

ISSUES IN EQUITY

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New Zealand Planning Council

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The authors have previously worked together on a report for the New Zealand Planning Council, which culminated in the publication "Who Makes Social Policy?"

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

This is a grievance list - a compilation of the views of a variety of individuals and groups within the community who were asked for their perceptions of equity within our society. It does not represent the collective opinion of the New Zealand Planning Council, simply because the Council's members (like any other cross-section of the community) reflect the widespread lack of consensus among New Zealanders on what represents fairness in our relations with one another.

Even supposing it were capable of doing so given the nature of this project, the Council has made no attempt to substantiate or rebut the views expressed here. It was, perhaps, inevitable that a project of this kind would attract responses that were predominantly negative, but this does not imply that community attitudes as a whole are weighted in the same way.

What the document does show is that there is a significant number of New Zealanders who feel that society is unjust and that decisions are made in ways which ignore them and which benefit more advantaged groups in the community.

Given the subjective nature of most of the responses (an inevitable outcome of a project of this kind), it might be asked where the usefulness of such an exercise lies.

The project was initiated by the first Planning Council under the chairmanship of Sir Frank Holmes and it was intended to provide a resource document for internal purposes. The project researchers were commissioned to canvass opinions from groups outside the usual range of contact of the Planning Council about issues which caused them concern. It was felt useful pointers would emerge from the responses to help the Council develop its work programme in the social, cultural and economic areas.

The new Council (which took office in October 1982) decided that this summary of the responses to the project should be published, both as a response to the individuals and groups who had been consulted, and as a stimulus to wider public discussion of the issues covered.

More importantly, the Council identified a number of concerns which should be taken into account in establishing its work programme for the coming year. Attached to this report is an outline of items in that programme which have either been directly stimulated by, or which relate to, the concerns expressed in the discussions on equity in our society.

The findings of this project will continue to have an influence on the Council's thinking as it develops its work programmes in successive years.

I.G. Douglas
Chairman

PART I: THEORETICAL ISSUES

For the purposes of this study, equity has been defined as social justice, or "getting a fair go". Attitudes towards fairness depend on the individual point of view, but the sum of individual feelings influences the degree of confidence which society has in itself and its institutions. Thus, in the interests of enhancing the cohesion and well-being of society, governments should be aware of and monitor feelings about equity.

It is necessary to make a distinction between equity and equality; they are associated, but different. An over-emphasis on equality would ignore essential differences between people. Equity is therefore a more justifiable, and more feasible, goal for society.

Economic pressures may be leading to greater inequalities in incomes, in employment opportunities, and in access to services. The inter-relationship between equity and efficiency, and the extent to which market forces enhance or detract from equity are complex and controversial issues.

The pursuit of equity must seek to ensure more equal opportunity and more equal access, while still allowing for personal choice and initiative. But whether equal opportunity of itself will achieve equality of outcome is again debatable. In some areas positive discrimination may be justified to promote equity. This approach would acknowledge the diversity of lifestyles and value systems which exist in our society. At the same time, the freedom to be different and to be treated differently must be balanced by responsibility, cooperation and respect for others. Thus, limits to acceptable diversity may have to be defined.

Equity also requires a lower limit to the standard of living, below which no individual or household is allowed to fall. In a country such as New Zealand this is represented by a "relative", rather than an absolute, poverty line, i.e.

relative to the standard of living of the rest of the population (as suggested by the Royal Commission on Social Security, 1972). There are problems of defining such a level. Household composition obviously relates closely to the adequacy of income. Such factors are important in assessing the equity of policies of income maintenance, welfare services and taxation.

The quantitative definition and measurement of equity, and the tracing of trends over time and space, is extremely difficult. Apparently straightforward measures such as household incomes produce problems on close examination - indirect measurement is often unsatisfactory, e.g. using mortality as a health indicator - and many factors, such as quality of life and legal rights, are unquantifiable. Thus planners and policy-makers face an extremely difficult task if they wish to set standards for equity in society and to monitor progress towards them.

PART II: AREAS OF CONCERN IN EQUITY

The purpose of this study was to record issues of concern related to equity. Consultations were held with groups and individuals in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. Forty-six group meetings took place, involving some 400 people chosen to provide a cross-section of society. The opinions recorded are those of the individuals and groups consulted, and no attempt has been made in the text to rebut or substantiate the views expressed. Discussion was free and unstructured, built around three basic questions:

- * Do we have a fair society?
- * If not, what are the areas in which there is unfairness?
- * If not, what sort of people are not getting fair treatment?

