must realise that their primary duty was "to see to the proper government of the colony

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91. Atkinson, 19 July 1889, P.D., 64, p. 577.

92. Cunningham, "Equality of Electorates in New Zealand", vol. 1, pp. 102-104.

93. See A.J.H.R., 1889, H. 20.

94. Fisher, 3 July 1889, P.D., 64, p. 189; A.J.H.R., 1893, H. 22. Atkinson asked Fisher to resign on 1 April 1889 for failing to prosecute the Junction Brewery for evasion of beer duty, after a private agreement with the Brewery that he would do so. Fisher resigned on 6 April, and an acrimonious correspondence was pursued until 3 July.

95. J. Hall to Hill, 29 September 1889, H. ms., vol. 11, pp. 82-83.



instead of making so many laws".<sup>96</sup> In his final speech he claimed that in spite of all its unpassed Bills the Government had not been idle: it had passed a Representation Act, ended deficit finance, cut expenditure, and put an end to borrowing. "That was the work this Government were sent here to do and they have done it, and done it most successfully".<sup>97</sup>

Ballance's<sup>98</sup> concluding speech, delivered on 16 September 1889<sup>99</sup> was a mixture of faint praise and diffident rebuke. He accused the Government of being slow to liberalise the administration of the land laws. He said that men with little or no capital needed more help to take up small blocks of land and stay upon them. He condemned the Maori land sales legislation, and blamed the Ministry, not the House, for the loss of Atkinson's Labour Bills. He warned the Government that the colony demanded change, reforms must be implemented, and further changes in taxation could not long be delayed. In conclusion he issued a warning against any increase in expenditure or in borrowing - both of which he suspected from the tone of the public works statement. The House had "throttled this public-works monster" and Atkinson must not revive it.

The 1889 session had been disappointing. The Political Reform Associations were still angry at the increased tariff, and alarmed by talk about imposing a graduated property tax or an income tax. The retrenchers were not fully satisfied either; although they were somewhat mollified by the surplus, they were uneasy about the plans to build

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96. Atkinson, 14 September 1889, P.D., 66, p. 559.

97. Atkinson, Ibid., p. 560.

98. He had been elected leader of the Opposition during 1889. T. J. Young, pp. 152-153; T. G. Wilson, The Rise of the New Zealand Liberal Party, 1880-90, Auckland, 1956, pp. 29-30.

99. Ballance, 16 September 1889, P.D., 66, pp. 603-608.



the Otago Central railway. This project had revived the fears of those who opposed borrowing and had never fully trusted Atkinson. The "liberals" were frustrated by reforms which Atkinson seemed to have introduced boldly, and then perversely dropped. The Ministerial rump was discouraged by the Government's fissiparity and by the manifest unfitness of its leader for the task which he would not relinquish. Nor did they dare try to replace him.

The prospect of an election - the traditional panacea - met with scarcely any enthusiasm. The rank and file of both camps was demoralised, and the country, seeing little difference at this stage between Government and Opposition, was sunk in depressed apathy.<sup>100</sup> On 14 September Atkinson had said that there were no parties in the House or in the country, and that an election would not change the political deadlock. No one had disagreed with him.<sup>101</sup> F. D. Bell congratulated Hall on his good fortune in not being involved "in that Pandemonium" and said that it was no wonder "that poor hard-driven Atkinson was looking ill & worn out with such a mob to drive!"<sup>102</sup>

Amidst the general apathy, however, two groups had begun to coalesce. Professor Sinclair has shown how a conservative group separated out from the mass in 1888,<sup>103</sup> and the nascent Liberals may be traced back to Ballance's election as leader of the Opposition in 1889. He suggests that the 1887-90 Ministry was an unaccommodating relic of former politics, filling a transitional period between politics of public works and

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100. e. g. T.H., 13 March 1890, p. 2.

101. Atkinson, 14 September 1889, P.D., 66, pp. 561-562.

102. F. D. Bell to J. Hall, 18 October 1889, H. mss., box 30.

103. Sinclair, "Significance of the Scarecrow Ministry"; Studies of a Small Democracy.



sectional politics. As such, Atkinson's Government was unpopular with its contemporaries and misunderstood by its immediate heirs, as such excrecences usually are.

On 16 September 1889 George Fisher, whose expulsion from the Cabinet had temporarily converted him to the political views of the Lyttleton Times, alleged that Atkinson was "kept in office merely to give effect to the wishes and desires of the Tory Conservative party". The Government, said Fisher, was at the beck and call of J. D. Ormond, Sir John Hall, W. R. Russell, D. H. Macarthur and "two members of another place" - probably Sir Frederick Whitaker and possibly Richard Oliver.<sup>104</sup>

Relations between these men and Atkinson were not cordial in 1889, and their votes certainly did not keep him in office, but Fisher's misleading charge nevertheless carried an element of truth. Atkinson was stubborn, unpredictable, distrusted and dangerously ill: but he was not Ballance, who was a self-confessed radical and had, in 1878, demonstrated extravagance as well. While Atkinson remained Premier he kept Ballance out, and there was always the hope that Atkinson, under unremitting right wing pressure, could be persuaded to use his power conservatively.

In 1889 the conservative faction organised themselves into a group of political vigilantes, with indifferent success in that year, but far more satisfying results in 1890. Hall said: "in these times a man who has anything to lose cannot afford to let politics alone - They w'ont let him alone - Days are near at hand when not merely

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<sup>104</sup>. Fisher, 16 September 1889, P.D., 66, p. 598.



improvements in our social system are in question, but the whole structure & its principles....It behoves all those who value what they have got or are likely to get, as well as the welfare of society, to qualify themselves for taking a useful part with voice & pen in the struggle which is coming - ".<sup>105</sup>

While they waited for the class war, the conservatives did their best to keep cheerful. They were pleased when W. R. Russell joined the Cabinet: a sign "that the conservative feeling is really in the ascendant"; and they hoped John Bryce would win in Waipa. But they feared that "a lot of hot radicals" would be returned from Canterbury as a result of the efforts of the Lyttleton Times.<sup>106</sup> Alfred Saunders hoped that when Atkinson retired there would be time for Hall and Bryce to form "a more honest and economical government".<sup>107</sup> Rolleston, by this time identified with Hall and the right wing, was gloomy. He feared that thanks to the 1889 Representation Act, "intelligence" would be swamped by the "amalgamated votes of the unwashed - undrinking - unthinking" masses, and that "excesses very prejudicial to the country" would follow the next election.<sup>108</sup>

In April 1890 Alfred Saunders and Sir John Hall were making arrangements to avert a split vote in Selwyn<sup>109</sup> as if they expected a short session and an early election, but the date of the election depended very much on Atkinson's health. He was far more ill than he had been in 1889 and a short holiday at the end of that year had done him little

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105. J. Hall to W. Hall, 2 August 1889, H. mss., vol. 11, pp. 2-3.

106. A. G. Horton to J. Hall, 14 October 1889, Ibid., box 30.

107. A. Saunders to J. Hall, 21 April 1890, Ibid., box 31.

108. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 22 May 1890, Ibid.

109. A. Saunders to J. Hall, 17 April 1890, Ibid.



good.<sup>110</sup> In February 1890 Anneliz Atkinson noticed that he was cheerful, and he enjoyed the visits of his youngest grandson; but she saw that he was not at all strong "like he used to be".<sup>111</sup> At the end of February he bought "a serviceable 26 horse" for exercise, but was not well enough to use it.<sup>112</sup>

Atkinson's doctor diagnosed arteriosclerosis and said that he must not be exposed to excitement or strain. If he sat through another session, or contested another election, the doctor threatened "a general break down for good and all". Sir Harry told Arthur Atkinson that there was nothing organically wrong, and he felt "more cheerful", but he was weak and unable to work for longer than an hour a day. He had decided to resign and was thinking seriously about taking the Agent Generalship.<sup>113</sup>

His friends also began looking for positions suitable for him to take when he retired. In May he seemed to his secretary to be very ill, and an alarming report was sent to Hall:

I was away up at New Plymouth with Sir Harry & although he enjoyed the freedom of being away from Welln yet I could plainly see his health was such as to make me fear that he would not be fit for work for a long time...I tell you all this in strict confidence because, like all invalids, he hates to be thought ill & is vexed if people make out he is bad - but Sir John he is ill...He gets so easily tired - He shambles when he walks & every now & then his memory clean goes & he cannot tell you the name of his own brother, & gets so angry over it...but his temper & patience are simply marvellous & I never had one unkind or hasty word from him ever since I joined him....I wish he would take the Commrship of Govt Insurance...<sup>114</sup>

Hall was worried, and although he knew that Atkinson had changed his mind about resigning and was going to deliver the 1890 financial

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110. R. Oliver to J. Hall, 1 January 1890, Ibid.

111. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, 17 February 1890, H.M.W.A. mss.

112. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, 24 February 1890, Ibid.

113. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 10 March 1890, R-A.mss., vol.7, p.

114. A. Smith to J. Hall, 5 May 1890, H. mss., box 31.



statement, he told Rolleston that Atkinson should retire for he was "really killing himself".<sup>115</sup>

Atkinson's Cabinet colleagues had persuaded him to deliver the Budget, and to postpone his resignation until the House had met and the Ministerialists had been gathered together to decide what was to be done. The difficulty of finding a new Premier loomed so large that one group wanted Atkinson to obtain leave of absence from the House but to hold on to the Premiership until the election. Atkinson himself wanted to obey his doctors. He had almost finished the Budget and asked Arthur Atkinson to come to Wellington and help with the final draft. He was very reluctant to return to the House.<sup>116</sup> Many Ministerialists, however, felt that without at least nominal leadership from Atkinson they could not survive another session.<sup>117</sup>

On 9 June 1890 Atkinson told Rolleston that his doctors were adamant, he had obtained three medical opinions and all advised him to resign; he had decided to do so.<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, within two weeks Atkinson was in the House. His colleagues had prevailed over his doctors and he had decided to continue as Premier, at least until the next election.

