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The New Zealand Project



Synopsis

By any measure, New Zealand must confront monumental issues in the years ahead. From the future of work to climate change, wealth inequality to new populism – these challenges are complex and even unprecedented. Yet why does New Zealand’s political discussion seem so diminished, and our political imagination unequal to the enormity of these issues? And why is this gulf particularly apparent to young New Zealanders? These questions sit at the centre of Max Harris’s ‘New Zealand project’. This book represents, from the perspective of a brilliant young New Zealander, a vision for confronting the challenges ahead. Unashamedly idealistic, The New Zealand Project arrives at a time of global upheaval that demands new conversations about our shared future.

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Customer Reviews

I initially read Max Harris’s article ‘The Politics of Love’ in ‘The

Interregnum " Rethinking New Zealand" published by BWB Books. This was music to my ears with quotes like "We need seeds of hope to be planted" and "new water for our collective garden" and "the New Zealand public may be hungry for a values-based approach at a time when politics appears to be dirty and politicians seem distant from the realities of everyday life". Then by chance, a friend bought me "The New Zealand Project". As a 58 year old, I was inspired by the way Max is looking at health, education, housing, justice, environment and economy, providing solutions to all of us who know there are more effective ways to manage them as a society. Max's generation need older generations to mentor them to usher a new type of government which is more about teamwork and playing to strengths than competition and point scoring. Max understands that people power is the only way that is going to happen and that people need power to make their own decisions giving them hope and purpose. As mental health issues rise, particularly for our youth, Max has provided us with ways to stay positive and fight for the Fourth Way " a new politics that creates a new Kiwi Dream " a life that places care, community and creativity at the centre. I have contacted Max and have invited him to speak in Carterton (a rural town in New Zealand) in July where many citizens are crying out for change. Max, thank you for your courageous vision. I look forward to meeting you and introducing you to an older generation who will provide whatever mentorship you and your generation require to make this vision come true. Jill Greathead

This book is the work of a prophet. It accomplishes for serious minded New Zealanders what Yuval Noah Harari, with "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind" implies for the work that lies immediately before world leaders generally. A timely practical guide to what we in our country must do, if we are to be responsible and effective.

This book really opened my eyes to some of the issues facing New Zealanders and made me think about what it means to be a kiwi. Since reading this book I have had countless discussions about politics - there are certainly no easy answers, but this book not only outlines the issues in New Zealand's political landscape it also provides a range of possible solutions.

Several things combined to make Max Harris' The New Zealand Project a disappointment and a one star rating for me. First there was his view that the problem with New Zealand is just that "values" have gone missing from our policy and public actions and debate and that a new, value-based politics is the solution. That a serious student of society could think in the twenty first

century that things were so simple is surprising. In fact, like other exponents of "values"-based action and critics of the lack of values in society (eg the US religious right), Mr Harris appears to be going through the process of noticing the symptoms of others acting according to different values to him, but has not progressed to the next stage of thinking through why this may be. But no serious politics (and still less, understanding of society - although it is not clear which of the two Mr Harris is aiming at in this book) can assume that there is one correct set of "values" and anyone acting contrary to our own preferences has somehow just forgotten them or slipped off the path. Second was the lack of new content, evidence, or theoretical framework to bring things together. The book reads instead like a political manifesto for a centre-left party going into an election campaign: here is the bit on social services, here is the bit on foreign policy, now we have the brief and standard history of the New Zealand economy and the perils of "neo-liberalism", here is the bit on how important it is for everyone to get involved... all familiar content, brought together into a single, normative, collection of stances for the stump. There's nothing wrong in doing this if you are a political party or advocacy group aiming to define your values for members and the public; as a book it makes tiresome and unoriginal reading. Third was the never-ending presence of Mr Harris himself - the over-use of "I", the name dropping, the humblebragging, the references to distinguished figures he has met and sometimes "interviewed" (most of whom who have made real, substantial contributions to knowledge and many to activism and politics) in terms of "as XXX said to me in his/her study" rather than referring to their many books and articles. Cringe-inducing. Harris mentions, but shows little sign of having understood, the works of Wolfgang Streeck and Thomas Piketty, who make sophisticated criticisms of today's political economy from a thorough empirical and coherent theoretical basis. One can contest their views but they offer new frameworks, and tie evidence together in new ways. Mr Harris would do well to read (or perhaps re-read) their works to get a feel for why things are a bit more complicated than just a lack of values. Actually, I'd also recommend going a generation or two back and taking a deep dive into Foucault, Arendt, Chomsky, Habermas, Hobsbawm and Russell to get some perspective on society's challenges. Any chapter from those authors - or, closer to home and today, from the gritty pen of Nicky Hagar, with his modest aims to add to knowledge by documenting new evidence; for that matter - has more new information and insight than the whole of this compilation of the standard views of the New Zealand left. Not recommended.

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