

# The Status of Women

"Discrimination against women is incompatible with human dignity and with the welfare of the family and of society, prevents their participation on equal terms with men in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries and is an obstacle to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity"

## **-United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women**

The Values Party supports the work of the UN Commission on the status of women and endorses the UN aims in designating this year as International Women's Year. We believe it is time that the status of women be considered an important priority in New Zealand politics and have taken the initiative by offering a comprehensive policy in this chapter of our party's manifesto.

However we would not be content with raising the status of women simply on male terms. We aim also to raise the status of traditional women's values which have stressed co-operation rather than competition, nurturing, healing, and cherishing instead of exploiting, destroying and conquering, and peace instead of conflict. We agree with Matthew Arnold that "if ever the world sees a time when women shall come together purely and simply for the benefit and good of mankind, it will be a power such as the world has never known".

We hope that International Women's Year will be that time but stress that it "must not benefit only a small minority of women, conferring on them a spurious and privileged equality in an unequal world. If International Women's Year becomes obsessed by this kind of equality - equality for the few inside the old structures at the expense of many and of the possibility of new structures - it will be irrelevant to the vast majority of women" ("New Internationalist" Jan. 1975.)

We therefore ask New Zealand women to broaden their women's movement so that "it does not simply seek admission to a system which is itself leading the world into despair" (Ibid). We commend to them all our party's policies for building an alternative system which would stress values that women have traditionally perceived were more important than those which currently prevail.

The Values Party's policy on the status of women is based on five premises:

- there are biological differences between men and women but far too much has been made of them and they do not justify a vast and inequitable system of discrimination against women throughout society;
- no human qualities should be culturally labelled "male" or "female". We want to create a cultural environment where all qualities can come out in all people;
- each individual person has a right to find out the kind

of person she or he is, to strive to become that person and to choose in what capacity she or he will serve society. Society should offer the same opportunities and encouragement to all to realise their individual potential;

-in a truly equal society women would be in a position comparable to men in that they would be able to combine occupational and other roles with those of spouse and parent. Men and women should share equally the responsibility for home and children;

-every time we liberate a woman we liberate a man ... We need the imagination, dedication, and creativity of everyone ... for a mutually respecting and supportive planetary society." (Dr Margaret Mead.)

## **Education at Home**

New Zealand society is characterised by a sexual version of apartheid. From the beginning children are taught concepts of masculinity and femininity, both deliberately and unconsciously. A girl's attention is directed in and on herself and the home. A boy is conditioned to look out to society and the world. Initiative, aggression and competitive instincts are strongly fostered in male children; tenderness, self control and flexibility in female children.

Girls are encouraged to be decorative, helpful and clean. Boys are encouraged to be adventurous, curious and rough. Girls have different toys and different books from boys. Relatively few toys are usually given to children of both sexes. Books for children reflect the same bias. Many studies show that two thirds of story books feature boys compared with one third featuring girls in both illustrations and text.

Education in sex roles outside of formal education is the main influence in keeping the status of women low. It is not so much that it controls a woman's alternatives but rather her motivation to choose any but one of those alternatives. As a result, half the population is under-rated, under-encouraged and under-achieving. How many potentially effective human beings can we afford to suppress in the name of traditional role playing?



### The Values Party would

- Reorient education to emphasise cooperation, caring, sharing and the worth of every child rather than achievement and competition.
- Foster the idea of partnership in marriage and childrearing at all levels of education, stressing role equality and sharing of responsibility.
- Encourage all people by means of a Government-sponsored publicity campaign to avoid sex stereotyping in the rearing and education of children.

### Education at School

By the time children start school they have already been burdened with an enormous load of traditional masculine and feminine lore - how a man should behave, what a woman should be. Stereotyping is less blatant in the school system and is effected more by individual teachers and the pupils' own peers than by the system itself. Nevertheless, education for girls differs in extent and substance from education for boys.

Girls observe that women predominate at the lower levels of the school system and men at the higher levels. They are more likely to have a male head of their school than a female. They do better academically at school than boys until puberty, yet leave school earlier with fewer qualifications. They take different subjects at secondary school. Fewer of them go on to tertiary education and again, those who do, take different subjects and degrees from those taken by most men.

Although in theory, educational opportunities are as available to girls as to boys, the assumptions made by pupils, teachers and parents seriously limit the girls' education.

Boys know education is relevant to them: they know they will have to get a job and work most of their lives; they fear failure. School seems less relevant to a girl once she has been taught that her main interest is supposed to be in the home and her main aim is to attract a man. Failure is less important to her as there is always the escape route of marriage.

