



Environment

"So it always seems to go
that you don't ever know
what you've got till it's gone.
They paved paradise
and put up a parking lot."

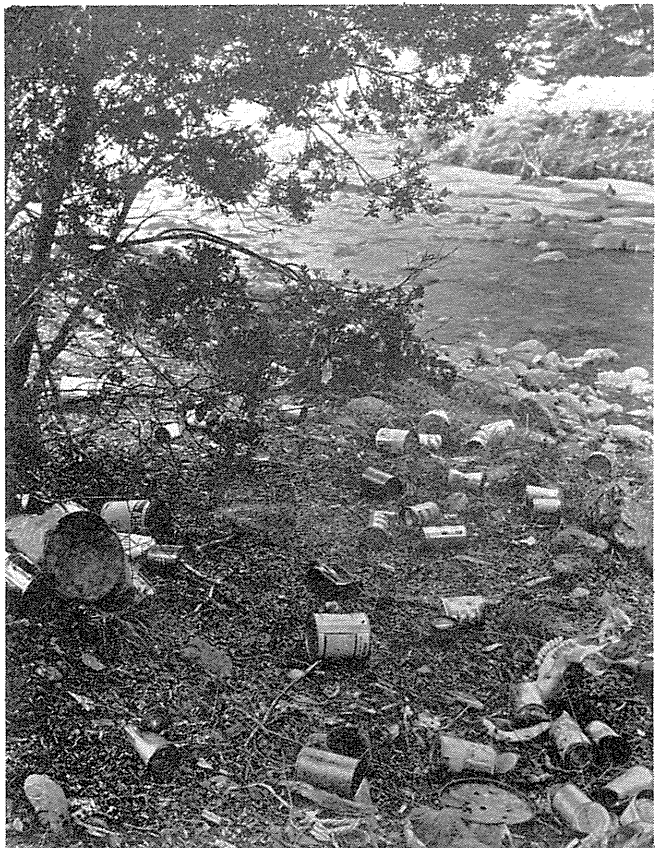
Joni Mitchell, "Yellow Taxi".

Man has developed the ability to radically alter his environment. Lakes are raised, hills bulldozed into valleys, rivers diverted from their natural courses - all in the name of "progress".

Factories pour pollutants into the atmosphere and into waterways to produce consumer goods which no-one really needs.

So far, the level of environmental damage has not yet seriously threatened New Zealand's way of life. But there are clear signs that our competitive, throw-away, growth economy is overloading the natural system - that New Zealand could reach levels of damage already achieved in other countries. If we continue our present growth pattern the systems needed to maintain all life will break down.

We seem to have forgotten that man is a part of living nature. Our survival is dependent on the survival of other plant and animal species. Their survival is dependent on a stable environment. Clean air, clean water, and clean food is essential to the maintenance of the natural system.



The major objectives of the Values Party's environmental policy are

- to preserve the life support system for the human species;
- to maintain genetic diversity of plant and animal species, since this is essential for our food supply;
- to protect the natural environment from pollution and destruction, for the enjoyment of this and future generations;
- to conserve natural resources, especially non-renewable resources, for the wise use of this and future generations.

Primary considerations

The Values Party believes that the most needed environmental reform in New Zealand is a conscious commitment to stabilising the population level and the eventual attainment of a steady-state economy.

A stable population will provide the most effective brake on the progressive use of New Zealand's natural assets. Most notably it will reduce the need for the expansion of power projects with their resultant harmful effect on the environment. Population and pollution are closely linked.

Access to wilderness areas is something every New Zealander takes for granted but which will be affected more and more by a growing population. Professor W. R. Catton, a sociologist at Canterbury University, said that the spacious habitat of the New Zealander has been an essential factor in making him the kind of human being he is, and the loss of such spaciousness must inevitably change the character of the New Zealander. "If we want to remain an egalitarian, democratic society, we would be well advised to keep population density low", he said. "Doesn't the New Zealand way of life depend on the safety valve of open space?"

We believe that when our party's basic goals are reached many of the environmental problems in the country will be greatly reduced in impact. A too obsessive concentration on "patch up" answers to the unavoidable problems of growth tends to obscure the need for a more fundamental approach.

Thus the specific measures advocated in this chapter are in addition to the measures already advocated in Part 1 of this manifesto. (In particular, refer to Chapter 2 on population, the rural ecological policy in Chapter 4, and the chapters on forestry, energy, transport, and consumerism.)

