

(Tizard, 2010)

1990

The Decontamination Tour

was invited to accept the Governor-Generalship shortly after the municipal elections in 1989, when I had been so triumphantly elected head of the new amalgamated City of Auckland. There had been press speculation for some time that in a term in which the Centennial of Women's Suffrage would be celebrated a woman might be the next Governor-General. I got the odd Sunday-night call from reporters — it always seemed to be the time when they were scrabbling around for a story for the next day. I gave them short shrift. The thought that

any government would appoint a divorced woman was simply beyond belief — ridiculous!

Bob rang me one night to alert me to the fact that I would be getting a call from Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer — the first time in my memory that Bob ever breached Cabinet confidentiality. When Geoffrey Palmer rang a few days later, I had still not come to terms with this incredible idea. He said I could think about it but he wanted an answer within two weeks. The Queen was coming to New Zealand for the Commonwealth Games early the following year, and she wanted to announce the name of the next Governor-General while she was still in the country. Apparently she had been told about former National Prime Minister Sir Keith Holyoake's appointment as Governor-General just as she was getting on the plane to leave New Zealand after a tour. Given the uproar that greeted his elevation, I suspect she didn't want to risk it again and wanted another, possibly controversial, appointment made public while she was still in the country.

I agonised over the decision. How could I betray the people of Auckland, who had just given me such a vote of confidence? The cost of a by-election on the new boundaries would be enormous. On the other hand, it was a huge compliment and an exciting prospect and it would provide the pension for my old age. I finally confided in the family, who sorted me out in short order. 'Keep on worrying like this and you will probably have a stroke. Then there will have to be a by-election anyway!' I accepted, with the proviso that the Leader of the Opposition was told and that he had no objections. I was more experienced about electoral prospects by that time and could see the writing on the wall for that rightist Labour Government.

There would be 10 months to go before I would take office so I could fulfil at least part of my contract with Auckland. But it was an uncomfortably long time to be a 'lame duck' Mayor. After the announcement was made, I called a press conference to make the point that if I were to remain as Mayor of Auckland in the meantime I couldn't do that job properly if, every time I spoke out, it was reported that 'Governor-General Designate says ...'. The press treated me well in this regard and while I remained Mayor, referred to me as such. With one or two exceptions, I've had a pretty good relationship with the press. I try to help them do their jobs and they have usually given me a fair go.

My understudy with the Government was that I would remain as Mayor until the Aotea Centre was opened, so after the opening celebrations in September 1990 I made preparations for my resignation and departure. The Council gave me a great farewell party with a Piping of the Haggis ceremony and I left with a good deal of regret, but excited and nervous about what lay ahead.

There was a lot to do. I had decided to sell the Freemans Bay house that we had lived in since 1975 as it was beginning to need some renovations and a facelift. I thought I didn't want the responsibility of being a landlord for the next five years but had no sooner sold it than I got cold feet. I bought a similar apartment in Herne Bay and arranged for it to be tenanted! I realised that not having any personal stake in Auckland was going to be too emotionally dislocating for me.

I had also undertaken to co-operate in a documentary film to be called *Dame Cath Moves Up*. This involved travelling to the Coromandel and Northland, participating in many interviews, and took up a fair bit of time. Somewhere along the line the house had to be packed up and the contents put into storage, and there were a lot of farewells and social events to fit in before I went to England to pay my respects to the Queen, as protocol dictated incoming Governors-General should.

Government House systems were beginning to swing into place. From the Comptroller of the Household I received a meticulously detailed flow chart, indicating dates and timings of the pack-up and shift and travel details, which had me somewhat bemused. I took it as an indication of how things might be done until I found out that it was already *a fait accompli*. It was my first experience of one of Colonel Joe Walker's meticulous, and soon-to-become-famous, 'battle plans'. I always took them seriously after that.

The documentary was a new experience. I had been filmed plenty of times over the years but had never been the sole subject before. I knew the documentary makers Tom Finlayson and Marcia Russell, not well, but as friendly acquaintances, and I trusted them. We included the granddaughters and went to the beach, where I was filmed on the beach showing them how to clean scallops. There were scenes of me scuba diving at Leigh, which luckily is a marine reserve so I wasn't