

Treachery and stupidity

Imagine you're the Labour Party. You're under pressure over some dodgy election spending. Your attempts to bluff through have not worked and the truculent "up yours - we'll make it legal anyway" attitude is starting to annoy voters. You have been trying for weeks to get some muck about the leader of your main opponent out into the public arena. You've been dropping hints in the House; your senior press secretaries have been hawking the sleaze around the press gallery - mostly in the hope that someone else will go chasing the issue. If not the gallery, then Winston Peters, perhaps. But Winston is no fool. Like you, he wants this stuff out there. But voters rightly despise people who hurl this sort of muck. So you spread the muck around as sneakily as possible - off the record, of course - and as widely as possible. As the Labour Party, you have had to hose down your hotheads. You had to give Trevor Mallard a horse tranquilliser to calm him down and even then he still almost blurts it in the House. Then - jackpot. Something beyond your wildest dreams happens. Someone from your main opponent turns out to have the fatally necessary mix of treachery and stupidity - and leaks it to the media. And now it's out there - without your fingerprints on it. Perfect.

Luck on its side

OK, readers can stop pretending now. But mull on this: first, the high-minded justification for delving into Don Brash's private life - that the alleged other party is from a like-minded lobby group - is humbug and hypocrisy. If Dr Brash had had an affair with Laila Harré, that would be a story. Second, Labour has often - rightly - been described as an immensely lucky government. You have to go back to Sid Holland's National government, which benefited from the Korean War wool boom, to find a government that had the economic indices going so much in its favour. But at times Labour has also been very very lucky in its opponents.

Nats embrace activist savings policy

National's finance spokesman, John Key, told a Conferenz conference on KiwiSaver that New Zealand has a savings problem - something National has been ambivalent about in the past. Although some extensive work by the Treasury suggests overall the country is saving enough, Mr Key says that applies only to the nation as a whole. But a considerable number of individuals are not saving enough, he believes. He has hinted at some form of compulsion along the lines of the Australian model.

More flak over business law

"Captive insurers" is not a well-known market but it has been slowly gaining a foothold. It's a growing risk management tool for companies, allowing them to self-insure but with a separate legal entity. The insurance risks are pooled: they are more able to be linked to the risks of a specific group or industry rather than to general insurance conditions. An obvious byproduct is the pool of funds to be invested. One of the drivers is Australian companies setting up captive insurers here to avoid the heavy compliance costs the Australian government put on the industry after the HIH collapse. The NZ Captive Insurers Association (NZCIA) estimates the industry paid \$3 million in tax last year. However, the Business Law Reform Bill threatens all that. The bill contains measures to stop offshore companies getting around their domestic laws. The NZCIA told the commerce select committee other countries have rules that allow captives but exclude less desirable insurers and proposed New Zealand adopt similar rules.