

## Auckland derby: Galloping Steed versus Anybody-but-Banks

swatting madly ... Elephant's pulling ahead ... this could be a decisive moment ...

Last month the US Republican Party – represented pictorially since 1877 by an elephant – mobilised to get consumer advocate and former Green Party candidate Ralph Nader on the presidential ballot in Michigan. Nader's own campaign team had only managed to find 18% of the signatures necessary to qualify, so local Bush supporters helpfully filed an extra 43,000 signatures, hoping no doubt that Nader would repeat his feat from the 2000 election, when he sucked three million votes from Democratic candidate Al Gore.

This time around the Democratic Party – whose long-time mascot is the donkey – reacted to the Republicans' vote-splitting tactics with a pledge to rigorously police the ballots in other states. There's a place for you in the wild, the John Kerry camp told Nader, but not in this race.

If Auckland mayoral candidate Christine Fletcher heard how Nader broke the law of the jungle, she might have thought back to the 2001 council election. Fletcher, although running with the pronounced limp of three unsuccessful years, was the defending champion, and was saddling up for a race against her former National Party colleague John Banks. Then a late starter, Alliance president Matt McCarten, entered the race and split the vote. He took

15%, leaving Fletcher foundering on 29% and Banks victorious on 44%. Like the Democrats in the US, Fletcher will be fearing a repeat in 2004.

Our mayoral derby isn't as epic an event as the American presidential race. You could call it a simple day at the gee-gees. But as in the US, where the pro-Kerry vote could just as accurately be called the anti-Bush vote, there is a substantial base of disaffected voters who simply want rid of John Banks.

Unfortunately for them, it's a two horse race and one steed is stumbling under the weight of multiple jockeys.

The frontrunner is the incumbent, Banks. Galloping several lengths behind is Anybody-But-Banks, a mount ridden by two separate challengers. Christine Fletcher, the mayor before Banks, is clasping the crop to spur the steed on. Clinging desperately to the haunches and trying not to fall is Fletcher's former deputy, Dr Bruce Hucker.

Earlier this month Fletcher challenged Hucker to dismount, citing a poll she said anointed her the "only serious challenger" to Banks.

The 500-person survey – which was funded by a curious Green Party community board candidate – put Banks on 32%, Fletcher on 25% and Hucker on 14%. The vote was well and truly split; Anybody-But-Banks' two riders

were a real handicap. But Fletcher took some nourishment from the supplementary questions, which showed that if Hucker stepped back she would lead Banks by two points, while if she dropped out Banks would still be ahead.

The poll left Tory nag Fletcher and Hucker – with his fine Labour Party and City Vision riding silks – jockeying for position.

"A vote for Bruce Hucker is a vote for Banks," Fletcher said. "Banks knows that he can beat Hucker. Banks also knows that he will lose to me."

"Neigh!" whinnied Hucker, calling for Fletcher to quit and saying his campaign – which for seven weeks has proceeded at a leisurely trot – would quicken to at least a canter before the October 9 vote.

On his campaign weblog, Banks trumpeted his ability to defeat all comers, claiming his own polls put Hucker neck and neck with "the other candidate".

Banks' trainers will be delighted with the cluttered race field. On cold mornings out by the track they'll have whispered the consoling words in his ear: even a champion stallion can't carry two riders to victory. If Anybody-But-Banks is to have a chance in this race it needs to get its jockey weight down.

With his 18 years experience on the council there's obviously a place in the political wild for Dr Bruce Hucker. But not in this race.

It sounds like one of Aesop's fables. A foot race: Donkey versus Elephant. Stubborn but smart versus lumbering and destructive. There's the starter's pistol! They're off! Elephant takes an early lead, thundering down the track, waving his trunk from side to side and trumpeting loudly. But don't count Donkey out yet: that's a mean kick he carries in those hind legs. And look: he's making some progress up the inside, braying in response to cheers from the crowd. Rounding the second corner, Elephant and Donkey have drawn neck-and-neck. It's anybody's race. But look! Who's that on Elephant's back? Could it be Tsetse Fly? It is! The blood-sucker has entered the race! But uh-oh, lil Tsetse just can't keep up with the mammals. A flick from Elephant's ear has sent him careening wildly ... he's landed on Donkey and it looks like he's trying to feed ... Donkey's

## Kiwis deserve the truth behind Pacific islands tourist brochures

Sun, sea and sandy beaches is how most New Zealanders picture the South Pacific. Okay, throw in George Speight and his infamous coup in Fiji four years ago because that was widely covered by New Zealand media.

But beneath the glossy tourism image of the Pacific islands lurk major problems – most Pacific islands are on the brink of economic collapse, democratic processes in some islands are non-existent and the roots of poverty are growing deeper in many societies.

But the ordinary Kiwi can be excused for turning a blind eye to the problems gripping Pacific islanders. The reason is simple – they don't know about them because media coverage of Pacific issues in New Zealand leaves much to be desired.

