

Over the Fence



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NUMBER THIRTY-ONE

5 AUGUST 2011

ONE HAWKE'S BAY

You may be somewhat tired of the amalgamation debate, but here I will present my thoughts. Not for the first time though, as I have been publically advocating it for over ten years.

One aspect of the debate which I deplore is the level it has reached: the personal denigration, slanging at other communities, mis-information and sheer bias that has nothing to do with the issue of the best form, whatever way we see it, for Hawke's Bay governance over the next generation. I think much of the public discourse on the issue has diminished this community. Some of the worst comments have come through the medium of *Hawke's Bay Today* texts. (If they're personal and anonymous they shouldn't be published. I've represented this view to the editor but unlike supportive emails, I've had no reply.) But other such comments have come from community leaders.



Let's start with a comment Napier Councillor Bill Dalton made on the issue in his blog. (Bill writes some pretty provocative stuff and I always read it, but I believe his comments on the amalgamation issue are way off the mark.)

On one occasion he nailed Chris Tremain for coming out for at least a productive debate on the issue, as this was not a popular cause in Napier. Stuart Nash, against amalgamation, he said, will gain ground against Tremain. "Bad call", says Bill. A bad call apparently is one where an elected official states his or her views knowing them to be unpopular. A "good call" then is when you mount a platform at state with mock sincerity that you are against something you actually believe in. Two terms for this spring to mind: demagoguery and lying. Also what springs to my mind are two quotes that reflect contrasting approaches.



Left:

"There go my people, I must find out where they are going so I can lead them."

**French Revolutionary Alexandre
Auguste Ledru-Rollin**

Right:

"Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays, instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

**British Parliamentarian and man of
letters Edmund Burke 1722-92**



I wonder, what would be one of history's worst 'calls'? Surely a claim would have to be Churchill's uncompromising opposition through the second half of the 1930s to his government's appeasement of the dictators. For this Churchill was excluded from government, a high price for an ambitious and experienced man. His wonderfully insightful description in the Commons of the (at the time) popular Munich agreement as 'a total and unmitigated defeat' brought boos and ostracism. He was branded a 'war monger' while Chamberlain was a man of peace. No doubt about it – a bad, bad call!

But Bill and others in Napier are terrified that this is all part of a plot for Hastings to take over Napier. It's nonsense of course.

This from Bill Dalton again: "How will paying our rates to a council, which by sheer weight of numbers will be dominated by Hastings councillors, improve the lot of Napier ratepayers and Napier as a city?"

And this from former MP Bill Sutton: "The proposal produced by Lawrence is clearly a simple takeover of Napier by Hastings."

List MP Stuart Nash has even flattered me by driving him into the arms of the anti-amalgamationists. "McGregor and [fellow Regional Councillor] Gilbertson are the greatest argument against amalgamation there is". "He doesn't give a shit about the people of Napier." Leaving aside the inelegance of the language, I do care about his 'constituents' (his term, not mine) and, apart from my various connections to Napier, I have sworn an oath of office to represent the interests of all of the Hawke's Bay Region.

There will be no Hastings takeover of Napier. For an effective united council to work there would need to be a balance of power between Napier and urban Hastings. This is easily achieved by establishing a Hastings urban ward of equal size to Napier. I suggest a fifteen member council (plus a mayor elected regionally) with Napier and Hastings having six each, and three rural wards over the remainder of HB. So how come Hastings will dominate Napier with six of 15? If anything, the remainder of Hawkes Bay will fear domination by the cities. Understandable, but my experience on the Regional Council is that it won't happen. Just one happy family!

The contrast to regionalism between Napier and Hastings is interesting. Neither of the economies of Napier and urban Hastings would last five minutes without the production of the wider Hawke's Bay hinterland – just look at the throughput, both inwards and outwards, of the Port of Napier, New Zealand's fourth largest by the way. But Hastings clearly understands this. Why? Well obviously they are the physical centre of much of rural commerce, but another reason is that urban and rural representation, and the constituency interests they bring, sit around the one council table. There they hammer out policy, then vote, and according to the obligations of collective responsibility, work as a council to bring effect to that policy. The same would be the case with a Hawke's Bay District Council.

Amalgamation is not new in HB. In 1968 we had 15 rating bodies: 12 territorials and 3 ad hocs (the Harbour Board was for about 60 years a rating body.) The first was Napier and Taradale combining.

Now we have five. What can we learn from this process?