Recycling and Waste

The problem of pollution is not a matter of dreaming up better ways of disposing of wastes. What we should be concentrating on is the recycling of materials so that virtually nothing is wasted. As much as possible should be returned to the natural mechanism of the ecosphere rather than dumped or dispersed.

Dispersal is the most common form of pollution control - but it isn't really control. In cases where air or water aids the dispersal, all that is altered is the proportion of pollution, so that many get some, instead of a few getting a lot. Thus most waste disposal is simply playing for time whereas effective recycling could do much to minimise our dependence on technology.

The Values Party would

- Appoint a National Director to organise and co-ordinate the recycling of goods.
- Give support to the revitalisation of industrial wastes.
- Advocate the cessation of all imports of metal, glass and other products that New Zealand can obtain from recycling.
- Enact legislation to stop manufacturers phasing out returnable containers in favour of non-returnable containers of metal, glass, or plastic compounds. Coupled with this would be measures to effect a gradual phasing out of most non-returnable containers, including rip-top cans.
- Tax all packaging that can't be recycled.
- Provide technology and encouragement for the recycling and re-use of domestic, organic and inorganic wastes. Individuals would be allowed to install recycling sewage treatment facilities in their own homes and given a relief on rates for doing so provided no waste had to be disposed of through community facilities.
- Encourage local bodies to base their waste collection system on the principle that all waste products would be sorted by the users and stored for collection in separate containers to facilitate recycling by the local bodies.
- Support an immediate increase in financial assistance by Government to Local Bodies for the construction of sewage treatment plants.
- Encourage community sewage treatment plants to produce fertilisers and animal protein extract, and utilise the methane gas produced.
- Encourage local authorities to amend their regulations to permit the use of properly serviced septic tanks where it is environmentally sound to do so.

Water, Rivers and Lakes

"Ecological processes can be disrupted by introducing into them either substances that are foreign to them or the correct ones in the wrong quantities. For example, in estuarine and coastal waters - crucial areas for fisheries - nutrients from sewage and agricultural run-off in modest quantities probably increase productivity, but in excess are as harmful as organo-chlorines and heavy metals." ("A Blueprint for Survival": The Ecologist.)

The Values Party would

- Reassess the Water and Soil Conservation Act and its amendments and overhaul its administrative machinery to enable greater public right of redress and heavier penalties for infringement.
- Review the water classification and permit systems to assess their effectiveness.
- Operate a more stringent policing of temporary permits allowing the discharge of industrial and community wastes into classified waters.
- Require users of flowing water to have their intakes downstream from their outlets and to return to the source water of the same quality and consistent with the best technology available.
- Encourage individuals to collect and use rain water run-off. [Not necessarily for drinking purposes.]
- Encourage Local Authorities to investigate the possibility of supplementing water supply and reducing storm-water run-off in built-up areas by the installation of individual water tanks collected from roofs, and enable local authorities to put a requirement on all buildings to install such tanks if they wish to take this option.
- Declare the upper catchment areas of all major rivers water and

soil conservation reserves where any use of land would be subservient to the need for water retention and erosion control.

- Stop further sub-division and development of coastal land.
- Ensure that no wetlands should be developed other than for wild life and fisheries management. Wildlife interests must be safeguarded and measures taken to control any extra downstream flow that results from the development.
- Investigate major hydro schemes such as the Lower Waitaki and Clutha Schemes where they cause major geographic disruptions.
- Use Lakes Manapouri and Te Anau for supplying power to New Zealanders [rather than to the overseas countries owning over 90 per cent of the Bluff aluminium smelter, as at present].
- Support the establishment of a procedure requiring talks between conservation groups, lake guardians, and the government before the raising of lakes and rivers or any other action concerning lakes or rivers.

Chemicals, Pesticides and Fertilisers

Industrial pollution by chemicals must be attacked by fiscal measures such as a raw materials tax to encourage recycling procedures which conserve energy, and by substituting naturally occurring compounds for synthetic compounds. However, the only solutions to the problems of non-recoverable pollutants and of the disposal of the undisposible is to reduce total consumption, reduce energy demand, and terminate industrial growth.

The best way to control the damage caused to ecosystems by pesticides is to use less. This means finding non-persistent substitutes for the organo-chlorines and substituting natural controls for pesticides in general.