Despite the wide range of people involved, the level of agreement over the main areas of concern was very high. It was probably inevitable that the discussions would focus on the unfairness in society rather than what is equitable and just. This produced a somewhat negative view of the current situation in New Zealand.

Topics are covered roughly in order of importance, measured by the number of times they came up in discussion. There was considerable overlap in some areas. More abstract topics relating to many of the areas of concern are examined in Part III.

Income, Wealth and Taxation

In many of the group discussions it was suggested that the gap between the rich and poor in our society is growing and that increasing numbers of people, especially one-income families, are suffering financial hardship. However, looking at income narrowly, as the return from labour, the inequalities were not

generally seen as unfair. No one suggested that everyone should receive the same income. People accepted that remuneration will, and should, vary according to skill, experience and responsibility.

Inequities of income in the broader sense were, however, recognised. Not everyone can participate in paid work - because suitable work is not available, because of caring responsibilities, because of illness or disability. People living on welfare benefits, on savings, or as dependents, were seen to be at a social and economic disadvantage vis-a-vis paid workers.

The ways of increasing income other than from wages and salaries were seen to be unfairly distributed. In group discussions it was suggested that people on higher incomes, especially the self-employed and those in private business, have access to fringe benefits, capital gains, unearned investment income and opportunities for tax avoidance -

"Having money gives you the opportunity to get more."

A lot of comment centred on the heavy taxation of middle level earners which reduces disposable income, and the fact that this discourages effort, and encourages avoidance and evasion. There was concern for single income families in terms of tax treatment and some contributors felt that tax policies which aim to reduce financial hardship among families with children are missing their mark.*

Services provided by the state for everyone - education, medical services, justice - are also part of income in the broadest sense. There was a feeling that it is the more

* The group discussions took place before the announcement of the 1982 Budget.

affluent who gain more from such services because the systems which provide them are oriented towards the middle class.

Education

Although education has been seen as the means whereby people achieve equality of opportunity and equity is promoted, the education system (which should probably be seen separately from education as an abstract concept) may not live up to this. Many of the people consulted saw education as serving to maintain, rather than reduce, inequities.

Criticisms arising from the group discussions suggest that our education system is too academically oriented, biased towards middle class values, and mono-cultural.

The groups saw the emphasis on academic attainment in our schools as being unfair on children whose talents do not lie in this direction. Secondary schooling and examinations in particular were seen to be oriented towards tertiary education, making it all too easy to brand those who do not succeed academically as failures. The academic bias was seen to neglect aspects of knowledge needed for everyday life - self-reliance, assertiveness, resourcefulness - and the practical skills of budgeting and handling money, managing family and sexual relationships, developing a constructive approach to leisure.

The dominance of European culture in the education system explained for some contributors the comparatively lower level of academic success among Maori and Polynesian children. Many people thought it unfair that educational goals were set by the white middle class. They also commented that stereotyping and lower expectations of achievement on the part of teachers put minority group children at a disadvantage.

The concept of "free" education in New Zealand was also questioned and this led on to looking at how educational resources are distributed. It was pointed out in the discussions that schools vary widely in what they can provide in terms of equipment, activities, social and educational environment. Schools in affluent areas where parents are comfortably off, interested in education, able to provide books, outings and other stimulation for their children almost inevitably give more opportunities than those in areas where parents are working long hours to make a living and have few personal or financial resources for their children, their school or their community.

It was noted that more money is spent per capita at the higher levels of the educational scale, despite the acknowledged importance of early learning. Voluntary effort is greatest at the pre-school level and declines through primary and secondary schools. Teachers' salaries and status, conversely, increase to be highest at university level.

Overall, many people appear to see our education system as one which encourages conservatism and conformity, blocking social change and upholding vested interests. This emphasis is seen to disadvantage both the above-average and below-average child. If different types of people are to have a fair chance to express their potential, there is a need for greater flexibility in our system of education.

Employment

It was emphasised many times in the group discussions that status in our society comes largely from having paid employment. Voluntary effort tends not to be recognised as "real work". Hence loss of work means loss of status. Many commented on the depressive effects of unemployment and several groups mentioned the blow to self-esteem which the loss of a job frequently brings. Strong concern was expressed for the school leaver

who has never been able to find work. Unemployment at this stage was seen as possibly having a permanent effect on a person's self-image and aspirations.

