Richards point out that postal charges are pre-paid and it would greatly increase transaction costs especially if rural recipients were to be surcharged. Nonetheless, as noted by Albon in his paper, Spain presently has such a two-tiered price system and in the past such a system has operated in Australia and Canada.

Intriguing though optimal pricing issues are, the nub of the policy matters concerning the postal service is whether it is characterised by the fundamental building block for a natural monopoly, namely declining marginal costs. The New Zealanders, who are further down the road to allowing full competition than others, consider this not to be the case. New Zealand's competitive strategy is outlined by Elmer Toime, New Zealand Posts Marketing Manager and is rather condescendingly dismissed by Ian Steel, his UK counterpart.

The volume, for all its interesting analysis, offers an inadequate platform to the view that postal services should be open to competition. We are, after all, talking about a service that today at best has 20 per cent of the message market, a share that is steadily falling. We know that competition stimulates cost savings. Terminating the present monopoly would quickly bring about price realignments, with those for intra-city deliveries falling and rural prices rising. It would almost certainly lead to a great deal more product differentiation. For example, mail sent to a central repository to be collected would find ways of sharing the cost savings and there would be further refinements of pre-sorting discounts.

One thing is certain, the post office and its product structure would be massively changed were it to be opened to competition. Transaction costs would rise but this would be offset by greater efficiency as prices became more accurately aligned with costs and as (industrial relations flexibility permitting) excessive labour costs were squeezed out. Many would resent the changes and some would lose from them. But to rest the case for the status quo on the transaction costs that might emerge seems to be concomitant to arguing that only one car model should be produced and be sold at one price because that way search and other transaction costs are avoided.

Thus, although offering an illuminating series of essays on postal services and providing many theoretical and practical insights into the service's provision, the book tends to suffer from being somewhat unbalanced in its portrayal of the policy options.

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Social Change in the Pacific Islands *edited by Albert B. Robillard*
(Kegan Paul International, London & New York, 1992), pp. xvi + 507, £ stg.45.00, ISBN 0-7103-0400-5.

This rather impressive collection of writings on the political economy of social change and development in the Pacific, in many cases since pre-contact times, brings examples from Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia — covering the spectrum from resource-rich, relatively large island states, to resource-poor atoll microstates — into one sweeping volume. The case studies contained in the 16 chapters present examples of societies which have been almost completely penetrated by foreign capital (e.g., Chapters 8 & 12 on the Northern Mariana

Islands and French Polynesia respectively) and others in which capital's impact has thus far been much less dramatic (e.g., Chapter 9 on Kiribati). These essays are predominantly written from the perspective of critical political economy and also present various reflections on theory in Pacific Island analysis. Furthermore, the introductory and concluding chapters present convincing arguments for a need to begin to question some of the heretofore unquestioned assumptions of the established political economic discourse and the theoretical representation of social change contained in such discourse.

This otherwise exceptional volume is, unfortunately, somewhat handicapped by the long delay in its eventual publication, resulting in some of the information being outdated; perhaps this was unavoidable. However, there is also an inconsistent quality in the manuscript editing (many spelling and typographical errors) and an unfortunate printer's error in this reviewer's copy which resulted in the text missing two chapters. Whereas this does not necessarily detract from its initial contribution to the discourse on social change in general and the transformation of Pacific Island society in specific, it does mar the readability of the book and the missing chapters detract from the overall geographical balance of the writings (the missing chapters were on Polynesian societies).

An additional criticism, and one acknowledged by the editor in his introduction, is that this is a book composed of chapters written entirely by Europeans and one Fiji Indian (writing from a European political economy perspective). This book is, therefore, an elaboration of the "European sensibility of the Pacific Islands" (p.2.) and reifies the "authorised" or "institutionalised" language for documenting and reporting on social transformation rather than giving voice to Pacific Islanders' alternative accounts of social change.[1] As was indicated by Robillard in his introduction, a comprehensive volume of this type has yet to be written.

Nevertheless, this book does indeed present the reader with a valuable opportunity to consider and to compare the experiences of a range of Pacific Island societies, and to arrive at some tentative conclusions about the factors which may have shaped them. From the case studies presented in this book, and the theoretical introduction of the editor, two points stand out in sharp relief. First, it becomes readily apparent that although external factors have had significant and in some cases devastating influence on social change in Pacific Island societies (e.g., Chapters 2, 3, 6 & 7 on Papua New Guinea, New Caledonia, Caroline and Marshall Islands, and Guam respectively), Pacific Islanders have also played a significant role in their own transformation.[2] Whereas some of the chapters pursue this theme as an argument for a situational analysis of social transformation (e.g., Chapter 2 on Papua New Guinea), still others draw particular attention to the possibility that Pacific Islanders concerned with the inherent physical and social instability of their situation after "first-contact" may well have perceived early opportunities to participate in the world economy as a means of limiting risks while gaining access to Western goods (e.g., Chapter 4 & 9 on Vanuatu and Kirribati respectively). Pacific Islanders, therefore, may have played a rather more active and deliberate role in the process of social transformation than has been expressed by some of the currently applied models of social change and development which draw principally from political economy — particularly the more determinist forms of that argument (e.g., Chapter 5 which presents a structural analysis using world system theory and the Marxian ideas of models of production, labor, proletarianisation, and class in the analysis of social change in Fiji).

