

SPEECH FOR 2010 ROGER AWARD EVENT, 4/4/11

- Murray Horton

Before I start I need to state the obvious. The Roger Award is organised out of Christchurch. It is the home of myself and all the other organisers. Two of the judges and the *Judges' Report* writer live in Christchurch or nearby – Christine Dann, the Chief Judge who is here tonight to announce the winner or winners, lives on Banks Peninsula. So, as you can imagine, recent conditions have not been optimum for dealing with the many tasks which culminate with tonight's event in a (hopefully) seismically stable Auckland. I wouldn't have minded if the actual Roger Award itself had been destroyed in the quake, because it's an ugly bloody thing, but it was already safely ensconced in John Minto's union office up here. But lots of other things were seriously disrupted. When you receive the *Judges' Report* tonight you will note how short it is (a fraction of the size of the 2009 version). The writer told me that he just could not concentrate on it and do it justice – his flat was trashed by the quake and a good friend and colleague of his was among the few survivors pulled off one of the flattened buses in central Christchurch. Of the two Christchurch judges one had his hillside home substantially damaged. All of us, along with just about everyone else in the city, suddenly had to contend with no power, water or sewerage (in my case for five days, during which time my wife and I slept under our dining table as the house was battered with waves of aftershocks). All of us know people who were much more badly affected – one of my closest friends and colleagues had to flee for his life as his hillside house was destroyed and he is now living indefinitely in Wellington. If things had turned out just a bit differently, I would not have been standing here tonight. On the morning of February 22nd, just a couple of hours before the quake, I was in the CTV Building for an interview. The 25 year old reporter with whom I dealt was among the nearly 100 people killed when that building collapsed that afternoon. That is all I'm going to say on that subject tonight (because like all Christchurch people I'm sick of talking about it) but it is important that you realise the context in which the 2010 Roger Award was organised. To put it mildly, it was not easy.

I have two functions for this event. I am responsible for the plaque engraved with the name of tonight's winner (joining all the other distinguished Roger Award winners). That will be duly reattached to the uniquely hideous trophy itself when Christine does the honours. At that point you will also be given a copy of the *Judges' Report* detailing why they selected the winner.

My other function, the here and now of it, is to be the opening act, the warm up act, and speak on behalf of the Roger Award's organisers (but definitely not to give you any hint as to the winner, that is Christine's job). To give you a little bit of the history of the Award and everything that has flowed from it. On behalf of the Roger Award organisers, I'd like to thank Global Peace and Justice Auckland for hosting this event.

Essentially this is an updated version of the same speech delivered annually (those of you who attended in 2009, the last time the Roger Award event was held in Auckland, might experience more than a vague sensation of familiarity with what I'm about to say). When I spoke at this event here two years ago I highlighted the fact that we were living through most unusual times, namely the global economic crisis, the recession. Politicians and the transnational corporate media would have us believe that "we" have now weathered the worst of it and "we" can now get back to business as usual. Tell that

to the record number of unemployed. Tell that to the banks and financial institutions which are still on economic life support courtesy of the tax payer. Mind you, Wall Street and City of London bankers, having been bailed out by the biggest act of corporate welfare in global history, have jumped straight back into the diamond studded trough. I recommend that you see Charles Ferguson's superb movie "Inside Job" for a very succinct summary of what I'm talking about. Suffice to say that the fun ain't over yet and that some extremely ugly chickens have come home to roost.

The Roger Award is for the worst transnational corporation operating in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the calendar year in question. So it is awarded for behaviour that is truly, outstandingly bad, the worst of excesses of transnational corporate capitalism, economic imperialism. I need to clarify one aspect – I don't want to give the impression that if "a few bad apples" cleaned up their act (or went out of business, which is what has happened, with breathtaking speed, in plenty of cases in this crisis), then all would be well. No, what we have been experiencing is a fundamental systemic crisis of capitalism, a system which is both inherently unstable and criminal; a system which carries within it the seeds of its own destruction. I don't subscribe to the view that capitalism will collapse of its own accord and, thus far, the facts have borne that out. The criminals have gone straight back to their life of crime, leaving us to pay their bills and suffer the consequences of their criminality. I happen to agree with my old mate Chairman Mao who said "if you don't hit it, then it won't fall", but that's a whole different subject.

