

Our Tourist Business

The Government seems to be peeved and fretful at the adverse criticism levelled at its lack of success in persuading people overseas that the Dominion is a Tourists' Paradise.

The explanation for the failure has certainly not been due to lack of expenditure of public money, but rather from the absence of any intelligent policy in furthering the project of attracting visitors to our shores.

Money has been squandered on many ill-conceived and abortive schemes propounded by indigent journalists and a species of mendicant showmen seeking Government bounty to write grandiloquent descriptions of this wonderland and to explore distant lands in search of the elusive tourist. Tons upon tons of illustrated literature has been literally scattered to the four winds, with more or less negligible results.

The Government are not, however, alone to be condemned for this extravagance. We find local bodies, public organisations, transport combines, and others interested in attracting tourists pouring out good money into a yawning chasm that greedily bolts this class of propaganda without giving any return.

For instance, the City of Auckland publishes a "Municipal Record" at a lavish cost, which seems to serve no more useful purpose than as a "sop" to those associated in its production. Similarly throughout the Dominion such publications come wet off the printing presses to be dumped into the post, and an extremely small percentage ever reach potential visitors or even readers in any way interested.

Surely all the money flitted away in this class of literature, and in prominent advertising could be better utilised if it were all pooled and a comprehensive scheme evolved for its better presentation.

Our scenic wonders, our sporting attraction, and our health-giving climate should be as saleable in the right markets as are our mutton and butter. We would never have sold our primary products and established a steady demand for them unless they had been prudently marketed and persistently "pushed" by intelligent salesmen.

Our tourist business has failed to profitably market its attractions chiefly because it lacked salesmanship, and secondly because, when it "sells a prospect" it does not always send its customer away pleased. It is one thing to make a sale; it is another thing and the more important one to create a goodwill. Every tourist who leaves our shores after a sojourn in these fortunate Isles is going to be either a good or a bad advertisement for New Zealand.

If a tourist leaves us disgruntled with the service we can offer, particularly as regards accommodation and transportation that tourist is going to discount the tons of booklets and miles of films sent out broadcast over a largely non-receptive world.

The tourist business wants organising on business lines, and no Government department alone is capable of running the business with the maximum of efficiency. A market was never created for our country's staple products by officialdom and by the same token they are unlikely ever to make our tourist traffic profitable by existing methods. The people primarily interested in catering for tourists, such as hotelkeepers, transport combines, and the hundred and one others who benefit from the annual influx of overseas visitors should assist in financing, organising, and managing the business of catering upon up-to-date lines for the reception and catering for tourists.

An Advisory Board might first be set up to co-operate with the Government departments to formulate a practical and business-like scheme to co-ordinate the various interests involved, and thereafter the Government may see its way to evolve a definite policy to pursue in relation to the exploiting of its tourist traffic.

New Zealand possesses a number of illustrated journals that compare favourably with the best produced anywhere in the world. These journals, and many most excellent booklets issued by leading publishers, receive the scantiest recognition from the Government, despite the undisputed fact that they afford the best means of bringing the Dominion's attractions to the notice of the most desirable class of potential tourists and prospective new settlers our country could have.

In addition to their illustrations, these same journals and publications possess the strongest appeal to people overseas, because they give an intimate reflection of the country's national life and aspirations, besides carrying with them the personal goodwill from New Zealanders who are proud to send them to friends overseas. These same friends are the Dominion's best "boosters," as they proudly bring its attractions under the notice of acquaintances, and thus foster a bond of sympathy.

Still, we find the Government Publicity Department passing these representative periodicals and publications by as a media for Government publicity, while at the same time public money is literally thrown away in spacious advertising in numerous catch-penny publications and subsidies to other classes of printed matter, which in themselves represent a poor standard of journalism and have comparatively no circulation overseas.

We are not worried because officialdom prefers to spend the taxpayers' money in conferring patronage in the way it does; but we are constrained to draw attention to the lop-sided way a State department distributes the money voted by Parliament for the ostensible purpose of receiving fair value for its disbursements upon advertising New Zealand.

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