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Ready! Fire! Aim!

“CYCLOPS”

During the Spanish Civil War, Stalinist military commanders sent Trotskyite soldiers into the machine guns of fascist troops who were trying to overthrow the left-wing government of Spain. Although Stalinists hated the Falange, they hated the other left-wing factions more.

It seems to be typical of the left that the enemy within is always hated and feared more than the enemy without.

Look at what's happening in Australia.

Twelve months ago Kevin Rudd looked secure as prime minister. However, as the Rudd juggernaut began to falter, polls showed that support for Labor was dropping. This resulted in a bloodless, if brutal, coup following which Julia Gillard became the first woman to be appointed prime minister of Australia.

Gillard quickly moved some of the more contentious items of Rudd's programme to the backburner. As the temperature dropped, she called an early election. The poll swung in Labor's favour and the political pundits began to pick an easy win for the Government.

Then the party factions stepped in.

Disaffected and/or ambitious *apparatchiks* in the Labor machine began to white-ant their own boss. It has even been suggested that Rudd himself has been leaking selected material to the press; but whether that's true or not, it cannot be denied that nasty little termites have been gnawing away at Gillard's credibility.

Polls released over the weekend have given the coalition a 4% lead, which is a 14% turnaround on the situation 10 days previously, before the backstabbers got the knives sharpened.

Bear in mind that this knife work is being done by people who, supposedly at least, feel about the coalition much the same way that the Loyal Orange Order feels about the Roman Catholic Church.

Now cut across the ditch to New Zealand.

When Chris Carter came to the conclusion that Phil Goff wasn't capable of leading the Labour Party to victory in the next election, what did he do? Did he front up to the caucus meeting and say, 'Hey, guys, why don't we have a ballot on the leadership'? Hell no! In the best traditions of the labour movement he set out to do the maximum damage for the minimum effort by sneaking an anonymous note, which turned out to be not anonymous at all, to the Press Gallery.

Once found out, instead of doing the decent thing and resigning from caucus and as a Labour MP, he has been pretending that he alone is the true voice of labour movement and that he did what he did, not because he wanted to do it, but because it had to be done. That was what Brutus said about Julius Caesar.

More incredibly, Carter's Labour electorate committee, conveniently chaired by his partner, rather than inviting him to sling his hook, has been making muttering noises about supporting him.

This leaves the electorate thinking that (a) Goff is a lame-duck leader and (b) nobody in the Labour caucus could organise a knee-trembler in a brothel.

Leadership changes on the other side of the House are handled more expeditiously.

After a short period of rumour-mongering, the leader walks into the caucus room with a smile on his or her face.

An hour or two later a new leader walks out of the caucus room with a smile on his or her face, arm in arm with the former leader who, wan and trembly, makes a teeth-gritted speech offering full support with the winner; then the various factions unite in a display of party loyalty before the losers go back to their offices and bang their heads against the wall.

You do have to ask yourself, don't you, whether a party that can't shoot its wounded humanely should be entrusted with governing the country?

NZTA expects delays caused by Auckland motorway closure

The NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) is confirming plans for a maximum 36-hour closure of a section of the Southern Motorway (State Highway 1) on the weekend of September 4 and 5 for necessary work to open the first stage of the new Newmarket Viaduct.

The motorway's southbound lanes will be closed between the Gillies Ave off-ramp and Greenlane interchange from 5pm Saturday, September 4, for final preparations to allow drivers on to the southbound lanes of the new viaduct from Monday morning, September 6.

The NZTA's state highways manager for Auckland, Tommy Parker, said even a managed closure of a section of the southbound lanes has the potential to cause extensive congestion throughout Auckland and he advised people to stay away from the Southern Motorway that weekend.

"Travel delays will be inevitable, and they will be considerable and widespread," he said.

Detours are planned, but Mr Parker said the alternative routes will not be able to cope if regular weekend traffic flows occur.

"We're talking about trying to redirect up to 80,000 vehicles on the Sunday alone," he

adds. "Even with detours, the impact of the closure will be felt well beyond the Southern Motorway and people need to allow a lot more time for their journey if they do have to travel."

