

Government Reform

The basic question of government is "Who makes what decisions how?" The Values Party realises that its answers to these questions will mean major changes to our present system of government.

The pace and direction of political, economic, social and cultural change has meant that our present system is inadequate. If we wish to attain justice and retain democracy we must do more than fiddle with an inadequate system. Values seeks to head off the sort of government developing in New Zealand - big and centralised, with too much power and too many functions, requiring a large, distant and faceless bureaucracy.

We are committed to the development of a decentralised participatory democracy within a just, co-operative society. Only a strong sense of community can counter the massness and alienation of western society. And this feeling of togetherness can be promoted to some extent by doing in an intelligent manner what many radicals and anarchists are calling for - "Power to the People".

Decentralisation

Values' policies consistently call for more responsibility, more power and more autonomy for regional community levels of government, and redefinition of the role of central government and head office.

Our long-term objective is a form of government in which the responsibility and authority for social services and amenities rests as closely as possible with the people using them. This would apply particularly in health, education, welfare, housing, land use, and as far as possible throughout the economy.

Decentralisation does not mean simply making Napier-Hastings for example into a mini-Wellington for the Hawkes Bay region. It means the development of social services in Waipukurau, Dannevirke, Porangahau and Pongoroa too. Nor does decentralisation mean that all power and functions are taken away from the centre. It means rather that the centre is freed to perform its proper roles of co-ordination and communication, maintaining balance and justice, legislating minimum standards, safeguarding civil rights, and researching and developing innovations. International relations, and national transport are examples of government functions that would not be decentralised.

We see such decentralisation as vital to the development of true communities in which the social needs of kinship and co-operation are fostered by the regular involvement of citizens in deciding the conditions that affect their lives.

We see such decentralisation as vital to curing the diseases threatening the health of our democracy - alienation, apathy, sectional greed and competitive

individualism. These conditions flourish when government is distant and unresponsive; then, government itself, which is really "Us", becomes "They". In the face-to-face government of decentralisation, enlightened self-interest alone advises that it is unwise to exploit today the people who can make the decisions governing your life tomorrow - your neighbours and workmates.

Effective decentralisation is impossible without an independent and sufficient source of revenue for each level of government. More and more loans from central government can only put local government "in hock" to central government and tie it to central conditions. The best method of financing local government will lie in some kind of regular payment for the community services provided by local government and in return for community-generated values enjoyed by citizens. This requires no radical change - rates based on land values provide such a source now. But rating has its disadvantages too.

The Values Party is currently investigating various alternatives for financing local government.

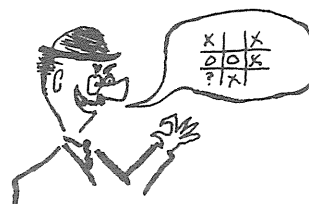
The Values Party would

- Endorse the general objectives of the Local Government Act. We would however amend it to:
 - give autonomy and greater responsibility to the proposed community councils;
 - acknowledge the role of neighbourhood councils or local progressive associations in government. There might be several of these within the territory of a community council;
 - establish statutory procedures for providing local government with an independent and sufficient source of revenue.
- Amend the procedures of the Local Government Commission so that it is able to hear submissions from individuals and community groups as well as local authorities. We would accelerate the development of regional and community levels of government.
- Bring harbour boards under regional government control and town planning legislation.

Participatory Democracy

It is decades since New Zealand had a majority government. Even in 1972, 52 per cent of the voters did not vote for Labour. Fewer than half a dozen MPs got the support of more than half their electorate.

Values believes that our present political system is fundamentally undemocratic and unjust. It points to evidence in the fact that most MPs are male, over 40, and from the professions, business, farming, or union administration. In all these respects MPs are not representative of the population. Recent free votes in Parliament indicate the extent to which Parliament opinion is lagging behind public opinion. A few people in a few marginal seats determine who will be the next government.



In a truly democratic society any citizen should feel that he or she can influence government. How many of us feel this in 1975? We get a solitary vote among thousands every three years and are then cast into the role of spectators of political games.

Obviously these conditions will not change overnight and cannot be changed except through a strong and active movement of people "at the grassroots level". Such a movement has emerged in New Zealand in recent years. It is still scattered, largely inarticulate, not very well organised, nor very confident of itself. But it is there. Manapouri, Aro Street, Otara are places where some of its battles have been won. It is a movement towards participatory democracy, and the Values Party is only one part of it.

In its role as a social action movement, the Values Party seeks to demonstrate that the ordinary citizen is not powerless. He or she can join with others and make their voices heard and their ideas considered. The Values Party does not need to become government to enact its policies. Many can be enacted in their daily lives by members.

Greater openness of government is a priority of the Values Party, and the encouragement of participatory democracy an important feature of its aspect as a social action movement. At present most government decisions are made behind closed doors. Items of information on matters of vital public interest - for example, nuclear power, justification for price rises, and the arguments being used by pressure groups and public servants in their relations with the political executive - are kept away from the public. Decisions made in cabinet and caucus at central government level, or committee and caucus at local government level, are presented as faits accomplis. Only with the greatest difficulty can a dissenting public reverse these decisions.

The Values Party

- Endorses the intentions behind the Educational Development Conference and would promote similar conferences, seeking the views of the public, when there are major policy changes contemplated [for example, in health and local government].
- Would examine present legislation and regulations and amend them so that planning decisions at all levels of government were made only after a process of consultation with those affected, during which process the participation of interested citizens was actively sought.
- Sees the Crown as distinct from the policies of central government and would amend the Town and Country Planning and Public Works Acts so that central government and its agencies were subject to the normal planning procedures and ordinances of central government.
- Give members of the public access to all government records as of right. A departmental head could deny access to certain types of information but such decisions would be open to appeal to the Ombudsman.
- Would increase use of referenda, questionnaires and pilot schemes.
- Make legal aid available to individuals and community groups taking cases to appeal before Town and Country Planning Appeal Boards.

