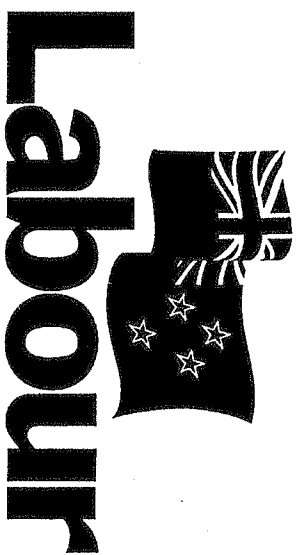


EMBARGOED UNTIL 8.15 PM MONDAY 4 JULY



Rt Hon Helen Clark
Leader of the Opposition

an address to the

Lions Club of Mt Albert

on

**Violence in New Zealand:
the problem and Labour's
approach to dealing with it.**

St Chads Church Hall
Mt Albert

8.15pm Monday 4 July 1994

Thank you for your invitation to address Mt Albert Lions this evening. I want to take the opportunity to talk about the problem of violence in the community - and what to do about it.

New Zealand is a society in trouble. The level of violence in our society is unacceptable. A violent crime is committed every 14 minutes. One in seven New Zealand families is affected by violence. There is a sexual attack committed every two and a half hours.

Violence affects all of us. We witness it on our television screens. Every day we read reports in our newspapers about apparently random street violence. More and more family violence is being exposed. The levels of self-inflicted violence, in attempted suicides, suicides, eating disorders, and self-mutilation is high. There is a growing awareness of elder abuse - or ill treatment of frail older people.

Fear of violence is in itself debilitating for a society. The Justice Department says that fear of violent crime "may be paralyzing individuals and communities almost as much as violent crime itself".

Violence extracts a high price from our community. Many victims and survivors of violence suffer physical wounds and bear long-term emotional scars. Victims often feel powerless and are filled with self-hatred. Violence, whether it be physical, psychological, emotional, or verbal, undermines self-esteem, confidence, and security. Experts say that violence directed against young people can later show up in violence against the self, such as suicide, against other victims, and against authority figures. Individuals pay the costs of violence for years. Our communities also pay. We all suffer a loss of security and peace of mind, wondering when it might happen to us.

The number of recorded violent offences has jumped over the past ten months, with serious assaults up by almost 40 per cent and other assaults increasing by nearly a third. Undoubtedly some of this increase is due to the police crackdown on domestic violence, but the trend upwards has been a constant feature of violent crime rates since 1990. In 1992 close to 30,000 offences of violence had been reported (29,899). In 1993 this had jumped to over 37,000 offences (37,274).

Ninety per cent of violent offences are committed by men, but women are often the victims. Over the period 1978 to 1987 one third of homicide victims were women, of whom 51 per cent were killed by a partner or ex-partner. In more than half of those murders by partners there was a previous history of domestic violence. The Police have estimated that one in seven New Zealand families is affected by domestic violence.

Putting that sad figure round the other way, Sir Clinton Roper estimated that eighty per cent of all violence occurs in the home. The Police agree. Over the last three years, women's refuges have experienced a national average increase of fifty per cent in their workload. They anticipate a four fold increase in their work this year because of the police campaign against family violence. Yet they have not been adequately funded for that increase. The number of children seeking refuge shelter is also continuing to rise.

Most children killed or abused in New Zealand are killed in their own homes. The United Nations' report released recently shows New Zealand has the sixth worst record in the world for the abuse of children.

We also lead the world in youth suicide rates. The numbers in New Zealand have almost trebled in the past 20 years. In addition more than 1100 young people aged 15 to 24 were admitted to hospital in 1992 after attempting suicide. In that same year 105 children under the age of 14 tried to kill themselves.

The problem is huge, but it is not intractable. The answers however, are not easy - they will take our most determined commitment of energy and time. Simplistic measures will fail. The role of government is to look at the issue of crime and violence in a rational way. Knee-jerk reactions won't do.