People generally seemed confused about the issue of unemployment, and about the contradictory messages they were getting from the news media, politicians, and pressure groups. Are the unemployed "bludgers", or is there a real shortage of work?

The majority felt that unemployment is indeed a real and long-term problem, which New Zealand shares with many other countries at the present time, and that, although there may be some who are unwilling to work and abuse access to unemployment benefits, the basic fact is there are just not enough jobs to go around. Few people discussed the causes of unemployment, and opinions tended to depend on the political persuasion of the speaker. There was also some disagreement about the right to work and how this relates to equity.

Given competition for jobs, the relative rights of school leavers, superannuitants, married women, and family breadwinners have to be weighed. Some contributors, however, considered that making such comparisons is unfair -

"It should not be beyond society to provide jobs for all."

There was considerable agreement among the groups that unemployment varies in its incidence and that this leads to inequities. They identified the young, women and the unskilled as being disproportionately affected, and noted high unemployment among Maoris and among the mentally or physically disabled.

Looking towards what could be done to ease access to work, the groups most frequently suggested job-sharing, reducing working hours and more flexible conditions. They saw such measures as favouring both male and female workers, and having social benefits for family life, community work and recreation.

Such an approach would be fairer than the situation, foreseen by some, in which large-scale unemployment becomes a permanent feature and an elite group only has full-time work. Several contributors noted that the element of choice is being reduced in the decisions which people can make about their careers, and this has implications for equity.

Social Welfare Benefits

Social welfare benefits in many "advanced" countries have become more complex and more expensive over the years. However, there were widespread doubts as to whether they are actually serving needs fairly. The groups suggested that some people are getting benefits they do not need, while others are not getting enough assistance.

Greatest concern in the first category centred on national superannuation. Many groups considered it unfair that some people over sixty receive full national superannuation, plus, sometimes, supplementary incomes from other pension schemes, while frequently still in paid work.* Many commented on the cost of national superannuation to the country, especially given the ageing of the population.

On the other hand, there were those who saw it as a just reward for a lifetime of contributions to the community. Instances were cited where national superannuation is not meeting needs - some old people, wholly dependent on this benefit, are suffering hardship. Doctors' fees, electricity charges, rates and rents were thought to cause most concern.

Another "universal" benefit which came in for criticism was family benefit. This was seen not only as going to many who do not need it, but also as being unrealistic as a support for

* One person commented: "At sixty, you can have both a job and a benefit - at fifteen, you can have neither."

older children. Comparisons were made between Accident Compensation payments, which are income-related, and flat-rate sickness benefits. Two people suffering from the same disability, and with the same expectation of life, may have totally different standards of living simply because in the one case, disability arose by accident, and in the other, through "natural" causes, i.e. sickness.

Many people pointed out the contrast in the "image" of benefits and beneficiaries between, on the one hand, national superannuation, family benefit and accident compensation, and on the other, the unemployment and domestic purposes benefits. Receipt of the first group is not seen as demeaning - no moral stigma is attached. Receipt of the others labels the recipient, in some eyes, as a bludger, who is to blame for their condition and may be viewed with suspicion.

As well as inconsistencies and inequities surrounding the unemployment and domestic purposes benefits, a great deal of criticism was expressed of the treatment of beneficiaries by staff of the Departments of Social Welfare and Labour. There is tension in the role of these officers as both givers of information and assessors of eligibility. Their judgemental attitudes combined with applicants' lack of confidence may not encourage constructive relationships and satisfying outcomes. Many beneficiaries said they would not approach a department directly with a query, but would seek advice indirectly, for example through a social worker with a voluntary agency.

It was suggested that the more senior officers are frequently unaware of the treatment of applicants, and desk officers dealing with the public are often the less experienced and less informed members of staff.

Families and Children

Equity in relation to families and children was a frequent theme of the group discussions and has been referred to in relation to incomes, education and social welfare. People clearly recognised that there is little government policy which does not have some effect on the family, albeit indirectly. They also see that home environment has a strong influence on achievement in the outside world -

"Some people are second or third generation failures."