From the day she starts school to the day she leaves a girl can assume she will receive approval for what she is (as an object) rather than for what she does (as a subject).



Academic success can restrict the number of marriage partners available to her and so the motivation of older female students to achieve is less than that of their male peers.

Education at school will continue to be inadequate in preparing girls for careers and parenthood for as long as society fosters different expectations for each sex and the belief that sex roles must differ for men and women.

### The Values Party would

- Ensure that all trainee teachers received instruction in how to perceive and counteract sex stereotyping of their pupils.
- Encourage teachers to pay particular attention to motivating adolescent girls to achieve and to resist social pressures which could discourage them from training for possibly life-long careers.
- Attach pre-schools where possible to secondary schools to enable students of both sexes to be involved in practical family life education which completely avoided role stereotyping.
- Encourage more men to be involved in education ideally to reach a staff ratio of 50:50 with women at all levels.
- Eliminate sex bias from teaching materials and school books.
- Make all subjects, courses, sports facilities, and cultural amenities equally available to both sexes at all levels of education.
- Make co-educational schools the norm at all levels of schooling.
- Provide an integrated manual training scheme for all primary children.
- Amend social studies curricula to stress adequately the achievement of women, and the history of women as a social group.
- Promote opportunities for work experience in a wide range of occupations in a greater number of schools.
- Expand and improve the vocational guidance counselling service so that it does not channel girls into lower-paid, less responsible, less challenging work, or discourage boys from entering fields traditionally reserved for women.

### Education after schooling

Education for sex roles extends beyond school into adulthood and continues until death. As reality often does not match the expectations girls have about marriage or boys about work, adults of both sexes need constant assurances and admonitions to bolster up the crumbling walls of the old stereotypes.

The mass media do a lot of role reinforcing. Advertisements show passive, obliging, dependent women, always child-like, slim and decorative, often in competition with other women and envying them. Men are shown as strong, successful, able to own status symbols, admired by women, knowledgeable, cool and efficient.

It is ironic that a society which is so geared to sex roles makes such poor provision for the women whose opportunities for continuing education are restricted by childbearing and domestic responsibilities.

### The Values Party would

- Discourage all advertising, especially on television, which undermined and insulted women's integrity, intelligence or sexuality.
- Disseminate more information about facilities and opportunities for continuing education.
- Provide more free education for adults especially those whose opportunities have been restricted by domestic responsibilities.
- Extend bursaries to part-time tertiary students.

- Article 23 [3] in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ... ensuring an existence worthy of human dignity."
- That Government or community expenditure should be diverted towards paying for the essential care and cost of the sick, disabled, handicapped, old and young.

In the long term, a Values Government would implement a national minimum income scheme which would provide for actual payments to be made to those working usefully without proper remuneration by society, additional to the income which belonged to everyone by right (see Economics policy).

In the meantime, we believe that a fair wage, broadly graded according to actual work done and actual responsibility carried, should be paid by the State to every person irrespective of sex who works in the home or within the community caring part-time or full-time for a person who is partially or totally dependent for reasons of age and/or physical or mental health and who would otherwise be a charge upon the State. This wage would not include remuneration for any housework other than that generated by the dependants they are being employed to care for.

### The Values Party believes

- Reasonable payments should be made to parents who by law and necessity are required to teach their own children under the guidance of the Correspondence School [children in remote areas who cannot be sent to school must be enrolled in the correspondence school by the age of seven, although most are enrolled at five and the mothers must act as unpaid teachers, spending about five hours a day supervising and teaching them. About 600 New Zealand women are in this position.]
- The experience gained by persons in bringing up a family and in voluntary work should be taken into account where relevant by employers [especially the Public Service].
- Financial assistance should be given to individual voluntary workers in such form as tax exemptions for the use of private vehicles.
- Community centres should be established which could provide scope for voluntary bodies to strengthen and expand their activities which otherwise will diminish as improving employment conditions attract increasing numbers of women into alternative paid work.



### Childbirth and Health

The twentieth century has seen an enormous improvement in the health of women in most countries, primarily because of new birth control technology. Previously, many women spent most of their lives pregnant or breast feeding. They died early, their bodies worn out by continual childbirth - often they died in childbirth.

Their new freedom to choose parenthood or not has enabled women to seek more personal freedom in other areas of their lives too. For more detail on the relevance of the new birth control technology see the section on fertility control in the chapter "Individual Freedom", (which deals with sex education, contraception, sterilisation, and abortion).

Our policies on women's health are based on our belief that all persons should have as much say as possible over what happens to their bodies.

We disapprove of the degree to which childbirth has been institutionalised and depersonalised.