So, if the whole economic and political system under which we live is currently being demonstrated to be fatally flawed and bad for the health of the planet and all its inhabitants, is there any point in continuing to have something like the Roger Award? The answer is yes, because the Roger is about evidence and examples. Every year since 1997 it has skewered the lies and bullshit that are sold to us on a daily basis (if it's done by other people, it's called propaganda; but if it's done by "our side", it's just the way things are). The Roger Award is basically a New Zealand people's court which hears evidence presented to it by ordinary New Zealanders about the specific corporate crimes committed by specific transnational corporations in a given year. It's not about rhetoric and slogans, but facts and figures. The Roger fulfils an invaluable role in proving, time and time again, just why it is such a bad thing to have allowed our country to have been colonised by transnational corporations. And it will continue to be needed in the future. Unstable capitalism goes through endless booms and busts. So, inevitably, the global economy will come out of this slump and once again we will be told that capitalism is the best possible system. Once again the answer will be "bullshit" and the Roger Award will keep on doing its invaluable national job of demonstrating why that claim is bullshit.

The Roger Award grew out of a 1996 brainstorm meeting in Christchurch, a meeting called to discuss some new ideas and strategies on how to counter the relentless tide of corporate crap which was in danger of drowning us all in that benighted decade, one in which we were told that "history has ended" (and many of the same Tory hacks, halfwits and hasbeens who held office in that last National government are back in office now. Not to mention the Act dinosaurs who are throwbacks to the good old days of the 80s. Their philosophy is that if they can just keep on doing what they were doing then, only more so, it might just work. They come from the school of "the operation was a success, but the patient died". You don't need me to spell out the details of what they're doing now, it's all around us). The prevailing philosophy of the 90s was "what's good for Big

Business is good for New Zealand". It gave us the Employment Contracts Act and similar atrocities.

So, it was in that atmosphere of full on class warfare against the working class, unions and beneficiaries that the Roger Award was conceived (the credit belongs to David Small; I take credit for the name). The idea was simply to fight back in the propaganda war, to point out the obvious fact that these transnational corporations are the most important players in the NZ economy, that what they do affects every one of us in all aspects of our daily lives, and to hold them publicly accountable for the enormous negative impact they have on our country. When we came up with the idea at that brainstorm meeting 15 years ago, we had no idea that it would last this long, become a national institution, and generally be a raging success.

Since the inception, the Roger Award has been organised by two Christchurch-based groups, namely the Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA) and GATT Watchdog. GATT was the acronym of the organisation now known as the World Trade Organisation. And the Christchurch-based Christian World Service has been an active supporter from the outset.

The procedures involved in finding the Roger Award winner every year have remained consistent throughout. We circulate nomination forms to our own members and enlist other groups (which have ranged from the Green Party to trade unions to special interest groups) to circulate them to their members. The form asks people to send in a nomination for the worst transnational corporation of the previous calendar year based on broad criteria, which we review every year. We restrict the eligible companies to those which meet the legal definition of a foreign company, that is, more than 25% foreign owned. Every year we have to reject several nominations as ineligible for this reason – the likes of Fonterra, and Slingshot (because they're New Zealand owned companies). The Roger Award is not for the worst corporation of the year, but for the worst transnational corporation. In the past we have received (and ruled ineligible) perfectly serious nominations for the likes of Victoria University and even Greenpeace. We usually receive at least one nomination for the Government or the Prime Minister. 2010 was no exception – my favourite nominated the National Party because of the Government's "communistic" sacking of ECan, the Canterbury regional council. I've no doubt the Tories would choke on being called communists.

There are two other major conditions attached to nominations – the corporations are only to be judged on their activities in NZ during the calendar year in question. We routinely receive screeds of accompanying material about the overseas activities of McDonalds or GE companies, for example, some of it going back years. In 2010 we received nominations for BP because of its Gulf of Mexico oil spill. Whilst interesting, we only view that as background or context. To keep it strictly relevant to New Zealanders, we confine the Award to what these companies have done here, and very recently. There are all manner of TNCs who behave appallingly throughout the Third World (think oil companies or drug companies, for instance) or much closer to home (think the James Hardie asbestos scandal in Australia) who never get nominated for the Roger, because they are just not on the radar in this country or don't even exist here. So, the Roger Award is not for the worst TNC, but for the worst TNC operating in NZ during the previous calendar year. This policy of keeping it strictly focused on NZ here and now is another major reason for the Award's success.

The secret of the Roger Award's success is that everyone involved takes it very seriously. Despite the utterly phantasmagorical appearance of the trophy itself (it looks like an airport security man's worst nightmare), the endless media references to rogering, and the highly enjoyable events themselves, the Roger Award is not a joke or a spoof. We play it straight, we play it seriously, and we mean what we say. Serious, of course, does not have to be deadly serious and it sure as hell isn't boring. The best way to sum it up is that the Roger Award is serious fun.