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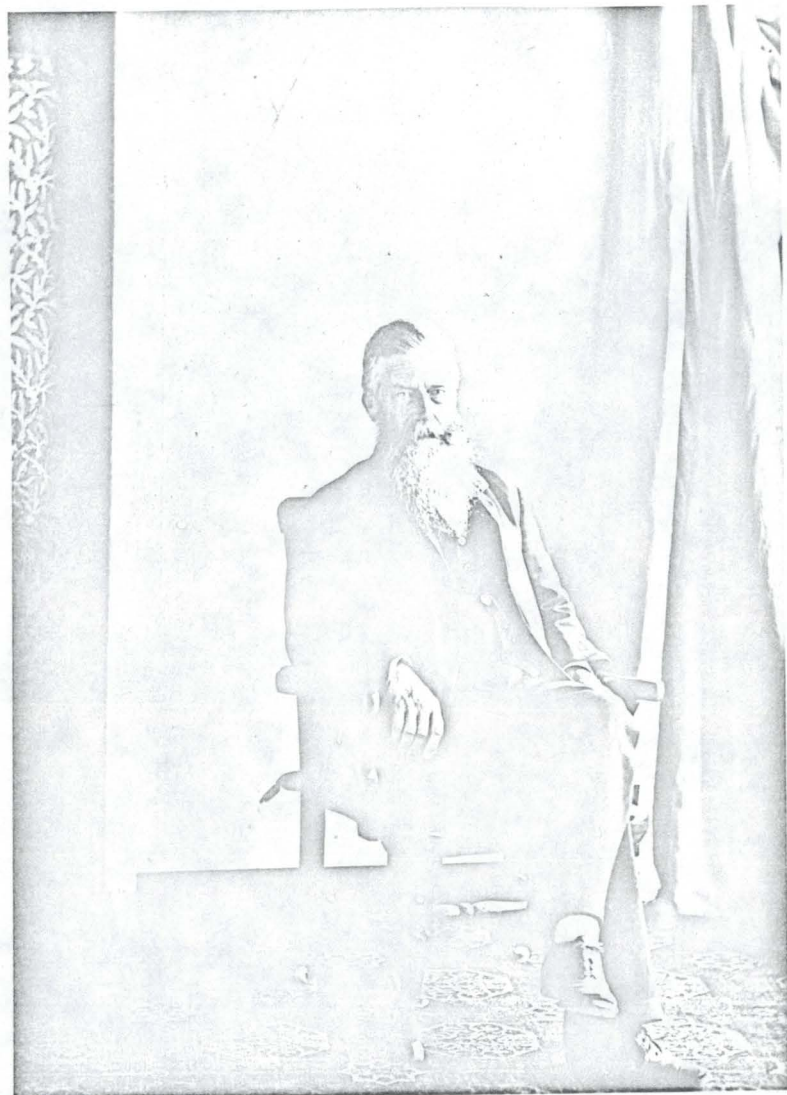
115. J. Hall to W. Rolleston, 15 May 1890, Rn. mss., box 8.

116. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 23 May 1890, "Family Letters", p. 324.

117. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 5 June 1890, H. mss., box 34.

118. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 9 June 1890, Rn. mss., box 8.





Sir Harry Atkinson about 1890

CHAPTER TEN : 1889-1892.

In 1890 Atkinson continued to be Premier. He attended the House when he was able, but did not speak.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to see why he decided to carry on - possibly he feared that if he left his post the right wing of the Ministerialists, or the free-traders, might take control and embark upon oppressive retrenchment, or he was reluctant to give up his power now that he was Premier again. Perhaps he thought that no one but himself could be trusted at the Treasury. Certainly he was too ill to consider the question dispassionately. His decision to stay in office disappointed a considerable section of his following who thought that a dumb Premier was a greater liability than any successor to Atkinson could have been. R. J. S. Harman<sup>2</sup> talked of the need for "further, even oppressive, economy", and had hoped to push the Ministry to the right after Atkinson had resigned. He wanted "someone whose ideas are of the Bryce type" to lead the Ministerialists, and told Hall that "a good many persons" agreed with him. They wanted Atkinson to resign, advising the Governor to send for Hall. Hall should then reshuffle the Cabinet to form "a more satisfactory" Ministry.<sup>3</sup>

Parliament opened on 19 June 1890, and Atkinson was able to be present when E. Mitchelson read his financial statement for him.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Atkinson, 25, 27 June 1890, P.D. 67, pp. 92 and 164.
  2. R. J. S. Harman: came out to Canterbury in 1850 by the "Sir George Seymour" - one of the first four ships. Became a prosperous land agent - partner of E. C. J. Stevens M.L.C. Prominent also in Anglican affairs in Christchurch.
  3. R. J. S. Harman to J. Hall, 8 July 1890, H. msa., box 32.
  4. P.D., 67, pp. 92-108.



There was another surplus, and in general the tone of the Budget was optimistic. Financial difficulties were being overcome, prosperity was in sight. A note of justification by success was very evident. No policy changes were proposed. Atkinson had reviewed the property tax during the recess, but had reluctantly decided that it could not be reduced. He did not see how it could be abolished or replaced while members were so divided on the subject of possible alternatives.

Settlement would be encouraged, as before, with more aid for men with little capital: the first year or two's rent for perpetual leases would be added in small sums to the later years' payments so that farmers would be free from this burden when they first took up the land. In bush districts, where the land had to be cleared before it could produce, settlers would be given road work in their first year. The difficulties of pioneer farming were so forbidding that Atkinson thought it was urgent to try to coax families from the towns into the bush. He suggested that the education system should be modified, because the existing curriculum seemed to make town life appear more attractive than rural life. Nevertheless, as the Budget showed, between 1888 and 1890 1,150,000 acres had been settled, compared with 700,000 between 1885 and 1887. The average area of plots was 200 acres, and the proportion taken up under settlement conditions, rather than for cash, was seven to one compared with four to one under the Stout-Vogel Government.

The financial statement's optimism, however, did not reflect the mood of the colony. A crusade against deplorable working conditions in Dunedin had resulted in the setting up of a Royal Commission to investigate abuses. The Sweating Commission reported on 5 May 1890

"that the system known in London and elsewhere as 'sweating', and which seemed at one time likely to obtain a footing in some of our cities, does not exist". But it described conditions almost as bad as those which were labelled 'sweating' and urgently recommended that a comprehensive Factory Act be passed. The existing legislation, the Employment of Females Act, was riddled with internal contradictions and was very poorly observed.<sup>5</sup>

Atkinson therefore brought down yet another batch of labour Bills, which fared no better than their predecessors. An Early Closing Bill, an Eight Hours Bill and a Bankruptcy Bill were read only once. An Employers' Liability Bill and a Truck Bill were lost in the Legislative Council. A Factories and Shops Bill never emerged from Committee. Three Hospitals and Charitable Aid Bills were introduced, but none was read more than once; nor was a Bill to classify the Civil Service. Two Bills to facilitate the opening up of Native lands were read once each; and a Bill to reform the Legislative Council was smothered by that House. "It is acknowledged from one end of New Zealand to the other that there is some screw loose in connection with the business in this House", said the member for Buller feelingly.<sup>6</sup>

Before the session ended the cities of New Zealand were in the throes of the colony's first general strike. Its background was the high rate of unemployment, the sweating crusade, and a bitter dispute in early August 1890 between the Maritime Council and Whitcombe and

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5. See A.J.H.R., 1890, H.5.

6. O'Connor, 15 August 1890, P.D., 69, p. 45.



Tombs over the employment of non-union labour.<sup>7</sup> Its immediate cause was a shipping strike in Australia.<sup>8</sup> This had begun when marine officers in Melbourne decided to join the Trades and Labour Council and the Federated Seamen's Union. The shipowners attempted to deter them with threats, and the officers struck. The Seamen's Union stopped work in support; and New Zealand unionists became involved when they refused to work the Union Steamship Company's vessels because the Company was fighting their fellow unionists in Australia. Thus the general strike which began in Christchurch on 29 August 1890 was "purely a sympathetic one in defence of the principles of unionism".<sup>9</sup>

The Atkinson Government was at first reluctant to intervene in this conflict between capital and labour. Atkinson said on 6 September, "I have carefully considered all the arguments...and have with regret come to the conclusion that any interference on the part of the government by way of mediation at the present time would entirely fail to be productive of satisfactory results". He asked both sides to draw up their terms for settlement as a preliminary to negotiation, and hoped there would be no breaches of the peace.<sup>10</sup>

By 16 September the Government had decided to call a conference between unionists and employers,<sup>11</sup> but the Dunedin Employers Association refused, on 29 September, to send a delegate. The Oamaru and Christchurch Associations followed suit.<sup>12</sup> An unrepresentative meeting was held in

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7. See Otago Daily Times, 4-16 August 1890. Also Sinclair, Reeves, pp. 105-107, 112-114.
  8. Otago Daily Times, 27 August 1890.
  9. F. M. J. Irvine, "The Revolt of the Militant Unions 1890-1913", unpub. M.A. thesis, Auckland, 1938, pp. 11-14.
  10. Otago Daily Times, 9 September 1890.
  11. Ibid., 16 September 1890.
  12. Ibid., 29 September 1890.



Wellington, but it ended on 7 October having achieved nothing.

