

Opinion

A Dog's Life

Cunning old croc out for self



Joe Bennett

NOW look, New Zealand, come on, don't weaken. I may be 70 and probably beyond doing any serious damage but a benign political grandpa I am not.

There's been a long tradition of the press mocking me, pointing out my failures over the years, my hypocrisies, my incoherence, my exploitation of prejudice. And quite right too. But the old journos are dying off, and already you can sense attitudes towards me softening.

It's not the young's fault, of course. Educated by NCEA, they emerge as adults so under informed you could stage a swim meet behind their ears. To them, the past is a primitive swamp from which sprang the perpetual present tense of the internet.

So they know nothing of the age when I sharpened my political claws. To them, the seventies might as well be ancient Greece, and Muldoon an Indian rainy season.

I resemble, I know, a gentleman companion on board a cruise ship. I am dapper, smartly dressed, not so young as to be implausible but not so old as to be infertile. But I know exactly what I am doing with that million-tooth smile of mine. I know, and have always known, the effect it can have on elderly female knees in particular. And I've used those knees to very good effect. For 40 years or so they've borne my snout to the public trough and let it sup.

Throughout that time I have been the enemy of substance. If I am to be admired for anything, it should be for my refusal to answer a question directly. The reptiles of radio and television can batter me for minutes at a time with what seems like a straightforward question that the public have every right to know my answer to, but I rebuff them with ease.

I use counter-attack, baseless allegation, metaphors that purport to clarify matters but only cloud them, polysyllabic obfuscations that impress the impressible but say nothing at all and, eventually, the interviewer gives up in the face of such cussed unreasonableness. It's a form of genius.

Partly in consequence, the history of my political career has been one of ever growing isolation. Indeed the whole career could have ended when I parted ways with the National Party. But I was saved by MMP, ironically, since MMP is not, in principle, my sort of system at all.

It allowed me to create the amusingly named New Zealand First and my campaign to get the party on the map was a masterpiece. I tapped into xenophobia. Of course it's a ruse as old as politics, but that doesn't make it any more virtuous.

I spread fear of an Asian invasion. I didn't define Asians of course — I merely suggested that ghastly different people from over there were invading this country and threatening its way of life. It worked a treat, dropping the balance of power into my hands.

With me into Parliament came a bunch of non-entities whom I was never going to allow to become entities so long as they remained in my party. They were merely the padding in my political arm chair. And every time I come back into parliament, I bring new padding.

When I stop or die, so will the party. It has never stood for anything except getting me back where I belong which is in parliament and grinning.

And please remember my hypocrisy. Time and again I insisted that we had no interest in "the baubles of office". The "we" was a royal one and the fib was a big one. We had great interest in the baubles of office as evidenced by my becoming at various times deputy prime minister, minister of finance and foreign minister, none of which lasted long and all of which ended badly. Especially comical was my performance as a would-be international statesman.

I spent much of it complaining that the press had it in for me. Which they did. And rightly. I am the sort of person who, elsewhere in the world and under a different political system, strives to become an emperor. Here such ambition is emasculated by democracy, for which the country should be grateful.

But whatever you do, don't start thinking that I am anything but a cunning old croc who's out for his own ends.

Another View

Parkinson's show never ends

By Peter Garelja

TODAY is James Parkinson's birthday, better known as World Parkinson's Day. He is the British doctor after whom the brain disease affecting movement is named.

In the 18th century, Parkinson produced a series of notes and sketches, based on his careful observations of patients in his care.

The accuracy of his observations still hold true today. That's important, because years onwards there is still no definitive test that can be used to identify whether or not a person has the disease.

The causes of the disease remain unclear and no cure is in sight. The disease is highly

inclusive and non-discriminatory, with millions of sufferers spread throughout the world.

The economic and social costs of this disease are huge. The disease is not one of uniformity. It manifests itself in many ways, with each person having their own mix or cocktail of symptoms.

I received my invitation to the "Parkinson's show" in 2008, when the neurologist informed me that I had Parkinson's Disease (PD).

Once I chose to make this news public, I was sent many messages of support, some of which read as eulogies. I was quick to point out it was not a death sentence, it was a life sentence. I have had to adapt my life accordingly. Six years after diagnosis I retired from school principalship.

I have joined the Northland division of the Parkinson's Society.

"I received my invitation to the 'Parkinson's show' in 2008, when the neurologist informed me that I had Parkinson's Disease."

The society is a charitable trust, which offers a range of support for sufferers of PD and their families.

This includes the employment of two community liaison workers,

and the co-ordination of activities for members to participate in.

