

IN SEARCH OF LABOUR'S GREEN AGENDA

Two new MPs with a history of environmental activism front Labour's shadow conservation and environment portfolios. John Blincoe, conservation, and Pete Hodgson, environment, are very keen to retain those jobs should Labour win the next election. ADAM LEAVESLEY spoke to them.

HIGH IDEALS, sentiment and a strong record from the 1980s aside, what has Labour got to offer environmentalists in the 1990s? What is the likelihood that two relatively junior MPs will secure the backing of the party and give environment and conservation the priority they need?

John Blincoe and Pete Hodgson have brought a new style of cooperation to the green shadow ministries. They point out that the boundaries between their portfolios are blurred. "We have no strict demarcation lines," says Blincoe. An example of cooperation is in the area of resource management. Blincoe with his legal training has played a prominent role, despite the fact that it is technically part of Hodgson's portfolio.

In the Labour caucus, green issues are no longer confined to the conservation and environment portfolios. Attempts are being made to integrate environmental concerns in the Economic, Environmental and Employment Committee of caucus. The party is doing a lot of talking about new creative solutions which incorporate environment at the ground floor.

The rhetoric is about "community involvement", "vision", "ownership of decisions" and the "harnessing of people's wisdom and imagination". "Any government will make dramatically more progress if they work with the community than if they don't," says Hodgson. "You will end up with better policy and



Pete Hodgson (left) and John Blincoe: marketing Labour to conservationists.

better outcomes. You can't ram the Resource Management Act or marine reserves down people's throats." Energy issues have also been incorporated into the caucus committee. Energy spokesperson David Caygill was Labour's representative at the Earth Summit. He and Chris Laidlaw, whose responsibilities include disarmament and international environmental issues, work closely with Blincoe and Hodgson. As associate energy spokesperson Hodgson plays a dual role on the committee and it would appear that energy policy is a major focus of the group.

IF LABOUR wins the next election and John Blincoe acquires the conservation ministry, he will be taking on the job at a time when some fundamental, long-term issues must be addressed.

Much of DoC land has a low ranking as stewardship land and is overdue for reclassification. Possums and other pests are seriously degrading conservation areas. The long term future of many native animal species outside the network of offshore island sanctuaries is in doubt. Conservation values are being compro-

mised by the requirement to raise income through concessions. Marine ecosystems are subject to heavy exploitation and are virtually unprotected. A considerable proportion of the estate is subject to Maori claims.

Direct DoC funding has been cut ten percent by this government, says Blincoe. "Denis Marshall is fighting a losing battle, but we will find the means to hold the line and keep the values of the estate together."

Labour says it will do some creative thinking on the pest problems, in particular on possums. Blincoe favours a mix of controls including a bounty system but the size of the effort will be subject to funding. He cannot promise a major research effort to deal with the problem.

Blincoe would like to introduce the sidelined Protected Natural Areas legislation and speed up the process of selecting and gazetting appropriate natural areas. High Country pastoral land which is marginal economically or of high conservation value will be de-stocked.

The requirement that forces DoC to raise revenue through commercial concessions does not find favour with Blincoe. Unfortunately the problem can only be completely solved by giving the department a bigger allocation. Labour