

Hon Sir ROGER DOUGLAS (ACT): Listening to the Committee stage of the appropriations debate reminds me how many of the issues that we have debated over the last few months are precisely the same issues that have been debated in this Chamber for at least 40 years. In 1979 I wrote a paper advocating broadening the tax base and lowering tax. That paper got me sacked from the front bench. Today the Tax Working Group is undertaking the same project.

Although some things have not changed, there are some things that have changed, and I am not sure that all of them have changed for the better. Today's political parties, it seems to me, are obsessed not with goals, not with things that we want to achieve, but with the way that things operate. There is no rational political discussion about setting goals and determining the best way to achieve them. Instead, politicians pigeon-hole each other according to how they want to manage things. A brief look at what the parties have been saying during the debate on this legislation demonstrates this particularly well.

When I was a member of the Labour Party we almost always agreed on what we wanted—a decent education for our children, an economy that ensured people had jobs, and a welfare care system that looked after people. We used to debate how to get there, and there was a lot of disagreement on that. Some believed in centralisation and clever bureaucrats, and others thought that we needed to make people responsible for themselves and to ensure that those who fell through the cracks had a safety net. We agreed, in other words, on the ends, but we argued about the means.

Listening to the debate on this legislation and other legislation in this House, I cannot help but realise that today's Labour Party is the complete opposite. The ends its members seek are different. Some want a growing economy, some want to eradicate poverty—

Hon Darren Hughes: This is National's bill.

Hon Sir ROGER DOUGLAS: That is all right. I am talking about that member's debate. Some Labour members want to stop economic growth, in the name of the environment. But the one thing they all agree upon is the means. They all agree that the best way to achieve the diverse ends they seek is through larger Government and the centralisation of power. That is what we have heard over recent times. They never tell us why centralisation is a good thing. They just tell us that it is so. There is no better illustration of this than the recent member's bill introduced by Phil Twyford, which sought to protect and retain State ownership of assets owned by local councils. To Phil Twyford, State ownership is all-important. He never talked about the best way to get value from the assets, he never talked about the proper role of Government, and he never talked about what he wanted those assets to achieve for the people of Auckland. As long as the State had its hands on the assets, he was happy. That is Labour today.

The same narrow view is present in education. When Anne Tolley and Heather Roy announced education scholarships for up to 250 students from low-income backgrounds, Labour members were opposed. They said it was the privatisation of education. They were

never willing to argue the merits of a few vouchers, over State monopoly. State monopoly has become their goal. It is obsessed not with goals but with structures. The reality is that Labour's inability to argue sensibly over means ensures that it will always be blindsided by National. National is hardly radical; it is just aiming to manage things better than Labour. If Labour was to come out in favour of increased competition between State-run schools—or State-run hospitals—as a means of increasing education quality, which is something entirely consistent, I would have thought, with its principles, that it could easily outflank National and put it on the back foot.

Labour, as currently structured, however, and as evidenced in this debate, has a situation where the privileged special interests that lurk amongst it—the unionists, the teachers, the ex - student politicians—have control of the party. It is predictable that these people are more concerned with preserving the current structures that privilege certain groups at the expense of the general public, but the policies are not, in my view, doing Labour a favour.

During this debate, National also confirmed what we have come to know, and that is that National is a party that is fundamentally conservative. It largely accepts the status quo and seeks to manage it better. There have been a few exceptions, such as National under Ruth Richardson, but people do not necessarily last if they are in that camp. We are seeing a sense of conservatism in National. From 2005 to 2007 Labour increased Government spending by over \$7 billion. From 2009 to 2011—and some of that period is covered by the Appropriation (2009/10 Estimates) Bill—National will increase its spending by over \$5 billion. It may be slowing down the progression to an even larger State, but it is certainly not reversing it. National is, and always will be, timid. That was evident in the selection of some of the Cabinet Ministers who were placed in various positions

Grant Robertson: Tell us which ones!

Hon Sir ROGER DOUGLAS: Do members want me to mention one or two?

Grant Robertson: Yes!

Hon Sir ROGER DOUGLAS: I am happy to do that if called on, but, on the other hand, I think it is self-evident who they are.

National has become the political manager. It engages in political stunts and short-term opportunism. The cycleway, the Job Summit, and the housing insulation scheme are current examples of political expediency. The problem with such a tokenistic approach to politics is that people are smarter than most politicians think. People are well aware that in their private lives sacrifices are often made to improve their prospects in the future. People save to buy a house, and go without to get a tertiary education. The voting public grows weary as politicians continually try to massage the polls by adopting short-term, popular policy.

I will finish by saying that, in many ways, I have been disappointed with the approach of the Māori Party, as well. It seems to me that the Māori Party, more than any other party, has the opportunity to help its people. Unfortunately, I think, too often it grandstands on one small issue after another. But I believe that Māori people rightly have very real grievances in some

big issues. Let me very quickly take the example of superannuation. Māori people often pay into superannuation early, and they often retire but do not live as long as others. Māori people are not treated equally in terms of superannuation. That is the sort of big issue the Māori Party should bring to this House, because I think that if it was pushing that issue, it might just win.