

Opinion

It's Al as in Emerson,
not as in Al Qaeda

Alternative View
Alan Emerson

It was an interesting week the week before last, starting off from the Blue Mountains east of Sydney and ending up at home via the Wellington Airport police station.

I won't reiterate the facts on page one except to say that I was alerted on the Monday about my name being on a parcel delivered to the office of the Minister of Agriculture, David Carter. Carter's office had given it to television and when informed I immediately phoned his office, said I didn't know anything about it and was happy to talk to anyone. I was told I'd be contacted but wasn't.

Returning to New Zealand on the Thursday afternoon my wife Adrienne and I were ambushed by the police at the airport, marched at a feverish pace through the assembled throng, no doubt to cause maximum humiliation and then interviewed at length.

My articles in *The NZ Farmers Weekly* featured strongly in the discussions. They must be really determined to set me up I thought, as my articles aren't available on the internet for long and I'm sure *Farmers Weekly* isn't a regular read at metropolitan police canteens.

Adrienne was interviewed as well being asked, among other things, whether I was "anti-government". What is the country coming to? Let me say here and now that we said we were willing to talk to the police, have fingerprints taken and, in my case, a DNA sample. I wouldn't have been so co-operative had I known what was coming.

The search warrant I thought was over the top and not being able to return home was most inconvenient. We had a couple of friends in their seventies minding the animals for us



Major event:
Police descend on
Alan Emerson's
Wairarapa home.

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who were allowed to stay under the supervision of two security guards. The police coming out here complete with flashing lights and siren was ridiculous. When one was told I was a JP the police response was "not for long".

I asked about the search warrant and was told that my name and address was on the cluster fly box and that I had written an article in *Farmers Weekly* on cluster flies.

I had a problem with that. Anyone can put a "sent by" on any postal item. If I was stupid enough to attach an address surely I would have got my own address correct. We live at 1242 Homewood Road the address on the cluster fly box was about three years old at 22.

Finally when New Zealand gets to the stage of issuing search warrants on the strength of *Farmers Weekly* articles I think our democracy is in a dire state indeed.

Arriving home on Friday morning we found eight police ensconced, complete with a rather rude dog handler who seemed convinced all farmers hoarded explosives. They

left four hours later having spent a total of 15 person hours going through my four by three metre office. That was in addition to sheds and personal clothing for whatever reason.

I believe that sets a particularly dangerous precedent. All my news media contacts were in my office, several drafts, articles and a number of projects.

There were letters from family, my late father's papers and the names and contacts of local golden oldies rugby players.

The justification for that invasion was that someone had sent the Minister of Agriculture a wine box full of cluster flies.

You can't get police for love nor money in rural Wairarapa, we have a considerable crime problem not to mention family violence.

Obviously the way to get attention is to be accused of sending a box of cluster flies to the Minister of Agriculture.

Also don't tell me the police are short of resources as they are



obviously not, they just need to establish priorities. So obsessed were they with me they sent a full week while the true perpetrator remains alive and well.

After their visit the parliamentary news media again phoned me. The police assured me they hadn't spoken to the media. I believe them; the inquiries all came from parliament's media. All the "leaks" came from parliament.

I am not going to criticise the police I was dealing with, they had a job to do and were, in the main, courteous and efficient.

I would however, strongly criticise the police hierarchy for being so politically sycophantic.

The whole over the top scenario reeked of politics. We know the Minister of Agriculture or his office tried to drop me in it, the police hierarchy obviously followed on. Operation Overkill was alive and well.

The whole sorry scenario encourages debate in several areas, first being that police should investigate without fear or favour and not be coerced into a plan of action.

It was clumsy, arrogant and a huge waste of resources. I have now no confidence that the police will not be influenced or instructed to investigate, inappropriately, by politicians.

Conversely I have no confidence that politicians would not use the police to pursue a political agenda. If all that happened to me I wonder how common the practice is?

What happened to freedom of speech in NZ when a *Farmers Weekly* column can be used as a basis for a search warrant with the police concentrating on the office where I write my stories?

Mind you I was probably indiscreet leaving a poster there publicising the parliamentary rugby team playing the legendary East Coast Wrinklies last year.

If the police asked me about it

I would have assured them that David Carter hadn't been in the parliamentary rugby team.

In fact I'd be pretty sure he'd never played rugby. In addition as a tight forward whatever happens on the field stays there.

Carter, with utmost respect of course, when I suggest you, your office or both put my name on the box and thought it was manna from heaven.

It didn't work. My resolve is stronger now than it has been and I won't be bullied by either politicians or police from writing any Alternative Views in *Farmers Weekly*.

There were some good things to come out of the experience. Karim Brown makes a mean bacon and egg burger and Brownie makes superb coffee at the Riversdale Beach store. House-sitters Tom and Christine showed courage under fire and are great mates.

The support from the local rural community also made us feel a whole lot better.

Thanks for the use of your phones when I wanted to discreetly talk to people and your support and sense of humour at the East Coast Rugby game last Saturday.

No Cloudy, I do still want to be called Al Emerson not Al Qaeda. We do live in a great place. Thanks also to mates in the news media who didn't take a politician's "leak" and rush into print.

Thanks hugely to the NZX Agri editorial team for their absolute support. At the time I needed it and you don't know how important it was.

Finally Carter I can handle myself in any scrap you want but in future leave my wife out of it.

Your View

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