



NARROW DEFEAT: National leader Don Brash.

Seducing the 'mainstream' without a pin-up ...

Editorial



CARETAKER PM: Labour leader Helen Clark.

The election has not delivered a clear mandate for power but it has clarified one significant point — the “mainstream” that National appealed to is a misnomer.

“Tackling the issues of mainstream New Zealand” was the title of National’s annual conference in June, and two days before the election it outlined on its website the 10 policies designed to appeal to this mainstream.

But when Brash was challenged to define the mainstream he struggled. He was only able to provide examples of issues that were said to have angered the mainstream — race-based funding, prostitution law reform and civil union legislation.

On TV3’s leaders’ debate Brash said Helen Clark and Labour supporters were not mainstream. Brash’s concept was defined more by what it wasn’t than what it was.

They were opinions without a speaker, a mainstream without a pin-up.

It begged the question: Who is now the mainstream?

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines mainstream as the prevailing trend in opinion or fashion. If National’s policies were directed at this “prevailing trend in opinion” and polled only 39.6 per cent of the party vote, does this mean 60 per cent of voters don’t regard themselves as mainstream?

National excelled in this election in re-capturing the provincial cities and rural areas that traditionally have been its strongholds. The mainstream message has appealed to these regions, however the urban centres, where the bulk of the population now lives, were not so

seduced by National’s policies. The result suggests that most urban voters were not mainstream.

Articulating the concerns of the regional mainstream has won National back many of the supporters it lost in 2002 but it has also created divisions.

The Iwi/Kiwi campaign created an immediate separation that said to Maori: “Are you with us or against us?” It demanded that people

choose their positions; you could not be a member of a tribe and a National-voting New Zealander.

This tactic was designed to drive a wedge between Labour and the rest of New Zealand but the divisive ploy polarised voters.

If voters didn’t agree with National’s policies they were

beyond the pale.

This election was a litmus test for personal politics — it reflected where people’s natural political allegiances lay. It was held in a climate of sustained economic growth after six years of economic prosperity and low unemployment. If ever Brash’s mainstream had an opportunity to show its true colours this would have been the time — instead 60 per cent chose either Labour or the smaller parties.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that several of National’s policies did have traction. Brash almost doubled National’s 2002 party vote and although tax failed to win the election for National, the wafer-thin margin sent a clear message to Labour. Workers want to see evidence of the country’s economic gains in their back pockets.

In this regard, there are similarities between Helen Clark’s

narrow election night victory and Tony Blair’s in the United Kingdom last year (although whether Clark can cobble together a working government is as yet unclear).

Both Clark’s and Blair’s parties had strong second terms where they consolidated their power and implemented their policies.

But as the election drew near, both Clark and Blair suffered for the little consideration they had given to the views of their electorates.

In New Zealand, National’s failure to define a solid mainstream reflects how its concept of our society has dated. Where 30 years ago winning the rural and provincial electorates may have delivered National victory at the polls, nowadays politics requires an appeal to an increasingly varied electorate.

There is no single definition of a mainstream New Zealander.

If voters didn't agree with National's policies they were beyond the pale.

Letters to the Editor

Good grammar

Congratulations on another excellent edition of *Te Waha Nui*. Your volunteers’ work — especially the grammar and quality of writing — is of a far better standard than that of most entrants in the Paid News Writer section of the 2005 ASPA (Aotearoa Student Journalists Association) awards, which I recently helped judge.

Te Waha Nui’s layout is also a strong point; in fact, it looks better than many community newspapers.

It seems there is hope yet for New Zealand’s student media, and I look forward to further editions.

Jon Stephenson
Auckland

Maori Expo

Thanks to the *Te Waha Nui* team for the great coverage of the AUT Maori Exposition (“A proud ‘whanau affair’”, *TWN*, No.9). It was a huge day for the Auckland and Maori community.

From fashion shows, kapa haka, dance troops, political debates through to Katchafire — this event is a unique response to AUT’s commitment to Maori advancement and the social fabric of Auckland society.

Once again, thanks to the *Te Waha Nui* team who were professional, responsive and contributed to the success of the event.

Nga mihi ki a koutou ra - te roopu o *Te Waha Nui* — i runga i AUT Maori Exposition — Kia Tu Kia Maia.

Renata Blair
Project Manager
Maori Exposition
AUT

Boys of league

I used to think you were a welcome addition to the Auckland publishing scene — a breath of fresh air. But your recent “Bad boys of league” article (Todd Hewitt, *TWN*, No.9) was an Ocker shocker and I’m not so sure any more.

With all the important issues crying out to be covered with some ferret-like reporting, it’s disappointing to see so much space wasted on a bunch of yob-bos who are paid far too much and who don’t matter anyway as far as the average Kiwi is concerned.

When can we expect a page devoted to your own reporters’ Hall of Shame?

Jackson D. Rannells
Pt Chevalier
Auckland



CARTOON: RUFUS MCEWAN

Men and women

You don’t get off that easy Hayden Donnell, (“Men: Bastards with redeeming features”, *TWN*, No.9). Believe it or not women flirt, flaunt and get fickle to the same degree, if not greater than men do. We just know how to keep it to ourselves better.

Also Kirsty Charles, there is no need to justify women’s equality with the bastardly behaviour of men by alluding to the former’s irrationality. Let’s keep that to ourselves too, we sisters need our secrets.

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