

Round table on Economic reform and the New Zealand experience: Rt Hon Jim Bolger'

The Right Hon. James Bolger was Prime Minister of New Zealand from October 1990 to December 1997. He led the National Party for almost 12 years and had three consecutive terms as the country's head of government. Under his leadership the New Zealand economy was transformed from having the lowest growth rate among the 29 OECD nations to one of the strongest. New Zealand is now recognised as being among the most open and competitive economies in the world. Mr Bolger's administration pursued an outward looking foreign policy to strengthen New Zealand's relationships with other countries, especially in the Asia/Pacific region. He represented New Zealand at the first five Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Leaders' summits since the original meeting in Seattle in 1993.

Mr Bolger was born in Taranaki on 31 May 1935. He was a beef and sheep farmer, and active in farming organisations before entering national politics in 1972 when he was elected Member of Parliament for King Country, a seat he held for nine terms. In 1975 he became a Parliamentary Under-Secretary and in 1977 became New Zealand's first Minister of Fisheries and Associate Minister of Agriculture. During this time he was engaged in international negotiations associated with New Zealand's move to declare a 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone. Following the 1978 General Election, Mr Bolger was appointed Minister of Labour and Minister of Immigration. During this period he introduced many important legislative changes, including laws permitting weekend shopping and voluntary unionism.

Mr Bolger was elected President of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1993. Following the National Government's defeat in the July 1984 general election Mr Bolger was elected Deputy Leader of the Opposition in November of that year, and in March 1986 he became Leader of the National Party and Leader of the Opposition. In October 1990 he led the National Party to the biggest electoral victory in New Zealand's history and started to implement far-reaching changes in New Zealand's economic and social policies. In the November 1993 General Election the Bolger-led National Party was again returned to power. Following the October 1996 General Election, which marked a shift in New Zealand's electoral process from that of "first past the post" to an MMP (mixed member proportional) system, Mr Bolger formed a coalition government with the New Zealand First Party.

In December 1997 Mr Bolger retired as Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party and was appointed Minister of State and Associate Minister of Foreign/Affairs and Trade (with responsibility for APEC). In 1993 Mr Bolger was sworn in as a Privy Councillor. On 31 December 1997 Mr Bolger was appointed a member of the Order of New Zealand (ONZ), New Zealand's highest honour. Membership is limited to 20 persons living at any time and recognises outstanding service to the Crown and people of New Zealand. From June 1998 to January 2002 Mr Bolger was New Zealand's Ambassador to the United

States. In 1998 Mr Bolger was invited to join other selected former Presidents and Prime Ministers as a member of the Inter-Action council.

In 2000 he was invited to join the International Advisory Board of the World Agricultural Forum based in St Louis, Missouri, USA and in 2002 he was appointed Chairman. In September 2001 Mr Bolger was appointed chair of the establishment board of New Zealand Post's new Kiwibank and from 1 July 2002 Mr Bolger assumed the chair of the Board of New Zealand Post. In recognition of his work Mr Bolger in 1994 received an honorary degree, Doctorate in Agricultural Economics from Khon Kaen University, Thailand, and in 2002 received an honorary Doctorate of literature from Massey University, New Zealand.

In 2002 he was appointed chairman of the Ian Axford Foundation. On 28 April 2003 he was appointed Chairman of the Gas Industry Steering Group. A former dairy, sheep and beef farmer, Mr Bolger now lists part time farming, watching sport, fishing, hiking, gardening and reading as his favourite pastimes. Mr Bolger married Joan Riddell in 1963 and they have nine children and five grandchildren. Joan Bolger's work in public life was recognised in 1997 when she was honoured with the award, Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit (CNZM)