### The Values Party recommends

- More real attempts to prepare women in the techniques of natural childbirth and an overall humanising of the process.
- Re-education of all professions involved in the provision of obstetrical services to give real support and encouragement to women who want more control and understanding of their bodies during childbirth.
- That hospitals cease discriminating against single mothers in such matters as who they receive as visitors.
- Total revision of New Zealand maternity services giving mothers the first and last say.
- Support for the "pregnant patients" bill of rights at present being advocated throughout New Zealand.
- Better provision for home deliveries and for counselling in breast feeding.
- Medical research into women's health should receive at least the same degree of financial assistance as that into the area of general health. At present too many so-called "women's problems" are simply accepted as a fact of life, not to be remedied.
- The medical world not assume so often that women's specific health problems are neurotic in origin. This assumption may cause a doctor to be less sympathetic than should be expected and may in some cases result in inadequate treatment of the physical ailment.
- Measures be introduced towards achieving a balanced ratio of women in the medical and para-medical professions and at all decision-making levels in the health service.
- There be more health care counselling and referral services in clinics located in community centres.
- The cost of breast prostheses be included under Social Security as an artificial aid benefit.

We are concerned that the incidence of mental breakdown in New Zealand is substantially higher among women than men as evidenced by the high ratio of women to men in admittances to mental hospitals and the high proportion of women in total attempted suicides. "Research ... has related this situation to depression caused by the pressures of domestic and social conditions on women, particularly those fully engaged in the home ... (and those) in the childbearing age group." Report of the NZ Select Committee on Women's Rights, June 1975, p.81.

The Values Party believes all its policies on the status of women would reduce these pressures and improve these conditions.

### **Marriage and Divorce**

The Values Party would discourage all practices resulting from regulations, orders, stipulations, awards and rulings which assume that women, especially married women, have only dependent status or which assume that women are financially irresponsible and not credit-worthy or that breadwinners are necessarily male (for example the Housing Corporation defines the breadwinner as the male spouse if he is capable of working).

### **The Values Party would**

- Outlaw discrimination against women in the provision of all goods and services including grants, mortgages, loans, credit finance, banking and insurance facilities: in particular outlaw the practice of requiring women wishing to undertake a financial commitment to provide a male guarantor or the signature of a husband.
- Condense the Matrimonial Property Act, Domestic Proceedings Act and Matrimonial Proceedings Act into one Domestic Act written with a marriage contract attached as a schedule to it; this contract to set out all legal obligations of each spouse.
- Amend legislation so that there be no obligation of one spouse to support the other financially; their joint obligation to support children to be set out, including procedures to be followed in the event of separation. Another schedule would become operative if the couple had a child or children and one partner stayed at home to care for them.
- Amend the Domestic Actions Bill to support the abolition of actions which treat women as chattels.
- Amend the law so that irreconcilable break-down of a marriage would be the only grounds for divorce.
- Base divorce settlements on the principle that a couple should generally be entitled to equal interest in matrimonial property [especially a joint family home] whether each person's contribution was in monetary form or not.
- Provide more legal aid for women whose husbands have far greater financial resources and who are at a disadvantage when they face the protracted legal proceedings which can follow from the application of the matrimonial and domestic laws. Women should have the same chance to state their case as a male breadwinner.
- Make sickness and unemployment benefits the same for married persons of either sex as for single persons.

### **Maori Women**

The Values Party is particularly concerned by the effect of urbanisation on Maori women. Since 1971 the rate of urbanisation has risen from 25 to 70 per cent of the total.

Maori women marry younger, start bearing children earlier, bear larger numbers of children, and stop childbearing later.

Since Maori families are larger and their breadwinners' wages lower, Maori women are being forced to work at a crucial stage in their children's lives in order to supplement the family income. 24.7 per cent (1971) of all married Maori women work. They tend to be younger than their counterparts and they work between pregnancies. Their earnings are extremely low mainly because of the fact that 89 per cent of them have no qualifications.

The Values Party believes that its policies on the status of women and on race relations would greatly reduce the social and economics pressures on Maori women.

### **Changing the law**

Previous sections present policy to:

- prevent the more blatant forms of discrimination against women in New Zealand society;
- create a cultural environment where the equal status of women and of traditional women's values can be achieved.

In addition to the provisions in policies given above, general legislation is needed to bring New Zealand law into conformity with international instruments relating to the status of women.

Much of our law has developed from the basis of Victorian male attitudes which were paternalistic and protective towards women, relegating them to a position of dependence. Such attitudes persist among members of the public and cannot be changed overnight but there is no reason for any delay in altering all New Zealand laws developed on such an unjustifiable basis. Such alterations will promote the changes needed in attitudes throughout our society, especially if complemented by educative action.

