

Over the Fence



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Nordy's 1958 Budget
- With the Prince in... WAIPAWA!
- Trees of Hawke's Bay
- Well Said x 2
- Last Word

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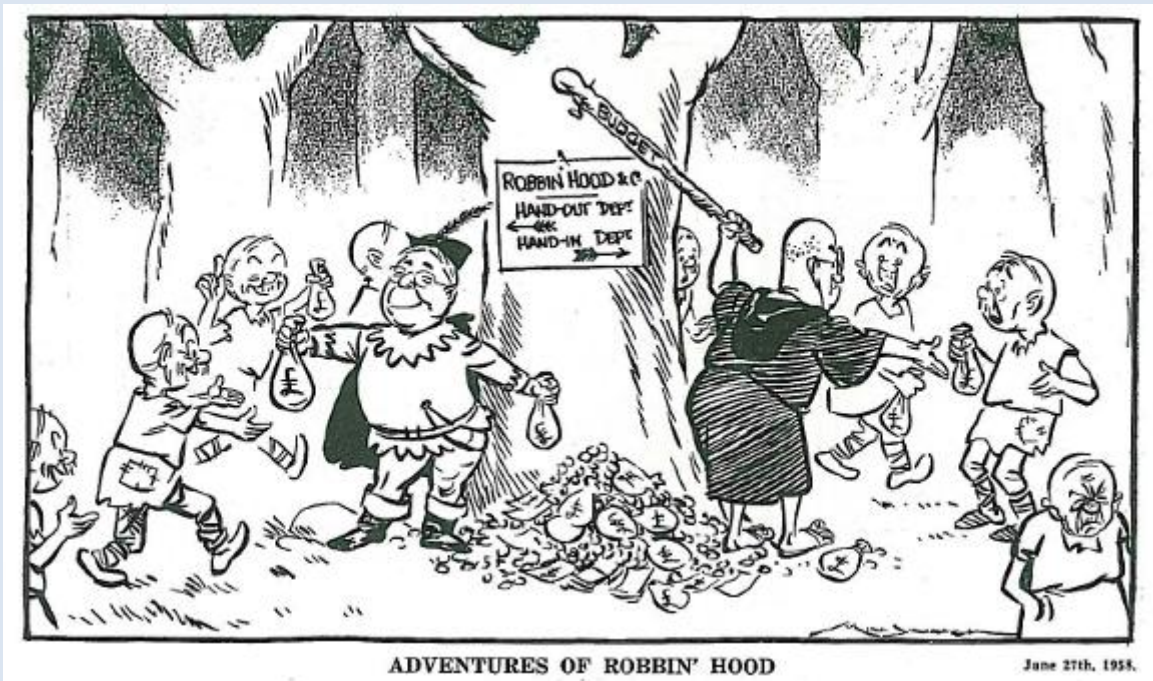
NORDY'S 1958 BUDGET

While the rather far-reaching and generally well-received changes announced in this year's budget are still to come, the budget itself is now old news. So let's look much further back at what is without doubt the most memorable budget in our history: Arnold Nordmeyer's 1958 **BLACK BUDGET!**



In the 1957 election campaign the two dominant political parties indulged in an unseemly auction using the people's money to bribe the people for their vote. It was fiscally irresponsible, and all the more so when the global economy was entering a significant downturn, known in America as the "Edsel Recession". (Edsel Ford was the long-suffering only son of Henry Ford. He died in middle age, pre-deceasing his eccentric but industrially brilliant father. In 1957 the Ford Motor Co launched a whole new make of car, named the "Edsel"; bigger and a little more luxurious – and expensive – than the popular "Ford". Its introduction, launched with great fanfare, coincided with the recession and it bombed. Manufacture was ceased shortly after. Today an Edsel – there are few survivors – is a very valuable car indeed.)

Anyway, after Labour won the 1957 election with a razor-thin majority of one, they were confronted with the need to honour their election promises from a rapidly diminishing exchequer. So Minister of Finance Nordmeyer no doubt thought that he would get the pain over with early in the electoral cycle. He increased taxation and estate



Cartoon by Gordon Minhinnick representing Nordy's 1958 Budget.

and gift duties, and introduced taxation on dividends. The sales tax on cars was doubled, as was the tax on petrol so motorists, which by the late 1950s included a fair portion of the population, were hit. But the real uproar came from the doubling of excise duties on cigarettes and tobacco (at a time when most men and many women smoked) and on beer (the working man's – i.e. Labour supporters' – drink) and spirits. (Wine too, but few noticed!)