I am part of the walking group who, every Monday morning, go for a walk on paths and byways, as selected by Margaret, our wonderfully efficient leader/organiser.

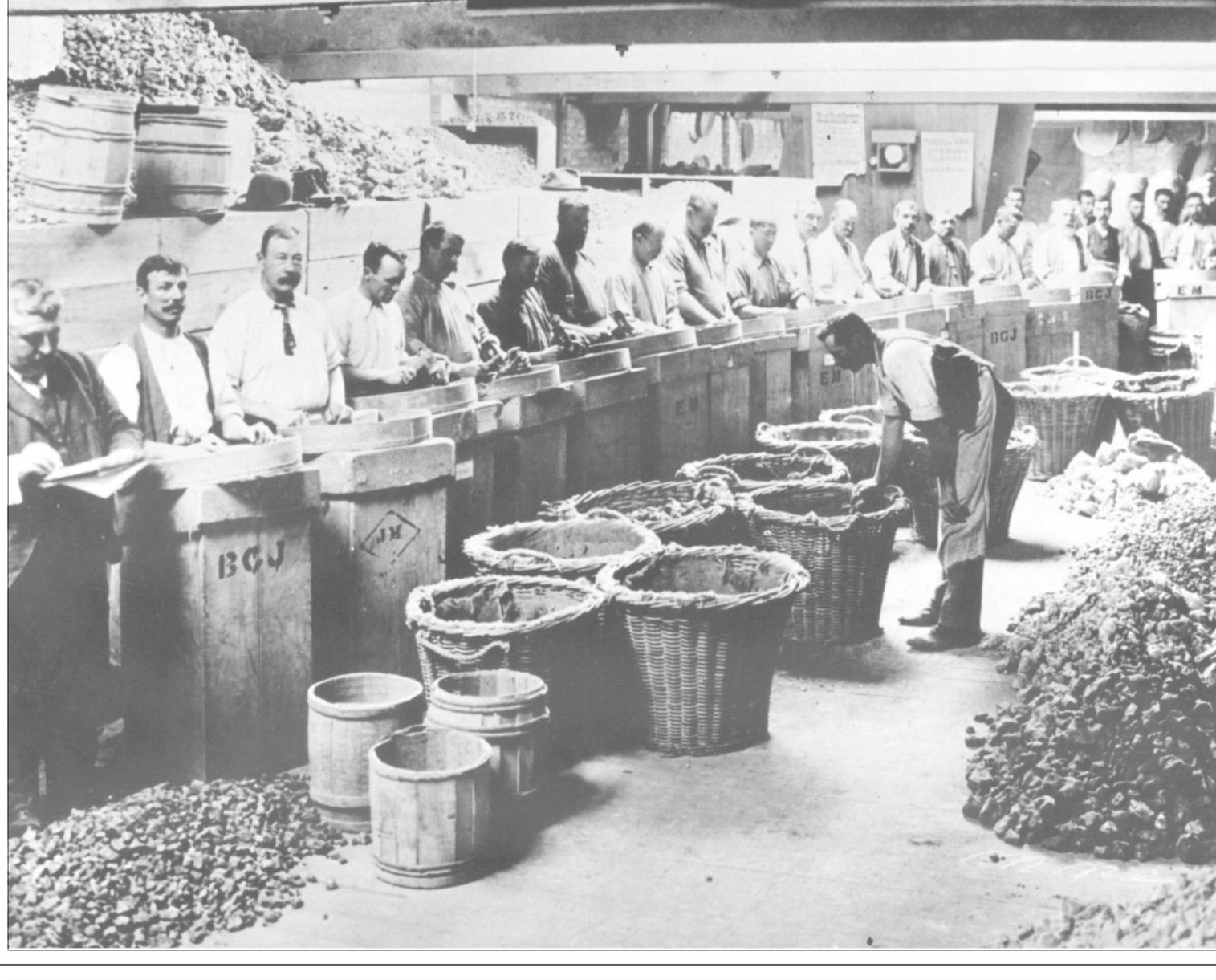
In some ways, this weekly walk serves as a metaphor for the journey in life we share. A journey, that if we take grace, humour and a preparedness to look out for each other along with us, is never one we take alone.

Yes, we await some scientific breakthrough but, in the meantime, the Parkinson's show keeps on going; a long-running sitcom, a potentially grim tale enlivened by humour and underscored by an overwhelming belief in the biggest superdrug of all: love, compassion and kindness.



WELCOME SUPPORT: Former Tikipunga High School principal Peter Garelja is a member of the Northland division of the Parkinson's Society.