### **The Values Party would**

- Examine, alter and add to all existing legislation with a view to detecting and eliminating all legal disabilities of, and discrimination against, persons on the basis of sex, marital status, or sexual preference, and prescribe sanctions against discriminatory practices.

Machinery is needed to enforce all such new legislation.

- Set up an office similar to that of the ombudsman to examine and remedy discrimination against persons on the basis of sex, marital status, or sexual preference, in particular infringements of the Equal Pay Act. Holders of office must have the power to prosecute and the complainant should be able to approach them directly. Another function of this office would be to inform and educate the public on the implications of equality for women.
- Recommend that all Government departments examine practices which discriminate against persons on the basis of their sex, marital status, or sexual preference, or which treat women in a paternalistic manner.
- Support legislative amendments to the effect that in cases of rape, the woman's sexual experience, apart from that with the person being prosecuted, should not be admissible evidence - the complainant be referred to only as Ms X; all names be suppressed until a conviction is entered.
- Make provision in the Superannuation Act for women who do not work for money [such as farmers' wives].
- Extend the Joint Family Homes Act to cover farm houses.

### **Power**

It is a fact that power in most of the forms that matter in our society - in government, in commerce, in religion, in community status - plus the power of wealth, weapons, and the press is largely in men's hands in New Zealand.

- Ensure that more part-time tertiary courses were available and that existing courses [for example at Massey] were better publicised.
- Provide more opportunity for parents returning to the work force to train for a different occupation or to familiarise themselves with their previous occupation.
- Establish more courses to give greater confidence to older parents re-entering the workforce at technical institutes in the main cities.
- Encourage firms to retrain people in technical skills outside those traditionally accepted as suitable for their sex.
- Establish a permanent system of education through television for the benefit of home-bound spouses.

### Employment of Women

The Values Party sees no reason in terms of inherent qualities why a woman should not be able to undertake any job for which she is qualified and to be successful in that job. Yet historically women have been employed in large numbers only when there is a shortage of male workers or where it is cheaper to pay women than men.

New Zealand has a shortage of skilled labour which it prefers to relieve by means of immigration. The Values Party would however look to the vast segments of our indigenous population which are employed below their potential (and sometimes below their skill, particularly when re-entering the workforce). Most of these are women.

Women in employment are generally unskilled or semi-skilled, doing jobs with minimal responsibility and jobs which are mechanical, repetitive and boring ("that men couldn't be expected to do"). The number of occupations effectively open to women is limited - men dominate factory, transport and agricultural jobs while women hold by far the greatest proportion of clerical and service jobs.

### The Values Party would

- Eliminate separate labour markets for men and women.
- Prohibit the advertising of situations vacant in which sex is specified even though irrelevant to the position.

### Recommend all employers to:

- Place advertisements where both men and women will read them.
- Depict both men and women on the job in career literature.
- Reach both men and women on recruiting trips.
- Standardise interview practices for men and women applicants, so that both are asked the same questions.

### Equal pay

Over the last three censuses the annual median income for female workers has been only half the level for males. This will be somewhat improved when the Equal Pay Act is fully implemented in 1977.

However, although equal pay has been in force for years in the Public Service, women still occupy lower rather than higher grades. Unless New Zealand is careful its equal pay legislation could fail by default as has happened elsewhere, especially with regard to the effects of fringe benefits (such as gratuities, low-interest home loans, medical and pension schemes) and job reclassification on real earning differentials.

The issue of equal pay is neatly side-stepped also in fields where certain positions are always filled by women.

The Values Party believes that in determining fair rates of pay in occupations filled mainly by women, notional male rates must be based on what employers would have to pay male employees recruited from the labour pool in any given region, and based also on job evaluations which have been carried out scientifically rather than by rule of thumb.

### The Values Party would establish a public relations campaign through the Labour Department to

- Allay the fears of both employers and employees regarding the implications of the Equal Pay Act.
- Re-educate employers with outdated prejudiced attitudes regarding the employment of women [for example "that men are more committed to their work than women"].
- Make employers more aware of the advantages to themselves of employing more women [for example, publicise the low female turnover rate compared with that for males employed in freezing works, the superior planting rates of women forestry workers, the dexterity of women in occupations such as carpet-weaving].
- Seek trade union understanding and support for changes in the pattern of women's employment.

### Conditions of work

Fair pay must be accompanied by fair conditions. The reason some occupations, previously filled exclusively by men, are now accepting women, is often because the poor conditions are not attracting enough male applicants. In order to improve working conditions for both men and women.