Atkinson was probably more sympathetic to the strikers than anyone else in the Cabinet, although the evidence for this impression is slight. He wanted to pay the unionists' delegates to the conference the travel expenses incurred in their trip to Wellington, but his colleagues oppose the suggestion. Stevens said coldly that "people who can distribute hundreds per week in strike pay cannot require inappropriate gratuities". Whitaker, Mitchelson and Russell agreed with this, but on 9 October Atkinson managed to persuade Mitchelson to agree to pay railway fares.<sup>14</sup>

The Otago Daily Times said early in October that the strike was "'fizzling' out day by day".<sup>15</sup> By 11 November it was over. The union had been crushed and the bitterness of defeat, added to the prolonged frustration of the depression, sealed the fate of the Atkinson Ministry. In 1890, wrote W. P. Reeves, "the Oligarchs lost their last chance".<sup>17</sup>

Atkinson was not an Oligarch, in Reeves's sense, but he was too debilitated to see the urgent need to put his radicalism into practice, or to face the work and energy involved in doing so. He fell reluctant but helplessly into the hands of the conservative wing of his followers who had counselled him to do nothing,<sup>18</sup> and salved his conscience with the necessity to conserve his frail health for finance.

Ballance's attack on the Government<sup>19</sup> at the end of the 1890 sess:

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13. E. C. J. Stevens to H. A. Atkinson, 8 October 1890, A. mss. Tu, 28.
  14. E. Mitchelson to H. A. Atkinson, 9 October 1890, Ibid.
  15. Otago Daily Times, 7 October 1890.
  16. See T. G. Wilson, The Rise of the New Zealand Liberal Party, 1880-1890, pp. 31-33. Armstrong, "The Politics of Development", says the 1890 disturbances were "prosperity strikes".
  17. W. P. Reeves, The Long White Cloud, 4th ed., London, 1950, p. 280.
  18. The Lyttleton Times, 30 August 1890, p. 2.
  19. Ballance, 17 September 1890, P.D., 69, pp. 957-964.



was unusually energetic. The content of his speech could well have belonged to a speech of Atkinson's, but the tone, pervaded with a sense of urgency and desire for action, could not. He began with the charge that Atkinson's silence for the whole of the 1890 session had largely contributed to the Government's impotence, and that more political energy on the part of the Ministry would have carried its reforms through the House and past the Legislative Council. He attacked the property tax, admitting that it probably could not be abolished at once, but suggesting its eventual replacement by a graduated tax on unimproved land values. This would attack both absenteeism and monopoly.

Eventually, Ballance hoped, the colony would be so conscious of the merits of the perpetual lease system that other tenures could be abolished. The land was the central issue, and a return to prosperity would be based on a rigorous land settlement programme. "Before all things, what we want is energetic administration". The last word of the session belonged to R. H. J. Reeves, who said that the Ministry had "displayed an amount of weakness and...political imbecility this session such as no other Parliament has ever seen..."<sup>20</sup> Members, uneasily aware of their shortcomings, went back to their electorates to prepare for an election.

W. P. Reeves said that in this election, which was held in December 1890, the "electors for the most part had been in earnest in voicing for a new order...For the first time...a democratic Ministry was in office".<sup>21</sup> T. G. Wilson, Reeves's historiographical descendant, sees

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20. Reeves, Ibid., p. 970.

21. Reeves, Long White Cloud, pp. 281-282.



the election as a watershed in New Zealand history.<sup>22</sup> Others would like to deprive the election of any importance at all. W. R. Armstrong puts forward this latter view at some length.<sup>23</sup> It is regurgitated in briefer form by "W.J.G." in a more recent publication. He says, "How did the general election of 1890 gain the reputation of a 'political revolution' in New Zealand history? There is nothing in contemporary facts or comment to justify the label?"<sup>24</sup> Yet the weight of comment in editorials and private papers of circa. 1890 is overwhelmingly on the side of Reeves and Wilson. The election came after eleven years of depression, after the first major class conflict in New Zealand's history, and was the first to be fought under the one man one vote provision. The hopes expressed by the Lyttleton Times before December<sup>25</sup> and the fears revealed by the right wing of the Ministerialists after the results were known,<sup>26</sup> show considerable awareness of the importance of the election, although neither the Government nor the Opposition was highly organised as a political party. Ballance was too diffident to attempt it,<sup>27</sup> and Atkinson too ill.

Atkinson seemed to be oblivious of the havoc wrought by his retention of the Premiership, which left a vacuum at the centre of power. He meant to contest Egmont again, and to continue in office during 1891 if he could obtain enough support when the House met. His

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22. Wilson, Rise of N.Z. Liberal Party, pp. 37-38.

23. Armstrong, "Politics of Development", pp. 299-310.

24. "W. J. G." in J. J. Saunders, ed., Common Mistakes in History, Canterbury, 1963, pp. 33-35.

25. See Sinclair, Reeves, pp. 114-121. Also G. G. Ash, "Ideas of Society and State in the New Zealand of 1890", unpub. M.A. thesis, Canterbury 1962, pp. vi, 45, 167.

26. See below, pp. 229, also Reeves, Long White Cloud, pp. 281-282.

27. Young, "The Political Career of John Ballance", pp. 173-175.



wife was so alarmed by these plans that she confided her fears to Hall on 25 August, and on the twenty-sixth she wrote to him, to make sure she had made herself clear. She did not want Atkinson to stand again, but, if he insisted on doing so "I feel sure that he ought to have a complete rest & change, in the recess if he is to continue Premier & reappear next Session - ".<sup>28</sup>

Because of his ill-health, Atkinson decided to make no election speeches. He would stay at Hurworth and receive electors' deputations, making his views known in this way. Early in November he published an election address which came to be known as "The Manifesto". After outlining his Government's achievements in land settlement, and restoring the colonial credit, he moved on to future policy. This section contained nothing new; indeed it specifically claimed as a virtue its having "no political or financial fireworks, no great or heroic policy". Atkinson said that "the people only required courage and prudence to steadily follow the course we have entered upon, namely, the stern restriction of all unnecessary expenditure, and the active settlement of the people on the land". He promised no further retrenchment, no more loans for public works, no replacement of the property tax, no machinery to avert future strikes.<sup>29</sup>

Atkinson's opponent in Egmont was Felix McGuire who had opposed him in 1887. McGuire wanted to break up the big estates; to cut the education vote by £72,500, abolishing all state secondary education and

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28. A. Atkinson to J. Hall, 26 August 1890, H. mss., box 32.

29. See T.H., 6 November 1890.

two of the Universities; he opposed the property tax because it frightened away men of capital; and threw in for good measure some classical liberal proposals such as the simplification and codification of the laws.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1891 Egmont bye-election McGuire stood once more, as a supporter of the Ballance Government, and won, thereby becoming a Liberal,<sup>31</sup> but in 1890 his policy was such a hotch-potch it is almost impossible to label him. He was, if he was anything, one of the "Liberal retrenchers" Taranaki had demanded in 1887.<sup>32</sup>

So slight were the differences between the two candidates, so far as the Taranaki Herald could see, that it refused to discriminate between them. It could see "no important public question at issue".<sup>33</sup> Atkinson although he did no campaigning, won by a wider margin than in 1887.

	<u>Atkinson</u>	<u>McGuire</u>
Hawera	197	142
Inglewood	184	48
Waipuku	16	24
Midhurst	42	68
Stratford	69	65
Rahotu	35	40
Warea	27	21
Okato	37	30
Oakura	36	25
Manaiā	117	75
Opunake	70	69
Otakeho	47	36
Okaiawa	45	38
Pihama	28	13
Kaponga	42	35
Tariki Road	7	1
Hastings & Opunake Roads	19	7
Macrae's Corner	44	35
Boylan Road	33	19
	<u>1095</u>	<u>793</u>

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30. Ibid., 14 November 1890, p. 2.

31. Lyttleton Times, 19 February 1891, p. 4.

32. T.H., 23 July 1887, p. 2.

33. Ibid., 5 December 1890, p. 2.

34. Ibid., 8 December 1890, p. 2.



As the election results came in it became clear that Atkinson's success in Egmont had been repeated nowhere else. Ballance claimed thirty-six or thirty-seven of the seventy-four members, with five doubtful. Atkinson told Hall and Rolleston on 8 December that he thought Ballance was over-optimistic. The Evening Post had given him twenty-eight, and Atkinson twenty-nine supporters, listing the others as opposed to Atkinson but not willing to follow Ballance.<sup>35</sup>

The results of the election surprised Atkinson. He had expected the situation to resemble that of 1887 with neither Government nor Opposition able to be confident that they could construct a Ministry from a chaotic House. He seemed bewildered and did not know what to do. He appealed to Whitaker, W. R. Russell, Hall and Rolleston for advice.<sup>36</sup> Atkinson's own inclination was to assemble Parliament in January 1891 and then see whether he could "get a Government together....It is clear to my mind that we should not be justified in simply resigning and advising the Governor to send for Ballance leaving him to call the House together or to form a Government as he thought best. I am undoubtedly better but I am not at all fit to do any real fighting in Parliament..."<sup>37</sup>

Other Ministerialists were equally unwilling to let Ballance be sent for, but they were far more decisive than Atkinson. Dr. M.S. Grace admitted to Rolleston that the situation "could not be worse". He suggested that if Atkinson resigned at once the Governor would be oblige

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35. H. A. Atkinson to W. Rolleston, 8 December 1890, Rn. mss., box 8; also H. mss., box 33.