A clear consensus is emerging among criminologists and in the community about the factors which contribute to violence. They include unemployment, drug and alcohol dependency, family breakdown, and physical and sexual abuse. Those factors contribute to the infliction of violence on others, as well as to self-inflicted violence.

Despite the Prime Minister's protestations to the contrary, unemployment and crime are linked. As Greg Newbold, a University of Canterbury sociologist, says "economics is an element in nearly all social trends and crime is no exception." Crimes against property and the person had been steadily rising since the 1950s, but like violence they took a sharp upturn in the mid-1970s, along with the onset of rising unemployment. Last April the British Independent noted that almost seventy per cent of convicted offenders in England are unemployed.

Here in New Zealand the statistics show that Maori and Pacific Island people commit proportionately more crimes of violence than Pakeha. Criminologists attribute these high rates to cultural alienation, and to social and economic disadvantage including high unemployment rates. The 1987 Roper Report on Violence told of Maori over-representation in lower socio-economic groups and among the unemployed, resulting in frustration, powerlessness and loss of self-esteem. The situation is worse today. Unemployment nationwide is 9.1 per cent. When the figures are analysed, however, we see unemployment among Maori at 22.9 per cent and among Pacific Islanders at 22.1 per cent. But for Maori and Pacific Island under twenty year olds, the figures soar to 46.2 and 45.2 per cent respectively.

The link between alcohol and violence is well known. Indeed, police reports estimate that alcohol is a factor in about eighty per cent of violent crime. Despite that, the Government saw fit to allow brand advertising of alcohol on television and radio - definitely a backward step. The link between drugs and crime is not as well established - but the links between drug addiction and property crime and the drug trade and violent crime is clearer, as evidenced by submissions to the Roper Report.

Then there is the problem of television violence. Teachers and other professionals who work with children see the link between that violence and children's violent play. Concern has been raised in particular about children's television shows which give the message that violence is acceptable. The Mental Health Foundation and the police agree that watching violence contributes to violent behaviour - among children and adults.

There is evidence of the intergenerational nature of violence - men who are victims of violence are often violent themselves. According to Dr Gabrielle Maxwell of the New Zealand Psychological Society "almost all the violent offenders who inhabit our jails have been subject to frequent and often severe physical punishment as children" *Adapted from*

If that were the whole picture though, women would be expected to figure much more highly than they do in violent crime rates as perpetrators rather than largely as victims of violence. The explanation given for the underrepresentation of women as violent offenders is that violence is about power and control. Men are violent because our society allows them to be violent. Too many men still believe they have the right to dominate women and children.

Those attitudes are, I hope, changing, but not fast enough.

The 1992 report on domestic violence for the Victims' Task Force compiled by the University of Waikato's Domestic Protection team revealed that judges and police alike shared such outdated attitudes. That report quite clearly challenged the police and judges to change.

Recent initiatives by the police, such as their 'Not Just a Domestic' campaign against family violence indicate that they are responding to that challenge. I applaud that. It is heartening to see police acknowledgement of problems in the handling of cases of domestic violence. And it is very encouraging to see the police go one step further to take the positive step of implementing a pro-active/pro-arrest policy. Less encouraging, however, is the slow response of government to the recommendations of the University of Waikato's Domestic Protection Team to strengthen domestic protection legislation. Women need that law strengthened urgently to guarantee better protection for them and their children in their homes. If we are not safe in our homes, where are we safe?

Enough is known about contributing factors to reduce the escalating rate of violence. But as the Mental Health Foundation has pointed out, "this will not happen unless there is substantial and sustained commitment on the part of the government and other major institutions within the wider community to make it happen" (Mental Health Foundation conference 1992).

Substantial and sustained commitment is about attitude and emphasis. It is about moving beyond the rhetoric. Talking tough and doing little is pointless. We must begin to break the inter-generational cycles of violence. We need to change the way we, as a society, see the roles of men and women. We must actively promote a climate where violence is not acceptable.