It is argued that if the family is to be the means whereby children are nurtured, the rest of society should support parents in this task. Means of support suggested in the group discussions included more flexible and family-conscious working hours and conditions, child care services, cheaper child health services, and practical community-based family support schemes.

Considerable concern was expressed in the group discussions over the plight of the one-income family. People feel materialism and consumerism, fuelled by TV advertising, lead to rising expectations, putting pressure on family incomes, especially households where one partner cannot work (because of illness or disability, childcare responsibilities, lack of suitable employment).

Greater legal protection for families was called for, especially in the context of threatened or actual marital breakdown. Cases were cited where division of property had left the parent with custody of the children at a disadvantage.

Care of children during their pre-school years is an important part of family support, but many groups noted the very low status of pre-school care and education and of those involved with it.

Many commentators with experience of welfare work suggested that if families are to receive fair treatment, policies must be adapted to recognise changes in the form, function and place in the community of the family.

Racial Issues

The concentration of Maoris and Pacific Islanders in the lower income and occupational groups and their over-representation among beneficiaries, the unemployed, offenders against the law, and the homeless, was noted in the group discussions. The differences between racial minorities and the rest of the population were sometimes ascribed to abilities and aspirations, sometimes to barriers imposed by society. One view suggested that if Maoris do not aspire to positions of status and power as recognised by Europeans, then there is no injustice if they do not achieve them. The alternative view said that Maori values are different from European values and therefore their aspirations are different.

Opinions also differed over the justification for separate institutions for Maoris - schools, courts, community services - and over whether positive discrimination or affirmative action in favour of racial minorities is fair for society as a whole.

Some of those who believed that society has created racial inequities distinguished between discrimination, which is embodied in law or regulation, and prejudice, which is "in the mind". It was recognised that laws against racial discrimination and procedures for dealing with complaints are well-established in New Zealand. However, many of the groups consulted suggested that status and advancement in our society is determined by the dominant European culture and considerable scepticism was expressed over the description of New Zealand as a "multi-cultural" society.

It is impossible to legislate against prejudice and stereotyping in racial or any other terms. Particular problems were thought to affect Maori women and Maori youth, who may feel themselves at a disadvantage vis-a-vis both Maori and European norms and institutions.

Several groups pointed out a growing lack of understanding between the racial groups, and the danger of violent outbreaks. The disadvantaged position of many Maoris and Pacific Islanders contributes to this, along with the interaction of the attitudes which have been outlined - claims for a separate cultural identity, calls for assimilation ("We are all New Zealanders first"), opposition to positive discrimination and racial stereotyping.

Equity and Community

Although not a clear-cut area of concern like education and employment, the community was a topic mentioned fairly frequently in group discussions. Many comments suggested that communities, local or sectoral, are not given adequate opportunity to participate in planning and decision-making and are frequently not consulted, or only inadequately consulted, on matters which affect their well-being. Examples were quoted of unemployed people not being consulted on training needs, state house tenants on urban planning, residents on the provision of shopping facilities.

At the same time many groups saw government cutbacks in expenditure as forcing the community to take over former government responsibilities without adequate resources, especially financial resources. The unexpected, and apparently arbitrary cutting-off of funds for established schemes, such as work trusts, was especially criticised. Preventive work which does not involve high status professional groups, such as doctors and lawyers, was seen to be especially vulnerable to budget-cutting.

The greatest community resource is people, with their skills and enthusiasm, but using this resource to the best effect requires money, time, access to information, and a good degree of freedom from bureaucratic "strings". Both local and central government were seen to fall short in providing information and freedom.

Commentators were, however, aware that the encouragement of service provision on a community basis could result in spatial inequities. Services will tend to flourish in areas where communities are strong and well-endowed. Where resources are scarce and people less inclined, for whatever reason, to support community initiatives, services are likely to be at a lower level.

Housing

There was a prevalent feeling in the group discussions that it is becoming much more difficult for the average household to achieve home ownership and to maintain it once achieved, because of high interest rates and the need to accumulate a large deposit. At the same time, private rentals are becoming scarcer and more expensive. Many instances were quoted where rents are reaching 50 percent of incomes, or even more, (for example \$80 rent out of a welfare benefit of \$120). In addition to high weekly rents, the equivalent of six weeks' rent may be required to secure a tenancy because of bonds, commission to letting agents, and rent in advance. This, on average, amounts to \$600 for a typical three-bedroom house in Christchurch. In these circumstances families are unable to compete with groups of single working people.*

* Housing costs - either mortgage repayments or rents - were often seen as a crucial factor in determining whether a household income would stretch to meet weekly outgoings.