36. H. A. Atkinson to J. Hall, 8 December 1890, H. mss., box 33.

37. Ibid.

38. Morgan Stanislaus Grace, M.D., M.L.C., C.M.G., Count of the Holy Roman Empire, born Ireland 1837. Principal medical officer N.Z. forces 1865. Called to Legislative Council by Fox, 1870. Wellington physician. Cyclopedia of N.Z., vol. 1, p. 251.

to send for one of the Ministerialists rather than Ballance, and some kind of coalition might be patched up to keep Ballance off the Treasury benches. But Grace did not trust Atkinson alone to defend the country against a possible Liberal Government: "if the Govt is true to the country even though Balance [sic.] Fish Fisher Seddon W P Reeves....do come in, they can be prevented easily from doing mischief - Our finance can be protected and the settlement of the land encouraged....". The method was simple. Grace wanted Atkinson "to make appointments freely and boldly to the Council, alleging the Country alarmed would support him -". He had already urged Atkinson to do this, but Atkinson had been hesitant and noncommittal. "Do you thoroughly understand Atkinson? Do I? Do [sic.] anyone?"<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile Hall answered Atkinson's appeal for advice. He carefully cited precedents, concluding that Ballance should not be allowed to form a Government before the House assembled.

I agree that the present Ministers should resign as soon as practicable but that a new set of men, whose appointment Parliament has never had an opportunity of expressing an opinion upon, should have the Govt. of the Colony for four months without facing the peoples representatives would be utterly wrong, and so far as I am aware unprecedented.

The only proper and regular way out of the difficulty seems for you to call Parliament as quickly as possible, and immediately before it meets, to place your resignation in the Governor's hands - This was the course adopted...when Grey made it impossible for the Fox-Whitaker Ministry to carry on...It is true that in England on two different occasions Gladstone & Disraeli resigned at once on ascertaining that they were beaten, but then there was a clear majority on the other side (a well defined party) and Parliament met at once.

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39. M. S. Grace to W. Rolleston, 8 December 1890, Rn. mss., box 8.



It has been suggested...that a reconstruction should be attempted from our side of the House - This would be useless and the attempt would only irritate - If a 'coalition' is ever to take place at all; it can only be after the other side have shown their inability to carry on, either by failing to get a working majority, or by quarrelling among themselves - <sup>40</sup>

The plan of action originally proposed by Atkinson and elaborated and endorsed by Hall, was adopted. By 16 December Atkinson had decided not to resign until Parliament had assembled early in 1891.<sup>41</sup>

Advice was pouring in from all sides. F. D. Bell wrote from London, repeating Hall's advice and hopefully suggesting that Ballance would not win the support of a majority of members.<sup>42</sup> J. D. Ormond had been analysing election speeches, and shared Bell's hope. He hoped that Atkinson might be able to remain in power should his health permit it. If not, then Bryce and Russell should try to form a Ministry, including Joseph Ward from the Opposition and "the best of the Labour men". All this he wrote to Hall so that Hall could personally impress it upon Atkinson.<sup>43</sup>

On 20 December Atkinson fled from his Wellington advisers and went to Christchurch to meet Hall, Rolleston and G. McLean.<sup>44</sup> He was still out of alignment with his political friends of the early eighties. They saw the election results as catastrophic: Bell thought them "quite horrid", a "fiasco", and could not imagine where it would all end;<sup>45</sup> Scobie McKenzie was similarly appalled.<sup>46</sup> Hall was frightened out of

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40. J. Hall to H. A. Atkinson, 10 December 1890, H. mss., vol. 11, pp. 213-249.
41. H. A. Atkinson to Scobie McKenzie, 16 December 1890, A. mss. Tu, 38. The secret was well kept. As late as 19 January 1891 the government intentions were not known. Lyttleton Times, 19 January 1891, p. 5.
42. F. D. Bell to H. A. Atkinson, 19 December 1890, A. mss. Tu, 29.
43. J. D. Ormond to J. Hall, 23 December 1890, H. mss., box 33.
44. H. A. Atkinson to J. Hall, 20 December 1890, Ibid.
45. F. D. Bell to J. Hall, 12 December 1890, Ibid.
46. Scobie McKenzie to W. Rolleston, 16 December 1890, Rn. mss., box 8.

his usual calm and wrote about Ballance's followers as "mere fluent audacious windbags who have won popularity by fanning discontent & preaching crude theories according to which everybody is to be made rich by Act of Parliament -".<sup>47</sup>

Atkinson was not nearly so alarmed. He had not grown conservative with age and sympathised with the Liberals' aims too much to wax hysterical about their means. Anneliz Atkinson saw him on 11 December and reported that "Uncle Harry says the result of the election is only another sign of a great social movement & one mustn't be cast down by the class of men returned by the working people - that will mend in time - I felt quite cheered to hear him talk....".<sup>48</sup>

When Atkinson arrived in Christchurch, just before Christmas 1890, he found Hall full of fear of the "smatterings of communistic theories" which he had detected amongst Opposition supporters. Hall felt that the state of politics in New Zealand had "become such that only some sense of duty to the land which has given one wealth, and a desire to protect what one has to lose reconcile one to remaining in N.Z.". <sup>49</sup> He was the spokesman for the conservatives, who had distrusted Atkinson for eight years, but now needed his last weeks of office to be used for their protection. Atkinson's reliance on Hall was shown by his trip to Christchurch, and Hall's importance as conservative spokesman is attested by the letters written not to Atkinson, but to Hall, who was required to direct Atkinson in this crisis.<sup>50</sup> McLean was a comparatively minor politician, and Rolleston remembered that he said little at their

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47. J. Hall to W. Fox, 24 December 1890, H. mss., vol. II, p. 288.

48. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, 11 December 1890, H.M.W.A. mss.

49. J. Hall to R. Oliver, 1 January 1890 [1891] H. mss., vol II, p. 312.

50. Ibid., boxes 33, 34.



meetings.<sup>51</sup> The major figures were Hall and Atkinson.

Hall hoped that Ballance's followers would be too divided to support a Government, and that a Ballance Ministry would collapse. If it survived, however, it could be frustrated in its attempts to pass radical legislation if Atkinson could be persuaded to pack the Legislative Council before Parliament met. One of Hall's political acquaintances said early in the New Year, "I have never recognised the advantages of the Upper House until the present time".<sup>52</sup>

The Atkinson Government had been thinking of appointing about six men to the Legislative Council as early as May 1890,<sup>53</sup> then, the Governor, Lord Onslow, invited Cabinet to submit the names of proposed appointees for provisional approval. He would appoint them as soon as Cabinet asked him to "if things go wrong with you in the House or Country". By 30 June he had the "little list" of names.<sup>54</sup> On 16 December, as the election results became known Lord Onslow reminded Atkinson of his promise.<sup>55</sup>

Efforts to persuade Atkinson to use Onslow's promise early in December failed.<sup>56</sup> No decision seems to have been made before Atkinson left for Christchurch<sup>57</sup> where the firm decision was probably made. J. D. Ormond was anxious that the appointments be announced quickly

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51. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 9 January 1891, *Ibid.*, box 34.

52. T. Durant to J. Hall, 27 January 1891, *Ibid.*

53. Rolleston was invited to be one. He refused - "it would be a confession that I was unfit for the real battle of public life - an impracticable [*Sic.*] creature (as many of my best friends think me) - a kind of marplot". W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 22 May 1890, *Ibid.*, box 31.

54. H. Richardson to W. Rolleston, 30 June 1890, Rn. *mss.*, box 8.

55. *A.J.H.R.*, 1891, A.1.

56. E. Grace to W. Rolleston, 8 December 1890, Rn. *mss.*, box 8; Sinclair "Significance of the Scarecrow Ministry", *Studies of a Small Democracy* p. 121, says Bryce was involved also. Whitaker and Russell were both in Wellington before 20 December.

57. H. A. Atkinson to Scobie McKenzie, 16 December 1890, A. *mss.* Tu, 38.

before the Opposition could agitate against such a step.<sup>58</sup> However the news did leak out before the New Year and the Opposition began to make such "a great noise" that Hall began to fear that Atkinson would not act.<sup>59</sup> Rolleston was soon regretting his part in the scheme, "I was told the matter was settled & therefore did not press my opinion but I feel that on our side [of] the House (that is the side which is to be a steady influence against Neo-Radicalism Pseudo-Liberalism and Socialistic violence will suffer for a long time from the effect of such a batch of Peers being made".<sup>60</sup>

Atkinson, once convinced that he should appoint new Legislative Councillors, did not waver, although the Governor was beginning to have second thoughts about the scheme. He was now in Christchurch, and on 16 January Atkinson made a hurried trip south to meet him. On the seventeenth he showed Atkinson a petition against the appointments signed by over 5,000 people, and asked what he should do. Atkinson replied at once, pointing out that the Council had rejected reform Bills in 1887 and 1890 and that new appointments might revitalise it. Both the Grey and Stout-Vogel governments had been quick to reward their followers, nominating twenty-one Councillors in five years of power, while the Hall, Whitaker, and Atkinson Ministries had appointed only eight men in eight years. Now Atkinson asked for only seven more.<sup>61</sup> Atkinson then returned to Wellington in the company of Hall, Rolleston and E. C. J. Stevens.<sup>62</sup> On 19 January Atkinson advised Lord Onslow to call

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58. J. D. Ormond to J. Hall, 1 January 1891, H. mss., box 33.

59. J. Hall to R. Oliver, 1 January 1891, *Ibid.*, vol II, p. 314.

60. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 9 January 1891, *Ibid.*, box 34.

