

SYMPOSIUM: GREEN PAPER ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Introduction

The publication in December 1985 of the document *Industrial relations: a framework for review* (the Green Paper) was an unusual event in the development of New Zealand's industrial relations. It was unusual in the sense that the Government was asking the public, but particularly persons involved in industrial relations, for their views of the future development of the legislative framework. The Government's intention, according to the preamble to the Green Paper, is to produce shortly a statement of the policy changes that will be incorporated in statute (a white paper).

Various criticisms have been made of the Green Paper. It has been criticised as too legalistic; as not having asked fundamental questions; as having ignored essential issues and as being biased.

To foster the debate sought by the Government, the editor of the *journal* decided to devote this issue to the Green Paper. Contributions were sought from leading academic writers and we present here a collection of 6 papers. The authors were given no specific brief other than that they write on the Green Paper. Three papers are each titled simply "Comment" and represent critiques of the Green Paper exercise itself. The other 3 are examinations of specific issues raised by the exercise.

The first comment by Noel Woods, a distinguished former Secretary of Labour and industrial relations educator asks the fundamental question: What is to be the relationship between the parties? Martin Vranken, the author of the second comment draws on his experience of industrial relations in Europe and the USA. Consequently he views the New Zealand system from a different perspective than persons who grew up in it. His comment points to issues ignored by the Green Paper and he further challenges the neutrality of the questions. The author of the third comment, Bill Hodge, a lawyer with substantial overseas experience, focuses on collective bargaining and appropriate structures for its development.

The first of the longer papers is based on an inaugural address by Kevin Hince, Professor of Industrial Relations at Victoria University of Wellington. In the nature of such addresses, it is wide ranging but it focuses, in particular, on the role of management in industrial relations.

The penultimate paper is the narrowest in scope but the most detailed. Written by Bert Roth, the doyen of New Zealand labour historians, it deals with union deregistration and the seizure of union assets.

The final paper is by Gordon Anderson, a former associate editor of this *journal* and an expert on industrial law. He examines the compatibility of New Zealand law with the major ILO conventions which remain unratified by this country and suggests ways in which the law could be amended to achieve compatibility.

Although the 6 papers have quite different themes there are interesting areas of overlap. Woods' concern with the quality of industrial relations, as opposed to the State's regulation of them is shared by Hince. Hodge, Hince and Woods all point to the quantity of regulations which have bound the New Zealand system. Hince, and Vranken, both query the omission of other fundamental issues from the Green Paper. Anderson also takes up points raised by others: the question of the most representative union raised by Hodge and the unacceptability of union deregistration and asset seizure which is documented in detail by Roth.

Taken together, these papers represent a valuable contribution to the Green Paper debate. The onus is now up on the Government to take notice of these critiques and act accordingly.

Peter Brosnan
Symposium Editor