The overuse of inorganic fertilisers pollutes fresh-water systems by run-off and slowly but inevitably impoverishes the soil, thus causing diminishing returns. What is needed is a gradual substitution of organic manures for inorganic fertilisers plus the adoption of highly diversified farming practices in place of mono-cultures.

The Values Party would

- Penalise polluters with the principle - "polluter pays".
- Stop the establishment of new polluting industries.
- Enact new laws to ensure that chemicals are subject to stringent scientific tests before being registered for use, in order to protect people from unnatural kinds or amounts of chemicals, especially those which persist and may be concentrated in food chains. New regulatory tribunals [independent of the manufacturers of these chemicals] would be set up to enforce these laws by open procedures, and the public would have access to reports on tests which would be carried out in accordance with published criteria.
- Restrict the manufacture of food-packaging materials made of polyvinyl chloride [which has been shown to migrate to food and liquids, and to cause cancer in humans].

The Values Party is concerned about plans to build a PVC plant at Marsden Point since workers at such plants overseas have ingested polyvinyl chloride and contracted cancer.

The Values Party would

- Ban the manufacture and use of fluorocarbon aerosol sprays because of the strong evidence that they threaten the earth's ozone layer.

- Ban supersonic air transport from operations in New Zealand for the same reason as above and also because this represents the mindlessness of technological "advance" for its own sake.
- Review the use of pesticides and fertilisers because of their threat to plant ecology and human and animal health.
- Subsidise the use of presently known methods of biological control as a substitute for chemical pesticides and actively encourage the search for further alternatives.
- Encourage a reduction in the energy input into agriculture by providing investment finance and research funds for such things as biological controls to replace chemical pesticides, recycling animal manure for fertiliser [for example, from piggeries and cowsheds], and increasing the retention time of fertilisers in the soil.

General

- Give teeth to all environmental legislation and law enforcement.
- Start a continuing multi-faceted public education programme on environmental and ecological matters, especially at all levels in schools.
- Require the Consumers Institute to take into account the ecological effects of relevant products when it publicises recommendations on them.
- Pursue by every available means the establishment of a nuclear free zone in the South Pacific including the elimination of all nuclear testing, whether atmospheric or underground.
- Support the objectives of 'Project Jonah' [an international campaign to prevent the extermination of whales].
- Require the Railways Department to end the use of railway property for rural advertising purposes, thus eliminating most of the ugly roadside hoardings polluting the New Zealand countryside.
- Examine and act on ways of eliminating other rural advertising hoardings which have no relevance to services offered in the immediate locale.
- Conserve New Zealand's natural and scenic resources.

Urban Environment

Many of the problems of the urban environment in New Zealand result from the fact that civil engineers have had too great a say in the way our communities have been designed.

Unlike town planners who are trained in the humanities and in the social impact of community structure, engineers tend to think in fairly mechanistic terms. They give great weight to technical and economic factors which seldom lead to the best use of the land. Many engineering and structural decisions which have a profound impact on the form and living conditions of a community are not subject to planning approval.

While a private home-owner must first gain a planning permit before he can erect a garage on his property, no permission is required for more far-reaching actions like the widening of roads, the installation of traffic lights and pedestrian crossings, the changing or re-routing of public transport routes, the construction of port facilities, and the siting and nature of new power projects.

The planning division of the Ministry of Works was not consulted by the Electricity Department on the Manapouri power project, nor on the various schemes drawn up to flood parts of the Clutha Valley. It was characteristic of the outlook of technicians that the inter-departmental committee which examined the

Electricity Department's Clutha proposals made no attempt to analyse or assess the social effects of the various schemes on communities in the valley - although they dealt at length with the effects upon wildlife.

The Values Party would

- Support the upgrading of the town planner in New Zealand local government.
- Make town planning meet the people's needs rather than those of developers.
- Widen the area of civil engineering and technical decisions subject to development planning approval.

Conservation of Man-Made Resources

Buildings which lend character to our cities and promote a satisfying quality of timelessness are being demolished and replaced at an increasing rate. In the campaign to preserve the natural assets of the country the preservation of man-made amenities is being ignored.

The Wellington district and regional schemes list only a small number of buildings as of historic or scientific interest or worthy of preservation because of natural beauty. A senior lecturer in geography at Auckland University, Mr Warren Moran, has pointed out the pressing need for Auckland to retain older buildings, both single and in larger groups, in a carefully planned and deliberate fashion.

