

# Promises, Promises

*Eighty years of wooing New Zealand voters*

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## A LIVELY HISTORY OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING, FROM THE FIRST ELECTION OF THE MODERN ERA IN 1938 TO TODAY

Brimming with political-party campaign advertisements from the 1938 election to the present day, this colourful, engaging book brings together 80 years of political advertisements that can truly be said to have made New Zealand history. The author's analysis is penetrating and original and visual material is abundant and revealing. Perfect for history, politics, design and nostalgia buffs.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Claire Robinson** is Professor of Communication Design and Pro Vice-Chancellor, Toi Rauwharangi College of Creative Arts at Massey University. Her research interest is the visual communication of political messages in the context of election campaigning and political leadership. Her research has been disseminated through international peer reviewed journal articles, book chapters, international conferences and designs. She is a frequent media commentator on New Zealand politics.

## SALES POINTS

- The first time a history of the art of political persuasion in New Zealand has been published
- Written by an expert and high-profile author, the book is a lively and accessible read
- A treasure trove of campaign material accompanied by an astute and fresh commentary
- A terrific resource of students of New Zealand politics and advertising history

## PRINTABLE A3 POSTER AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST



ONE  
EVERYONE  
EVERYWHERE  
IS BETTER OFF  
TODAY!

**THIS CHAPTER TITLE** is a slogan from a Labour poster produced for the 1951 election. 'Everyone everywhere is better off today' refers to prosperity. Vote Labour again! (see page 10). The poster contains an illustration of a smiling, happy voter family. It was an extension of Labour's 1949 campaign slogan 'Everyone's better off under Labour' and its 1950 campaign slogan 'Everyone – yes, everyone – will be better off under Labour' (see page 10). In these campaigns the words everyone, everywhere and yes were used to suggest that everyone and everywhere were better off. But easily who is better off everywhere in Labour's version of 1949–1950? New Zealand? It doesn't take a microscope to see that everyone is better off, gleaming white, not a sample of colour to be seen. It's not far to pack on Labour as the only example of this, nationalised the term everyone in its 1951 advertising, and in national ad, similarly, everybody or where (see page 10). The chapter looks at how white (European or Pakeha) families came to be valued as the archetype New Zealand voter.

One of the first attempts to understand New Zealand's political culture was written in 1943 by Leslie Lyons, the American founder of the Political Science Department at Victoria University of Wellington. In his book *The Politics of Country Union* Lyons declared New Zealand's political culture to be homogeneous and like-minded. He put the blame for the persistence of a single national, racial and cultural tradition – that of Britain – on the homogeneity that made possible the egalitarianism that 'lighted New Zealand democracy' to focus on 'the day for everyone who looks up to the group' (its passion for social justice and the eradication of poverty, and the absence of privilege and class distinctions). Lyons confidently proclaimed that there is no underdog, not in anyone's opinion – unless it be the housewife and mother.

Today it is undeniable that women's exploitation should be brushed off as inconsequential or that the indigenous Māori population should be totally ignored. The 1940s was a time, however, when the perspective of Anglo-Saxon men was all that counted in public life – and not just in New Zealand, but all over the Western world, where they have composed and delivered the dominant political culture for hundreds of years. People who are comfortably part of a dominant political culture don't normally pause to consider that those outside that culture might not share their views and values. They assume that, like them, everyone is perfectly happy with the status quo. We would like to think those times have past, and that New Zealand's political culture now reflects the complexity of its diverse population. However, dominant cultures are resilient and highly resistant to change, and New Zealand is no exception.

First, a bit of context for non-New Zealanders. In the 1940s, the Māori people, the Māori people, are the indigenous people (people) who lived on the land of Aotearoa, New Zealand. They occupied the land for 800 or more years before British settlers arrived in the early nineteenth century. Until then Māori lived in small, scattered groups called hāpū (tribes) and were then, and still are, connected by whānau (family) groups.

