



PHOTO: ZOE HOOPER

BUSKER: Michael Sheffield playing the keyboard on Queen St.

## Auckland council tries to silence boy musicians

by Zoe Hooper

A battle is being waged between the Auckland City Council and two young buskers.

Daniel (13) and Michael Sheffield (18) have been threatened with fines, prosecution and seizure of their equipment if they continue busking in central Auckland.

The boys play classical keyboard on Queen Street — sometimes working 12 hour days — to raise money for their sister's up-and-coming ballet career.

"When I see her dance I think if she had to give it up it would be pretty sad," says Michael.

The city had a system where buskers could buy a permit, but this was stopped and now busking is banned unless specifically authorised.

Warren Adler, team leader of Incident Management at the council, says "the essence of it is that no one has a right to busk in a public place. Council officers can at any time ask a person to stop".

Michael says the council's amended busking bylaws are unfair and inflexible, and they should at least return to the old permit system.

"We've paid so much money for permits over the years and now they've just changed it. It's a constant battle."

Over the past few years the boys have had numerous run-ins with the council.

"Once a council member came and told us he's sick and tired of hearing us, we know the rules, and now he's going to ring the police," says Michael.

However, when the police arrived they couldn't see a problem and pro-

posed a meeting between the boys and the council to resolve the issue.

"The council weren't interested so the meeting never happened."

The council now hires a security firm to enforce its busking regulations.

Mr Adler says buskers are dealt with on a case-by-case basis depending on the nuisance caused.

"Some busking may never cause the nuisance that results in complaints."

The Sheffields have been targeted by the council because there have been "a number of complaints by retailers, private land owners, and customers visiting premises outside which the Sheffields have been located", says Mr Adler.

Ian Logan, watching Sheffield brothers busking, says he has no problem with it "as long as it's not too late at night".

Student Alek Janev says technicalities shouldn't allow people's dreams to be trampled on.

"People are listening to great music while walking along the street, if anything it brightens up your day."

Leslie Darcy, an Australian tourist, has no problems with performing on the street but can see that the council might want to control numbers and the types of buskers.

"Maybe they need a permit system."

Mr Adler says the council will review street trading in public places in the next few months and, although he cannot speculate about the outcome, buskers may be included.

He says the review will "deliver a response to traders that aligns with an overall vision about use of Auckland City's public spaces for private and commercial benefits."

# Govt delays Civil Union Bill to maintain United Future support

by Edward Gay

The Government has postponed debate on the controversial Civil Union Bill in an apparent effort to maintain the support of its ally, United Future, says a University of Auckland lecturer.

Professor Jack Vowles, head of political studies at the university, says the Government has a lot on its plate at present and has been forced to rely on the support of the Christian-oriented party, United Future, which is strongly against the bill.

"The Civil Union Bill is likely to increase the rift between Labour and United Future, and Labour can't afford that right now," says Prof Vowles.

The controversial bill was to be tabled this month but has now been pushed back to July, says Labour MP Tim Barnett.

The bill will provide the opportunity for same-sex couples to join in a legally recognised union with rights equal to heterosexual marriage.

In April a One News-Colmar Brunton poll showed those supporting the bill at 46% and those against the bill (or against the bill including same-sex couples) at 50%.

Mr Barnett has been involved with the Civil Union Bill since 2001 and says he will likely chair the parliamentary select committee hearing in July.

"About 150 pieces of legislation discriminate against same-sex couples. Providing equal rights to same-sex

couples will reduce the possibility of legal action under the Human Rights Act," says Mr Barnett.

The bill will also allow non-religious heterosexual couples to obtain a legally recognised relationship outside of marriage, which carries religious connotations.

"We're offering New Zealanders 21st century relationship status," says Mr Barnett.

The Civil Union Bill will be accompanied by the Omnibus Bill which will amend past legislation that discriminates against same-sex couples.

Current legislation discriminates against same-sex couples to varying degrees — including citizenry rights, where a spouse can gain citizenship after two years but a partner has to wait three years.

The Family Law Act provides free relationship counselling to people with marriage or relationship problems but does not offer the same service to same-sex couples.

Next-of-kin rights will be awarded to same-sex couples, providing partners with the power to make legal decisions if one partner becomes sick.

However the Omnibus Bill will not apply to the Marriage Act, which will remain available to heterosexual couples only, says Mr Barnett.

The bill is also opposed by the conservative think-tank, the Maxim

Institute, which fears that the Civil Union Bill will have adverse effects on marriage.