The nominators are the vital first step in this process and they take it very seriously indeed, some of them absolutely swamping us in accompanying material (I'm thinking in particular of one guy who regularly nominates one or more tobacco companies). The organisers select the finalists and send them to the judges. The calibre and dedication of these completely unpaid people, who give up part of their summer holiday to cruise through this corporate sewer in a glass bottomed boat makes all the difference to the success of the Award. The organisers and the judges are, very deliberately, quite independent of each other (this year's judges are scattered from Auckland to Banks Peninsula). So, let's hear it for the judges.

It's always a total lottery inviting people to be Roger Award judges. There is absolutely nothing in it for them. This year we have three women and two men, three North Islanders and two South Islanders. We've had some high profile people as judges – Anton Oliver, who was a 2007 judge, was our first All Black (in fact, he had been All Black captain) . I'll let you into a secret. For the very first Roger, we invited Ian Wishart to be a judge. Thank Christ he turned us down, because we then approached our first "reserve", Dunedin's then Mayor, Sukhi Turner. To our surprise she said "yes", she did it for several years and she became the face of the Roger Award, giving as good as she got when subjected to enormous political and media criticism for her association with it. Stropky sheilas have always been a feature of the Roger Judges. One year Sukhi's husband, the world famous cricketer and current NZ selector, Glenn Turner, joined her as a judge. This was too much for the *Otago Daily Times*, which rang me up to ask: "We expect this sort of thing from Sukhi but what is Glenn doing getting involved with people like you?" It just wasn't cricket, apparently. The 2010 judges are a former Green MP and activist, a writer and researcher, a union official and a couple of academics. All of them have also had years in the progressive movement.

The people who write the *Judges' Reports* every year do an excellent job, under a very tight deadline. They have included some wellknown figures who have always preferred, for a variety of reasons, to keep their names out of the limelight. And Sue Newberry, originally from the University of Canterbury and now Associate Professor of Accounting at the University of Sydney, does a superb job of translating the winner's arcane financial accounts into plain English, often to devastating effect. She has added a whole new dimension to the annual *Judges' Report* since she volunteered her services to write a proper *Financial Analysis* in the past several years. This year's *Analysis* is her most "political" ever, and the one which is most accessible to the lay reader.

Equally dedicated are the people around the country who every year organise the keenly awaited Roger Award event, the highlight of many people's social calendar (we actually had a national paper's gossip columnist threaten to attend one year here in Auckland – she didn't). They are the secret as to why the Roger may be serious but not deadly serious; they are the people who really make it fun. The Roger Award is organised out of Christchurch but it belongs to all of New Zealand – most of the judges have come from

outside Christchurch; and the event has been held outside Christchurch more often than in it. Last year it was held in a Wellington pub, co-hosted by an informal group of union officials called Drinking Liberally. It was a great evening of speech and original music and song written specially for the event. There was even some drinking. And it was part of a memorable week of activities in solidarity with the three Christian peace activists who were on trial that week in Wellington for their 2008 deflation of one of the domes at the Waihopai spybase (even better, they were acquitted). CAFCA deliberately held the Roger event in Wellington that week to show the links between the two. Waihopai is a small but vital cog in a global system of exploitation, intimidation, war and mass destruction that exists to make the world safe and profitable for the transnational corporations, many of whom are an integral part of that global war machine.

This is the fifth time it's been held in Auckland and they've always been great fun. Those bloody big city skites held the first one entirely outdoors and in the central city – just to rub into our faces that if we tried that in Wellington, we'd get blown away or frozen, in the case of Christchurch. They tried the same the second year but I struggled to keep a straight face as it pissed down with rain, so we retreated into a building where it continued to rain because it was an authentic Auckland leaky building. It was leaking all over their sound system control panel, which made for an interesting evening. The third time it was held, appropriately enough, in a Queen Street comedy club. I wondered why it came complete with a very large cinema screen – I later learned that it used to be a porno cinema. What an appropriate setting for judging the worst transnational corporate offenders. The last time it was held (as now) in the much more prim and proper Trade Union Centre, but we still had comedy – we watched an episode of “Yes Prime Minister”, which was uncannily appropriate for the winner (British American Tobacco). As well as Wellington, it has been held once in Dunedin, and that was notable for the speech by our Chief Judge, Mayor Sukhi Turner. I gave her a speaking time of 15 minutes and she spoke for 50, stopping to direct ad lib remarks and challenges to the reporters present, saying “I bet you won't print that”. They did, actually.

As befits our more modest nature (some would say less talented), the Christchurch events have been more prosaic than poetic and the last time it was held there, in 2008, was no exception, although we did have a highly entertaining singer (who demonstrated the artistic temperament by not singing any of the agreed songs but he also did add a personal, very funny, anecdote about one of the finalists).