"A city's character - the non-economic reasons for existing - derives partly from its history and the physical presence of buildings of earlier times", he said. "Older buildings give people both a greater sense of identity with the past and of belonging to a particular city."

Both the Town and Country Planning Act, of 1953, and the Historic Places Act require the designation and registration of objects and places of historical or scientific interest or natural beauty, and both seek the preservation of amenities to safeguard the physical and mental health of people. Yet in practice there is little evidence to suggest that the preservation of amenities throughout the country is given any particular emphasis.

The Values Party would

- Promote the preservation of older buildings and public amenities in New Zealand cities in order to preserve the character of the cities and protect them from "progress".
- Support a major increase in the present low financial priority given to the funding of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust which is presently not able to act ambitiously to preserve much of the country's fast-fading historic and architectural heritage.

Building Heights

Tall buildings, remote from any human scale, disturb the skyline of a city and bring shadow and a sense of unreality to our streets. The increasing incidence of high-rise buildings in New Zealand is another disturbing reflection of the belief among architects and

planners that the American model of urban development is identifiable with social progress.

As one Wellington town planner has noted: "It is seldom that individual developers, or the community, consider in any systematic way the visual implications and impact of new developments on the community landscape."

Apart from making cities even more jarring on the senses, tall buildings frequently deprive property-holders and occupants in other buildings of long-held views. In Auckland the Harbour Board's downtown development scheme involves the construction of tall buildings along the waterfront. The Board is blocking off a view of the sea and the North Shore to future generations. It is too late to stop the scheme now.

The Values Party supports

- The introduction of architectural and town planning codes incorporating a system of maximum height controls for buildings, in order to keep building height on a human scale and protect the visual resources of the community.

Visual Quality

One of the features of New Zealand suburbs which has tended to reduce their visual quality and make them less congenial environments is the excessive width of most roads, even in areas of low traffic use. This another example of the undue weight given to the accommodation of vehicular traffic.

Narrower streets bring houses closer together and tend to foster an atmosphere of intimacy instead of isolation.

One of the most depressing aspects of urban sprawl in New Zealand, especially in Auckland and Christchurch, is the monotony of housing design and land use. Houses of similar appearance tend to be sited in exactly the same manner in the middle of properties for street after street.

The code of ordinances contained in the Town and Country Planning Act is fairly rigid and encourages the positioning of houses in the middle of sections. This is a powerful factor in the monotonous appearance of suburbia. The ordinances were designed to encourage this style of land use for technical reasons which are no longer very relevant.

In order to slow the development of new suburbs and cater for the desire of many young people to live in more homely dwellings, the Housing Corporation would be instructed to allow general lending for the purchase of old houses as well as new ones.

A more liberal loans policy should be adopted by the Housing Corporation in respect of applicants who wish to build homes of unusual design. The design of State houses should be more imaginative than has generally been the case.

The Values Party would

- Support a reconsideration of planning practices regarding road-width in order to halt the tendency towards wide roads with their damaging effect on visual quality and human interaction.
- Review the code of ordinances contained in the Town and Country Planning Act in order to allow greater flexibility in the siting of houses on properties.
- Support a large increase in Government financial assistance to those homeowners wishing to renovate and upgrade older dwellings. Assistance for this form of urban renewal - the only generally acceptable one to most residents - would be on a suspensory loan system.

For other policies affecting the appearance of residential areas, see the chapter on Housing.)

Conclusion

The environment is a system which includes all living things and the air, water and soil, which is their habitat. This system must have unity and stability. Man is not lord of this system - he is merely an integral part of it.

Environmental concern is not a luxury - it is a necessity. There is a crisis impending which as yet no New Zealand government has clearly recognised. Crucial decisions must be made soon at governmental level if this crisis is to be averted.

Yet our government still looks at environmental problems in a piecemeal fashion, concentrating on cure rather than prevention. It has still no adequate machinery for looking at food, environmental disruption, energy, resources, and social disruption as a whole. What is happening already in Europe and America can happen here; what is already happening here is part of a general global pattern.

"By now it should be clear that the main problems of the environment do not arise from temporary and accidental malfunction of existing economic and social systems. On the contrary, they are the warning signs of a profound incompatibility between deeply-rooted beliefs in continuous growth and the dawning recognition of the earth as a space-ship, limited in its resources and vulnerable to thoughtless mishandling. The nature of our responses to these symptoms is crucial."

("A Blueprint for Survival": The Ecologist.)