"Marriage has been diluted, particularly in the last 100 years — you used to have to get permission from Parliament to get a divorce," says Scott McMurray, spokesman for the Maxim Institute.

The Civil Union Bill will further dilute the status of marriage, says Mr McMurray.

"The government is redefining the meaning of marriage to suit a small group of people. Homosexuals only make up 1-2% of the population," he says.

However, the number of homosexuals in New Zealand is unknown, since questions about sexual orientation are not included in the New Zealand census.

"The state takes an interest in marriage because of the benefits to society. Marriage provides stability for child bearing. Marriage is about commitment, economic stability — it provides social security," says Mr McMurray.

He acknowledges that these benefits could be provided to homosexuals under the Civil Union Bill but says homosexual partners have a low level of commitment.

The Maxim Institute is currently planning a formal submission to Parliament and encouraging its supporters to write letters to newspapers around the country.

## Party launched to 'clean up' Manukau city receives criticism from opponents

by Patrick Crewdson

A new party formed to contest this year's Manukau City Council elections is confident voters are connecting with its message, despite critical letters to the editor in the local newspapers.

Peoples Choice was launched in February to "clean up Manukau city". It plans to run candidates in every ward this October, making it Manukau's first city-wide ticket.

Founding chairman Hamish Stevens, who is also the chief financial officer at DB Breweries, says the "underlying culture of incompetence and arrogance" at Manukau City Council needs to be fixed.

"It's about the people of Manukau having more choice in how their city is run," he says.

Councillor Dick Quax, of Pakuranga, says Peoples Choice has received a good level of support for their policies, which include reducing graffiti and crime levels, and making the council's operations more open.

Mr Quax, a former ACT Party candidate and a well-known Olympic medallist, describes himself as a "supporter" and says he has made a "modest financial donation" to the party. Rumoured to be a candidate for Peoples Choice, Mr Quax maintains he is still weighing up his options for this year's election.

Peoples Choice supports the Eastern Corridor motorway and opposes the construction of the controversial \$45 million Pacific Events Centre. Other policies include pegging rates increases to inflation and focussing on what it calls the council's core business — lighting, rubbish and water.

"What Peoples Choice has got here are very sensible policies that are family friendly and will make Manukau City a pleasant place to live, work and bring up children," says Mr Quax.

An announcement of candidates scheduled for the end of April has been delayed.

According to chairman Hamish Stevens, who has lived in Manukau

for three years, the organisation has 200 members.

Mr Stevens says Peoples Choice is economically centrist and socially centre-right, a description incumbent councillor Neil Morrison, also of Pakuranga, disagrees with.

"The people in it are not centrist, they are right-wing people," says Mr Morrison, who believes Peoples Choice is dominated by National and ACT Party members.

But Mr Stevens says the organisation — which is not related to the Peoples Choice that contested the 1999 general election — has "absolutely no ties" with any political party.



PHOTO: PATRICK CREWDSON

# Man unhappy with Govt starts his own party

by Jonathan Dow

Tersem Singh is not happy. Like quite a few others the Otahuhu resident does not like the current Government, which he says "never helps the people".

But it is his response that sets him apart.

Mr Singh is trying to register a new political party, which he has named after the Bharatiya Janata Party —

which until last month led the government in India.

His policies would appeal to many: fewer taxes, compulsory military service for young people and more doctors, nurses and teachers.

Mr Singh also says people should pay less when shopping at the supermarket.

Although politicians would like to think their party is a venerable institution, there really isn't much to it.

Anyone can start a political party.

As Geoff Barnett, senior legal advisor at the Electoral Commission, puts it: "You or I could start a party on two sheets of paper."

Mr Barnett hasn't heard of Mr Singh but he isn't surprised that he is trying to start his own party.

"There's always more interest as election draws closer," says Mr Barnett.

You don't even have to form a party

— just stand in an electorate as an independent.

Nor do you have to register your party. Getting registered takes a bit more effort but because of MMP and the party vote it is good idea.

This is because only registered parties are eligible for the party vote and can submit a party list.

Just remember to submit the list nominating candidates before noon on "nomination day". The Libertarianz

were late last time and missed out.

To register, the Electoral Commission requires prospective parties to have a standard form letter, certain statutory declarations, and proof that there are at least 500 financial members.

"Anyone who wants to register a party is welcome to come to us and put their hat in the ring as long as they meet the statutory regulations," says Mr Barnett.