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Letter: We are still a democracy



News Editor

Dave Stewart

There have been several letters to the editor and opinion pieces asking the WAG folk to offer tangible alternatives to the screeds of negativity and hyperbole and it's disappointing that they just simply aren't listening.

They call on folk to attend their meetings and participate but as I can bare witness to, if you don't tow their line of their politburo the welcome mat is very quickly removed, as are you.

Now they are telling us they support a new kind of autocratic local democracy structure. The councillors we elect and give our mandate to must ignore our votes and instead serve 'the great leader'.

There can only be one voice, and we will elect that voice once every 3 years and the councilors will obey. Totalitarian local authority – what could possibly go wrong?

In the 2022 Whakatāne election, there were 11,710 votes for mayoral candidates. Victor Luca received 3192 of those votes. While we hear voices telling us the mayor has a "mandate" and "we" and our councillors should follow him, those numbers need to be remembered.

I do feel for the mayor. He clearly is frustrated that he can't demand people do as he instructs them to simply because of those 3192 votes. But is it the councillors he's frustrated with or the fact that we are still a democracy?

And is the answer really an authoritarian structure that will deliver change by what amounts to table thumping and bullying?

In the latest in what has become a long list of personal attacks on Councillor Nandor Tanczos, they issue a broadside on consensus.

"The problem with consensus builders is that consensus support the status quo, support mediocrity, stifle innovation, strangle change and generate analysis paralysis. A leader with a vision and a mandate, on the other hand, pursues completely the opposite, attacks sacred cows, wants change and wants to get (often very necessary and urgent) things done."

This is more disinformation.

The last WAG meeting I attended, I saw people who will probably remember the 1984 Lange-led Labour government at least, if not better, than I do. That government's first action in September 1984 was to call the Economic Summit Conference, dubbed the Consensus Summit, held in Parliament, and brought together a cross section of the community.

The consensus they were able to achieve at that summit was extraordinary and it would take someone much better at rewriting history than WAG's correspondent to make anyone forget the radical and innovative changes that consensus brought about.

WAG are using rhetoric that suits their argument but is at odds with the truth. This is becoming a concerning habit, especially around a democratic process.

At the same WAG meeting I attended, they spent most of the time talking about putting up candidates to oust current councillors.

They talked about approaching candidates who had stood and had been rejected by the voters in the past. WAG offers us those we have already rejected. That's what they think of our views.

Why doesn't WAG accept that we have already elected councillors, and a mayor and we expect the mayor to use the leadership skills he has to run the council and win over our elected representatives to his point of view?

Now they want to change the rules so that councillors we will elect will have no say and all will support the mayor. Or else.

WAG closes their 'Make Autocracy Great Again' manifesto with "At next year's election, the Whakatāne Action Group will support candidates for mayor and council who want to tip the status quo baby out with the bath water and head off in a new ratepayer respecting direction."

What that translates to is "The elected mayor (assuming you elect one we in WAG have pre-approved) will be the sole source of truth and the councillors you elect will serve them, not you".

That's a Yeah Nah from me, thanks WAGers