Violent crime flourishes where there is economic and social injustice. Violent crime must be tackled within that broader context.

We need to refocus our criminal justice system. We know that simply imprisoning violent offenders without attempting to help them modify their behaviour is not the answer - imprisonment has not proved to be successful at deterring would-be offenders or at preventing reoffending. On any one day there are approximately 4,500 New Zealanders in prison for a range of offences. Sixty per cent of those New Zealanders will be in prison for the second or third time. The answer is not, as the Christian Heritage Party would have us believe, to lock up people for longer and throw away the key. The answer is to refocus our system away from one that is focused on revenge and punishment to one that is focused on healing - for the victim, the offender and the community.

There are numerous New Zealand reports on both the shortcomings of our present system and the way forward. The Government has been slow to enact their recommendations. Government right now is not short of advice on what to do. It is short of political will. That is what I will change.

Labour has said that it will act in Government on the recommendations of the Roper Report (the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into the Prison System, 1989), the reports of the Victims Taskforce, and the reports of the Crime Prevention Action Group. It is true that for too long our system focused ineffectually on offenders while largely ignoring the victims of crime.

Labour will implement an integrated set of policies to address both the causes and effects of violence. An integrated social justice strategy is needed to establish overall policy priorities and to work across departments and agencies to get the best results.

Policies must be co-ordinated in line with a clear long term strategy. Long term strategies do get results, but not overnight. That is why it is all the more important that we begin now.

At the last election Labour outlined the key components of its social justice strategy. It focused on the four areas of

- public health, disability services, and accident compensation
- security and belonging for all New Zealanders
- development of the full potential of every member of society, access to life long learning, and
- growth in the economy and jobs.

Within the broad area of security and belonging Labour identified as a priority the implementation of an integrated strategy to reduce violence through:

- increased support and education, including parenting and human relationships skills, for children and families
- stronger responses to domestic violence
- strict enforcement of legislation to control pornography
- extension of safer communities schemes and expansion of community policing
- habilitation alternatives to imprisonment
- reducing discrimination and racism
- more effective controls on weapons and drugs.

Labour's social justice strategy recognises the need to develop everyone's potential. Equality of opportunity through education has been a cornerstone of Labour Policy since our party was founded in 1916. Without renewed efforts to promote equality of opportunity and a vibrant public education system, the disintegration of New Zealand into unequal camps of haves and have nots will be near impossible to stop. Raising educational levels will, however, contribute to decreasing crime.

Growth in the economy and in jobs is also vital. Labour's commitment to full employment will play its part in reducing crime and violence.

It is my firm view that without an integrated approach to social justice, the problem of violence will not be able to be addressed effectively. The Fourth Labour Government's approach to crime and crime prevention was working, because it was underpinned by policies to provide affordable housing and health care, educational opportunity, and wages and benefits which people could live on with dignity. Violent crime by the end of Labour's term in office had fallen by 8.58 per cent. Under National, violent crime is up 41 per cent. Can we be surprised after state tenants were rack rented out of their homes, wages for low income people fell with the Employment Contracts Act, unemployment soared, benefits were slashed and the public health system was turned on its head?

We just cannot ignore the contribution of unhealthy and unjust social and economic policies to rising levels of crime and violence. Our schools are on the front line in dealing with the children who are damaged by those policies - and principals and teachers are becoming more vocal about the time bombs we are creating.

Take the story of the unemployed fourteen year old who murdered a seventeen year old in Onehunga two weeks ago. The principal of the high school he briefly attended at the age of thirteen described him as a symbol of the fragmentation of our society and policies. He was a state ward. His mother was on the street at thirteen years of age, pregnant at fourteen, and had three children by the age of eighteen. The boy ran away from foster homes and spun out of control.

The school principal said that she and her staff can only work with a child if there is the support of the parent or parents as well. What the boy needed she said was consistent, loving, firm, parenting care.