### The Values Party would

- Apply protective legislation [for example regarding hours of work, toilet and resting facilities, heavy lifting which might injure employees] equally to both sexes where it was necessary.
- Remove from all orders, awards, industrial agreements and statutory regulations any clauses of specific disadvantage to either sex.
- Require that policies of fringe benefits, leave entitlements, marriage allowances, travel opportunities, job training, increased responsibility, extra duties [for example, tea-making, shifting furniture] and retirement age, affecting employees be extended to all employees irrespective of sex.

### Promotion

With regard to promotion opportunities and practices,

### The Values Party would require that

- Employers consider all eligible applicants irrespective of their sex for each promotion vacancy.
- Separate salary ceilings for men and women be eliminated.
- All transfer expenses and assistance including housing and costs of moving family be equally available to both sexes.
- Employers levy no duties and make no demands [for example, dress, behaviour, right to take a job] on the spouses of any of their employees unless they are prepared to bring them into remunerative employment on an ordinary part-time or casual basis [for example, wives of diplomats, politicians, executives].

### Making up the leeway

It will take some time before new promotion practices alter the domination of men in executive positions and the marked absence of women from senior positions





in all fields. Remedial measures are needed to help women who have been employed for some time to compensate for past lack of opportunity.

#### **The Values Party would recommend that employers**

- Offer special in-service training and accelerated promotion to women who have been held back by past policy.
- Endow women's scholarships and traineeships in trades or professions where women are under-represented [a special stress on management training may be indicated].
- Credit women's past service towards benefits for which they have just been made eligible.
- Appoint a special staff member to deal with women's interests until the firm has eliminated discrimination.
- Educate all existing staff on intended changes in such a way that acceptance and understanding is hastened.
- Set quotas of women in all occupations and promotional levels and attempt to fill them [for example, by recruiting selectively in places where women are to be reached].

#### **Workers outside normal employment**

Much valuable and productive work is done for society by workers who receive no remuneration for their work. In many cases such people are therefore forced to become themselves dependent on the charity or generosity of a friend, relative, spouse, or sexual partner, despite the fact that they are healthy, sane, adult and working both fulltime and overtime.

Hundreds of thousands of women are just such workers, caring for dependants, supervising pupils of the correspondence school, and doing voluntary social

work. The late Mr N. E. Kirk said (26.6.73) "If the homemaker's sister goes out to work, she gets paid at the same rate as men. Where is the economic justice in motherhood and for the homemaker?" Although jobs done by women in normal employment are usually socially lower-rated and less prestigious, the job of housewife is at the bottom of the pile - very low social status, no leave, no sickness benefit, no superannuation, and no income-related accident compensation (though the home is eight times as dangerous as a farm and six times as dangerous as a factory).

Society praises the role of the mother in nurturing and caring for her family yet fails to give her any real support in performing this function and penalises her for the rest of her life for having done it. Even the most unskilled full-time paid job carried occupational benefits in contrast to which the housewife caring for dependants, on whose physical and mental resources enormous demands are made, is in the unique position of having no call on standard conditions of employment.

The Values Party believes that whatever role a woman chooses it should be freely chosen on the basis that it will not place her at any disadvantage compared with other sections of the community.

#### **We endorse these principles**

- That every person irrespective of sex who does socially useful work should receive a fair living wage.

All magistrates (bar one) and judges, almost all ministers of religion, business executives and university professors, most academics and professionals, most of the armed forces and mass media, and most of the owners of resources in New Zealand are men.

Women are for the most part absent from union meetings, trade councils and the annual conference of the Federation of Labour. They have always been totally absent from the National Executive of the Federation of Labour, and the teams representing New Zealand at the annual I.L.O. Conferences.

In our parliament, 83 out of 87 seats are held by men, yet men are only 48.7 per cent of the population. There were no women in parliament at all until 1933 even though women got the vote in 1893 and have been able to stand for Parliament since 1919.

#### The Values Party would

- Promote measures to ensure more women applicants are appointed to public office, especially with regard to judicial and magisterial appointments.
- Revise the Juries Act with a view to putting jury service for women on a par with jury service for men.
- Encourage all clubs and other organisations to provide access to their facilities to women on the same basis as for men, where sex does not justify exclusion.
- Recommend that all political parties give special encouragement and special assistance to female candidates to help them overcome difficulties and prejudices and that they select all candidates on merit regardless of sex.
- Urge the Federation of Labour and all Trade Unions to promote actively the full participation of women at all levels of trade union activity.
- Encourage the full participation of women at all levels of decision-making in all sectors of society.



Photo, Ian Bilson