

Local Government

Participatory democracy requires that decisions be made at the lowest practicable level. For too long local bodies have been concerned with just drains, roads and footpaths. We think they should be equally concerned with the wider social needs of the community which have to date been left to a distant bureaucracy.

Acquisition of new powers by local government is required especially in the social field, with a consequent reduction in the functions and size of central government (see "Government Reform"). Decentralisation of the control of housing, health, welfare and education to regional bodies will ensure that these services would react more readily to local needs and that those directly affected by such services will have a greater say in their management.

Organisation

There are 670 local bodies and ad hoc authorities in New Zealand. The boundaries for most have been drawn on historical bases which are now well out of date. Powers and duties often overlap, and there is an absence of any coherent planning and coordination.

The Values Party would

- Support the rationalisation of local bodies into Regional Councils, District or City Councils and Community Councils as envisaged in the Local Government Act, 1974.
- Encourage the establishment of ward systems for those city and district councils where such a system does not already exist.
- Bring Harbour Boards under the control of regional government.
- Abolish the ratepayers' poll, so that the only qualification for voting at local body elections becomes a residential one.

Finance

Almost all local body revenues are raised by a system of rating on property. This system is an archaic remnant of the Land Taxes which were the source of practically all government revenue in colonial days. Rates are inequitable for the following reasons:

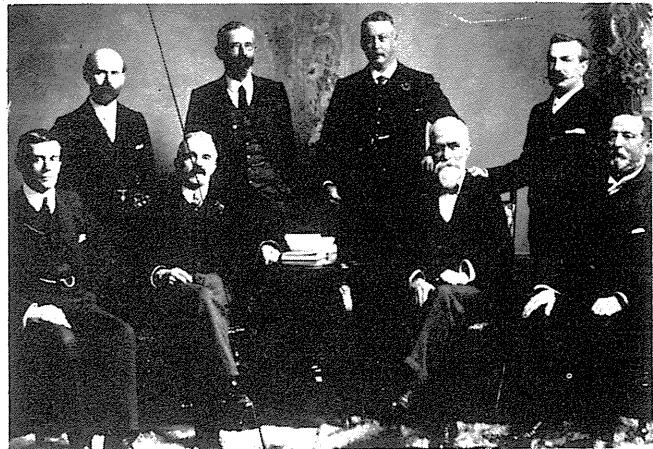
- unlike income tax, rates are not paid according to means. They are paid according to the value of the land and this may increase with inflation, changes of zoning and so on, while the occupier's income may not increase at all;
- although every citizen uses the amenities provided by local bodies, not all citizens pay rates. Generally rates do not take account of the number of people living on a property.

The Values Party would

- Abolish rates on residential property and substitute a local income tax set by regional and city or district councils and collected by central government concurrently with national income tax.

This means of collecting local body revenues would have the following advantages over the existing rating system:

it would be paid according to means. Those on low incomes, especially pensioners, would pay a great deal less than they now pay in rates;
the burden of local body finance would fall on all



income earners rather than just those owning property;

- the administrative costs of collecting local body finance would be substantially reduced.

Community

We see local authorities as the most important means of fostering a sense of community and a feeling of involvement, which is lacking in our society at the present time.

The Values Party would

- Develop a National Recreation Plan to determine local, regional and national responsibilities.
- Encourage local authorities to set up community centres in consultation with local community councils providing such facilities as advice bureaux; day care centres, sports and cultural amenities; homework centres, offices for Family Planning, Plunket and a community based policeman, a hall and meeting rooms.
- Encourage local authorities to employ community social workers who would work in the field in close liaison with community advice bureaux and existing social welfare agencies.
- Encourage local authorities to set up branch offices in local communities with specialist staff in attendance, at least on a part-time basis.
- Encourage local authorities to give employees the opportunity to spend working time [one day a month, for example] on community service.
- Encourage local authorities to pay a fulltime salary to mayors and committee chairmen where necessary, and pay an adequate honorarium to councillors to enable a wider cross-section of the community to stand for office.
- Encourage local authorities to publicise meetings and agenda widely.
- Require Public Notices to be written in easily understandable language.
- Encourage local authorities to prepare with public participation a full register of objects, buildings and sites of historic, scientific, architectural or environmental value and to budget for the maintenance or gradual acquisition of property on this register.

The profit motive of private land developers has proved to be inconsistent with the interests of the community. The activities of these developers have resulted in "scorched earth" subdivisions designed to reap the best monetary return for the developer rather than develop a congenial environment for those who will live there. Natural amenities are frequently totally destroyed in the interests of the developer.

Giving sole power to regional and local government will ensure development of subdivisions in the interest of the people who will live in them. It will also result in cheaper section costs by avoiding the situation where rural land prices soar on a change of zoning, since local bodies would be able to purchase land at the rural valuation.

The Values Party would

- Encourage local authorities to update building ordinances to allow more flexibility in the use of materials and construction methods, and to enable the construction of groups of dwellings on a "community" concept with common facilities.
- Require mayors, councillors and those standing for office to make full disclosure of relevant financial interests.
- Provide a major increase in financial support to local bodies for the construction of sewage treatment plants.
- Encourage local authorities to amend bylaws to permit the use of properly serviced septic tanks where it is environmentally sound to do so.
- Allow local residents' associations to appear before the Town and Country Planning Appeal Board in order to object to proposals.
- Make the Town and Country Act binding on the Crown.