61. A.J.H.R., 1891, A.I.A.

62. *Lyttleton Times*, 19 January 1891, p. 4.



six men to the Council. A day later Onslow asked Atkinson, in view of the "uncertainty of the strength of parties...since the general election", if these were the men "best calculated to strengthen the efficiency of the Upper House". Atkinson immediately replied that they were, and Onslow appointed Sir Harry Atkinson, C. C. Bowen, J. Fulton, C. J. Johnston, J. D. Ormond, W. D. Stewart and J. B. Whyte to the Upper House.<sup>63</sup> They were gazetted on 23 January, the day Parliament met.<sup>64</sup>

On the same day Atkinson became Speaker of the Legislative Council and resigned as Premier. Ballance, who had been "surprised and pleased"<sup>65</sup> at the election results, was sent for and his Ministry was sworn in on 24 January. The end of the Atkinson Government was greeted with relief by the towns. The Wellington Post described its career viciously: "It was a peerish, fractious, ill-bred child, it led a dissipated and politically immoral youth, its maturity has been weak and unhealthy, and now it is passing into an unhonoured grave".<sup>66</sup>

The Opposition which faced the Liberal Government was almost completely disorganised. Bryce and Rolleston co-opted Scobie McKenzie, W. R. Russell and D. H. Macarthur to help them lead it.<sup>67</sup> By June 1891 Russell was more or less in command of "the feeblest Opposition yet seen, with neither a following, organisation, or programme".<sup>68</sup> The Lyttleton Times's Wellington correspondent thought that "the translation of Sir Harry was an irreparable loss to the party".<sup>69</sup>

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63. A.J.H.R., 1891, A.I.A. For brief sketches see Lyttleton Times, 26 January 1891, p. 4.

64. New Zealand Gazette, 1891, vol. 1, p. 76.

65. Lyttleton Times, 3 January 1891, p. 5.

66. cit., Ibid., 22 January 1891, p. 4.

67. Ibid., 23 January 1891, p. 5. E.P., 3 February 1891, p. 2.

68. Lyttleton Times, 11 June 1891, p. 6.

69. Ibid.

Atkinson had not originally intended to enter the Legislative Council. He had wanted the Agent Generalship and when Bell's term had last been renewed he had agreed to resign whenever the Government asked him to do so,<sup>70</sup> and as late as December 1890 Government circles confidently expected Bell to relinquish his post to Atkinson. Hall inquired on 10 December whether this arrangement was still convenient for Atkinson.<sup>71</sup> Bell had been warned some months before, through his son Harry, that he would probably be asked to resign at the end of the year, but "to the surprise of those conversant with the facts" he refused to keep his word.<sup>72</sup>

The problem, therefore, of finding a suitable billet for a retiring Premier with comparatively slender means, had been vexing. Fortunately Sir William Fitzherbert was resigning from the Speakership of the Legislative Council. The post was dignified, it carried a salary of £500 p.a., and it was arranged that Atkinson should take it.<sup>73</sup> Bell sent hypocritical congratulations to Atkinson,<sup>74</sup> but others were sad and embarrassed at his relegation to a political limbo. C. W. Richmond regretted "such a termination" to a political career;<sup>75</sup> Oliver found the idea of Atkinson "thrown away in that somnolent chair of a somnolent chamber...really too absurd. Fitz used frequently to take a nap, & I never observed that it made any difference."<sup>76</sup>

Some of Atkinson's enemies saw the manoeuvre as final proof of his

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70. J. Hall to R. Oliver, 1 January 1891, H. mss., vol II, p. 314.

71. J. Hall to H. A. Atkinson, 10 December 1890, *Ibid.*, p. 245.

72. J. Hall to R. Oliver, 1 January 1891, *loc. cit.* Bell was, nevertheless removed by Ballance in September 1891.

73. C. W. Richmond to his daughters, 20 January 1891, R - A. mss., 1891/2, box 7.

74. F. D. Bell to H. A. Atkinson, 6 March 1891, A. mss. Tu, 30.

75. C. W. Richmond to his daughters, 20 January 1891, *loc. cit.*

76. R. Oliver to W. Rolleston, 6 February 1891, Rn. mss., box 6.



love of office and desire for gain. Alfred Saunders considered "that Atkinson's mind up has been intensely selfish and is a plain and sad proof of his willingness to put the country to any expense to serve either himself or his friends".<sup>77</sup> The Lyttleton Times was of the same opinion. "Sir Harry has held the fort for three long years, and, though beaten at last, he is not routed. His evacuation is orderly and deliberate. Not only does he save his baggage - What there is of it - but he carefully packs up everything portable about the place".<sup>78</sup> Lord Onslow regretted some of the vituperation that accompanied Atkinson into his last office and did his best to console his lamented late Premier. He deplored the absence of "that loyalty to leaders to which I am accustomed in England."<sup>79</sup>

In March 1891 Atkinson and Grey were sent to Sydney as delegates to a conference which the Australian colonies had called to discuss Australian federation. Atkinson had been interested in this subject for a decade, and in 1883 he had attended a similar conference in the company of Sir Frederick Whitaker, another of the "tigers at federating". However, in 1891 Atkinson and Grey did little. Their choice, as suitably elder statesmen but completely without influence with the Ballance Government, reflected the apathy of their fellow New Zealanders.<sup>80</sup> Grey proved immensely popular with Australian radicals but said little about federation.<sup>81</sup> Atkinson told his family that he felt "quite unfit for any work". He found the heat of Sydney "not unbearable, if

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77. A. Saunders to J. Hall, 24 April 1891, H. mss., box 31.

78. Otago Daily Times, 24 January 1891, p. 5.

79. Lord Onslow to H. A. Atkinson, 10 February 1891, A. mss. Tu, 30.

80. See Sinclair, Imperial Federation, pp. 14-17.

81. Rutherford, Sir George Grey, pp. 644-647.

you have plenty of clean shirts".<sup>82</sup>

The trip to Australia proved temporarily beneficial to Atkinson, but his health remained intermittently bad throughout 1891.<sup>83</sup> In 1892 he had difficulty in breathing and suffered attacks of trembling, but he was cheerful, said Anneliz, and pleased to hear news of his beloved grandson.<sup>84</sup> Early in June he was worse, and seemed more depressed. His wife told Anneliz that the Australian doctors had made him afraid of straining his heart "so that he can't enjoy doing things".<sup>85</sup>

The 1892 session began on 28 June. As usual the Legislative Council's proceedings opened with mention of members who had died since the last session. Atkinson was so greatly moved by this, he told Richard Oliver, that he had not trusted himself to join in the valedictions. Oliver did his best to comfort the old man and left him alone in the Speaker's room. A short time afterwards he was found there, dead.<sup>86</sup>

The news was immediately carried to the House of Representatives. Ballance stopped in the middle of a speech. Parliament adjourned. On 29 June the Upper House assembled to hear laudations from P. Buckley, E. C. J. Stevens, D. Pollen, R. Oliver and Dr. Grace.<sup>87</sup> In the Lower House Ballance conceded that Sir Harry "deserved well of New Zealand, which he faithfully served," and granted him a public funeral. Hall and Rolleston, who had become estranged from him, R. H. J. Reeves, a political enemy, and James Allen, who had scarcely known him, followed

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82. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, March 1891, H.M.W.A. mss.

83. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, 1 October 1891, Ibid.

84. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, 22 May 1892, Ibid.

85. A. E. Atkinson to D. K. Richmond, 4 June 1892, Ibid.

86. Oliver, 29 June 1892, P.D., 75, p. 45.

87. Ibid., pp. 44-46.



Ballance. Allen spoke as a junior member of the House. To him the death of Sir Harry Atkinson meant the loss of a living relic of the past. He had been "the most perfect type of an old settler" - something which the new member for Dunedin East revered as a rare and precious curiosity.<sup>88</sup>

Atkinson's family had been expecting his death for some time, but were nevertheless stricken by their personal loss. C. W. Richmond "reverenced his absolutely unselfish spirit & his unquenchable Hope - his belief in God & therefore in man".<sup>89</sup> Arthur Atkinson told his sister Emily that their brother's life had ended tranquilly. "His end was like his life, full of courage and kindness. No distrust & so no shrinking, no perturbation even. We were talking one morning at breakfast about his state & he said 'of course I don't want to go - but when the Dr. told me what it was, it did not seem to affect me at all' And so it seemed all through when I was there".<sup>90</sup>

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88. Ibid., pp. 64-66.

89. C. W. Richmond to A. Blake, 11 August 1892, R - A. mss., 1892/5, box 7.

90. A. S. Atkinson to E. E. Richmond, 7 July 1892, Ibid.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION.

Atkinson has been called the mainstay of "the Conservative Party", on the one hand, and a quasi-socialist radical on the other. Both these extremes were foreign to him. He was, essentially, a moderate, who upheld fiscal orthodoxy in a time of severe and prolonged depression, but was in all other respects, rather left of centre.

An unconventional, small-town, English upbringing had roughly shaped Atkinson's political outlook before he came to New Zealand, but nevertheless, he probably brought fewer set ideas with him from England than did most of his contemporaries. Since the age of eighteen he had been preparing to emigrate, and was aware that the New Zealand environment would demand different skills from the English one in which he had grown up.

He arrived in Taranaki when he was twenty, having had almost no experience of country life, and found that he greatly enjoyed the challenge of pioneer farming on his own land. It was at Hurworth that he spent his most formative years. There he established a farm, married, and had children. When this life was interrupted by the Maori Wars he joined the Volunteers to defend his fellow settlers. His deepest affections were always centred upon his family, especially his wife and his brother Arthur. He loved children: Anneliz Atkinson remembered Sir Harry helping to organise an exceedingly boisterous children's party only a short time before his death.<sup>1</sup>

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1. H.M.W.A. mss.



