

# Newman Weekly

By Dr. Muriel Newman  
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The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

## Lowering the Bar

When governments become embroiled in scandal, there comes a point where the confidence of the public, begins to wane. If the scandals continue, a "tipping point" approaches whereby voters begin to question the capability of an administration to govern effectively.

With the paper-thin majority that Labour has cobbled together by relying on unlikely political bedfellows, the potential for government collapse has never been higher. That instability is being further exacerbated by a litany of scandal that is fast becoming the hallmark of this administration, with eleven Government Ministers having resigned, been sacked or stood down for lies, forgery, misrepresentation, disloyalty, abuse of power, assault and drunkenness:

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2000, following the launching of a Police investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct by Dover Samuels, the Prime Minister stepped in and sacked him stating that it was impossible for him to be effective in his ministerial role as "allegations, controversy and public debate swirl around him".

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2000, Ruth Dyson resigned from Cabinet on drunk driving charges, having been caught with a blood alcohol level that was almost twice the legal limit.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 2001, Marian Hobbs and Phillida Bunkle were forced to resign as Registrar of Electors and the Auditor General undertook investigations into their enrolment status and accommodation allowances.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2003, Harry Duynhoven was stood down while the Government passed a

legislation to prevent the MP, who had broken the electoral act law by renewing his Dutch citizenship, from having to resign from Parliament.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2004, Lianne Dalziel resigned from Cabinet after admitting that she had lied regarding a controversial immigration case.

On 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2004, Tariana Turia resigned from Cabinet and quit Parliament over disagreements regarding Labour's controversial foreshore and seabed legislation.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of November 2004, John Tamihere resigned from Cabinet following investigations by a Wellington QC and the Serious Fraud Office over controversial claims of irregular golden handshakes.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May 2005, David Benson-Pope was stood down, while police investigated historic allegations of assault against students. A prima facie case was established, but the police decided against prosecution.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2005, the Prime Minister ordered an investigation into allegations that Philip Field had abused his power in a visa application case. She later removed all of his ministerial responsibilities.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2006, David Parker resigned as Attorney General over revelations that he had filed false company returns. The next day he resigned from his other ministerial posts following an announcement by the Companies Office that an investigation into the case was being launched.

Meanwhile, as the scandal unfolded, the Prime Minister tried to claim that filing false company returns was just a minor matter even though it is punishable by up to five years imprisonment. That view is now symbolic of moral gulf that has emerged

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between the Prime Minister and her citizens over the basic values of right and wrong.

This gulf, caused by Helen Clark's ruthless determination to hold onto power at all costs, first became apparent during the "Paintergate" scandal: following a news story in April 2002, alleging that Helen Clark had passed off as her own work a painting that she didn't paint, the Prime Minister vigorously denied any wrongdoing. She claimed that she could see nothing wrong with signing and selling a painting that she didn't paint.

A Police investigation that was subsequently undertaken, found that a prima facie case against the Prime Minister did exist, but the Police, in their wisdom, decided that it was not in the public interest to prosecute.

A second case in which the view of the Prime Minister was even more at odds with that of the general public was with regard to the "Speeding-gate" scandal: during a high speed dash, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2004, when the Prime Minister's motorcade travelled at speeds of up to 172km per hour to get her to a rugby game on time, the public felt that her claim, that she was not aware that her vehicle was travelling at such excessive speeds, was simply not credible.

Further, when the Police brought charges against a driver and accompanying police officers, it was widely felt that she was making them take the

rap for something that she should have taken responsibility for.

A more recent scandal, which has the Prime Minister's fingerprints all over it, is the illegal spending of \$447,000 of taxpayers' money on Labour's election pledge card. After an Electoral Commission inquiry into the case, and a Police investigation, the Labour Party has escaped prosecution, in spite of the Police finding there was a prima facie case to answer. With this being the third prima facie case against the Government, which the Police have decided not to pursue, there is now a growing perception that this Labour Government is above the law.

This perception has, of course, been reinforced by the Minister of Conservation's highly controversial decision to over-turn a court ruling, thereby breaching the historic separation of powers on which our Westminster democratic system of government is based.

Is it any wonder that there are a growing number of New Zealanders who are not only losing confidence in Labour's ability to govern, but are becoming increasingly concerned about the appalling example that they are setting for our young people?

The poll this week asks: *Do you have confidence in the Labour Government?*

*"...it's not in the public interest to prosecute..."*

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