

Peters slams economists

by Nic Daley

New Zealand is a Third World country on the road to impoverishment, according to New Zealand First leader Winston Peters.

He condemned the sale of state assets and the high level of overseas investment in New Zealand's economy in a speech to an Auckland University of Technology Breakfast Club meeting last month.

Peters quoted a report by *The Economist* magazine in which New Zealand is described as the only First World country that has become a Third World country in the last 50 years.

His criticism comes after the Government announced it was disbanding the Overseas Investment Commission (OIC) and relaxing restrictions concerning foreign investment.

Peters said closing down the OIC makes little difference as it did not perform its investor gate-keeping role anyway.

"The Overseas Investment Commission was a toothless poodle that spent most of its time rubber stamping everything that

came over its table."

He was also scathing in his attack on "commentators" who say that the economy is strong.

"Every commentator says we are living through a boom, excepting 85 per cent of the country can't smell, taste or feel it."

"A grotesque proportion of wealth that is being generated in this country goes overseas."

"A grotesque proportion of wealth that is being generated in this country goes overseas."

New Zealand is slipping economically in comparison to the rest of the world and there is little the Government is doing to stop it, he says.

"You don't need a PhD in economics to see that taking money out of the economy on the scale it's happening now will impoverish this country in the long term."

"Selling the family silver has never been a way to build the family fortune."

After arriving late to the

breakfast, Peters asked the 180-strong audience to name any sizeable business that New Zealand has started in the last 20 years.

"What is new around New Zealand in the last 20 years apart from a Warehouse in every provincial town and brand new garages everywhere?"

The New Zealand First leader also criticised both Labour and National, despite previously suggesting he may have to join with one of them at the next election.

"You remember Don [Brash], he's the one that's got a wife who was born in Singapore, and keeps on telling people ad nauseum."

National have been falling in the polls since March, Peters says, and they are "in trouble".

"In trouble because they have chosen a leader who can't find the parliamentary toilets."

"And being the governor of the Reserve Bank is no qualification for this job."

The AUT Breakfast Club will be holding further functions in October.

Bookings can be made by calling 917 9999 ext 5379.



Auckland's lava tunnels under threat

By Kate Palmer

A volcanic subterranean world beneath Auckland's streets is being put at risk by property developers.

Auckland University geography department field technician Peter Crossley began mapping lava tunnels in the 1960s and has spent 30 years documenting all known caves.

He says the unique heritage of the caves is under threat from property developers excavating land for building.

"Most developers try and hide the caves if they find them and fill them in before the inspectors arrive."

"Unfortunately there's only a couple left and very few of those are accessible to the public."

"If we don't make the public aware of them they'll disappear before too long," says Crossley.

Lava tunnels and caves were formed around 50,000 years ago as molten lava flows from eruptions rapidly cooled on the outside to form a solid crust.

As the lava drained out it left behind empty tunnels that can be found on land surrounding

Auckland's volcanoes.

One is Scott's Cave in Onehunga, unearthed by developers in 1992. At 40m in length and 1.5m high, it connected to a 150m tunnel running along Cardwell and Grey Sts that is still used as a storm water drain.

Crossley doubts the cave survived construction work on the site.

"You can do a lot of damage with a bulldozer. Now there's just a concrete development that's stalled and is going nowhere and another piece of Auckland is lost," he says.

Auckland City Council Heritage manager George Farran says the council protects all known caves.

"We also have areas where we suspect there may be caves."

"Any development we see coming we use ground-penetrating radar to look for caves," he says.

Farran says that the Auckland property development world now sees the value in protecting caves.

The majority of caves are on private land and aren't widely publicised by the owners, so pub-

lic access is limited. The New Zealand Geological Society (NZSC) recommends people interested in exploring caves start on Rangitoto Island or Ambury Regional Park in Mangere Bridge.

NZSC geologist Hugh Grenfell says that while a number of known caves have heritage status, many more are being destroyed before they can be documented.

"There's legislation for archaeological sites that are uncovered but nothing for lava caves. Once they're gone that's it," he says.

Grenfell conducts regular tours around Stewart's Cave in Three Kings for the University of Auckland continuing education department.