This kind of warmth, however, was not easily communicable outside the family. Atkinson's public manner was rough and pugnacious, making him a formidable antagonist in debate. But he was too deficient in oratorical emotion to be successful on stumping tours. None of his speeches fired the popular imagination as Grey's, Stout's, or even Ballance's could do. Except in Taranaki, where his war service was remembered, Atkinson was never popular; Rolleston said in 1887 that his public image was sadly awry. "We know him to be a man with the largest popular sympathy & the kindest man to deal with but the people don't care for him down here".<sup>2</sup>

After the Maori Wars, Atkinson, significantly, decided to stay on the land. He was the only member of the Richmond-Atkinson clan who did so, and who earned his living by farming for the rest of his life. The others reverted to their urban-professional backgrounds as soon as they could afford to do so. Atkinson, however, identified passionately with those farmers who were hacking homesteads out of the bush, as he had done in the fifties, and throughout his political career they were to be his first concern. As late as 1888 he said: "I am a country settler myself, and I know the difficulties of weak [recently settled] districts. I know what striking through the mud is, not only by talk, as some honourable members do, but by actual experience of daily life; and therefore my sympathies are entirely in that direction".<sup>3</sup>

Atkinson's love of the land and his respect for backblocks farmers

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2. W. Rolleston to J. Hall, 30 September 1887, H. mss., box 25.
  3. Atkinson, 1 August 1888, P.D., 62, p. 383.

were reinforced by his belief that men could achieve a modest prosperity, as he had done, if they would take up land. The 1876 deferred payment scheme, for example, was intended to bring land within the reach of men with little capital. Once they had established farms, they would not only help to boost exports receipts, but would swell the ranks of the stable, prosperous, rural middle-class which was his ideal of social health. Atkinson's trust in this class, and in farmers generally, as opposed to townsmen, lent personal conviction to his support for the abolition of the provinces. When he abolished the provinces in 1876, replacing town-dominated provincial councils with small administrative units directly responsible to the locality they served, he considered that he had introduced "local self-government". The Counties Act of 1876, in Atkinson's view, rescued the backblocks farmers from the greed of the provincial towns, which had formerly absorbed public works money before it reached the periphery of the settled area, where it was most needed.

In 1878 Atkinson once more rallied to the defence of the farmers, this time in opposition to Ballance's land tax. He began to consider the principles that should govern land ownership and taxation in a "new country"; and revealed an understanding of his social and political context which was rare among contemporary politicians, whose ideas tended to be heavily coloured by their European experiences. In a "new country", said Atkinson, land was an investment like any other, and should be taxed to the same extent as any other investment, but not more. Landowners should not pay taxes from which all other investors were exempt. Accordingly, when he returned to the Treasury in 1879, Atkinson repealed



the land tax and replaced it with a property tax on "all realised wealth"

Administration "in most...things is the key stone of success",<sup>4</sup> Atkinson told his brother very early in his career; and he seems to have preferred his administrative work to political activity. Here, again, the land took precedence over all but finance. Even in the late eighties, when loan money was almost unobtainable, he found money for continuing with main trunk railways. His next priority was roads, which he thought were more useful to farmers than branch railways. They too had to be built because settlement was useless if produce could not be marketed cheaply. He seems, also, to have derived satisfaction from drawing up his financial statements, balancing as many Budgets as he could, and spreading the money at his disposal as far as it would go. He became reluctant to allow anyone else to take over the Treasury, and solicitude for the accounts helped to keep him at his post against medical advice, until he was voted out in 1890.

Like Gladstone, Atkinson placed a high value on fiscal circumspection and he was inclined to view Ballance's (and later Vogel's) open-handed administration of the Treasury as not only financially inept, but morally wicked. While out of power in 1877-1879 and 1884-1887 he adopted tactics of watchful, but not obstructive opposition, and waited for the Government to discredit its extravagant policies by its own acts. This inertia disgusted his followers who did not always share his eschatological view of politics.

As the depression deepened in the eighties, the retributive tone of Atkinson's taxation policies became more pronounced. Extravagance

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4. H. A. Atkinson to A. S. Atkinson, 26 January 1876, Scholefield, Papers, vol. 2, p. 412.

and greed for expenditure began to be punished with direct taxation and heavier local body rates. Atkinson said that he had supported the introduction of direct taxation, "to connect the expenditure of loans with taxation, so that the people might really be awakened to the danger of allowing unlimited sums to be raised without seeing how they were affected by it...I submit it has very successfully awakened the country to the fact that borrowing means paying ultimately".<sup>5</sup> He began to cast about for sections of society from whom he could extract special levies: smokers, drinkers, bachelors, gamblers; all were considered. "The single man who spends an inordinate amount in tobacco and spirits is not a subject for the commiseration of the House; he is a fit subject to pay taxation, if he spends his money in that way instead of saving it".<sup>6</sup> In 1881: "as to the state of bachelorhood being...a luxury he should think it more of a wickedness, and...it ought to be penal".<sup>7</sup>

After 1879, social issues, which had been concealed by prosperity, were brought into the political arena by the depression. Atkinson became interested in such questions and acquired a reputation for "fads". Between 1879 and 1890 he supported deferred payment, the leasehold, proportional representation, women's suffrage, and temperance. He became a leading advocate of Australian federation and Pacific imperialism. In 1882 he introduced, but did not see adopted, a national insurance scheme. Between 1888 and 1890 he introduced a number of labour Bills, which failed to pass. In 1888 he imposed a protective tariff. The

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5. Atkinson, 27 June 1882, P.D., 42, p. 46.

6. Atkinson, 2 August 1882, Ibid., 43, p. 89.

7. Atkinson, 26 June 1888, Ibid., 61, p. 358.



1890 strike presented Atkinson with his last challenge, but in this conflict between capital and labour he did not know how to act. He refused to adopt a partisan position, and remained strictly neutral. The decision to do nothing was supported by his followers.

Atkinson's political interests developed gradually in response to a series of social, economic and political stimuli. In 1857 he had followed the more articulate Richmonds into the Taranaki provincial council to "speak for the bush". In 1861 he followed them into central politics for a similar reason. At this stage he was clearly a particularist politician, and his term as Defence Minister, 1864-1865, was an extension of this role.

In 1872 Atkinson decided to stand against W. S. Moorhouse for Egmont because Moorhouse was a "Foxite". (Fox had spoken up for Wiremu Kingi during the Maori Wars.) When Vogel's public works policy emerged as the central issue of the campaign, however, Atkinson put forward a policy for moderate public works expansion, while Moorhouse enthusiastically advocated rapid development. Atkinson won, by a narrow margin, and went to Wellington as an independent member. For two years he said little except to plead for the slowing down of the Vogel Government's borrowing policy. His constituents demanded only that he should secure public works for Taranaki.

The abolition controversy absorbed most of Atkinson's attention between 1874 and 1876, and provided him with the chance to join the Vogel Cabinet; then the depression evoked an interest in social questions. In the eighties, when his position as a major politician was well established, Atkinson began to take an interest in foreign policy.

He was, in his pursuit of Pacific imperialism, and of Imperial federation as a means to this end, quite typical of other New Zealand politicians.<sup>8</sup> Men such as Grey, Reeves and Seddon, having attained positions of importance in New Zealand, disliked the idea that they, and New Zealand, were of small significance in the world.

Atkinson felt that New Zealand was too tempting a prize to be able to afford to be neutral in any war, and he made uneasy estimates of the cost of defence once other, potentially hostile, European powers gained island bases in the Pacific.<sup>9</sup> He supported federation with Australia because he believed that eventually the English-speaking people would become "one great united nation" and Australasian federation would be in accordance with "the spirit of the age".<sup>10</sup> Another reason for Australian federation was that the united Australasian colonies could press more strongly for the annexation of Pacific islands than any of them could do singly. Only by exerting pressure on Britain could New Zealand obtain a voice in world affairs.<sup>11</sup> For this reason Atkinson also supported Imperial federation. In 1887 he said: "It has been said by some honourable gentlemen that they are proud of New Zealand; and so am I. They say they hope New Zealand is going to rise to be a great nation. I have no such hope; but I hope and believe that we are going to be an important part of a great nation...I am proud of being an Englishman as well as a New Zealander - but, if I had to choose between

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8. See A. Ross, New Zealand Aspirations in the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century, Oxford, 1965, passim; Hemer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 280-302.
9. Atkinson, 10 June 1886, Ibid., 54, p. 417.
10. Atkinson, 28 June 1883, Ibid., 44, p. 250.
11. Seddon was the most notable exponent of this view. See K. Sinclair Imperial Federation: A Study of New Zealand Policy and Opinion, 1880-1914, London, 1955, pp. 31-33.



the two, I should choose to be an Englishman rather than a New Zealander".

Atkinson was unusual among nineteenth century New Zealand Premiers in that he had never attended a University. Lack of formal education is an almost universal qualification of twentieth century Prime Ministers, but among Atkinson's contemporaries only Seddon and Ballance had not been University-educated. Atkinson was not an original thinker; he was an eclectic, empirical collector of opinions from a wide variety of sources. Like the Richmonds, Atkinson almost certainly brought a Liberal, *laissez faire* philosophy with him when he came to New Zealand;<sup>15</sup> but he soon recognised its inappropriateness. The severe shortage of investment capital in New Zealand obliged governments to take an active role in economic development. To Atkinson, the transition from State activity in that sphere, to State involvement in the development of society, was easily and consistently made when the need for the latter became manifest. He constantly altered political theories to meet the needs of New Zealand, measuring them against his own experience. In 1882 he told the House: "I am as little trammelled with the political-economy ideas of old countries as any man. I can look at the writings of the various political economists and form my own opinions upon them; and although it may sound presumptuous, I venture to say that, whenever their doctrines are not sound in my opinion, I would not act up to them in

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12. Atkinson, 10 December 1887, *P.D.*, 58, p. 313. See also J. Bassett, review of A. Ross, *New Zealand Aspirations, Landfall*, vol. 19, no. 3.

