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Tēnā koe Chris

I am writing to you on behalf of Trust Democracy, which was established as a non-profit incorporated society in 2019 to strengthen public discourse, education and research about democracy in Aotearoa New Zealand. Trust Democracy has actively participated in New Zealand's Open Government Partnership programme.

We understand from reports in the media that you will be leading a thorough review of all Labour Party policies; drawing on the values of the Labour Party of equal access to resources in the social sphere and a just distribution of wealth: "We start the policy process again with a blank piece of paper". We support you in this as there are many aspects of how New Zealand is currently governed where the opportunities for nurturing and developing everyone's talents and potential coincide with the urgent need to rethink how and whom we govern for to deal with the challenges, as well as possibilities, of the 21st century.

While we understand that any policy review will require input from Labour MPs and the Labour Party more widely, we believe that limiting any such review to MPs and Labour Party members would fall well short of addressing the growing sense of mistrust ordinary people have in politicians, and government processes and policies.

I am sure that you will have seen the results from the '[Populism Global Survey – The New Zealand Results](#)' published on 18 April. It makes for disturbing reading. Two-thirds of the country think that "New Zealand's economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful". They also believe that "New Zealand needs a strong leader to take the country back from the rich and powerful". And 60% agree "The main divide in our society is between ordinary citizens and the political and economic elite". This and other surveys point to an increasing disillusionment with democracy and democratic processes which, if only partially realised, could lead to serious social fragmentation and disharmony.

The sorts of results demonstrated by the Populism Global Survey are one of the reasons why many of the countries we compare ourselves with e.g. Australia, Ireland, Belgium, France, England, etc., are adopting deliberative democracy practices such as citizens assemblies, where ordinary people are put at the heart of the decision-making process. What surveys on people's attitudes to politics clearly show is a feeling of alienation from the political process and decision-making because the current form of representative or electoral democracy, whilst nominally equitable (one person, one vote), is in reality very unequal and those with the most resources tend to be the beneficiaries of policy decisions.

Under your leadership the Labour Party could use the review process as an opportunity to use innovative democratic processes that have the potential to include many thousands of New Zealanders in helping to shape future Labour Party policy. This would signal to the public that a major political party is serious about reducing the democratic deficit and their input is meaningful. Some of these deliberative democracy processes such as citizens assemblies can be resource intensive, however, there are many digital platforms such as *Polis* that are relatively inexpensive to run, and are demographically, gender and ethnically inclusive. By design, they move people beyond top-of-the-head opinions and knee-jerk reactions to where they seriously engage with the important issues of today and the future whilst recognising some of the difficult trade-offs which will need to be made.

We know that you personally have been committed to strengthening people's rights to information, which as the purposes of the OIA state, are for enabling people's "more effective participation in the making and administration of laws and policies", and not just for accountability.

The principles that guide the Labour Party are admirable but, as with all principles, they need to be assessed in light of the current conjunction. To add the principle of self-government through institutionalised citizen decision formation would begin to restore faith and trust in the democratic process.

Trust Democracy has members who have years of experience in designing, planning, organising and evaluating deliberative processes. We would welcome the opportunity to come and talk to you and other members of your caucus as to how, through the use of innovative democratic processes, the Labour Party could help restore not only trust in government and better, more durable policies, but also the true meaning of democracy as self-government.

If you would like to explore such possibilities, please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss this further.

Ngā mihi, nā



Simon Wright
Chair, Trust Democracy

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