Parliamentary Reform

In 1972 we stated "the Values Party believes that there is an urgent need for reform of Parliament in order to make it a more effective and relevant body". Many of the policies we stated then are contained in the 1975 Electoral Amendment Act.

The Values Party calls for

- A 15-year maximum term for all MPs.
- Establishment of a parliamentary forum convened by the Opposition, for the public to air grievances and suggest alternative policies.
- Increased youth representation on decision-making bodies.
- In-service training for MPs.
- A review procedure for legislation whereby each new bill contains a statement of its objectives, its estimated costs and benefits, and specifies a time, not more than 20 years, during which it must be reviewed.
- Liberalising of standing orders to allow private members' bills that propose increases in expenditure.

New Zealanders expect more than is humanly possible from their MPs, who are expected not only to represent the interests of constituents, but also to keep up with everything going on in all fields of government, to be effective members of their party, and to prepare for and participate in parliament. When the responsibilities of cabinet are added as well we wonder why many talented people do not make effective use of their talents.

The Values Party

- Supports increased secretarial aid for MPs.
- Would expect any MPs from their party to delegate some of their responsibilities to their local branch so that they were able to remain healthy and effective representatives.
- Believes more fundamental changes are needed to make parliament relevant and effective in a participatory democracy, and that any proposed changes should be subjected to the kind of public scrutiny and discussion pioneered by the Educational Development Conference.

The Values Party has never been one that is particularly attracted by the style and procedures of our present so-called debating system. We feel that "adversary" or "confrontation" politics has had adverse effects on the reputation of parliament, the consideration of legislation, and even on legislation itself.

We see no reason in opposing or amending legislation simply because the other side introduced it and little point in participating in the petty points-scoring or Tower of Babel aspects of parliamentary debate. We feel the two-party system is largely to blame for this situation.

We realise that adversary situations, disfranchisement between elections and parliamentary pettiness are deeply ingrained in New Zealand tradition and cannot be changed for the better overnight. That is no reason to endorse them in the meantime.

Role of Experts

The Values Party believes that the most reliable experts on a decision are those who are going to be affected by it.

Science, technology, general social change and the specialised professions have developed to the stage that experts in these relatively narrow fields have immense influence over decisions that will affect all of us.

More and more political decisions have to be made on issues that are highly technical as well as far-reaching in nature.

Current examples are debates and controversy about such issues as private versus public transport systems; import quotas for new technology; the approvals or restraints on defoliants and drugs; the introduction of cable television and FM radio; the best method of superannuation; long-term social and environmental costs versus short-term economic benefits of aluminium smelters/beech forest utilisation/container ports/power plants. The role of technical experts in advising on these issues must be acknowledged and safeguarded if we are to make wise decisions. But this role poses major problems for participatory democracy and social justice.

The Values Party believes that its principles of justice, participatory democracy, decentralisation and community control, and the policies it has developed to implement these principles, are part of the answer. We suggest that the role of experts must be confined to providing reliable information on the technical details of various alternatives, and answering the questions as posed for them by both elected politicians and community groups and individuals.

If they are to perform this role well they must be given the resources and opportunities to respond to the demands made of them.

The general public may not be competent to judge issues on technical details but it is competent to judge between conflicting values and to set overall goals. This role is vital in the framing of questions asked of experts by government.

In voting Values, for example, the public is clearly endorsing the general principle that long-term social and environmental costs are a higher priority than short-term economic benefits. Such an endorsement will not change the technical detail but will change the kinds of questions experts are asked, and it will shuffle the technical detail into a different order of priority.

The Values Party feels there is a chance of preserving democracy and justice in New Zealand if the above points are recognised and the following policies implemented:

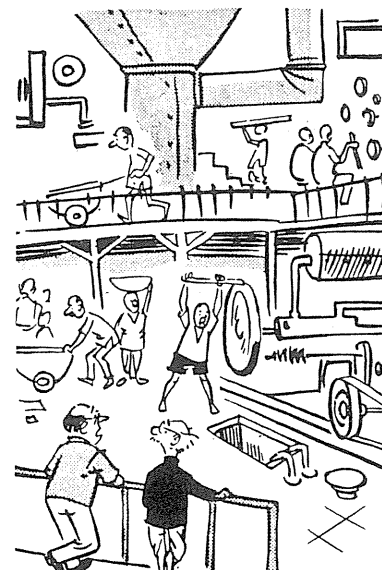
- All expert bodies should include wherever appropriate non-experts who represent important groups in the community [for example, women, youth, and consumers].
- Expert government departments such as the DSIR must answer relevant questions on political issues raised by community groups and individuals, as well as questions posed by politicians. Some help in framing these questions should also be provided.
- The general public should have access to all information on political issues under certain conditions. [Refer also to "Participatory Democracy"].
- The general principle of social control over technology and science embodied in the Technology and Science Assessment Board [refer "Technology"] should be extended into transport, manufacturing and health.

The Public Service

The main expert agency in government is the Public Service. The Values Party believes that New Zealand's Public Service has in general served New Zealand well. If it is not the most imaginative, dynamic and responsive Public Service in the world that is largely because New Zealanders have not yet asked it to be.

- The Values Party would amend Public Service regulations to make it easier for private sector personnel to be appointed to top levels of the Public Service.

Values Party policies in industrial relations, the role of experts, and participatory democracy will have direct effects on the Public Service and will have indirect effects on most other sectors of society. The result of these policies would be a Public Service which is more responsive to the needs of people and the demands of social change.



Actually this factory produces nothing.
It is just a device to employ labour.