Detour routes to key destinations, such as Auckland International Airport, are available online, at www.nzta.govt.nz/newmarketconnection and www.facebook.com/switchmyroute.

Mr Parker said construction of the new viaduct is ahead of schedule and the NZTA and its Newmarket Connection partners want to deliver the benefits from the project to drivers as quickly as possible.

"To have reached the stage where we're now ready to switch southbound traffic across to the new structure, significantly ahead of schedule, without having previously closed the motorway to daytime traffic, is a remarkable achievement," Mr Parker said.

"We are now asking people to recognise these efforts in keeping the city moving, and support us through the closure."

The Automobile Association is also urging people to avoid unnecessary trips. If they do have to travel said AA spokesman Simon Lambourne, they should plan their journeys and drive with patience and care.

"Congestion will be significant with the closure of the southbound lanes," Mr Lambourne said, "but the short-term pain will be well worth it given the long-term benefits of the new viaduct."

Over the next month, the NZTA will run an extensive communications campaign using traditional and social media to make people aware of the closure and its impact on travel.

During the closure, the viaduct's new lanes will be connected to the motorway and the blue lifting gantry shifted on to the existing southbound lanes for stage 2 of the Newmarket Connection: Viaduct Replacement Project. When traffic is switched, work can also start to complete a fourth southbound lane across the viaduct to Greenlane, due to open early 2011.

The weekend before it opens to traffic, people will have the chance to walk over the new viaduct. The community event is planned for Sunday, August 29, from 9am to midday. More information is available online at www.nzta.govt.nz/newmarketconnection and www.facebook.com/switchmyroute.

The closure is the second involving projects that will improve journey travel times through Auckland's Central Motorway Junction the country's most congested section of highway. The Victoria Park Tunnel project is closing the northbound Wellington Street on-ramp for three months from August 22. Mr Parker said neither closure will impact on the other.

Palmerston North parking wardens receive accolade

PALMERSTON North's parking wardens received an unexpected accolade recently when they were named the "most helpful and positive" parking wardens in the country by Her Magazine.

The praise has come as no surprise to Palmerston North City Council's head of environmental protection services, Wayne Jameson, who believes the training the council provides its parking wardens allows them to handle all aspects of their role in a positive way.

"Over the last three years we've provided training to our parking wardens to develop their customer service skills; this focuses on giving them the skills to manage difficult situations, maintain a friendly outlook and not to get involved in arguments or hostile discussions," says Wayne.

"We've seen a huge reduction in complaints about our parking wardens since we instigated the training programme. We now receive only one complaint every three to four months where we used to get one a week. We investigate all complaints and in the last year only two complaints were substantiated.

"We have no qualms handing out infringement notices to those who break the rules but our wardens have been trained to use their discretion when there are obvious and genuine reasons for the infringement, particularly where there are safety or mobility issues involved.

"A lot of the complaints we receive accuse the wardens of targeting people and that couldn't be further from the truth. We target areas, not people. For example: we're more vigilant of illegal parking in mobility

parks or on yellow lines around schools. We're primarily focused on safety and freeing up parking so more people can enjoy the city centre.

"We know that no one likes getting a parking ticket, and our wardens have been subjected to verbal and physical abuse in the past. We're proud that they now have the skills to carry out their work and act as positive ambassadors for our city.

"It's really satisfying that even in this small way our wardens have been recognised for the work they do. It's an unpopular job but every one of our parking wardens is a family member themselves. They're real people, they're not hunting for your car, they're performing a regulatory role that helps make our city centre a more accessible place for everyone."

Hamilton to hold a kowhai tree sale in garden place

HAMILTON residents will have the opportunity to purchase and plant their very own 'Hamilton icon' when a kowhai tree sale is held in Garden Place on Saturday from 10am-3pm.

The tree sale aims to build on the momentum of the city's kowhai planting programme to help reinstate the many kowhai which once bloomed in Hamilton. Traditionally the banks of the Waikato River in Hamilton were awash with golden kowhai blooms, while ancestors of local iwi adorned themselves in kowhai to celebrate the onset of spring and signify the time to plant new crops.