I well remember the despair that prevailed at the time. Oh dear. Everyone was crying into whatever it was that they were drinking.

Political suicide or fiscal courage and responsibility? Well, if there was any discretion it may have been the former because Labour lost the next four elections. But with the passing of the years it seemed increasingly the latter as subsequent governments ran from the tough decisions. More than once I recall when he was Prime Minister Robert Muldoon being asked by the interviewer "Who is the politician you most admire?" Muldoon, after paying homage to his hero Keith Holyoake, would single out Nordmeyer for his fiscal courage. This was obviously a leading question to which the interviewer had been previously primed. The strategy was that some of Nordy's fiscal courage would rub off onto Muldoon. If it did it was pretty obscure to me.

The irony is that the continual "Black Budget" taunt eventually destroyed Nordmeyer, but if the National Party had been returned in 1957 *honouring their election promises would have been even more costly!*

WITH THE PRINCE IN... WAIPAWA!

It is 90 years ago this month that the most famous young man of the times, the Prince of Wales, later briefly (uncrowned) King Edward VIII, and after that the Duke of Windsor, was in Hawke's Bay. Famous maybe, and in his tour of Australia and New Zealand his father's subjects turned out in droves. But he was a weak character; if character is the right word, he didn't have much. Mrs Simpson did Britain and her Empire a favour by hauling him off the throne.

Following his tour one H. Hector Bolitho wrote a book *With the Prince in New Zealand*. It is really a succession of descriptions of the rapturous welcomes he was afforded in the towns of the country, together with appropriately agreeable comments. Except Waipawa that is!



H.R.H Prince of Wales on Whistle Stop Tour at Waipawa, May 5, 1920. Rear of picture: A.E. Jull and Lachlan McKay. Left to right: Admiral Halsley, Ted O'Brien (Town Clerk), H.M. Rathbone, Prince of Wales, W.I. Limbrick, Sir George Hunter.

[On the Royal Train] the Press typewriters rattled industriously when we received warning of another reception. The acres of farm-land ended, and houses came into view. We drew into another of New Zealand's ugly little railway stations, built below the level of the town of Waipawa.

It seemed to be a solitary little town with nothing but the fine spirit of the people to commend it. The buildings were aged and they huddled together on both sides of a long street. But its citizens turned out in full force to greet the Prince. Time did not permit our inspection of the town closely, so the people gathered on the railway station, in front of an hotel that told us in big letters that there was plenty of time for refreshments before the train departed. The railway hotels throughout New Zealand announce this alluring fact to travellers and it is a common sight on arrival of a train on a station, to see a little army of thirsty people rush towards the hotel with the firm intention of sandwiching as many drinks as possible in the time. But I do not wish to cause the impression that it is a land of topper!

The school children gathered and they were assembled with the returned servicemen and veterans. The Prince found a minute to walk among the children; up and down the cheering ranks of little people who were not the least bit noisy and pleased with this, their day of days.

As is the case of many of the inland towns, the hotels and banks of New Zealand were the only inspiring buildings in Waipawa. Even the hotels, and newspaper office looked as if they needed a coat of paint; a condition that seemed to rein throughout the town. But its people needed no embellishment to make them appreciate the Prince's visit, and the train departed with the picture of two thousand cheering people, and the Prince on the rear platform waving his farewell.

From the condescending tone of this book one would think that Bolitho was a Brit out here following the Prince. He was in fact a Kiwi, but no doubt furnishing his descriptions for British readers. Bolitho was a most prolific author, publishing 59 books. He immigrated to Britain subsequent to this book being published and died in 1974.



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II leaves Waipawa after a Whistle Stop, Thursday January 7, 1954. Pictured left to right: Mrs Eileen Kingston (Town Clerk's wife), Mrs B.W. Johansen, partly obscured (Mayor's wife). Mr Eric Kingston (Town Clerk) and B.W. Johansen (Mayor).

And in terms of the visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1954, I well remember being with all the local school kids on the bank across the main road (now planted in cherries!) and in advance of the Queen's and Duke's arrival being handed by Mayor Burt Johansen a little Union Jack on a stick to be waved with great patriotic fervour at appropriate moments.

