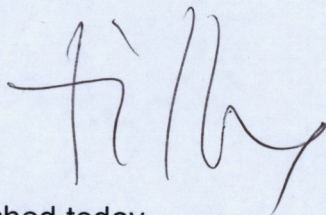


Media release

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Nicky Hager book launched today

Nicky Hager's new book was launched at 5pm today at Unity Books in downtown Wellington. The book is not about the Snowden documents; Mr Hager said publicly months ago that he was not writing a book on that subject. Today's book follows on from his earlier book *The Hollow Men* and gives an inside view of politics after the John Key led National Party. It revolves around a cast of Key, Cameron Slater, Jason Ede, David Farrar, Judith Collins and other National Party figures. It shows a very different side of John Key and his government than most New Zealanders know.

Mr Hager said he thinks many New Zealanders have felt something is wrong with New Zealand politics, where more and more personal attacks, nastiness and petty scandal is getting in the way of ordinary politics. 'In recent days there has been some news about personal attacks on the prime minister,' he said. 'But the book is about a much more serious and long term problem. Throughout Key's time as prime minister, his staff and notably senior adviser Jason Ede have been assisting and coordinating persistent personal attacks and dirty tricks against his political opponents.'

'Journalists have suspected these activities but the evidence has been hard to find. There have been repeated political attacks launched by the National Party attack dogs, notably Slater backed up by Farrar, and what the book shows is that many of these lead back to the Beehive. This is a technique originally from US republican politics known as a two-track strategy, where the prime minister maintains a friendly, relaxed public image while relying on political proxies to relentlessly attack opponents. This approach has meant that Key and his government have not had to take responsibility for their negative politics. This and many other stories about internal National Party politics are revealed in the book.'

The book is called *Dirty Politics: How attack politics is poisoning New Zealand's political environment*. It will be in book shops around the country tomorrow morning. It covers the six years of the Key National Government.

The book is based upon a large number of internal communications between the National-aligned blogger Slater and a network of National Party figures. The documents are very revealing about Slater and his collaborators, including much that is shocking and distasteful. But, much more important, the documents also cover politicians and Beehive staff, showing the highly coordinated National Party attack politics used year after year throughout Key's prime ministership. Readers can see the inside story of issues they have seen in the news, now revealed in the participant's own words.

Mr Hager said that the leaks seem to have come from when Slater had his website crashed in January this year after comments he made about a West Coast man who died in a car crash (he said the 'feral' had done the world a favour). Mr Hager had no part in obtaining the materials. The book also draws on information provided by some National Party sources.

'As readers will see, there is a very high public interest in the public knowing about the activities revealed in the book. I believe that any news organisation would have jumped at the opportunity to get this material,' Mr Hager said. For instance:

- * During the 2011 election campaign Slater obtained a database of the Labour Party's members, e-mails and donations, and gleefully attacked the party. What no one knew is that Key's dirty tricks person, Ede, had helped throughout, including searching inside the Labour Party computers and helping Slater plan the subsequent attacks on Labour. Ede's office was just two doors from John Key's and presumably he was using his Ministerial Services computer (Chapter 2).
- * In the same election campaign, the prime minister's office used its knowledge of secret SIS documents to tip off Slater and arrange an attack on the Labour leader (Chapter 3).
- * Ede drafted official information act requests for Slater to use in other attacks, for instance against Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff who were in conflict with the government (Chapter 3).
- * When the Labour Party leadership race was on last year and getting good publicity, Ede got National Party research staff to prepare an attack on David Cunliffe and other contenders' policies that was published on David Farrar's Kiwiblog website the following day (Chapter 9).
- * The more the National Government has used Slater, the closer that Key himself has got to the attack blogger. For instance, when most New Zealanders were appalled by Slater's offensive comments about the West Coast man who died in the car crash, his closest associates rallied to support him. One of those who phoned him and commiserated at that time, according to Slater's account of the conversation, was John Key (Chapter 12).

Key and his colleagues have known their use of proxies and allies for attacks and dirty tricks was risky, but they believed they could keep it secret. It was only the unexpected leak that has brought the story to the light. The book is full of stories that might otherwise have remained secret.

There will be updates about the book at www.dirtypoliticsnz.com

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