Hamilton City Council parks and gardens manager Lance Vervoort said that while the city's planting programme focuses on establishing kowhai along the riverbank and in public parks and gardens, the aim of the tree sale will be to encourage residents to plant kowhai trees in their own backyards.

"While we are making good progress with plantings in public areas, by planting kowhai in their own backyards residents will be helping to foster Hamilton's special character and will be contributing to the long-term goal of attracting more tui to the city," said Mr Vervoort.

Sourced from Hamilton City Council's nursery, the kowhai trees will be sold for \$10 each, with part of the proceeds from each tree sold going to the Hamilton Hydrotherapy Pool Trust whose volunteers will be assisting with the project.

Manukau City Council to launch bond issue

MANUKAU City Council is planning a retail bond issue to raise up to \$350 million, most of which will be on-lent to other councils in the Auckland region.

The move comes at the request of the Auckland Transition Agency.

"This will provide initially the existing Auckland councils and, after 1 November, Auckland Council, with further funding to provide the assets, services and facilities needed for the greater Auckland region's future development," finance director Dave Foster said.

The bonds would be secured over the rates of Manukau City Council. After 1 November, Auckland Council would assume the obligations and rights relating to the bonds.

The full details of the offer will be in the investment statement which is expected to be released in late August in time for the offer to open in early September.

Manukau City has appointed ANZ and Craigs Investment Partners as arrangers for the offer. The syndicate members are ANZ, Craigs Investment Partners, First NZ Capital Securities, Goldman Sachs JBWere (NZ) and Forsyth Barr.

No indication of interest will involve an obligation or commitment of any kind.

No money is currently being sought and no applications for the bonds will be accepted or money received until the subscriber has received an investment statement.

Rodney area communities demand motorway access

THE NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) has been left in no doubt about the need for access to and from the proposed Puhoi to Wellsford motorway for the Waiwera, Puhoi and Mahurangi West communities and tourism zone.

The agency's northern regional director, Wayne Macdonald, has heard from local community leaders that 98% of residents polled demanded the agency rethink its initial proposal that there be no access on the new route south of Warkworth.

Mr Macdonald was attending a meeting brokered by Rodney's Mayor, Penny Webster, which included as well as the community leaders, local MP Lockwood Smith and ARC Rodney representative Christine Rose.

Mayor Webster said her council supported fully the communities' view that access was essential for the entire district's economic future and for the safety of road users.

Several representatives echoed the

stance with one saying the lack of access would "kill the town and potentially kill us if we are forced to again use the old (Waiwera) route."

Representing the ARC, Christine Rose said the regional council supported the concept of an improved northern route but was still to be convinced that it should be any more than an improvement to the existing State Highway 1 route. She suggested that more time and consultation was needed.

In what appeared to be a direct contradiction to that, Dr Lockwood Smith made an impassioned plea to fast-track the process.

Pointing to the proposed time-line, which would not see the motorway completed before 2022, he said the NZTA should be working to shave at least three years off the construction period.

"Let this community be in no doubt of my commitment to this project and my intent to act as their representative to get it finished, and meeting the community's needs.

"This is a government project and the Government wants it completed."

In response Mr Macdonald said that the meeting along with earlier public meetings were just the start of the consultation process.

"Nothing yet was hard and fast," he said. "These projects always evolve and they take their shape from community input."

In a last agreement, ending the meeting, Mayor Webster gained a commitment from Mr Macdonald to extend the period for submissions on the access issue by a further two weeks.

"Given the passion exhibited here today and the logic of the (access) argument, it's the least the agency can do. And I am glad they have done it," she said.

Mrs Webster said she is also willing to organise a community reference group to ensure the community voice continues to be heard throughout the agency's deliberations.

Work to begin on repairing State Highway 29 damage

THE NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) is about to begin a nine-week project to shore up a bank supporting State Highway 29 at Tauriko on the outskirts of Tauranga.

