

Chief Reporter

2013 ROGER AWARD FINALISTS NAMED

The seven finalists for the 2013 Roger Award for the Worst Transnational Corporation Operating in Aotearoa/New Zealand are: **ANZ, Chorus, IAG Insurance Group, Imperial Tobacco, Rio Tinto, Sky City Casino** and **Talent 2**.

The **criteria** for judging are by assessing the transnational (a corporation with 25% or more foreign ownership) that has the most negative impact in each or all of the following categories: **economic dominance** - monopoly, profiteering, tax dodging, cultural imperialism; **people** - unemployment, impact on tangata whenua, impact on women, impact on children, abuse of workers/conditions, health and safety of workers and the public; **environment** - environmental damage, abuse of animals; and **political interference** - interference in democratic processes, running an ideological crusade.

There is also an **Accomplice Award** for an organisation (not an individual) which was the worst Accomplice during the year in aiding and abetting transnational corporations in New Zealand to behave as described in the criteria. The Accomplice's award is in addition to the Worst Transnational Corporation award and will not necessarily be awarded every year. There were several nominations for the **Accomplice Award**, all for **the Government**, mainly on general grounds. But the nomination for **Chorus** also nominated the Government for the Accomplice Award specifically in connection with Chorus.

ANZ has been a regular finalist and won the 2009 Roger Award. In 2013 it has been selected as a finalist because of profiteering, and treatment of its staff. One nomination specified "excessive pay for CEO; excessive profits; and charging excessive fees to customers". ANZ is the first of the major banks to appear in court to defend the class action suit about excessive fees.

Chorus makes its first appearance in the Roger Award line up of corporate villains (perhaps it should be called the chorus line). It was specifically nominated in the economic dominance category and, within that, for profiteering. To quote from the nomination: "Chorus continues the worst features of the old Telecom, from which it was split in 2011 (as a touted "solution" to those worst features). It strives to preserve a monopoly; it grossly overcharges and tries every trick in the book to keep those inflated prices, including special pleading to its backer and accomplice, the Government. This story is very far from resolved at the time of this nomination and it remains to be seen how it turns out. But it is yet another example of the corporate welfare for which this Government has become notorious – Warner Brothers, Sky City, Rio Tinto, Media Works and now Chorus. The list goes on".

IAG is a finalist for the second consecutive year. The reasons why are distressingly well known to anyone living in Christchurch in the last three years. The nomination is worth quoting in full: "Because instead of making thousands of Christchurch house owners feel looked after and doing their job, they quibble, penny-pinch and weasel out of their obligations. They have worn people down until they feel stressed and defeated. Despite their PR hype, they don't 'Love Christchurch'. They love maximising their profits and pleasing their shareholders. They are hated and despised for their chain-dragging and changing the rules in the middle of the game. May they rot in Hell!"

Imperial Tobacco continues a long and dishonourable history of tobacco companies featuring as finalists and winners of the Roger Award. The very detailed nomination specified Imperial's "crimes against the health and safety of its workers and the public; and endeavouring to expand its market in NZ, after the Government has committed to making the nation smokefree by 2025". An extract from the conclusion: "Tobacco kills about 5,000 New Zealanders annually. It is the greatest preventable cause of death and illness in New Zealand... If Imperial Tobacco were

genuine in regard to their corporate social responsibility, they would cease to manufacture all of their existing brands. Instead, they conducted 'testing programmes' where thousands of cigarettes were distributed to their employees in breach of the Smokefree Environments Act: they proudly boast a growing market share in New Zealand even after this nation's Government has committed to making the nation Smokefree by 2025: and they cynically settle disputes with the agreement to donate thousands when their profits remain in the millions. They must be shamed".

Rio Tinto won the 2011 Roger Award and was runner up in 2012, 2009 and 08. One nomination said simply and in its entirety: "Blackmailing country". So, 2013 has seen more of the same from the biggest recipient of corporate welfare – the Bluff smelter is the biggest bludger in the country. The 2011 Roger Award Judges' Report concluded that the company has a 50 year history of "suborning, blackmailing and conning successive New Zealand governments into paying massive subsidies on the smelter's electricity; dodging tax, and running a brilliantly effective PR machine to present a friendly, socially responsible and thoroughly greenwashed face to the media and the public". The 2012 Judges' Report is more succinct: "...it has us by the balls and has continued to squeeze ever since. It is corporate welfarism, but somehow doesn't attract the same vindictiveness as the sickness beneficiary".

Sky City Casino was nominated by several people because of its "more pokies for convention centre" deal with the Government. One nomination refers to the "current Key government essentially selling our laws in return for Sky City building an international convention centre" and to Sky City's "ability to profiteer from others' misery". It concludes: "...Sky City is attempting to lock future governments into this dirty deal. (It) is pushing for draconian compensation provisions should a progressive Government decide that it is not OK to pay for a convention centre to be paid for by others' misery".

Talent 2 makes its first appearance in the Roger Award because of the complete and utter balls up that is its Novopay payroll system for long suffering teachers. Media reports routinely use words like "debacle" and "mess" in the headlines about Novopay. It has become a byword for an expensive IT failure, which has cost teachers' millions in missed or mucked up salaries, plus it has cost taxpayers millions more as the Government has attempted to get it sorted out. The nominator specified: "monopoly" and "impact on teachers, teachers' families, administrators and schools in general".

The judges are: **Christina Stringer**, a Senior Lecturer in International Business at the University of Auckland; **John Maynard**, from Wellington, President of the Postal Workers Union of Aotearoa, spokesperson for People's Power Ohariu and founding member of the Brass Razoo Solidarity Band; **David Small**, a lawyer and Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Canterbury; **Sam Mahon**, an artist, author and activist from North Canterbury; and **Wayne Hope**, Associate Professor, Communications Studies, Auckland University of Technology

The winner(s) will be announced at a Nelson event on the night of April 15th.

Full details, including previous winners and annual *Judges' Reports*, can be read online at <http://canterbury.cyberplace.co.nz/community/CAFCA/publications/Roger/index.html>.

Bad luck to all the finalists and may the worst man win!

Murray Horton
Secretary/Organiser