

STEVEN MAHAREY

Member of Parliament for

**Palmerston North
1990 - Present**



Special Note

As a close friend of Steven Maharey, I have not attempted a political essay as for the others in this volume. As I am too identified with the events of the period 1990-2005, I have opted to provide what I term notes to cover the parliamentary career of Steve Maharey only.

Whilst I recognise this is less than satisfactory, it is the best I can do. Later, no doubt, some other person will provide an objective and interpretative essay on Steve Maharey's time as an MP for Palmerston North.

Introduction

Born in Palmerston North on 3 February 1952 to William and Irene Maharey, Steve Maharey was raised in Palmerston North, attending Freyberg High School from 1966 to 1969, and Massey University from 1972 to 1976. He holds an MA (Hons) in Sociology.

Steve Maharey married Elizabeth McKay [deceased] and has two stepsons, Dylan and Joshua.

P16-1 : Steve Maharey



His leisure interests include mountain biking, film and music.

Early Employment

During his time at university, Maharey worked in the Valuation Department and retail shoe stores.

In 1978 he was appointed as a lecturer in Sociology at Massey University, and around this time joined the Labour Party.

Palmerston North City Council

Steve Maharey was elected as a Councillor on the Palmerston North City Council in 1986, and served until 1989.

Parliamentary Career, 1990-1996

Steve Maharey was first elected as an MP in 1990, and returned in 1993, 1996, 1999, 2002, and 2005.

When he first became an MP in 1990, his majority was wafer-thin - 257 votes. In the context of the time, it was amazing political survival. In the 1990 election, the Labour Government was swept away by a powerful, rejuvenated National Party, who then remained in Government for nine years.

The Fourth Labour Government [1984-1990] had undertaken major reforms to the economy and the structure of government. Profound changes in the international economy and in the New Zealand economic scene precipitated debate throughout society. Within the Labour Party, a strong split occurred between the Prime Minister, David Lange, and Roger Douglas, Minister of Finance. It had huge negative political effects, with Labour being defeated at the polls in 1990. This story is poignantly told by David Lange in his memoir, *My Life*.

Steve Maharey thus began his parliamentary career in Opposition. He established quickly his presence in parliament, taking up a centre left position within the Labour Party.

In his maiden speech, given in Parliament on 13 December 1990, Maharey had this to say ...

“A maiden speech provides the opportunity for new members of Parliament to outline principles, beliefs, and values that will guide them during their time in office. Of course, with experience, details may alter. It is my hope that I will always be able to explain and justify any changes that I make. However, I would be disappointed if the convictions I state this evening do not stand the test of time. I focus my comments this evening on the changes taking place in our society and on some possible responses. For the past decade there has been a decisive shift in the direction of this country. In simple terms, that shift has been marked by a move away from the State and the collective towards the market and the individual. Some would say that the shift has been both necessary and beneficial, and, in part, I agree.

“However, as we enter the 1990s we are beginning to relearn a lesson already well understood by our forebears. The lesson is that the market is a mixed blessing. We now hear calls for a return to the good old days of regulation, import substitution, intervention and State control. Perhaps, fortunately, there is no way that we can go back to the future. I say “fortunately” because, just as we know that the market has failings, the past 50 years of world history should have forcefully demonstrated that reliance on the State also leads to problems. Therefore, it would seem to me that in this decade we will need to rethink the respective roles of the State and the market, and that we will need to do so with an eye on the circumstances we will face in the next century.

New Zealand - indeed, the world - faces what amounts to new times. Deep economic, social, cultural, and political changes are taking place, and we must search out new and relevant policies. It is worth noting just a few of the changes we must face: the information growth of computer-based industries; the greater emphasis on choice and product differentiation; the decline in the number of male, manual, working-class people; the rise of the service and white-collar worker; more women in the work-force; multinational companies that are largely autonomous from the nation state; the breakup of traditional political coalitions; and the resurgence of ethnic identity. The list goes on and on.