Private renting was seen not only as expensive, but also insecure, with rent increases and sale of properties precipitating frequent moves by tenants. Tenants often do not know their rights, and even if they do, may find it difficult to assert themselves. State rentals, being related to income, were recognised to be cheaper, but some groups (e.g. women with children who have left a marriage) find them hard to secure, and they were frequently seen as badly placed in relation to workplaces and transport routes.

Many of the people seen as suffering from housing problems have serious social problems as well, including unemployment, family or marital breakdown, physical or mental illness and disability. Supportive services and help to overcome the problems which have precipitated homelessness, may well be required in addition to shelter. Access to adequate housing for these groups relates to fairness in other areas of social and economic life.

Justice

To obtain fair treatment through the legal system, people must know their rights and must have the motivation to seek assistance and take action. This usually requires access to a lawyer and the ability to afford legal fees. These points were made at group discussions attended by people working at the community level.

Neighbourhood law offices were seen as a means of reducing the money barrier and educating people about their rights, but motivation is a problem. People frequently "feel the system is against them". Even when assured of their rights, they often do not pursue them - tenants will write off their bonds rather than take landlords to court, they will plead guilty "just to get it over with".

Once before the courts, the law assumes that the parties are equal in their values and capacities. Comments made in the discussions show the difficulties of achieving this ideal.

The court atmosphere itself was seen as intimidating to those not familiar with it, and the language and procedures may be incomprehensible to many. It was felt a well-dressed defendant, of conventional appearance, accompanied by someone of standing, e.g. an obviously middle class parent, a clergyman, a commanding officer, would probably be dealt with less severely than an unsupported, untidily dressed defendant. Others noted, however, that reforms such as the introduction of family courts are helping to reduce the system's remoteness and inflexibility.

The fact that Maoris and Polynesians are over-represented among offenders against the law and in the prison population, was mentioned by several groups and informants. There were comments that young Maoris and Polynesians are likely to be "picked on" by the police, especially in the streets at night. Examples were given of this type of treatment to totally innocent people.

This was explained in terms of stereotyping, which has been mentioned elsewhere in this report. There was speculation on the extent to which cultural factors could explain the situation, and to which implicit racism was a feature of the judicial and penal systems.

Health

Although it was recognised that financial barriers to health care are not as great in New Zealand as in other countries, fear was expressed in group discussions, by older people in particular, over the prospect of prescription charges. It was suggested that some people, especially solo parents and young unemployed people, are now thinking twice about consulting a general practitioner, because of the cost.

Many groups suggested that the rise of health insurance schemes is bad for the public system and is hastening its decline. Even those who had such insurance expressed these opinions, although they felt they could justify its use in personal terms. People mentioned waiting-lists for surgery in public hospitals and the greater comfort and personal attention which could be obtained privately. Fear was expressed that a two-level health system could develop, with a lower level of service for the poorer sections of the population.

The group discussions raised several comments about how people are treated in the health system, especially in hospital. There was a strong feeling that health services are arranged for the convenience of medical professionals rather than consumers. The situation of psychiatric patients in particular was considered inequitable, in respect of their ability to make decisions about treatment, welfare benefits and so on. This was perceived as part of society's lack of tolerance for people not considered "normal". Difficulties of communication with medical personnel, especially as experienced by members of ethnic minority groups, the aged, women, and low income earners were also seen as barriers to fair treatment.

Health services concentrate on the treatment of sickness much more than the preservation of health. Cutting resources for preventive medicine and health education was seen as short-sighted and inequitable. The emphasis on hospital care and high technology medicine was taken to underline the hold which senior medical personnel have over the system.

Women and Equity

Comments from the group discussions concerning equity between the sexes centred mainly on women's access to paid employment. There was considerable concern about the disadvantage suffered by women wishing to return to the workforce

after having brought up children. Some of the points made have already been raised in the employment section - inadequacy of retraining opportunities, lack of recognition of home-making or voluntary work as "real work", lack of status and stability in part-time positions, and dwindling opportunities in many traditional areas of female employment. Relatively high rates of unemployment among women were noted - among the registered unemployed for young women, and the "discouraged job seekers" for older, unregistered married women. Access to good quality child-care, affordable and conveniently located, was seen as essential to many women's chances of continuing in paid employment.