And finally, the really big secret of the Roger Award's success is the truly breathtaking standard of bastardry of the contenders who year after year thrust themselves forward to be picked as the worst in the country. We've always been spoilt for choice. 2010 was no exception, as Christine will tell you in detail. Some finalists have proven to be eerily prescient. For example, in 2007 Pike River Coal was an unplaced finalist. Here is a quote from the *Judges' Report* for that year: “...It was Government involvement in a project which most judges are agreed is not in the interests of the West Coast, NZ or Planet Earth that most offended us this year. There might be nothing extraordinary about a mining company wreaking environmental havoc. But the complicity of (former Conservation Minister Chris) Carter and the Department of Conservation is lamentable as is the fact that it was the lobbying by a Government-owned company, Solid Energy, which created the regulatory soft spot through which Pike River has been able to push its own project. For the record, the evidence presented to us indicated that far from the ‘low environmental impact’ and ‘very small footprint’ claimed, the mining operation will produce 6.8 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent in the form of methane through fugitive

emissions during mining and processing on top of the greenhouse gasses that the use of the coal will emit, and impact on landscape, scenic values and an important catchment that is home to many endangered species". In light of the death of 29 miners and contractors in the November 2010 gas explosion that closed the mine, I find that mention of methane emissions chilling.

Nor is there ever any shortage of contenders for future years. Just one egregious example will suffice, namely the outright lying propaganda advertising campaign waged by the foreign-owned beer barons to rewrite and reinvent history about the legendary 1950s' Labour government's "Black Budget" by its Minister of Finance, Arnold Nordmeyer, which increased the price of beer. The campaign was a not very subtle hint to today's politicians not to mess with the liquor laws, as that might lead to what the ads portrayed as a popular uprising by beer drinkers. This was such bullshit that the Advertising Standards Authority ordered the ads to be pulled after a complaint by Jim Anderton MP, a man who does know his Labour Party history and who has a photo of Nordmeyer on his Christchurch electorate office wall. The Authority ruled that parts of the ad were "demonstrably false".

Which brings us to the central question about the Roger Award – does anyone care about it, does it matter? Take my word for it, the media certainly care about it, they play it straight, and it gets covered somewhere in the mainstream media every year. The Roger Award always gets covered in the mainstream media and the last one, for 2009, was no exception, with reports in both print media (hard copy and online) and on radio. Major media coverage spread across the Tasman, doubtless because it was won by an Australian bank, the ANZ. Indeed, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported it not once but twice. Here is one of those reports, in its entirety: "ANZ Bank has failed to live up to the NZ in its name, according to some of our friends across the Tasman. The bank won one of the so-called Roger Awards last night - for supposedly being the worst transnational company operating in the group of islands south-east of Lord Howe Island. Unlike here in Australia, apparently the bank in New Zealand has been practising a form of 'pure greed capitalism'. The award ceremony was held in a Wellington pub and was hosted by the anti-free-market activist group, Campaign against Foreign Control of Aotearoa. Rather than alluding to any particular act of getting done over by someone, the Rogers are named after the former New Zealand pro-market finance minister Roger Douglas". And it was not only the main winner which was the subject of media and public interest. For example, papers in both Waihi and Waiheke Island were very keen to publicise how "their" finalists got on, namely Newmont Mining and Transpacific Industries.

The Auckland City Council and its officials won the Accomplice Award for contracting out Waiheke Island waste services from a local community company to transnational corporation Transpacific Industries, which had political consequences both in Auckland and on Waiheke. The two Auckland judges for 2009, Joce Jesson and Wayne Hope, both attended the Wellington event and they enthusiastically accepted the winners' laminated certificates for the Auckland City Council and its officials (two certificates, one for the Mayor; the other for the Chief Executive Officer) and undertook to get them presented. One of those certificates duly came before the Council's City Development Committee in April 2010, having been referred there by the CEO, rather than to the full Council. The Committee Chairman refused to accept it, merely "noting" the Accomplice Award. This actually attracted quite a bit of media attention in Auckland. And to cap it all off a special event was held on Waiheke Island in May to present a sympathetic Auckland City Councillor, Cathy Casey, with that laminated certificate. This was the front

page lead story, plus photo, in the *Waiheke Gulf News*. Gulf Islands Councillor Denise Roche said: “The ‘Accomplice’ Award went to the ‘running dogs’ for encouraging multinationals. Traditionally every year nominees have been the Business Round Table. This year, Auckland City Council beat even the Business Round Table in the stakes for the organisation ‘that has done the most in extracting New Zealand capital and taking it overseas’”.

