

Unpopular peacenik unshaken

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The butt of Opposition derision, Green Party foreign affairs spokesman Keith Locke sees his role as making people think about the questions behind the issues, writes NICK VENTER.

Do not adjust your sets. The sibilant noise emanating from radios tuned to Parliament is not static.

It is the sound of National, ACT New Zealand, and New Zealand First MPs hissing whenever Green Party foreign affairs spokesman Keith Locke rises to ask a question or speak about last week's terrorist attacks on the United States.

The hissing, punctuated by jeers, loud sighs, and eye-rolling, is a measure of the unpopularity of Mr Locke's peacenik views in the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Centre and the attack on the Pentagon.

It takes more than hissing and jeering, however, to unnerve the author of works such as *Why Workers Should Support Soviet Action in Afghanistan*, and *Cambodia Liberated: Victory for Humanity*.

The son of communists Elsie and Jack Locke and the brother of peace activist Marie Leadbeater, Mr Locke is a radical's radical.

His 1975 article hailing the Khmer Rouge's takeover of Cambodia has become required reading for Opposition MPs. In commemoration of it NZ First leader Winston Peters calls him Pol Pot. National MP Murray McCully has taken to referring to him as the "member for Cambodia".

Mr Locke's 1980 article welcoming the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan is similarly celebrated. It has become one of the most tabled documents in Parliament.

Both were written for the Socialist Action paper while he was a member of the Trotskyist Socialist Action League.

He has since recanted his views on both invasions. The Cambodian article was written before Pol Pot's name or crimes against humanity were known, he says.

The Afghanistan piece was a reaction to a perceived threat from Islamic fundamentalists. It was wrong, says Mr Locke.

In the intervening years he has changed his political stripes.

He now describes himself as a "libertarian eco-socialist" rather than a Trotskyist.

However, he still seems to delight in taking unpopular positions, and challenging the prevailing world view.

The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon have given him full range to do so.

In a rare display of caution the Greens put up co-leader Rod Donald rather than Mr Locke when Parliament considered its response to the attack last week.

Nevertheless, it was not long before Mr Locke was provoking hoots of derision from the Opposition by asking Prime Minister Helen Clark if she agreed "that one way to counter terrorism and improve security is to support initiatives such as Unesco's culture of peace programme to ensure that younger generations are committed to non-violence and international understanding".

He followed that this week by attempt-



Keith Locke: libertarian eco-socialist.

ing to quote from a letter written to the New York Times by the parents of one of those killed at the World Trade Centre.

The parents were concerned about the vengeful tone of the US Government's reaction to the attack. "This does not make us feel better about our son's death," they wrote. "It makes us feel worse."

Mr Locke, however, could barely make himself heard above the uproar from the Opposition benches.

The reaction is a source of annoyance for his Green Party colleagues.

"If I stand up and say something, I don't get hissed and jeered," says party co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons.

This large-scale searching through electronic communications doesn't catch any serious terrorist.

Keith Locke
Green Party

"When Keith stand up and says the identical thing, he gets hissed and jeered.

"They have just decided to pick on a scapegoat because Keith was politically active in his youth in a way that a number of MPs have been."

ACT leader Richard Prebble says Opposition MPs are not prepared to sit silently while someone who has praised the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan suggests that when the US is attacked "what we should do is sit around and talk about it".

He also claims that Mr Locke's views are diluting the Government's response to the US crisis because the Government is

relying on the Greens for its majority in Parliament.

Ms Clark says that the Government is in step with world opinion. Mr Locke's views are not shared by the Government, and the Opposition attacks on him are both undemocratic and unwarranted.

Acting National leader Bill English says Mr Locke is paying for the "baggage" he brought to Parliament.

In terms of policy, the Greens are alone in Parliament in opposing Ms Clark's offer to contribute Special Air Service personnel to an international effort to combat terrorism.

The party supports her calls for international co-operation through bodies such as the United Nations, but it does not believe that a military strike against the terrorists or their supporters will end terrorism, says Mr Locke.

There is no justification for the attack on the World Trade Centre, and no justification for terrorism in general, he says, but if terrorism is to be combated, its causes need to be understood.

His advice to the US is to look at why the Middle East has become a breeding ground for terrorists dedicated to attacking it.

There are two main reasons, he says: US military support for Israel and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens because of the US-led sanctions against Saddam Hussein.

Neither irritation will be soothed by executing summary justice on terrorist suspect Osama bin Laden, he says.

Nor will attacking Afghanistan's ruling Taleban regime end the attacks. "The way out is to bring those responsible to trial. If they are found guilty, put them in jail."

In the wake of the attacks, leaders including Ms Clark have spoken of the importance of international co-operation between intelligence-gathering agencies, but Mr Locke says the Greens have not changed their opposition to the Waihopai spy base in Blenheim.

"We are not against the need to gather intelligence. It's a question of how and through what means.

"One thing this crisis has shown is the failure of the Echelon system, of which Waihopai is a part, to play any role in detecting this bombing.

"This large-scale searching through electronic communications using Waihopai and international communications satellites doesn't catch any serious terrorist or any serious criminal because they have so many ways of communicating in an undetected manner," says Mr Locke.

How does he feel about being the butt of Opposition derision?

"I'm confident in myself, in the validity of my own views.

"In some ways it's a tribute. If they feel the need to demean themselves in that way in response to my ideas, it means perhaps they haven't got a rational response. I think it's important to make people think about the essential issues." —Dominion