It was felt that pressures on women, especially financial pressures, have removed the freedom of choice between taking up paid work and being full-time homemakers. Whichever they do, women may be made to feel guilty. Unfair expectations of the role of women may mean that many not only work outside the home, but are also expected to bear the full burden of housework and childcare. Participants in the discussion called for greater equity within marriage and the family. The situation of solo mothers was cited as another example of unfair expectations -

"They are made the scapegoats for many of the ills of society."

Discussions in both women's and mixed groups suggested that society has a long way to go to break down unfair conditioning of women which emphasises passivity and subservience and the persistent stereotyped attitudes about what is "appropriate" for girls, especially in the areas of education and training. Several of the groups consulted felt that freeing up sex role stereotyping would improve the quality of life for both men and women, and would also promote fairness and freedom in society.

PART III: GENERAL THEMES AND CONCERNS

As well as the specific areas of concern already covered, a range of more abstract themes was put forward in the discussions. These overlap the topic areas and were raised by people from a range of backgrounds.

Equality and Conformity

There was general agreement that equity is not the same as equality, and that the latter is not a justifiable aim. It was suggested that emphasis on equality in New Zealand history has tended to disadvantage those who do not conform, whether they fall above or below the prevailing norm. The result has been a society which suppresses diversity in lifestyle and culture.

Individual Responsibility

A few groups suggested that, given equal opportunity, it is up to each person to assume individual responsibility - a "sink or swim" approach. More common was the suggestion that society "stacks the cards" against certain groups, and individuals from these groups can advance only through extraordinary effort. This attitude suggests that affirmative action is needed to achieve equal opportunity.

Some saw individualism as promoting competition and setting people against one another. At the same time it is generally expected that individuals should be responsible for their own acts. Excessive reliance on government was also criticised, and some saw the welfare state as encouraging this. However, the support offered by the welfare state, combined with an emphasis on conformity, may foster dependence.

Value Systems

In the discussions, examples of differing value systems arose - attitudes towards home ownership, unemployment, university education. Several groups criticised the rise of materialism, with its focus on things rather than people. It was suggested that the dominant value system is that of the affluent, white, middle class male, and that the further away from this model a group or individual is, the less chance they have of receiving fair consideration.

Stereotyping

A great number of groups and informants suggested that it is unfair to label people and apply stereotypes - this disregards people as individuals and is extremely damaging. Stereotyping begins with age and sex - it has already been noted that rigid expectations of the roles of men and women can hamper both. If old people are seen as worthless once their economic contribution to society ceases, this can become self-fulfilling. The same applies to young people, regularly described as irresponsible, and Maori people described as happy-go-lucky.

Group discussions also mentioned more specific groups suffering from stereotyping. They included solo parents, the unemployed, ex-offenders and state house tenants, as well as landlords, businessmen and farmers. Labelling was seen not only as self-fulfilling but also long-lasting. People labelled as "losers" may find that society and its institutions are against them all their lives.

Access to Knowledge

Many instances were cited where lack of knowledge has led to disadvantage. Many people do not know their rights as consumers, as defendants and plaintiffs, as beneficiaries of the welfare state.

The discussions cited many instances where people did not have access to knowledge owing to problems of communication, deliberate secrecy, or because it was couched in specialised language. People often require "interpreters" for moral and practical support when they approach bureaucratic systems.

It was suggested that those "in the know" receive an unfair advantage. This may operate on a personal level - knowing how to get a loan, how to obtain planning permission - and also applies to groups and businesses. People who do not know how things are "normally" done, a group including ethnic minorities, may not get fair treatment -

"You have to know the system to make it work for you."

Access to and Use of Power

Like income and knowledge, power is unevenly distributed in our society, and there was a feeling that it has become too concentrated. The inter-dependence of these three elements and the need for a fairer distribution of them came through clearly in group discussions. Power brings with it control over the allocation of resources and choice in how they will be bestowed. Conversely, lack of power reduces both choice and control, not only over resources, but over everyday occurrences. As one commentator said:

"There is also poverty in not having your voice heard."