13. The only one with a degree was the stop-gap Prime Minister, Sir Francis Dillon Bell, 14 May-30 May 1925.

14. For example, the property tax was an American "fad", according to Ballance, *Southland Daily News*, 17 May 1880, p. 2.

15. Tosswill, "Life of Harry Albert Atkinson", p. 204, says "the writings of John Stuart Mill had been studied for thirty years by members of the Atkinson family".



any respect".<sup>16</sup> He was, in fact, a transitional figure, bridging the gap between the University men of the nineteenth century - the pastoralists and professional gentry - and the self-educated, empirical reformers of the twentieth.

Atkinson never developed a comprehensive political philosophy, rather, he retained his early laissez faire, free trade notions, and used them as an ideal standard, an eventual goal which a matured colonial economy might attain. Upon every specific issue in which he became interested, however, he departed from the ideal on the grounds that it was inappropriate for a "new country". Hence there was a basic inconsistency in Atkinson's political thought, as in Stout's,<sup>17</sup> that makes him impossible to categorise except on specific issues. It helps to explain how he could have been simultaneously labelled a "socialist" and a "Conservative", while in fact fitting neither label.

Nine of the twelve years in which Atkinson held Cabinet office were years of steadily worsening depression, when the basic demand made upon governments was to do something to restore prosperity. In fact they were unable to do so, because the New Zealand economy was precariously reliant upon two inadequate export staples, wool and gold. Wool prices were low from 1879 until the end of the period, and fell particularly sharply in the late eighties. Gold exports were declining in value at the same time.<sup>18</sup> Until prices rose elsewhere, and adequate staples could be found, the depression could not be dispelled.

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16. Atkinson, 7 September 1882, P.D., 43, p. 864.

17. See Hamer, "The Law and the Prophet", pp. 509-511.

18. See Sinkin, The Instability of a Dependent Economy, p. 30; Horsfield "The Struggle for Economic Viability", passim.



All governments could do was to try to mitigate the effects of depression, yet they made only feeble efforts to do so. Vogel made the most energetic thrust in this direction in 1884, but he was trying to relieve only one group, city investors; and he failed to achieve significant results, even for them. Atkinson's efforts were less spectacular than Vogel's, but were <sup>not</sup> so markedly sectional. Like J. G. Coates, who found himself in a similar predicament in the 1930s, Atkinson "blazed more than one trail that his successors saw fit to follow and widen".<sup>19</sup> He eased payment conditions for leaseholders, made small advances to farmers, and brought in a protective tariff for the towns. With Grey and Ballance he was responsible for the abolition of plural voting in 1889. W. B. Sutch says that "the legislation of the 'nineties was being prepared in the 'eighties";<sup>20</sup> but at the same time Atkinson's measures made little impact. In 1887-1888 the frozen meat market collapsed, shutting out what had been a faint ray of hope, and there seemed to be no alternative but to balance the Budget and wait for prices to rise. No one suggested any other plan.

Because he clung to office beyond the time when he had anything of positive value to contribute, Atkinson has been labelled an intransigent conservative: but as long as he was Premier he protected the Treasury from the 'Skinflints', whose reactionary finance would have caused far greater hardships than Atkinson's administration; and from the Vogelites who would have dissipated the colonial resources in the interests of city investors. Atkinson always tried to keep the frontier open, and, on

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19. R. M. Burdon, The New Dominion: A Social and Political History of New Zealand 1918-39, Wellington, 1965, pp. 231-232.

20. Sutch, "The Long Depression", p. 29.



the whole, succeeded. Towards 1890 it was only slightly open, but the 'Skinflints' would have closed it completely.

Except on questions of finance, where he felt the need to pass his measures was urgent, Atkinson was politically lethargic. He disliked lobbying, and was reluctant to undertake it on behalf of social reforms which he felt, at heart, were ahead of popular demand, and in any case were not as urgent as financial reforms. As a country member he dared not press his "fads" too insistently upon the House, or upon the electorate. Those members on whom he relied for support for his finance Bills were not the urban liberals, whose Treasurer was Vogel, but the rural members, who tended to be timid on the question of social changes. He was not prepared to risk the loss of support for finance Bills for the sake of other measures.

National insurance, the most radical of Atkinson's "fads", and the one which was most clearly his own development, was introduced more as a topic for discussion, the basis of future Acts, rather than as a reform which Atkinson expected to be quickly adopted. He said, "I do desire that Bill to be passed,...and I believe that the country will desire it; but it is impossible to pass such a Bill until the country does desire it".<sup>21</sup> Such an approach undervalued political leadership; especially at a time when the colony was desperate for guidance. It was rooted in a Darwinist belief in the educability and inevitable progress of mankind.

Historians and political scientists have been greatly interested in

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21. Atkinson, 12 June 1884, P.D., 47, p. 108.



the question of whether governments in the eighties were Liberal or Conservative,<sup>22</sup> and their usage of these terms has a political, not a financial connotation. Yet political action, of any kind, could do little for New Zealand until the economy revived. After 1890 the Liberals embarked upon an extensive programme of reform legislation, but the value of most of it was not felt until prices rose and the refrigeration industry established itself. The measure that would have done most to boost the economy - generous aid to the struggling meat and dairy industry was left to private enterprise.

Because he held moderate views on the two most important issues of his time, public works and land, Atkinson was abused by both left and right. Yet in the amorphous politics of the eighties, when 'pork barrel' alignments were becoming increasingly rare, as public works expenditure slackened off; and where coalition Ministries were becoming more common, Atkinson, because he was a moderate, was almost indispensable. He was, moreover, always willing to take office, because he firmly believed in his administrative ability and felt that no one could take better care of the colonial credit than he.

Essentially, Atkinson was a middle class country liberal, whose progressive views on some questions estranged him from his rural associates,<sup>23</sup> while his cautious financial policies won their tepid approval. After 1885 some of them would have preferred a fiscal reactionary, but they had not got one who was suitable to put into the

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22. Lipson, The Politics of Equality, is an obvious example; another is Wilson, The Grey Government.

23. Not that "fads" were unknown among rural members - Rolleston was a leaseholder, and Hall advocated female suffrage, to name only two; what distinguished Atkinson in this group was the range of his "fads".



Treasury. Both the town-country division, and the split between 'bold' and 'cautious' borrowers, separated Atkinson from the town radicals; by 1890 he was also separated from most of them by age.<sup>24</sup> Like Coates again, Atkinson's moderation in financial policies proved unacceptable in the long run to the conservative rump of his own group; yet he was not radical enough for the new party coming up on his left. He became, by the end of his life, lost in no man's land, acknowledged by neither of the political groups who were waging a battle made bitter by prolonged depression.

To the end of his career, Atkinson kept to the middle of the road. His views on the "Yellow Peril" were less rabid than those of his contemporaries; and his rural prejudices were modified by his town upbringing. His attitude to the Maoris most clearly shown in the Parihaka crisis, was far calmer and less hostile than that of other Taranaki settlers, although it was less detached than that of someone like Rolleston, whose farm was in Canterbury. Unlike later country Liberals Atkinson was radical on questions like the tariff, labour legislation, electoral reform, and, above all, the leasehold. The range of his "fads" was unusual among country members of his own time, and would have been strange political equipment for a Seddonian Liberal from a rural electorate; yet his devotion to the land, his exaltation of the rural virtues, and his belief that social legislation should follow upon public demand for reform, would have made him an uneasy inhabitant of any Cabinet bent on root and branch reform.

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24. See Sinclair, Reeves, pp. 82 & 91.



When he died, in 1892, Atkinson was estranged from the conservative Opposition group. The Liberal Party acknowledged no debt to him, and since he had been in opposition to it, he was recorded as "Conservative" by W. P. Reeves, the Liberal historian. He had never quite been attuned to the "spirit of the age" that he had invoked so often. When news of his death was delivered to members no one knew how to sum up his political career, so they sidestepped it; and mourned him for his personal virtues, his bravery in the Maori Wars, and as a relic of the pioneers. Much later, when Seddonian conservatism was in its hey-day, some of his contemporaries looked back at Atkinson and bemusedly labelled him a socialist - an odd description for a cautious, humanitarian liberal with strong views on fiscal rectitude and the proper use of the land in a "new country".

Colonial Secretary:	Secretary for Crown Lands	1.11.1874 - 1.11.1875
	Minister of Immigration	10.11.1875 - 1.11.1876
Colonial Secretary:	Colonial Treasurer	8.11.1876 - 1.11.1877
	Secretary for Crown Lands	8.11.1877 - 1.11.1878
	Minister of Immigration	8.11.1878 - 1.11.1879
Colonial Secretary:	Secretary for Crown Lands	1.11.1879 - 1.11.1880
	Minister of Immigration	1.11.1880 - 1.11.1881
	Commissioner of Customs	1.11.1881 - 1.11.1882
Colonial Secretary:	Colonial Treasurer	1.11.1882 - 1.11.1883
	Colonial Treasurer	1.11.1883 - 1.11.1884
Colonial Secretary:	Colonial Treasurer	1.11.1884 - 1.11.1885
	Colonial Treasurer	1.11.1885 - 1.11.1886
	Secretary for Crown Lands	1.11.1886 - 1.11.1887
	Minister of Immigration	1.11.1887 - 1.11.1888
Colonial Secretary:	Colonial Treasurer	1.11.1888 - 1.11.1889
	Colonial Treasurer	1.11.1889 - 1.11.1890
	Commissioner of Customs	1.11.1890 - 1.11.1891
	Minister of Immigration	1.11.1891 - 1.11.1892

APPENDIX A.

ATKINSON'S POLITICAL OFFICES.

