

18 | Opinion Let

Reclaiming the success of the state

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"Picking winners would be a good thing were it possible" Mr Hooton says, "but it never is, which is why the practice went the way of Sir Robert Muldoon..."

Having spent the first half of the 1980s in active opposition to Sir Robert's "Think Big" policy bulldozer, I was one of those who spent the second half of that decade trying to check Sir Roger Douglas's extremist small-government knee-jerk reaction, which eliminated the ability of government in this country to do good industrial policy, and destroyed the government agencies - Ministry of Works, DSIR, NZED, DFC, the 1912-model Public Service - that made it possible for the state to do big, productive things successfully.

Our electricity system, nation-wide telephone system, railways, roads, waterworks and state housing portfolio were products of a state sector that knew how to plan and deliver. Rebuilding that capacity is now urgent. So is keeping lobbyists and their political puppets out of the hair of the engineers and scientists while they get on with the job. But the answer is not for Government to abdicate its role and responsibilities.

Geoff Bertram, Karori

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