The feeling of powerlessness was expressed many times in the discussions by a great variety of groups. Many felt power is being used for the benefit of the groups who already have it, and that little attention is paid to "ordinary people". It was suggested that to promote equity, people need to be involved much more in decision-making and planning at all levels. At the moment consultation is seen to be selective. People and

groups who are non-conforming, non-aggressive and lacking in status (as conservatively defined) tend not to be taken seriously.

Growing Cynicism

Almost every group consulted commented on the growth of cynicism in New Zealand society, noting a lack of confidence in the system and a lack of trust, of politicians and lobbyists in particular. There was a widespread feeling that most people are "out for themselves" and that the "law of the jungle" applies in many aspects of national life. A "we-they" adversary approach is developing in which groups are set against one another. Some commentators were even led to wonder whether some people in fact did not want a fair system.

The result appears to be cynicism in the majority, apathy in the many and anger in the few. As already noted, many people feel powerless, and observers can only conclude that if people do not have a stake in improving the situation, they are unlikely to feel a responsibility to do so.

PLANNING COUNCIL FOLLOW-UP

In considering the findings of the group discussions, the Planning Council noted several important areas of concern related to government policy. These include the appropriateness of the education system and the extent to which it increases or reduces options for particular groups; inequities in the incidence of unemployment; the devolution of decision-making and improvement of communication between government and the people; a perceived widening of the gap between rich and poor in terms of total income, broadly defined; perceived inequities, inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the social welfare benefits system.

The Planning Council also accepted the report as useful background in developing its 1983-84 work programme.

The programme was finalised in early February 1983 and contains several projects directly stimulated by, or closely related to, issues raised in the equity study. A study of social planning and service delivery in the community will take up points from the "Equity and Community" section of this report. It will examine local participation in decision-making, and the delivery of services of all types, including those which may be described as "social welfare". This will lead into more general themes such as access to, and use of, power and knowledge, and value systems, covered in Part III of this report.

A project on family policy will evaluate current mechanisms for family support in view of changing social and economic circumstances. It will include a consideration of welfare benefits, taxation and family incomes. The project arises from concern expressed in the sections "Families and Children" and "Women and Equity".

The employment situation has been of on-going concern to the Planning Council, and the prominence of access to employment as an issue in equity reinforces the importance of a current project in this area. It seeks to establish a clearer understanding of the causes of unemployment, and will include analysis of the major economic factors which have a bearing on employment prospects in this country.

Racial issues have been noted in this report in relation to cultural biases and also as the basis of stereotyping and discrimination. The Planning Council has an on-going interest in cultural development and this year is undertaking a study which aims to identify the key issues associated with social, economic and cultural aspects of Maori land utilisation. In addition, the Planning Council will continue to be informed on Maori issues through its "Round Table" meetings.

The concern for education issues shown in the group discussions led the Planning Council to undertake further work in this area immediately. Exploratory work was begun in late 1982 to identify the key educational needs for the next decade, to pinpoint areas where change was needed and to promote action to achieve this. The work entailed widespread consultation and discussion with people involved in education at all levels, including employers and trade unions. During 1983 many of the issues raised will be followed up and liaison maintained with the Department of Education and other bodies to help define a specific Planning Council project on education.

In addition to the project work which will be undertaken in the coming year, the Planning Council will continue to "monitor and report on trends, prospects, issues and options in relation to the social, economic and cultural development of New Zealand", as set out in its Act of 1982. It has been accepted that the findings of this report will continue to influence and inform the work of the Council in its monitoring and reporting role. The equity study has also established that the Planning Council should continue to consult a wide range of people in all the policy areas which concern it.

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 Newtown Community Liaison Group
 Parents' Support Group - Newtown Health Centre
 Parklands Residents' Committee
 Patients' Association
 Polytechnic Students' Committee
 Pre-school Play Group, Roseneath
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 Public Service Association Equal Opportunities Committee
 St Aidan's Churchwomen's Group
 Sociology Students, Victoria University
 Tawa Churches Pastoral Committee
 Theology and Philosophy of Health Group
 Thorndon School Children
 Wellington Branch, Nurses' Association
 Wellington Child Care Association
 Wellington City Council Community Workers
 Wellington High School Students
 Wellington Unemployed Workers' Union

Auckland

Anglican-Methodist Social Services Workers
 Auckland District Council of Social Services Housing
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 Community Workers, Auckland Regional Authority
 Detached Youth Workers and "kids"
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