Technology and the Future

The speed with which western societies are changing is a consequence not just of naturally evolving ideas and attitudes but also of technological innovation that is too often applied without due consideration for its impact on the human spirit, on our cultures and on our way of life.

Advanced technology has been instrumental in the development of the inhuman nature of modern society. It has also been closely involved with the breakdown of the living environment which supports human life, and has been heavily responsible for the inroads being made into the world's non-renewable resources (particularly fossil fuels).

A primary task of technology is to lighten the burden of work we have to carry in order to stay alive and develop our potentials. However, this has not worked out in practice and one economist has remarked "the amount of real leisure a society enjoys tends to be in inverse proportion to the amount of labour saving machinery it employs".

Modern technology does reduce and sometimes eliminate some work. But often it deprives us of the type of work we enjoy most - creative useful work which uses both our hands and our brains. Modern technology has replaced this with processes of production which are joyless and boring.

We need a different kind of technology, a technology which, instead of making human hands and brains redundant, helps them to become more productive. This will not come easily, for anyone can make things complicated but it takes a certain flair and real insight to make things simple again.

The Values Party believes it is both reasonable and possible to give a new direction to technological development, a direction that will lead it back to the real needs of all people, by continually exploring the possibilities of smaller scale, more labour intensive technologies.

Many developments in the scientific pipeline or in the introductory stages overseas are likely to have a considerable impact on society and we must either prepare ourselves for them or reject them.

Somebody ought to be worrying now about their ethical, cultural and environmental implications and their long-term effects.

Associated with this technology assessment there should be ongoing study of future directions and paths open to New Zealand in its development and way of life. There should be an independent board asking basic questions and challenging conventional ideas about "progress" and development.

Such a body could liaise and co-operate with the Consumers' Institute, social scientists, and trade union and occupational groups in order to gather and disseminate information. It should be constituted so that it could receive public complaints and, if necessary, hold hearings. Its main role would be an educative one, though it could recommend to the government rejection of a technology if such a technology was under government control. If any production or consumer technology was felt to be socially harmful, the board would have the power and facilities to mobilise public support to gain its modification or its outright rejection. It should be funded by government but be completely independent It would be something like a technology ombudsman.

The Values Party would

- Encourage action by the United Nations to establish a body to keep technological and scientific development under close observation.
- Support the establishment of a Futures Institute to charge future paths and options open to New Zealand in terms of its broad development.
- Support the establishment of a Science and Technology Assessment Board in New Zealand to assess the effects on society of technologies likely to be introduced into this country in the future.