

Industrial Relations

Industrial relations are the relations between those who own and run industry and those who work for the owners. Industrial disputes arise from the conflict of interests between these groups, a conflict which is aggravated by the alienation of the worker.

Alienation

Workers are deprived of control over their own work, and, so become alienated from it. This alienation is heightened by the use of production technologies which make many jobs oppressive and meaningless. All this leads to growing dissatisfaction which takes many forms; staff instability, absenteeism, lack of interest in the work, indifference to quality, a fall-off in production and an aggressive attitude.

What is more, these things are not limited to blue collar workers. White collar employees and management staff in industry, banks, insurance, and public service are also finding their work becoming monotonous, fragmented, depersonalised and failing to offer sufficient opportunity for the use of judgement and initiative.

Hours

Despite all our "progress", working hours remain long and sometimes excessive with often very inadequate time for rest and leisure. Long hours not only contribute to the oppressive nature of work but also to strain on family life and the breakdown of community interaction.

The Values Party supports a cut-back in working hours and the length of the working week and believes we should begin with the reintroduction of a 40 hour week which returns a living wage.

Work should respect the workers' life and health, leave free time for rest and leisure and enable workers to serve society and achieve self-fulfilment by developing their personal capacities, as well as providing a satisfactory, secure income.

The Values Party believes that the best judges of these things are the people involved in the work.

Workers must be given their rights in the management and control of industry; to be instrumentally involved in the decisions affecting their working lives. In addition we must make progress on the development of more human technologies. (See Technology.)

Job Satisfaction

Thousands of members of the New Zealand work force do not achieve any real satisfaction from their work.

Vague talk about "better communication" between workers and management fails dismally to come to grips with the need to humanise work, to make it more worthwhile, more satisfying.

There is an urgent need for government initiatives to encourage job satisfaction through work-place innovations such as the rotation of jobs and the broadening of tasks, including allowing workers to finish a whole job and to work in independent teams.

However while many overseas "job satisfaction" experiments have been successful, none constitutes a complete solution to the problems of industrial relations.

In his report to the ILO conference held in Geneva in June this year the Director-General of the ILO said "the question must be considered ... of the participation of workers in decisions affecting conditions of work and the working environment in general".

Industrial Democracy

People must be given a greater say in the running and organising of their work.

Industrial Democracy means that all the staff of an enterprise, either directly or through their elected representatives, are instrumentally involved in the decisions relating to the operation of that enterprise.

The Values Party

- Favours the immediate initiation of a study of forms of industrial democracy currently in operation in the world's industrial nations [for example West Germany and Yugoslavia] with a view to early introduction of full participation of wage and salary workers in decision making at all levels of industry.
- Would give immediate support to the freezing industry to institute job enrichment and worker participation programmes. Urgency would be given to the introduction of full industrial democracy in this industry.

As well as direct moves towards industrial democracy, the Values Party believes that the development of co-operative enterprises (see Economics) would lead to a much greater degree of democracy in the work place.

Critics who say that New Zealand workers do not seem interested in sharing in the responsibilities of management and workshop supervision ignore the fact that a large part of the work force has been trained to expect, and adapt to, an authoritarian work environment, to regard their employers as simply providers of wages to whom 'loyalty' - if any, is due only until the whistle blows.

Unions

The Values Party

- Recognises the need for unions to protect the interests of their members under the present social and economic system and therefore does not in any way associate itself with the present campaign of denigration of unions.
- Sees present industrial conditions requiring the retention of preference provisions in existing industrial laws.
- Believes that unions can play an important role in the transition to, and the success of, a co-operative economy.

Employment Opportunities, Redundancy and Retraining

The Values Party realises that its policies to encourage

a movement towards a co-operative economy will have an effect on employment patterns and opportunities.

Values Party would develop

- Government, community and individual enterprise retraining schemes.
- Alternative employment schemes which would endeavour to use existing skills in more socially and/or environmentally sound enterprises.
- Shorter working hours complemented by adult education in a wide sense.
- Encouragement of shared employment.
- Payment for homeworkers to ensure that no homeworker is forced by hardship to seek outside employment.

As the transition towards a stable economy progresses more attention will have to be paid to helping people adapt to the tasks of the new economy, especially where old jobs are being phased out because of their incompatibility with community objectives. Elected bodies at all levels, as well as individual enterprises, will become involved in retraining and redeploying some members of the workforce (for example into the field of recycling).

Health Hazards

The problem of industrial relations is compounded by the disturbing situation regarding occupational safety and health. In New Zealand there are some 65,000 industrial accidents a year, about 75 of which are fatal and some 1,000 of which result in permanent disability.

Chemicals and other pollutants are causing health problems, mechanisation and automation are causing mental health problems and often the growing complexity of tasks faced by managerial and technical staff is causing exhaustion and breakdown. All this adds to the picture of modern industry as an extremely unhealthy activity.

The Values Party Believes

- That industrial education, legislation and incentive measures should be investigated and implemented as part of an urgent programme to overcome health hazards.

The problems of industrial relations will not be solved without the progressive introduction of cooperative community control of enterprises, or government, community, union, employer and individual efforts to increase job satisfaction and make industrial democracy effective.