To allow the contractors safe access to the work area, several temporary changes to the highway will be made. These include reducing the speed limit through the area, re-marking the highway to move traffic towards the centre of the road and removing car parking in the vicinity.

Rod James, the NZTA's Bay of Plenty state highway manager, said several temporary patch ups have previously been carried out in this spot but it remains vulnerable. This more substantial project will provide a permanent fix.

"A retaining wall will be built to protect the highway from further risk of being undermined from slippage. It will be buried approximately three metres deep into the ground and protrude about four metres above the ground. 'Anchors' up to six metres long will be pushed horizontally into the ground to hold the wall in place. It's a complex piece of work and will involve some disruption to traffic for the duration of construction."

The NZTA is aware people use this area as a 'park and ride' spot. Parking will be unavailable during the works so the NZTA recommends people park in The Lakes area.

Improvements to Wellington rail stations now complete

BOX Hill Station on the Johnsonville Line has reopened to passengers now improvements to the station have been completed. It was closed in May so the platform could be extended and resurfaced. Work to improve and extend Johnsonville Station is now also complete.

The two stations were the last on the line to be upgraded, following work over the past year on all other platforms on the Johnsonville Line.

Wellington region rail programme director David Gordon said it was a good feeling to have all stations on the line complete.

"Temporarily closing platforms or having live construction sites on operating stations is disruptive but people have been very patient," Mr Gordon said.

"We had to extend the length of every platform so longer trains could use the line. At the same time we've smartened them up and passengers have really appreciated the improvements."

The station improvements are part of the Wellington region rail programme, a joint initiative between KiwiRail and Greater Wellington Regional Council to improve passenger rail services.

The \$550 million programme includes: a fleet of new electric trains; extension of electrification and double tracked lines to take commuter services to Waikanae; installation of power supply equipment and railway signalling; adding another line into Wellington Railway Station to reduce delays; making the Johnsonville Line tunnels larger; and improving a number of platform and station facilities.

Public transport integrated ticketing takes step forward

MOVES towards national integrated public transport ticketing have taken a big step forward with the development of a key agreement between the NZ Transport Agency (NZTA) and ticketing system providers.

The agreement paves the way for the creation of a set of national standards for integrated public transport ticketing.

NZTA group manager of regional partnerships and planning Dave Brash said a wide range of industry representatives are participating in the development of the ticketing standards.

He said this is ensuring the best possible system for public transport consumers, transport operators, regional councils and the Government.

"We can continue to move forward co-operatively to progress the creation of national standards by the end of the year," said Mr Brash.

"It's important that we are able to work well with ticketing providers to establish a scheme within the overall national framework which creates a fair and level playing field for all parties," he said.

National operating standards define how the central core of a national system will function as well as how operator equipment such as on-board bus ticketing machines will interact with that system.

"This standards approach will enable us to establish a long-term integrated national system that regions throughout New Zealand can cost-effectively link into," said Mr Brash.

Auckland will be the first region in New Zealand to adopt the national integrated ticketing system and it is anticipated that other regions will follow.

Mr Brash said national integrated ticketing is part of an overall strategy to establish a more efficient and effective public transport system. That is why it is a core part of the NZTA's leadership initiative in public transport.

"It opens the door to contestability on transport ticketing equipment while ensuring the development of a cost-effective, nationally-integrated system."

The new national ticketing standard is being developed by the NZTA in consultation with industry players including transport operators and regional authorities.

Another big advantage of an integrated ticketing system will be the ability to easily collect common format strategic information about public transport usage. This will enable better long-term planning and funding, which will result in a more efficient and cost-effective public transport system.

The national standards process is being assisted by Dutch specialists, Collis, who have also been involved with the development of other multi-modal integrated card systems in Europe and Dubai.

Organisations that are participating in the definition of the integrated ticketing standards are ARTA, Bus and Coach Association, Environment Canterbury, Electronic Ticketing Systems, Greater Wellington Regional Council, Init Pty Ltd, KiwiRail, Snapper, Thales, and HTS Group.