

**ENCOUNTER** with Edward Rooney

Behind the slogans and fiery glares is a man who — get this — is actually quite likeable.

Peter Low catapulted into the public eye seven months ago when his East Auckland rally attracted 15,000 people demanding action on law and order.

While the lead-up to the general election had been bubbling along with smirking politicians promising tax cuts, Peter turned up the heat with a battle-cry for a crackdown on violent crime.

I've talked to Peter before, usually in short conversations while getting comment or information for news stories. He's always been abrupt, terse,

good country," he says. "But I now believe the government system has ruined it."

Like many migrants, he saw business opportunities beyond someone else's payroll. He set about importing and distributing the foods he missed from his homeland.

Peter hasn't surrounded himself with displays of wealth here. The curtains don't match, the boardroom furniture includes a white plastic patio-chair and other pieces you'd pick up at any inorganic streetside collection.

He's a businessman, but not on any grandiose scale.

Peter's 27-year-old daughter works in the front office, although she is leav-

# Low and behold

even angry. I'd guessed he was a man driven by some sort of righteous rage, born of being the victim of crime and seeing his family and friends as victims.

Sitting in the meeting-room at his business premises, however, his outbursts about callous thugs, police inaction, government indifference and public apathy are interspersed with surprises.

His mobile phone has Robbie Williams' *Better Man* as the ringtone. Peter plays guitar and drums. He's a vegetarian. He leads a lion dancing troupe of 50 young people who meet weekly in his East Tamaki warehouse.

Singapore-born Peter was raised in a tough neighbourhood. His father was a plumber who served in the Singapore army and police at various times. Both parents were musically inclined and played many traditional Chinese instruments.

Like all young Singaporean men, Peter spent two years in the armed services, although he was enrolled later than the usual age of 18 because he'd been injured in a motorcycle accident. He served his military time in the cultural division.

Peter has been in New Zealand since arriving on a working permit as a boat-builder in 1987. He'd worked for many European people in Singapore and a New Zealander sponsored Peter and his family to migrate.

"I came to New Zealand and it's a

ing for Los Angeles soon to pursue a singing career. His 30-year-old son lives in Hong Kong.

Peter faces slightly downwards across the table, looking up at me. At times this makes him look feisty, even combative. His eyes remain fixed on me or the photographer.

No single incident provoked his organising the protest, although his business has been repeatedly burgled and his wife's handbag was ripped from her arm in the street. Conversations with business colleagues and friends led to the march after some high profile robberies and killings in South Auckland.

Peter is disappointed that the Act Party wasn't given a role in the law and order areas of the new Government. He claims some credit in the removal of the Labour Party from power and warns that National will follow the same path in three years unless law and order is addressed fully.

"If we change the soup but not the ingredients, then there is no point in changing," he says.

He will continue to highlight safety concerns. Peter says he is coordinating his Asian support base with Maori, Korean and Indian sympathisers into a new collective. He calls it a union, although it has yet to adopt a name. The Asian Anti-Crime Group has outgrown the ethnic description and some members don't like the negative

**MEET**

**WHO** Peter Low  
**WHAT** Anti-crime crusader  
**WHERE** East Tamaki warehouse  
**WHY** We all want a better life

connotations of the word "anti".

Peter says his warehouse was burgled six weeks ago, for the fifth time.

"To this day, I have not heard from the police. I still can't claim insurance."

After our discussion, we walk through his warehouse of canned drinks, snack packets, dried foods. He shows me how he rolls the pallets back to clear the way for weekly gatherings of the E-Pacs lion dance team. Colourful masks and costumes are tucked behind shelves.

Students are also encouraged to learn about discipline, respect, friendship, teamwork, mental and physical exercise.

Here, in the warehouse, the man glimpsed in the boardroom is fully revealed.

Yes, there's the public face of someone who's busy and quick to anger, driven to indignant, sometimes irrational outbursts.

Behind this tough exterior is a cultured and disciplined character. A family man and, ultimately, a good and caring man.

■ Edward Rooney is chief reporter of The Aucklander.

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