And the transnationals themselves take it very seriously. There’s no mystery why they do – like all big bullies, not only do they want to be feared, they also want to be loved. And the Roger Award tells them in very detailed terms that they aren’t and why they aren’t – it is an anti-bullshit, demystification exercise. Either they themselves or their hired guns in PR usually try to beg, threaten or cajole as a result of their appearance in the Roger. The 2009 Roger was no exception. When the finalists were announced, the heads of two of them approached either me or one of the judges to demand that they be removed from the list. Not because they denied any of the serious accusations against them, they didn’t even bother to address that subject, but because they said they are ineligible because they claimed to be New Zealand-owned companies. For the record, those two companies are Infratil and Rymans Healthcare and, also for the record, they qualify as foreign-owned companies. As recently as October I received an e-mail from a senior company executive of Infratil wanting, once again, to argue that it is a New Zealand company. “It is unfair to brand Infratil as ‘Foreign Owned’ just because of a technical ‘line in the sand’ in one Act. It is very unfair, and incorrect, to suggest someone here is attempting to fool people into thinking anything false”. Ouch, obviously the truth hurts. And that “technical ‘line in the sand’ in one Act” just happens to be the NZ legal definition of a foreign-owned company, a definition which has been in place, unchanged, since the original 1973 Overseas Investment Act. For the record, neither Infratil nor Rymans are finalists in the 2010 Award.

When the former Tranz Rail had an absolute lock on the Roger (we eventually shunted it into the Hall of Shame, where it remains the sole occupant, to let somebody else have a go) senior management actually contacted all the judges individually and then me as organiser offering to meet us in person to advise on how it had improved its behaviour and urging that it no longer feature in the Roger. Some companies have sent us corporate handouts to justify their existence – we’ve had glossy booklets from British American Tobacco (with tobacco leaf shaped cutouts in the pages) and a video from the former owners of Waste Management about how their Auckland rubbish dump is good enough to eat. Phone calls or e-mails from company managers or PR hacks wanting to argue the toss are quite common. Sometimes the transnationals go to the top to have a go at us – one year Jim Anderton wrote to me in his former Ministerial capacity demanding that the Roger Award organisers apologise to Ernslaw One, a Malaysian forestry company which was a runner up that year. We caught Jim out using exactly the same wording as the company’s CEO when the latter complained about it winning the Roger. His name was Mr Song, so we went public, telling Jim he needed to get a new songwriter. And the only time a Japanese company has won (Juken Nissho, the only ever Asian Roger winner), I was rung by the Japanese Embassy with a string of questions about how we selected our judges, why was the Mayor of Dunedin involved, and the killer question, did I think that this would adversely affect Japanese investment in NZ? I said that I hoped so, but that I doubted it. So let’s hear it for the transnationals, without whom none of this would be possible. Let’s give them a resounding boo.

To conclude – the Roger Award is more necessary than ever. We're now coming up to six years of the 2005 Overseas Investment Act and the new "oversight" regime that was introduced with it by Labour. CAFCA said at the time that the new law had only one goal – to make the transnational corporate takeover of New Zealand even easier. Within the past couple of months the Government has signed an investment agreement with Australia vastly increasing the threshold under which Australian companies don't require any permission or oversight to buy NZ companies (for the record that threshold is now set at \$477 million for the Aussies, versus \$100m for everyone else).

And in a related move, negotiations are well underway on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement between NZ and eight other countries. This is intended to bring into effect a free trade agreement with the US, one which will benefit only that country's transnational corporations and which will have severe negative impacts on New Zealand. All around us is the evidence of the moves that National is taking to "make the New Zealand economy attractive to foreign investment". Both major parties are equally guilty of blindly promoting this obsessive compulsive belief in foreign investment and "free" trade as their major policy. The only difference is one of degree. Having said that, there are some hopeful signs, both at the political and grassroots levels, on the whole issue of the transnational corporate recolonisation of Aotearoa. I am devoting a national speaking tour, starting in Auckland tomorrow night, to the issue and the fightback. So I suggest that you come to that.

When you read the *Judges' Report* tonight on the six transnational corporations who are the finalists for the 2010 Award, that will remind you of the huge crime perpetrated on the people of New Zealand by a system that permits our country to be run as one big garage sale for the benefit of the giants which dominate and plunder the global economy (even if the crisis of capitalism means that their looting and pillaging has had to be scaled back a bit).

So, is it all hopeless? No bloody way. Are we up shit creek? Yes, but not without quite a few paddles and there's one of them on display here tonight, good old Roger. Look at him, he's a sharp and prickly beast, all the better for jabbing and poking the bastards that are trying to squeeze the life out of us. So let's get on with it.