



**Old-school:** Laconic, sharp, self-deprecating, Murray Horton is the sort of character Labour used to hoist on to the hustings. Here, he is speaking at an anti-GCSB protest in Christchurch last year.

Photo: JOHN KIRK-ANDERSON/FAIRFAX NZ

# Horton's latter-day pilgrim's progress

Chris Trotter



Last Friday, I had the privilege of listening to one of Canterbury's finest sons, Murray Horton. For 40 strenuous years Murray and a dedicated band of supporters have run the organisation called Campaign Against Foreign Control in Aotearoa (CAFCA).

The official organ of CAFCA – *Foreign Control Watchdog* – is edited by Murray, published quarterly, and along with articles and reviews on politics and economics contains a handy compendium of all the latest decisions of the Overseas Investment Office. It always makes for challenging, not to mention sobering, reading.

Every election year, for close on 20 years now, Murray has journeyed from one end of New Zealand to the other, bringing to New Zealanders the facts, the figures and the consequences of foreign investment in their country.

Though the rigorously atheistic Horton would probably frown at the suggestion, I look upon these nationwide tours as a kind of pilgrimage. Not the sort of pilgrimage where faith is restored through the proximity of saints, shrines and relics, but through a renewed connection with that most essential raw material of democracy – the people themselves.

In trades halls, church halls, community halls (and the occasional university lecture hall) from Bluff to Kaitia, Murray gives his 90-minute talk to groups ranging in size from half-a-dozen to several score. It's not for the faint-hearted because

Murray's a political campaigner of the old-school – the sort that eschews sound-bites for hard evidence and patient reasoning.

And people love it: asking him questions and arguing about his answers for hours at a time. In this regard the talk I attended in Auckland on Friday was no exception. People arrived at 4pm and didn't leave until after 7pm.

The gospel according to Horton is a compelling testament, not least because the person delivering it is so quintessentially Kiwi. Laconic, sharp, self-deprecating, larger-than-life and with an accent you could sharpen a knife on, he's the sort of character Labour used to hoist on to the hustings. (Back in the days when describing someone as working-class and clever was not discounted, in rounded middle-class vowels, as oxymoronic.)

It is compelling, too, because it is directed at people who still regard themselves, culturally, as members of a national community, and, politically, as citizens of a nation state.

It's no accident that CAFCA was founded in 1974, a year in which the potent, genuinely progressive New Zealand nationalism unleashed by Norman Kirk just 12 months earlier was gathering strength.

The nationalism which would reach its apogee in the anti-Springbok tour protests and nuclear-free New Zealand movement of the early 1980s.

The enduring conviction of what New Zealand should represent – and could represent – that the neo-liberal ideology introduced by Roger Douglas and Ruth Richardson has worked so diligently to deconstruct for the past 25 years.

Kirk's progressive nationalism – and Horton's – can trace its origins all the way back to the progressivism



Old campaigner: Murray Horton in Christchurch in 1972.

of the Liberal Government of 1891-1912.

It was during this period that New Zealand acquired the sobriquet "social laboratory of the world", giving practical effect to the author of *God Defend New Zealand*, Thomas Bracken's prayer that the Almighty would "guide her in the nations' van" as humanity's pathfinder to a more just and abundant society.

That New Zealand's most enduring nationalistic traditions should derive directly from the progressive side of politics is hardly surprising.

The mobilising sentiment against which they have invariably measured themselves has almost always been generated by this country's conservative elites on behalf of the supra-national entities in which New Zealand has historically found itself culturally, politically and (most importantly) economically enmeshed.

First as a colony and then as a (reluctant) dominion, New Zealand's conservative leaders have consistently presented these islands and their inhabitants as the British Empire's most loyal

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subjects. The awful blood sacrifice of World War I kept the "Mother Country's" doors open to all the butter, cheese, wool and lamb her Pacific farmers could send. And when, in 1941, the Japanese were unkind enough to sink Mother's warships *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*, New Zealand was compelled to shift, without so much as a pause of breath, into the imperial embrace of Uncle Sam.

While the United States was under the progressive management of Franklin D Roosevelt that might not seem so bad, but as Uncle Sam swiftly acquired the bloodthirsty habits of all imperial potentates, New Zealand's conservative elites were only too happy to again subsume their country's interests in the supra-national, US-led "Free World" and, after the Cold War's end, into "the global marketplace".

Listening to Murray Horton's inspirational pitch for progressive New Zealanders to put the interests of New Zealand first, and those of foreign investors second, and, then, to reduce the "Five Eyes" global surveillance agreement to a Kiwi-less four, I suddenly understood Che Guevara's cryptic observation: "The Revolution is not a portrait – it's a landscape."