

The Economists and New Zealand Population: Problems and Policies 1900–1980s

We examine contrasting modalities of economic thought by economists on population problems and policies in NZ, 1900–1980s. Since the early 1900s NZ economists have been concerned with interactions between economic and demographic outcomes. During the inter war period Malthusian concerns were muted because NZ's population growth approximated a stationary state. A 'laissez faire' position was articulated among some economists in terms of external migration flows; others debated the implications of a stationary population. The post WWII era ushered in a doctrine of 'stable population Keynesianism' based on optimistic neo-Malthusianism; that perspective clashed with contemporary views on population expansion and the promotion of immigration coextensive with the policy of planned industrialization. An intellectual void became apparent in the early 1980s, perhaps because concern with the dynamics of population change in a small, liberalized, open economy seemed misplaced. Lessons are drawn from this intellectual history that may inform modern debate on population policy, broadly conceived.

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