What can we learn from this case? The key lesson is to break the cycle of deprivation. Perhaps that family didn't have a great chance of coming right, but we cannot stand by and see them and thousands of others like them destroy themselves and those they impact on. To break the cycle of disadvantage which leads to despair, crime and violence, we need

- more jobs
- wages and benefits families can live on
- homes families can afford to live in
- schools resourced to cope with children at risk
- more effective and better co-ordinated services for children, young people, and their families
- better primary health care, and more effective health promotion for healthy lifestyles and to combat unwanted teenage pregnancy

There is a Maori proverb: he tangata, he tangata, he tangata. It is people, it is people, it is people. Current meanspirited economic and social policies have forgotten that. Is it any wonder that we have created child monsters who are unemployed killers at age fourteen?

I am determined that the Labour Party in government under my leadership will fight crime and violence against the background of policies which promote social justice. There will also be specific initiatives in the justice and policing portfolios.

Community programmes with proven track records, such as Neighbourhood Support and Safer Community Councils, must be extended. They can only succeed if they receive strong leadership and support. Labour is committed to giving that leadership and support.

The recent tragic deaths of members of the Bain family in Dunedin remind us of the urgent need for effective gun laws. Labour says the country needs gun laws that are strict, but at the same time workable. A recent survey published by the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) confirms the dangers of firearm ownership. That survey found that a gun in the home increases the risk of homicide in the household by a factor of three.

Labour is committed to involving the community in the fight against crime, but that doesn't mean that Government should abdicate its responsibility. We will support community initiatives. We will support community policing. It is not a soft option. It requires more skills, but it works. We are fortunate here in the Mt Albert electorate to have community constables who are very much a part of our community and do a fine job. Community policing helps reduce violent crime through its preventive approach to crime.

While prevention of crime is the long term aim, we must also be aware of the immediate pain felt by victims and their families. We must have more effective policies to support people who have been offended against. It is important that victims of crime do not remain victims, but are given support to put the crime behind them and move on. Victims of crime are not dealt with fairly, with ACC not even able to meet effectively their needs for trauma counselling. Some state agency must take responsibility for funding that.

Labour has a comprehensive policy on victims' rights. It includes the creation of a structure to co-ordinate victim support services, monitor victims' issues, provide policy advice and produce public education on victims' rights. The work of victim support and advocacy groups needs co-ordination and resourcing. The pilot Victim Court Assistance Project will be monitored and the need for independent advocacy and advice explored. We believe a Victims' Charter needs to be developed to ensure that the voices of victims are heard, and their needs are not forgotten. This Charter would complement the movement towards a restorative system of justice where the victim plays a central role in the search for solutions which promote repair, reconciliation and reassurance. Labour also intends to consult widely on an appropriate victims' compensation scheme.

The needs of victims of domestic violence have been well researched. Women have waited far too long for the government to action the recommendations of the Victims Task Force report, "Protection from Family Violence". Every day we wait, another woman and her children are beaten, bruised, or maybe even killed. If the National Government fails to act prior to the election, the incoming Labour Government will give the needed amendments to the law top priority.

Another form of violence against women that is covered in Labour's approach to violence and crime is pornography. Pornography is a justice issue because it tells lies about women and children and can contribute to violence, including rape and child abuse. We welcome the new legislation in this area and have a commitment to ensure that its effectiveness is monitored.

We know that the answers to violent crime are not easy. It will take enormous commitment and time to reduce the level of violence in our society. The recommendations of the Roper Report 'Te Ara Hou: The New Way' do provide a new way. It is a way that involves the establishment of a new system of habilitation directed at the factors behind crime: unemployment, alcohol abuse, drug addiction, behavioural disorders, family breakdown, and physical and sexual abuse. But I stress again, these specific initiatives must be backed by socially just economic and social policies. The "dog eat dog" society sanctioned by the National Government is a large part of the problem. Labour is committed to comprehensive policy initiatives to make New Zealand a better place to live in. We must start now the long term change that is necessary to stop violence.