The next tours are scheduled for September and October.

"Anyone can come on the tour and we've had all ages go through. There's a bit of scrambling over rocks and I guess you wouldn't do it if you were claustrophobic," he says.

Grenfell says due to lack of air flow there is no life in Stewart's Cave.

"There aren't glow worms or running streams. I've seen the odd possum dropping but nothing else really — not even rats. It's damp because the rock is so porous but there isn't a lot of water," he says.

The history of Auckland's caves and tunnels is rich.

Three burial caves were discovered in Cornwall Park in 1907 while ancient moa bones were found in a cave beneath the site of National Women's Hospital in 1957.

Bones were once a feature of the caves at Three Kings.

The remains were believed to be those of cannibal feasts after Hongi Hika's massacres.

"Caves are the stuff of legends."

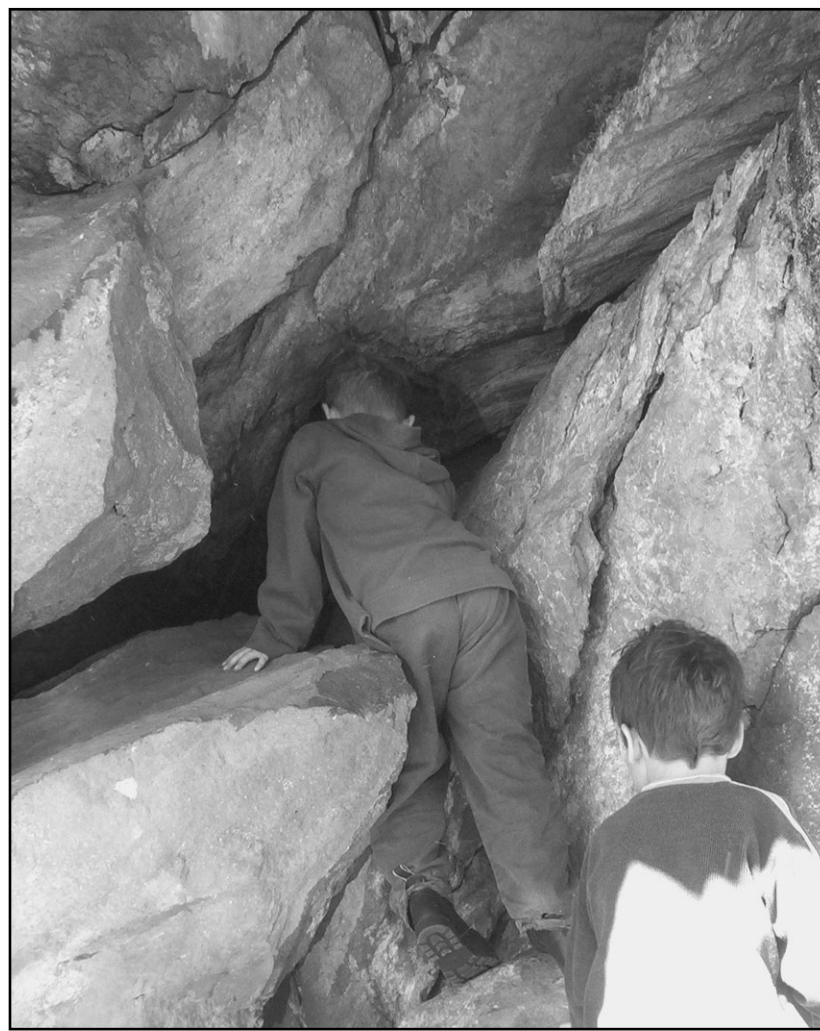
"Kids are normally responsible for the tall stories you hear about tunnels going for miles but that's because they're dark and quite frightening so the imagination takes over," says Crossley.

The popular 1979 Maurice Gee book *Under the Mountain* describes a connecting lava tunnel system under Auckland but scientists say the concept is pure fiction.



PHOTOS: KATE PALMER

INSIDE OUTSIDE CAVE: A dug-up example of a lava tunnel.



HIDDEN: Secret entrance to a lava tunnel in Newmarket.