1. Provincial:-

Deputy Superintendent of Taranaki	28.XII.1861 - 19.II.1862 16.II.1863 - 15.VI.1863
Member, Taranaki Executive Council 1868	16.V.1874 - 14.X.1874
Member, Taranaki Provincial Council	8.IV.1857 - 15.V.1861 8.VIII.1861 - 1.III.1865 23.XI.1873 - 26.IX.1874

2. Colonial:-

Member, House of Representatives	
for Grey and Bell	20.VI.1864 - 27.I.1866
for Town of New Plymouth	29.IV.1867 - 18.III.1869
for Egmont	3.X.1872 - 22.I.1891
Weld Ministry: Minister for Colonial Defence	24.XI.1864 - 16.X.1865.
Vogel Ministry: Secretary for Crown Lands	7.IX.1874 - 6.VII.1875
Minister of Immigration	10.IX.1874 - 6.VII.1875
Pollen Ministry: Colonial Treasurer	6.VII.1875 - 15.II.1876
Secretary for Crown Lands	6.VII.1875 - 15.II.1876
Minister of Immigration	6.VII.1875 - 15.II.1876
Vogel Ministry: Secretary for Crown Lands	15.II.1876 - 1.IX.1876
Minister of Immigration	15.II.1876 - 1.IX.1876
Commissioner of Customs	15.II.1876 - 3.VII.1876
Atkinson Ministry: Premier	1.IX.1876 - 13.IX.1876
Colonial Treasurer	1.IX.1876 - 13.IX.1876
Atkinson Ministry: Premier	13.IX.1876 - 13.X.1877
Colonial Treasurer	13.IX.1876 - 13.X.1877
Secretary for Crown Lands	13.IX.1876 - 4.I.1877
Minister of Immigration	13.IX.1876 - 4.I.1877
Hall Ministry: Colonial Treasurer	8.X.1878 - 21.IV.1882
Commissioner of Customs	8.X.1879 - 10.III.1881
Commissioner of Stamp Duties	29.X.1879 - 21.IV.1882
Minister of Marine	10.X.1879 - 21.IV.1882



Whitaker Ministry:	Colonial Treasurer	21.IV.1882 - 25.IX.1883
	Commissioner of Customs	21.IV.1882 - 25.IX.1883
	Commissioner of Stamp Duties	21.IV.1882 - 25.IX.1883
	Minister of Marine	21.IV.1882 - 25.IX.1883
Atkinson Ministry:	Premier	25.IX.1883 - 16.VIII.1884
	Colonial Treasurer	25.IX.1883 - 16.VIII.1884
	Commissioner of Trade and Customs and Minister of Marine Department	25.IX.1883 - 16.VIII.1884
	Commissioner of Stamp Duties	25.IX.1883 - 16.VIII.1884
Atkinson Ministry:	Premier	28.VIII.1884 - 3.IX.1884
	Commissioner of Stamps	28.VIII.1884 - 3.IX.1884
Atkinson Ministry:	Premier	8.X.1887 - 24.I.1891
	Colonial Treasurer	8.X.1887 - 24.I.1891
	Postmaster-General	8.X.1887 - 17.X.1889
	Commissioner of Telegraphs	8.X.1887 - 17.X.1889
	Minister of Marine	8.X.1887 - 24.I.1891
	Commissioner of Stamps	8.X.1887 - 24.I.1891
	Minister of Education	8.IV.1889 - 9.VII.1889
	Commissioner of Trade and Customs	8.IV.1889 - 24.I.1891
Member, Legislative Council		22.I.1891 - 28.VI.1892
Speaker of the Legislative Council		23.I.1891 - 28.VI.1892

Source: G. H. Scholefield, ed, New Zealand Parliamentary Record 1840-1929, Wellington, 1950.

APPENDIX B.H. A. ATKINSON, ASSETS AND LIABILITIES. 21 SEPTEMBER 1871ESTIMATE OF VALUE OF STOCK

2 working steers	18	-	-
1 Bull stag	4	-	-
1 Cow	6	-	-
Pigs	4	-	-
1 horse	20	-	-
2 horses	10	-	-
1 foal	1	10	-
	63	10	-
25 sheep	11	5	-
	74	15	-
2 Drays	20	-	-
1 cart	7	-	-
1 cart horse	8	-	-
Bows & chains	1	10	-
	111	5	-
Cash A.S.A. & J.C.R.	46	-	-
Pitcairn	60	-	-
D. A. Titanium	34	-	-
D. A. Sundries	10	-	-
Mother & Sam	30	-	-
	291	5	-
Cash on Landing	40	-	-
	331	5	-

LIABILITIES

Wood	10	-	-
D	3	10	-
Jordan & James	5	17	-
Revell	2	8	-
Collins		9	-
Colson	5	6	4
Burton	4	10	-
Leech	1	-	-
	33	-	4
Biscoe	4	-	-
	37	-	4



H. A. ATKINSON ASSETS AND LIABILITIES, APRIL 1872

ASSETS

Blake	2	19	-
Broadmore	13	-	-
Hammerton. hire of cart	4	6	6
Wiltshire	10	-	-
Walker	23	15	4
Hammerton for cart	8	-	-
D. A. firewood	7	17	10½
" " hurdles	1	7	-
	69	5	8½ [sic.]
3 tons hay	12	-	-
3 " "	9	-	-
4 " potatoes	20	-	-
carrots	1	10	-
turnips	1	10	-
Hurdles	3	-	-
	116	5	8½
	37	-	4
	79	5	4½

VALUE OF STOCK APRIL 1872

2 pr working bullocks	50	-	-
1 single " "	12	-	-
1 pair steers	11	-	-
2 cows	12	-	-
2 "	10	-	-
11 calves @ 30/-	16	10	-
5 yearlings @ 60/-	15	-	-
2 Horses	10	-	-
1 foal	2	10	-
pigs	1	10	-
	140	10	-
1 Dray	10	-	-
yokes, bows & chains	6	-	-
12 wethers @ 15/-	9	-	-
2 rams	2	-	-
57 ewes @ 9/-	25	13	-
30 lambs @ 7/-	10	10	-
	203	13	-
	79	5	-
	14	-	-
	294	18	-

Source: R - A mss., 1872/3, box 4.

APPENDIX C.

RICHMOND-ATKINSON LANDHOLDINGS IN 1882

A. S. Atkinson, solicitor, Nelson.

263 acres, Taranaki county	1,182	-	-
Raleigh borough	120	-	-
Nelson borough	1,250	-	-

Total value	£2,552
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Decimus Atkinson, settler, Auckland.

1 acre, Taranaki county	12	-	-
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Total value	£12
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H. A. Atkinson, farmer, Taranaki.

791 acres, Taranaki county	5,870	-	-
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Total value	£5,870
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Harry Dunstan Atkinson, farmer, Waitara.

Raleigh borough	15	-	-
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Total value	£15
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C. W. Richmond, Judge of the Supreme Court, Wellington.

195 acres, Taranaki County	400	-	-
Dunedin	1,000	-	-

Total value	£1,400
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H. R. Richmond, New Plymouth.

844 acres Taranaki county	3,170	-	-
Inglewood	135	-	-
Raleigh	422	-	-
Stratford	40	-	-
New Plymouth	2,220	-	-

Total value	£5,987
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J. C. Richmond, Nelson.

5 acres Inangahua county	5	-	-
185 acres Taranaki county	730	-	-
1,737 acres Waipa county	2,198	-	-
Nelson	1,550	-	-

Total value	£4,483
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Source: The Freeholders of New Zealand, 1882, Wellington, 1884.



APPENDIX D.

MEMBERS OF THE RICHMOND AND ATKINSON FAMILIES MENTIONED  
IN THIS THESIS.

AMELIA JANE ATKINSON (1831-1865) nee Skimmer. Married Sir Harry 23 March 1856. 4 children.

ANNIE ELIZABETH ATKINSON (1838-1919) nee Smith (sister of Mrs J. C. RICHMOND). Married Sir Harry 13 June 1866. 3 children. Her delicate health caused her husband constant anxiety. He was "dreadfully sensitive to any suffering of his wife" - Rn. mss. 18 February 1887, box 7.

ARTHUR SAMUEL ATKINSON (1833-1902) Younger brother of Sir Harry. Came with him to Taranaki 1853. In 1854 he married JANE MARIA RICHMOND. Active in provincial and central politics until 1868 when he retired to take up law - but remained his brother's principal political confidant until Sir Harry's death.

HARRY ALBERT ATKINSON (1834-1892) See above, passim.

HARRY DUNSTAN ATKINSON. Eldest son of Sir Harry. Managed the Waitara farm.

RICHMOND HURSTHOUSE (1845-1902) goldminer, and engineer. Member for Motueka for nine years after 1876. First Mayor of Motueka. Nephew of Sir Harry by marriage.

CHRISTOPHER WILLIAM RICHMOND (1821-1895) Married EMILY ELIZABETH ATKINSON, Sir Harry's elder sister. Came to Taranaki 1853. Active in provincial and central politics. Colonial Treasurer and Colonial Secretary 1856, in the Stafford Ministry; and Minister of Native Affairs 1858-1860, at time of the Waitara purchase. In 1862 became a Judge of the Supreme Court and retired from politics. An early political mentor of Sir Harry's.

JAMES CROWE RICHMOND (1822-1898). Came to Taranaki 1850. Married Mary Smith, sister of A. E. ATKINSON. Entered provincial and central politics. Provincial Secretary of Taranaki at time of the Waitara purchase. Colonial Secretary under Weld 1864-1865. Called to the Legislative Council 1883. His daughter Anne Elizabeth - ANNELIZ RICHMOND, married E. T. ATKINSON, Sir Harry's son.

HENRY ROBERT RICHMOND (1829-1890). Came to Taranaki 1850. Superintendent of Taranaki 1865-1869. Schoolteacher and scientist.



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