Two weeks ago Fiji's Vice President Ratu Jope Seniloli was sentenced to four years imprisonment for his role in the 2000 coup.

Seniloli, a high chief, illegally took oath as President days after the coup. The deputy speaker was jailed for six years. The nation is gripped in tension as political manoeuvring is underway to have the imprisoned men pardoned. Yet few New Zealanders (including the 75,000 who holiday in Fiji every year) would be aware of these developments.

The recent election of pro-independence activist Oscar Temaru as the new President of French Polynesia is one of the most significant developments in Pacific politics for many years. Temaru unseated a pro-French president who had been in office for almost two decades, naturally much to the dismay of Paris.

Democracy is a foreign flower to many island states and even independent media in the Pacific feel the wrath of rulers.

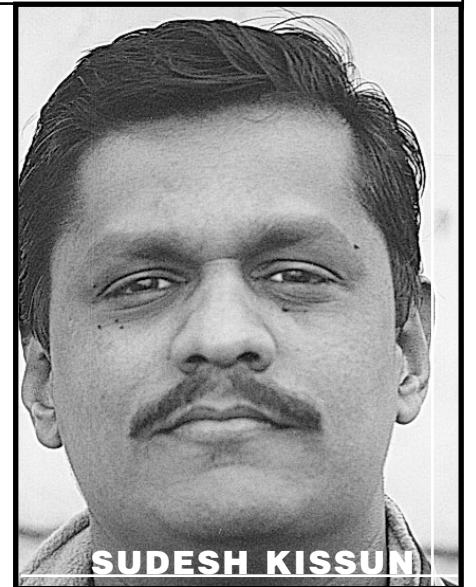
Standing out like a sore thumb is Tonga, the world's tiniest kingdom. The rulers have banned *Taimi O Tonga* (Times of Tonga) news-

paper, published out of Penrose in Auckland by Christian missionary turned journalist Kalafi Moala. Moala's crime is that he is highly critical of the regime and some of its practices. He is still embroiled in a court battle to allow his paper to reach Tongans at home.

Moala's story is better known in New Zealand simply because the *Taimi O Tonga* saga has received considerable media coverage here. And Moala can thank his contacts among New Zealand-based journalists and the fact that his newspaper is an Auckland-based operation.

Pacific islanders make up almost 8% of New Zealand's population. They may not buy newspapers every day but they have a right to know what's happening back home. New Zealanders have a right to know what's happening in their Pacific neighbourhood.

A 2002 UNDP report says 37% of Papua New Guineans live in poverty compared to 25 per



cent in Fiji. In the Solomon Islands only 35 per cent of the population have access to improved water supply.

New Zealand media can play their part in delivering a better future for Pacific islanders by an increased and balanced coverage of the Pacific. Out of sight, out of mind is not the right policy for media organisations in New Zealand as far as the Pacific is concerned.



## 'Buenas noches. Una habitacion para una persona, por favor?'

### Fiona Webster's Monterrey diary

Hola from Mexico! Here I am in Monterrey, in the North-Eastern state of Nuevo Leon as part of an exchange programme between AUT and Tecnológico de Monterrey. There are two of us here from Auckland, Rachel and myself, for one semester only. Our mission – to explore, experience and immerse ourselves in the city and its cultural delights and, of course, study communications.

Over the next few weeks I will be bringing you regular updates of our adventures.

It is summer in Monterrey and it is hot. I realized just how effective the air-conditioning

is at the airport as the automatic doors slid open. A wave of heat hit me as if someone had just opened a giant oven. The time was 7.45 pm.

The temperature drops only slightly at night and the only thing to do during the forty degree afternoon is – nothing. I have become a big fan of the siesta tradition, which none of the Monterrey people seem to be into. Shops and businesses open at nine or ten and close at around eight at night, sometimes later.

Geographically, Monterrey is in a huge, flat space surrounded by massive and spectacular craggy mountains on all sides. Monterrey is Mexico's third-largest city of around four million people. It is close to the Texan border and the influence of the United States is every-

where: glossy malls, seven-elevens on almost every corner, multiplex cinemas, all the trappings of globalization.

But there is a very Mexican feel here as well, especially in the poorer parts of the city, like the area around the bus station, where I checked into the seediest hotel imaginable on my first night here.

I walked in, all smiles.

"Buenas noches. Una habitacion para una persona, por favor?" I had been rehearsing the words in my head.

"Que?" replied a man who was tucking into take-away tacos with his friends.

I tried again, but with hand gestures this time. It seemed to work and I was given a key

and directed upstairs.

My room was big enough for the double bed and a small dressing table with an empty frame where the mirror used to be. There were windows high up on one wall and a fan/light on the ceiling.

An open door led to the tiny bathroom where some past tenant had strung a washing line. There was a bucket under the sink to catch the water before it spilled out over to a hole in the floor under the shower head. I flicked the light switch. Nothing happened.

I was inhabited by the spirit of Jack Kerouac; a lone adventurer, on the road, experiencing life: a good feeling. I smiled to myself and hoped the cockroaches stayed on the floor.