

# Coalition for open government will check election funding plans

By Spike Mountjoy

The Coalition for Open Government has re-formed to keep a check on the Labour Government's planned reform of election funding rules.

Labour's plans include an increase in taxpayer funding for election campaigns, which would see the two main parties receive more than \$1m each to fight the next election.

The coalition, which originally formed in 1979 to promote the Official Information Act, now includes journalist Nicky Hager and law lecturer Steven Price.

The group has expressed concern that the rules are being rewritten by politicians, who stand to gain most from the changes.

Hager says the main issue is

wealthy and often anonymous interests having an unfair influence over elections.

"In exchange for laws to control this, public funding of party election campaigns has been suggested," he says.

But he warns that risks further cutting parties off from their members and supporters and undermining their part in our democracy.

"Power in parties is already highly centralised, with most decisions made by a few people around the leader."

Elections are already partially publicly funded, with more than

\$3m allocated each election to pay for party adverts on TV and radio.

Money is also distributed via the Parliamentary leaders' fund for office staff and supplies.

In the past this money has also been used for advertising and campaign strategy.

Political commentator Laila Harre says if taxpayers are going to fund political parties, then they should have a say in how the money is spent.

Any new funding could be used to get people involved in the democratic process, such as paying for public meetings, she says.

"Power in parties is already highly centralised, with most decisions made by a few people around the leader."

disillusioned with politics.

"Our politics is cluttered with those paid voices advocating for large business interests.

"Ours is a nominal democracy, but governments feel hugely constrained by what economic interests will tolerate."

In his book *The Hollow Men* Hager describes a system of anonymous trusts, through which money has been transferred to political parties.

The National Party received more than \$1.5m of its \$1.8m in funding for the 2005 campaign through these trusts.

Anonymous trusts would be outlawed under current proposals.

Transparency International New Zealand has added its voice to growing opposition to politician-driven reforms to election funding.

"This could help to stop the flow towards public relations-style election campaigns."

Dr Raymond Millar, head of political studies at the University of Auckland, says 100 per cent government funding would be "another nail in the coffin of public activism".

He says 50 per cent of funding should come from party members, with a cap of \$100 per member.

"This would force parties to recruit, to engage the public. Political parties are increasingly becoming oligarchies," he says.

How parties receive funding from the public is also up for review.

Government moves to force parties to declare donor identities has support from the coalition.

Hager says that people are

# Support a key to success for migrants chasing Kiwi dream

By Michel Sam Mathew

It's a new approach to finding work and it's fast becoming an instant guide for migrants chasing the Kiwi dream.

Employment support groups run by the Migrant Action Trust have been helping new entrants into New Zealand search for jobs, find employment and ultimately settle down.

"The support groups were launched in May 2005 and so far approximately 120 people have gained employment through this programme," says Olga Bernstein, who works as an employment group facilitator.

"One of the focal areas of the trust is to help migrants find jobs as a pack rather than search alone and the role of employment support groups has been found to be very helpful," she says.

An employment support group consists of 12 people or more along with a group facilitator.

It meets twice weekly for three hours.

"The group meetings, which are akin to an orientation process, help migrants support each other and ultimately learn from each other," says John Rasquinha, who was helped by one of the groups into work.

John, who originally hails from Mumbai in India, was working with Air India until he decided to quit and move to New Zealand in 2006.

"The immigration process was easy because my family was in Auckland for some time now.

"However, finding work was tough until I joined an employ-



JOBSEEKERS: Support groups like this one are proving a big success in helping migrants find work.

ment support group."

The meetings help migrants to write Kiwi-style CVs, develop job search skills and prepare for an interview.

Other aspects include learning about New Zealand culture and Government, New Zealand English and using public transport.

"An employment support group runs for around eight weeks and by the end of the course more than 50 per cent of

the people would have found work," says Olga.

"In most cases it has been found that the migrants find employment within a space of four months from the time they have joined a support group," she says.

However, the role of the support group does not stop there.

"The support group also assists with life coping skills for migrants to settle down in a new

culture, managing stress, relaxation techniques, self-motivation and goal setting," she says.

Most group members have been directed to the Migrant Action Trust through Work and Income NZ and the Auckland Regional Migrant Centre.

"The support group also assists with life-coping skills for migrants."

For more information about the trust log on to [www.migrantactiontrust.org.nz/](http://www.migrantactiontrust.org.nz/) or contact Olga Bernstein on 021 1364528.

## Unionist assured of safe return home

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and Amnesty International have documented extra-judicial killings in the Philippines, including the murders of political activists, journalists and politicians. Both reports attribute many of the killings to the Philippines military.

The UN report released this year showed how people responsible for the killings acted with "virtual impunity" and many of the deaths were "convincingly attributed" to the military.

A researcher for Amnesty International, Tim Parritt, found many of the senior military officials were talking openly about "neutralising" left-wing groups.

Parritt, who also researched the UN report, wrote: "No-one deserves to die for their political affiliation."

Maga arrived in New Zealand a week before Philippine president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo arrived for the interfaith talks.

The talks brought people of different faiths together with the goal of reducing religious radicalisation and to promote peace in the Asia-Pacific region. They were co-sponsored by New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Activists condemned the presence of the Philippines and Indonesia, which they say are responsible for mass human rights violations.

After the protest Maga was told by his father a family member working for the immigration ministry had told them orders had been given for Maga's arrest. His father said their house was under police surveillance.

Maga was due to fly home on June 3 but then decided to stay until he was given assurances that he would not be arrested.

Maga was invited to New Zealand by the National Distribution Union and Unite Union.

After news of his potential arrest NDU workers marched in Auckland on May 30 to raise awareness of his situation.