

The History of The Green Party

Origins

In May 1972 a meeting at Victoria University, Wellington, launched the Values

The party contested the 1972 general election, with radical new policies such as: population growth and promoted reform of laws covering abortion, drugs and ho

These policies formed the world's first Green election manifesto 'Blueprint for New Zealand - An Alternative Future'.

Over the next three years Green policies were further debated, developed and expanded to create 'Beyond Tomorrow', the 1975 Values Party manifesto. This comprehensive statement of Green politics was widely distributed overseas and contributed to the development of Green parties elsewhere.

The Values Party achieved 5.3% of the vote in 1975 which, under an MMP system, would have earned it seats in Parliament. Unfortunately under the First Past the Post constituency-based system Values was never able to concentrate its vote in one electorate and thus could not win even one seat.

Despite a large and active membership, and a very professional election campaign in 1978, its vote dropped to just over 2% as voters attempted (unsuccessfully) to rid the country of conservative Prime Minister Rob Muldoon by voting Labour.

In 1979 Values was also torn by internal debate about its political orientation with an Auckland-led environmentalist faction and a Christchurch-led socialist/unionist faction. Those strands are still there in the contemporary Green Party but they are in concert rather than opposition.

It was difficult inventing Green politics before the term 'Green' was even coined (which came in 1980 when the German Greens contested their first national level election). But Green politics saw successes in New Zealand during that time, as many Values Party members came from or were heavily involved in 'movement' politics - particularly the peace movement, the women's movement, and the environment movement.

Values made major contributions of people, money, time and effort to the anti-nuclear movement, in both its anti-war and anti-power branches, largely running the Campaign Half Million petition and the Campaign for a Non-nuclear Future. Both were successful and New Zealand is a nuclear free zone.

Values members lead major environmental campaigns to stop excessive hydro-electric development and polluting, industrial growth. At the local level they were behind numerous campaigns for better public transport and cycleways, for recycling and reuse of waste, for urban heritage preservation and restoration, and for co-operative enterprises.

The Values Party also had the first female Deputy Leader of a New Zealand political party (Cathy Wilson, 1974) and the first female Leader (Margaret Crozier, 1979), and the first 'out' gay candidate (Robin Duff, 1978).

Between 1981 and 1989 the Values/Green Party existed largely in spirit rather than in practice. But in 1989 there was a revival of the Green impulse and Greens contested local body elections throughout New Zealand, with several successes.

The 1990s and the first Green Party campaign

In May 1990 the current Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand was formed from Values and the new Green groups, and contested the 1990 general election six months later, winning 7% of the total vote or nearly 9% in those seats where it stood candidates.

The Greens became foundation members of the four-party Alliance (Greens, NLP, Democrat and Mana Motuhake) in 1992, linking with other parties that also wanted electoral reform and opposed the New Right direction of both National and Labour. The Liberals joined later, making it a five-party Alliance.

In 1992 Jeanette Fitzsimons was elected Deputy Leader of the Alliance and when the Greens decided to elect leaders in 1995, she was elected alongside Rod Donald. (The Party had previously had four speakers.)

The Greens contributed to Alliance policy development, by championing environmentally-sustainable economic development and helped the Alliance contest the 1993 and 1996 general elections. It was in 1996 that the first Green MPs - Jeanette Fitzsimons, Rod Donald, and Phillida Bunkle - took their seats in Parliament. By then there were also more than 20 Green representatives at local government level, including Dunedin Mayor Sukhi Turner.

As at date of publication
Archive

conferences
used
Parliamentary
Library
source

In November 1997 the Green Party left the Alliance and stood a separate list in the 1999 election. The Green Co-Leaders honoured their pledge to remain members of the Alliance caucus until the House rose to begin campaigning in 1999, while Phillida Bunkle chose to leave the Greens and stay with the Alliance.

In 1998 the Greens began developing separate policy from the Alliance, and policy themes for the election campaign were safe food, nature conservation and strong communities. A two-goal strategy was also agreed. The first goal was for Jeanette Fitzsimons to win the seat of Coromandel. The second goal was to win more than 5% of the party vote, the threshold for representation in Parliament. In the event that the Party failed to reach 5%, a Green victory in Coromandel would at least ensure that there were some Greens in Parliament.

The 1999 election campaign started with nothing - no campaign chest, no staff, no material resources, and with the Greens polling at less than 1%. Its main resources were the Green Co-Leaders, MPs Rod Donald and Jeanette Fitzsimons, who worked enormously hard to raise the Green profile. Genetic engineering proved a good publicity platform with major news breaks on secret GE trials in NZ. The Green petition for a Royal Commission of Inquiry into GE gathered 93,000 signatures.

The Greens were further helped by National setting the election date as late as possible and with its intemperate attacks on Green candidates Jeanette Fitzsimons, Sue Bradford and Nandor Tanczos. The attacks raised the Party profile more effectively than the limited paid publicity the Greens could afford, and attracted late enrolments from young people and other previous non-voters.

Yet by the middle of 1999 the Greens had just started to consistently poll over 1% and were still way short of the necessary 5%. This made media coverage difficult. By the end of October 1999, however, the tide began to turn. Polls showed Jeanette could take Coromandel, and 5% was within sight.

On election night, November 27, neither goal was reached. An agonising ten-day wait followed, while special votes were counted. These votes tipped the balance and Jeanette won Coromandel (the first Green in the world to win a constituency seat in a first-past-the-post race).

The Party vote finalised at 5.2%, and seven Green MPs (Jeanette Fitzsimons, Rod Donald, Ian Ewen-Street, Sue Bradford, Sue Kedgley, Nandor Tanczos and Keith Locke) took their seats in the new parliament.

2000: The Green Party enters Parliament

The Greens began to negotiate with the new Labour/Alliance coalition Government for a co-operation agreement that would ensure the Government Green support while providing the Greens with access to Government information and budget initiatives. An agreement was drafted, and discussed several times by Green and Labour representatives, but never signed. The Greens found out much later that the Alliance did not want to improve Green access to government information and/or influence on government, and so put the brakes on the agreement. Despite no formal agreement with the Government, the Greens began to make their mark in Parliament.

- The Party set a new milestone in New Zealand politics by negotiating a \$15 million 'green' package in the first Labour/Alliance budget. This included spending on organics, energy efficiency, legal aid and other assistance for environmental organisations, biosecurity, smoking cessation programmes as well as complementary health planning and natural resource accounts.
- The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Genetic Modification that the Greens had campaigned for was set up and began hearings in October 2000.
- The first Green act - the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act - was also passed. This act was first introduced as a member's bill by Jeanette in 1998, and gained majority support.

The Green Party's public profile also increased, with opinion polls in 2000 reaching 7%. From mid-year the Greens generally polled as the third most popular party, overtaking the Alliance and ACT.

By the end of the year the seven Green MPs had made an impact on Parliament out of proportion to their numbers, and on December 7 2000 the Party celebrated its first anniversary in the House (Green Day) in a way not possible on election night 1999.

Among other things, it was important to celebrate the difference the Greens made to parliamentary debate. As a matter of principle - and common decency - the Greens never make personal attacks or use abusive language in the House.

2001

Green MPs successfully negotiated \$16.4 million of Green Budget initiatives in the 2001 Budget - funding projects ranging from a small grower's organic development programme, expanding organic gardens in primary schools and securing additional funding for EECA to develop the first national Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy, under the