(Johansen, although a likable fellow, somewhat later but while still mayor had cause to leave town in a hurry.)

TREES OF HAWKE'S BAY

Cherries

The genus *prunus* – Cherry – is cultivated for one of three quite distinct objectives: extremely high-grade timber (regrettably rarely done in New Zealand), delicious fruit, and for its spectacular blossom (the result of hundreds, perhaps thousands of years of breeding by Asian, especial Japanese breeders). As a bonus most colour well in the autumn with often vibrant orange hues.

The production of cherry wood, used for such specialty purposes as furniture, musical instruments and internal decorative panelling, is attracting increasing interest in America and Europe and I saw some encouraging initiatives when there in 1994. I was shown a magnificent cherry growing in a German forest in the state of Hessen. It was maybe .6 metre dbh (diameter breast height) and 8 metres to the first branch. Probably it had taken over a century to reach this dimension. It was being used for grafting stock, (although its timber value would have been at least \$10,000) and the scientist showed me through his laboratory where thousands of genetic replicas were being propagated from the tree's budwood.



My favourite cherry – Shamudsu shakura in full glory.



Cherries brightening up the centre of Waipawa.

But in New Zealand cultivation is generally focused on fruit production and amenity. Nowhere, though, is its showiness more on display than around the “Tidal Basin” in Washington DC. Okay, these are not the trees of Hawke’s Bay, but offer an inspiration as to what such beautiful trees planted in large numbers can do to enrich the life of a community both emotionally and economically.

In 1912 the Japanese Government gifted 3000 cherry trees to the City of Washington, “honouring the lasting friendship between the United States and Japan”. (This friendship came somewhat unstuck when the Japs sunk the best part of the U S Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour three decades later. From 1942 to 1946 the Washington trees were known officially as ‘Asian Cherries’.) The U S reciprocated with a gift of dogwoods. In 1965 a further 3,800 cherries were accepted by First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson.

Today people flock from all over the nation and around the world to view the cherries in full blossom and an annual festival is held when the peak of flowering is anticipated, although this can vary from year to year, depending on climatic conditions. This is a noteworthy example of theme planting, something Kiwi landscapers have not been good at.

The cherry blossom, although magnificent, is relatively brief, lasting in full glory for about a week. This, to the Japanese, symbolises human life: transient but noble, beauty to be celebrated and cherished while it lasts.

Cherry is a tree well-suited to urban cultivation giving fine ornamentation and not growing too big. Accordingly they are being grown increasingly in Hawke’s Bay. Among our most historic trees is a group of ‘Burmese cherries’ growing over the grave of Herbert Guthrie Smith at Tutira. When, upon his death in 1940, his casket was being lowered his pet wood pigeon – there’s a well publicised photo of him feeding it – alighted on the bough of one of the trees. Unfortunately they were seriously damaged some time ago through ring-barking by goats.



Cherries can colour brilliantly in autumn.

WELL SAID – 1

“Dear Chief Secretary, I’m afraid there’s no money. Kind regards – good luck. Liam.”

Note left by departing U K Chief Treasury Secretary to his successor (not intended to be made public).

This has shades of an earlier message. Reginald Maudling cheerfully told James Callaghan, who took over as Chancellor after Labour’s 1964 election victory: **“Good luck, old cock, sorry to leave it in such a mess.”** Callaghan thought he meant the office in Number 11. He later realised that Maudling was talking about the economy. (Reported by *The Times*)

And here’s one in the same vein, closer to home. **“Congratulations, Mr Lange. I’ve got some bad news for you tomorrow.”** A phone call of congratulations from defeated Prime Minister Sir Robert Muldoon on election night 1984. Before Lange could reply he hung up. (David Lange *My Life*, page 173.)

WELL SAID – 2

“I’ve looked the matter up, but the dates don’t coincide.”

Churchill teasing wife Clementine when she confronted him as to whether rumours were true that faithful aid Brendan Bracken – like Churchill, red haired – was his son. Of course Churchill’s answer reveals the security of an innocent man. In fact in nearly 60 years of marriage he was never seriously accused of infidelity. One of Churchill’s virtues (magnanimity was another) was security. Once when someone congratulating him on a new-born grandchild said, “He looks just like you Winston”, Churchill growled “All babies look like me!”

LAST WORD

For previous newsletters, take a look around my website: www.overthefence.org.nz

Cheers, Ewan Mac