1. Initially popular opinion is always overwhelmingly against.
2. Advocates are subject to personal denigration, or have their motives aspersed, starting with "Mr Tait just wants another link in his chain"; Taradale mayor Miller.
3. After the initial bedding-in serious regret is non-existent. You will occasionally hear this comment: *I have to admit that initially I was against it*. But you will never hear this: *I've said all along that it wouldn't work*.
4. Disproportionate debts are solved (conceded, with some difficulty) by ring-fencing. (Another form of debt, one that may literally be buried, is substandard infrastructure. I'm not saying that there is disparity here, but it is something the public need information about.)
5. Community identity is unaffected. See Havelock North and Waipawa/Waipukurau. (There was a fear prior

to 1989 that Waipawa would lose its identity in one council. It didn't happen and after three terms they formed a common urban ward and no problems. Of the four councillors, two are from Waipawa, one Waipukurau (with two thirds of the population) and one from Porangahau.) Look, overwhelmingly the locals couldn't give two hoots as to the location of their council chamber; they just want the best decisions made in their interests. And visitors? Their interest in such is non-existent.

Hawkes Bay is punching below its weight and has been for years.

- It is the largest population centre in the country without a university, so we lose our brightest young people to other centres at a crucial stage in their lives, and they take the vibrancy that they bring to a community with them.
- We are the foremost region, or at least a heavyweight, in the production of wine, meat, fruit, wool and food processing, yet in every case the primary research establishments are elsewhere.
- The delays and energy spent on infighting has delayed centralised facilities for many decades. What better example than the never dying argument over the regional hospital. As if the regional hospital could have been on the Napier Hill, where a helicopter can't land, and where would you park? And how selfish to expect the long-suffering taxpayers of New Zealand to provide two hospitals 20 minutes apart. The current site is ideal and we should all rally around it. But no! Moaners still can't accept the decision. Hastings folk don't seem to be moaning about the location of the Airport, Museum, McLean Park, Pettigrew Green Arena, EIT, Park Island, all, by the way, being in receipt of extra Napier funding. But if they are, they shouldn't be.

Final note: Early last month the Napier City Council went behind closed doors to discuss amalgamation, the outcome of which was to seek to garrotte the debate. This looked more like a party caucus than a collection of independently elected councillors, where differences are thrashed out (if there were any) in private, and a united front presented to the public. Not one, apparently, felt that there could be constituents who had an open mind on this issue and wanted to dispassionately debate it. Compare this with this piece from the Greater Wellington Regional Council website (now of course past its 'use by' date).

How our region is governed – your thoughts?

Are you interested in how the Wellington region is governed? Are the region's current local governance arrangements best-suited for taking the region into the future?

If you're interested in these issues, make sure you read and provide feedback on a recent report prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers on regional governance.

The report, commissioned by the Wellington Mayoral Forum, looks at the current local government arrangements in the Wellington region and provides ideas on how the region's governance structures might be improved. The forum has agreed that each council in the region seeks feedback on the report.

The Greater Wellington Regional Council is keen to encourage community discussion on this issue and hear your thoughts on the form and function of the region.

The consultation closes on 30 June. If you would like to read the report and make a submission, see:

www.gw.govt.nz/regional-governance

HOW HERITAGE MINDED ARE WE KIWIS?

Cynthia and I recently spent a few days driving from Adelaide to Melbourne via the Great Ocean Road. It was a great drive, and, for those interested in the farming scene there, we saw thousands of hectares of verdant green grass for they have had an historically wet season in that part of the continent. But the geology of the coastal landscape was very interesting and we passed through some nice towns built round the various estuaries and bays.

(We had one of these remarkable GPS things that direct you along the route to the destination that you have entered in to it. Not only does it have a little screen, but a woman speaks to you, giving directions. Jeez, did that woman have a lot to say! She was one of those women who knew everything, even the remotest little lane in the remotest hamlet, and never let you forget it. But her diction was good, and I understood every word, though she had just a touch of an electronic accent. By the end of the trip I detected that Cynthia was starting to pick it up.)

One conclusion we came to is that the Aussies are ahead of us in promoting their heritage, at least their European if not indigenous one – well, actually it was almost non-existent. They have the advantage of many wonderful stone and brick buildings, the result of ample supplies of suitable building stone, and of course no great earthquake risk, at least apparently so.

They seem to honour their pioneers better than we do. It is not unusual to see monuments to the hardy and enterprising pioneers that battled the elements in the middle of the 19th Century and set the scene for the subsequent development of industry and society. We had them here in Hawke's Bay just the same, and they laid the foundations for what we are blessed with today. So where are the monuments to those unspecified forefathers and foremothers? We have no shortages of memorials to Queen Victoria, who I suspect knew little of New Zealand and had never heard of Hawke's Bay. (But full marks to the Chamber of Commerce and Port of Napier for their recent inductions into the Business Hall of Fame.)

The Aussies are better too at the commemoration of their military history. See the photos below to illustrate my point.



