

Political Parties

(Steward, R., 1998)

NZ Green Party Leaves Alliance

Charting Our Own Course

by Rosalie Steward, International Secretary, Green Party of New Zealand

November 23, 1997 saw over a hundred activists and members attend a Special General Meeting in Wellington to decide whether or not to stand under our own name at the next General Election.

A major point was that the three Members of Parliament (MPs) are pledged to support Alliance policies for the parliamentary term. Whatever the Party might decide, the MPs were honor bound to respect the undertaking they had given which was the foundation of their presence in Parliament.

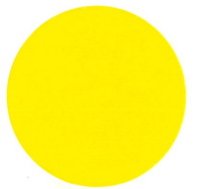
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Dissatisfaction with Alliance decision-making procedures had been growing for some time, and the lack of any recognizably "Green" flavor to the election campaign was seen as a symptom of this. Members were divided, however, as to the wisdom of severing the seven-year partnership within the five-party Alliance and taking on the electoral contest independently. Those in support of staying argued that at a local level relations with activists from the other parties were generally good. The combined energies were experienced as a real strength, and there was real anguish that friends would be turned into competitors by choosing to disengage.

The success of having Members of Parliament for the first time was also seen as being jeopardized, with doubts expressed about whether we had the party strength and the level of voting support to cross the 4% threshold on our own behalf. In 1990 the Greens won 7% of the vote, but at a time when the Labor vote was in decline.

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Those in support of standing alone pointed to the declining support for the Alliance (currently around 7% from a high of 18%), to the "old-style" processes within the Alliance that had caused activists to withdraw their support, and argued that the Green constituency was no longer supporting the Alliance because they saw nothing that appealed to them. Standing alone would give us the chance to reclaim this constituency.

The Constitution of the party allows that if consensus cannot be reached we resort to a voting mechanism that requires a 75% majority of voting delegates. At the last moment a vote was taken, and the proposal to stand separately was carried by a 75.6% majority. Green MP Phillida Bunkle, Alliance Health Spokesperson, announced at the meeting that she would not be joining Co-Leaders Jeanette Fitzsimons and Rod Donald on the Green Party List at the next election. Remarkably, the whole exercise has been negotiated with no public acrimony.

We are now embarking on a major effort to improve our organization and to both reclaim the support of 1990, and if possible to enlarge it. Having two Members of Parliament provides major advantages that green politics in New Zealand has not experienced before. We've got 22 months (though speculation is rife as to the stability of the Coalition Government) to establish our own ground and win our own place in the politics of the country.

In *Synthesis/Regeneration* 13 (Spring, 1997, p. 10) Curt Firestone wrote

The New Zealand Alliance is a coalition of five political parties that came together in the realization that they were too small to succeed independently in the electoral arena. Founded in December, 1991...The five political parties forming the Alliance are:

- The New Labor Party, a progressive split from the Labor Party.
- The Liberal Party, a progressive split from the National Party.
- The Green Party, an outgrowth of the Values Party. The Values Party dates back to the early 1970's and was the first environmentalist party in the world.
- The Democrats, the renamed Social Credit Party, mainly comprised of small business operators and farmers who couple progressive positions with economic reforms.
- The Mana Motuhake Party, a Maori workers progressive party.

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