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Adam Hamilton is quoted as saying, 'Family traditions and the family spirit have been of supreme importance in shaping the character of the British race and the family spirit and responsibility are allowed to die the race will die with them'. Labour was positioned the family as the underpinning of the state. Labour's aim is to 1938 manifesto was to 'drive to the maximum the welfare of the nation of the Dominion by maintaining and improving living standards and by organising an internationalism to distribute the production and service in such that will guarantee to every citizen able and willing to work an income sufficient to provide him and his dependents with everything necessary to make a home and home life in the best sense of the meaning of those terms' (see page 10). In exchange for a father's vote, bank major parties offered themselves as the backbone should not be able to earn an income that would support his wife and children. These messages and images were inter-changeable between one major party and the other.

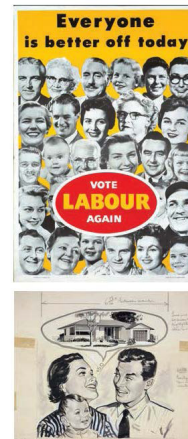
There was nothing strictly New Zealand about the families depicted in the early political ads. Indeed, New Zealand families were presented as sophisticated, prosperous and British-American. From the 1930s through to the late 1950s, New Zealand's commercial and advertising agencies were heavily influenced by the British and American advertising industries, which were then the most modern and successful in the world. New Zealand voters were drawn as happy and hyper-achieving, modelled on the British-American movie stars like Cary Grant and Humphrey Bogart. The war the golden age of magazine illustrations, in which female images covered the pages of women's magazines with sophisticated and less 'spicy' (such images made their way into New Zealand political advertising, where glamorous mother-in-laws figured as the most 'in' status) were waiting for their husbands and dressed for success. Husband voters to whom home from abroad day in the office. These political ads were more often than not located adjacent to men and women's families in newspapers.

Sociologist Enay Gifford's major study of gender in American advertising in the 1970s observed that the nuclear family was well adapted to the requirements of electoral representation in print advertisements. Its compact nature meant that all of its members could be contained easily within the same close picture and positioned so that the family's social structure – with the father tallest and head of the household – could be clearly communicated. 'Due to this, the father in our political ads is normally taller than their wives and positioned as the centre of family action. Their assembling with their shirt sleeves frequently rolled up. They smoke pipes



1. The Labour Party, opened a poster which was a family portrait, not a New Zealand family portrait. 2. The Labour Party, opened a poster which was a family portrait, not a New Zealand family portrait. 3. The Labour Party, opened a poster which was a family portrait, not a New Zealand family portrait. 4. The Labour Party, opened a poster which was a family portrait, not a New Zealand family portrait.

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With the geography of New Zealand is one of the only things binding the voters of New Zealand. It is no coincidence that the New Zealand map features in other political advertisements as a symbol of a unified nation (see page 10) – as do images and campaign slogans referring to mountains, rivers, waterfalls, beaches, and the long white cloud (see page 10). As someone as these images and slogans are they are not much of a base on which to build a modern nation state. And so as our political parties were creating New Zealand as a consumer and property-developing democracy, they were also creating other narratives to bind us together as a united polity. As one New Zealand.

WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN that Māori were largely absent in images of related target voter groups. When I started researching for this chapter, I anticipated a comprehensive on the Treaty relationship in parties' broader election agenda. Unsurprisingly, I found that from the 1930s to the early 1990s the major parties did not recognise an equality issue that needed to be resolved between the state and Māori. So much so that the early ads promised things that no major party would permit today.

In 1938, under the heading 'Native Race' the first National Party manifesto (see page 10, chapter 1) announced the party's view:

It is essential to the full resources in land and man power of the Māori people. We will improve the status of the Māori people and give its members equal opportunities with the Pakeha, with whom they share nationalhood.

National admitted

We are intensely aware of the generosity of a number of tribes of the Māori race. It is their duty to call them into our confidence, thoroughly to investigate their problems and to secure their justice. Housing will be provided at reduced costs; the membership of the Māori will be developed in technical pursuits and more vigorous measures will be taken with regards to Māori health.

Under the heading 'Native Affairs', Labour's 1938 manifesto (see page 10, chapter 1) offered:



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