Left: WW1 Prize of War on display in centre of Mt Gambia, under cover in a replica band rotunda (You may spot the original in the distance.) The plaque tells its history.*

Right: photo of plaque



On the following page is a similar model gun presented to the Havelock Borough Council after WW1. It was kicked around Havelock for years, and after sitting in the borough yard was rescued from being scrapped by the then named HB Black Powder Club. The gun languishes forlornly in a remote paddock at the club's shooting range. I have tried to excite them to re-present it to the public as a heritage piece but they have been intransigent. I have emphasised that this piece is their property and honour them for saving it, but I simply cannot comprehend why they do not wish to see it restored (mainly new replication wooden wheels) and protected for posterity.

To be sure, the gun (similar calibre, but the shorter barrel qualifies it as a 'howitzer') presented to Waipawa has been restored and sits proudly on the town's war memorial, arguably making it the most eye-catching war

memorial in the region. Nevertheless, when it fell into disrepair (the wheels really, for it is made of the finest Krupp steel) about 25 years ago, the local RSA said they weren't interested in its restoration, the Club President saying "we saw enough guns during the war". This was incomprehensible; given that it was placed on the memorial by diggers freshly back from the trenches in 1920, beside the fact that RSA clubs around the country have placed guns cast off from the NZ Army in front of their facilities.



Out standing in its field.



The Waipawa War Memorial Howitzer.

***Band rotundas**

I was surprised at the number of band rotundas in Aussie towns. The nearest original I know of is in Woodville. A fine one was built last year by the community in Nellie Jull Park, Waipawa, by volunteers. There was one in front of the Masonic in Napier, but it succumbed in the Earthquake. I also seem to remember one at Westshore, now long gone. I understand it has been suggested that one be built in the wonderful Frimley Park rose garden, which would be an ideal location, and where the band playing at a rose festival would surely attract the citizenry.

WILLIAM COLENZO

Talking of our heritage, one of the great (if unconventional) pioneers of Hawke's Bay, William Colenso, has his 200th birthday coming up on November 17th. Coincidentally, a couple of days ago I received an email from friend Chris Geddis who reminded me of this. Colenso has only been recognised for his contribution to this county's history in recent decades, chiefly the naming after him of Colenso High School in 1959. There is of course the memorial at Waitangi (Awatoto) which approximates the flood-prone mission station he founded in 1844, but it is little recognised. The Aussies would have a statue in a prominent place in an appropriate town. So should we. I wonder if there could not be an initiative to see a memorial to this great man placed in a prominent part of Napier.



The Colenso grave at the entrance to the Napier Cemetery.

PARAPROSDOKIANS

I was sent this by a friend and had to look up "paraprosdokian". Here is the definition: *Figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected; frequently used in a humorous situation.*

"Where there's a will, I want to be in it," is a type of paraprosdokian.

1. Do not argue with an idiot. He will drag you down to his level and beat you with experience.
2. The last thing I want to do is hurt you. But it's still on my list.
3. Light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.
4. If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong.
5. We never really grow up, we only learn how to act in public.
6. War does not determine who is right – only who is left.
7. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
8. Evening news is where they begin with 'Good Evening,' and then proceed to tell you why it isn't.
9. To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism. To steal from many is research.
10. A bus station is where a bus stops. A train station is where a train stops. On my desk, I have a work station.
11. I thought I wanted a career. Turns out I just wanted paychecks.
12. Whenever I fill out an application, in the part that says, 'In case of emergency, notify:' I put 'DOCTOR.'
13. I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you.
14. Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and a beer gut, and still think they are sexy.
15. Behind every successful man is his woman. Behind the fall of a successful man is usually another woman.
16. A clear conscience is the sign of a fuzzy memory.
17. I asked God for a bike, but I know God doesn't work that way. So I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness.
18. You do not need a parachute to skydive. You only need a parachute to skydive twice.
19. Money can't buy happiness, but it sure makes misery easier to live with.
20. There's a fine line between cuddling and holding someone down so they can't get away.
21. I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not so sure.
22. You're never too old to learn something stupid.
23. To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first and call whatever you hit the target.
24. Nostalgia isn't what it used to be.
25. Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.
26. Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.
27. A diplomat is someone who tells you to go to hell in such a way that you look forward to the trip.
28. Hospitality is making your guests feel at home even when you wish they were.
29. I always take life with a grain of salt. Plus a slice of lemon, and a shot of tequila.
30. When tempted to fight fire with fire, remember that the Fire Department usually uses water.

LAST WORD

If you haven't already, don't forget to take a look at www.overthefence.org.nz.
And if you think a friend would like to read Over the Fence then feel free to forward it.
Cheers, Ewan Mac