However, what Pacific Ilanders thought and why they chose to begin to participate in the world economy as they did, we will probably never know. We get intriguing glimpses in Chapter 14 (Language and Social Change in the Pacific Islands) of how Pacific Islanders might have perceived the significance of writing and how this might have led to an eagerness to participate in the activities of European missions which controlled such a powerful system of symbols along with the perceived power apparently associated with it. We also see a similar concern for understanding the Pacific Islanders' world view in Chapter 4 (Social Change in Vanuatu) in which the author attempts to explain why the people of Efate may have chosen to become involved in the polity and the economy of the modern nation-state of Vanuatu in the way in which they have; much of which seems to rest on their understanding of private knowledge and public knowledge, the somewhat nebulous definition of *kastom*, and its control and use as a political resource. Likewise, in Chapter 3 we are lead to understand that important historical events in New Caledonia are not merely moments in time, but social institutions in the memory of the contending parties (both Kanak and *Caldoche*) which are re-invoked over generations, serving to maintain and elaborate increasingly more polarised opposition.

Still, one cannot escape the overwhelming evidence of dramatic social change brought by the shift from subsistence to capital-market economies which has altered the scale of life, segmenting the individual from access to and control of the modes of production. This problem, one of dependency born of commodity consumerism, is also addressed in the chapters on French Polynesia (Chapter 12), the Caroline and Marshall Islands (Chapter 6), and children's survival in the Pacific Islands (Chapter 15).

The second point, related to the above discussion, is the editor's argument in his introduction that we should abandon our simple, "anthropocentric models" of social change centered around *Homo economicus* and formulated in the positivist discourse of classical political economy, and admit other ways of understanding and other motives for doing things; in other words, admit the possibility of alternative analyses of social change. The concern here is not for the "incorrectness" of the dominant paradigm of social change, but that the current models which we share may also limit our perception and force to the margins of disciplinary attention other equally "correct" ways of viewing change. Robillard asks us to consider whether the model which has presently assumed centre stage (that of macro-sociology rooted in political economy) in the study of social change is any more than a "fictional code [which] serves as an imperialistic ideology, effacing actual and possible alternative cultural worlds" (p. 18). This is not an argument against theory in general or against any theory in particular, but rather an argument for a "fuller" theory which draws on the widest range of data from multiple fields of discourse, to produce a more complete picture of the complexity of human activity. As was stated in the conclusion. "if we cannot be visionaries, we can at least reflect carefully on our models and be aware of their limitations" (p. 431). The papers that make up this volume accomplish this task and implicitly suggest that the time may be ripe for a shift in orientation in the study and understanding of social change and development in the Pacific Islands.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Examples of the emergence of an "alternative discourse" by Pacific Ilanders on social change would have to include the writing of Samoan novelist Albert

Wendt, Tongan sociologist and novelist Epeli Hau'ofa, and Fijian anthropologist Asesela Ravuvu.
2. This concept is not new to scholars of the "New Pacific History" as represented by K.R. Howe in his insightful book, *Where the Waves Fall* (1988), Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

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To Inform Or To Control? The New Communications Networks *2nd ed. by Oswald H. Ganley & Gladys D. Ganley*
(Ablex Publishing Corporation, Norwood, New Jersey, 1989), pp.xv + 260, ISBN 0-89391-510-6.

Our first reading of the book was an unmistakable impression that the theme of communications and information (C&I) technologies in the framework of the new communications networks concerned the dilemma of the United States as a global power facing the uncomfortable prospects of losing its dominance and influence. The authors have done a good job by showing the impact of C&I technologies with its pervasive effects on the global power relationships centering on the US as the reference point. The message in the book is apparently for policy makers of the United States to be proactive and reassert the leading role for the United States in influencing the global environment which is fast undergoing political and economic restructuring.

Our subsequent reading confirmed our first impression and we consider that the thrust of the book can also be generalised universally to any country, now that C&I technologies are making the world more open and globalistion of businesses is forcing countries to face the challenges and seize the opportunities of a changing environment. As we deliberated among ourselves, we concluded that this excellent book, *To Inform Or To Control?* could perhaps be more appropriately entitled *To Respond Or To Perish?* in view of the glaring significance of C&I technologies.

The current edition of this book incorporates the first edition, presented in five parts under Section One, and includes seven new chapters under Section Two. In Section One, the strategic role of C&I technologies or in our pariance, IT (Information Technology), is well covered by the authors who argue convincingly that the merger of the computer and communications is transforming the communications and information sector and changing the dynamics of the overall American industry. The authors also cover the major issues arising from the pervasive impact of C&I technologies, among them, the competition from a unified Europe, Japan and the newly industrialising countries, conflict in the choice of international standards for the interconnection between computer and telecommunications networks, and cultural disputes over the internationalisation of the media and related information.

Put in a global context, the impact of C&I technologies poses the problems for the United States to either come to terms as a world power losing its dominance or to reposition itself by taking new initiatives to influence the developments arising from the impact of these technologies. While the authors accept competition to be inevitable, they feel that the US must take seriously the threat of other countries overtaking it in the C&I technologies. In fact, as pointed out by the authors, the world of today is witnessing the emergence of multiple technological centres and each does not have a monopolistic claim to