Looking Back



BIG BUSINESS: A gum store circa 1900 in Northland during the kauri gum boom, which peaked between 1890 and 1910. PHOTO/DRUMMOND TE WAKE COLLECTION

Your Views

Rates posers

To comment reasonably on the proposed rates increases, I believe the public needs information that seems to be available only to those with the determination to go in and get a copy of the council's financial statement.

Particularly, we should be told what is the alternative in regard to even more debt? I am aware that this has increased considerably in recent years. What is its level now?

I note that the glossy statements on expenditure of rates continue to omit the item of debt charges, which suggests two possible conclusions:

1: That we borrow afresh every year to pay the interest, or 2: that this information is deliberately concealed from the public by being allocated anonymously to various projects. Either way, can we please have also the latest data on this?

John G Rawson, Whangarei

Key logic

In the words of John Key, "good news is coming".

Ten-year passports are likely to soon return but in typical John

Key logic, "these are likely to lead to higher fees because revenue from processing the documents will fall".

If that is not a blatant case of revenue gathering then what is?

More Aussies are settling in New Zealand states the headline in the news. I wonder if they are going to be subjected to the same non-benefit rules as the Kiwis who settled in Aussie after 1999 are now finding over there, despite the fact that they all pay the same taxes.

Marie Kaire, Whangarei

Poor response

January this year I delivered a letter to the Whangarei Council offices, regarding the concerns of myself and family re: the overgrown section in Tamingi St, Ruakaka adjacent to our property, it is covered in gorse and grass and we view it as a fire hazard. So far they have not had the decency to reply to my letter, which I think is very rude. They never hesitate to send me my rates demand though. I am very disappointed at their lack of response.

Maureen Penney, Whangarei

Right verdict

It's pleasing to hear that the jury in the Mark Lundy trial has come up with the verdict of guilty of killing his wife and daughter.

At their funeral he put on a Hollywood act when they were putting their bodies in the hearts. A medium who read his aura told me that he was guilty of the murder of his family.

So now at his retrial he has been found guilty again. This person deserves to spend his time in prison. I know of a person who has been sent to prison for 24 years on jacked up crimes that he never committed and didn't even get a fair trial to defend himself.

Ian Brougham, Wanganui

Treaty clarity

In the Whangarei Leader (March 17) M Armstrong put the Waitangi Tribunal on a pedestal whereas a Ngapuhi kaumatua, David Rankin, a direct descendant of Hone Heke, says, "The tribunal makes up history as it goes along", and Brian Priestley MBE, "It would be hard to imagine any public body less well-organised to get at the truth." Agreed the Maori text that

approx 500 chiefs signed is the correct treaty. Unfortunately, since 1975 the Waitangi Tribunal and successive governments have related to the inaccurate and excessively legalistic "official English" version which was penned by Hobson's secretary James Freeman using discarded earlier drafts.

The differences between the two texts have been exploited to use treaty "principles" instead of the exact text of the Treaty of Waitangi (TOW) as authority to transfer wealth, assets and rights to Maori.

The main fear for Maori was the French as a letter (1831) to King William IV from 13 chiefs asking for protection shows, not the "intentions of the British" as Armstrong said.

Armstrong's letter touched on the 1835 Declaration of Independence (DOI), historians Claudia Orange, Michael King and Paul Moon say the DOI had no international status, was an unauthorised act and that there was no indigenous power structure within New Zealand. Only 57 chiefs north of the Firth of Thames thumbprinted the DOI, New Zealand had some 600 chiefs at that time.

Even if the DOI had any validity the chiefs themselves breached

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Your views

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the agreement by not meeting annually as agreed and were back at war with one another within months.

Armstrong then incorrectly inferred that the DOI was incorporated in the treaty, the fact is it was superseded by the 1840 TOW because Hobson made sure that the chiefs that signed the DOI also signed the TOW. The letter continued by asserting that the treaty only "allowed for a governor to oversee British settlers" when the treaty says "ALL the people of New Zealand".

The violence in the "violent colonisation" she refers to was in most cases instigated by Maori rebels and I have covered the fact that most of New Zealand was sold by willing Maori sellers in a previous letter to the Leader.

The Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 vested ownership in the Crown for the benefit of ALL New Zealanders including Maori. Whereas now under the Marine and Coastal Area Act 2010 there are at least 11 applications for title/rights to large areas of the coastline by separate Maori interests. Close to home there is a large claim in place for most of the upper Kaipara Harbour around Pouto Point and on the coastline to Mahuta Gap, and on the east coast from Te Arai Point to Langs Beach. Geoff Parker, Kam