The magnitude of the changes we face leaves no real choice as to whether we change or not. The only choice we have is how. Change can be allowed to sweep over unprepared individuals and communities, making

victims of those people with no personal resources, or we can prepare for change, sharing its costs and benefits fairly throughout our society. We cannot change the past, but we do control the future. The challenge for us in the 1990s is to do all we can to make sure that New Zealand is in control of its future. Let me suggest the way that that change might be managed. For me, the lead must be taken by the State. However, I do not mean the State as we have known it over the past 50 years.

During the post-war period the State was a liberating force in this society. For people such as myself it meant access to education, health care, and housing. However, the traditional Welfare State was also centralised, bureaucratic, and hierarchical. In addition, it was too often captured by vested interests that used to prevent much-needed change. I do not believe that that kind of State is relevant to New Zealand today. The kind of State that I am advocating is one that is democratic and decentralised; one that involves people in making decisions that affect them; and one that is accountable and helps citizens to take responsibility for their own lives.” [NZPD. Vol 511. 1990. p.334]

Leadership of the Party

In 1993, after the election of that year, Maharey emerged as a powerful supporter of the successful candidacy of Helen Clark in her election as Leader of the Opposition.

The 1996 Election

Following the 1996 election, there had been difficulties for the Coalition National/NZ First Government and the popularity of the Labour party ensured victory in 1999.

Proportional Representation

An early indication of a fresh approach to political life was Maharey’s decision to support the campaign for the introduction of proportional representation in preference to the first-past-the-post system.

He became a powerful supporter of the Mixed Member Proportional Representation proposal made by the Royal Commission in 1996. He campaigned vigorously for the new system in the binding referendum in 1993. This led to the new system, 120 MPs, 60 of whom would represent electorates and 60 from the party lists. The proportionality of Parliament would be determined by the percentage of party votes won by each party. To win any list seats a party had either to elect at least one member for a constituency seat, or pass a threshold of 5% in their party vote.

The 1999 Election

In the first MMP election in 1999, Maharey won 39.23% of the party vote against the National candidate with 28.54%. He won 63% of the electorate vote; he had increased his support.

Appointed a Cabinet Minister after the 1999 Elections

In his six years as a Cabinet Minister responsible for Employment and Social Development, Steve Maharey has seen unemployment drop to a 16 year low. He has had a major input into the tertiary education sector, and grappled with the thorny issue of student loans.

The 2002 Election

Faced with a strong National Party candidate, Steve Maharey still managed a substantial majority in both the electorate vote and the party vote.

P16-2 : 2002 Election result

<u>Party Vote</u>		<u>Electoral Vote</u>	
Labour	13,051	Maharey (Lab)	17,032
National	6,603	Scott (Nat)	9,405
Others	11,190	Others	3,767

The 2005 Election

On the 17 September 2005, Steve Maharey was re-elected as M.P. for Palmerston North. It was his sixth successive victory at the polls., The final figures for that election reveal him winning yet again with a solid majority in both party and electorate votes. His National opponent had made significant gains both in the share of the party vote and in the electorate vote.

P16-3 : 2005 Election Result

<u>Party Vote</u>		<u>Electoral Vote</u>	
Labour	45%	Maharey (Lab)	17,263
National	37%	Plimmer (Nat)	11,763
Others	18%	O'Halloran (Green)	1,141
		Others	1,878
		Majority	5,500

In 2005, Maharey was appointed Minister of Education.



P16-4 :
Steve Maharey, Minister of Education,
talking to students during university
orientation.

When Steve Maharey completes this term in Parliament in 2008, he will have been the longest serving Member of Parliament for Palmerston North since the electorate was formed.

Local Member

Steve Maharey has built a strong, personal constituency in Palmerston North. He has proved to be a very successful local Member. Born in Palmerston North, and with strong family links, he has identified with the strengths and weaknesses of the electorate, and has worked extremely hard in the fifteen years he has been in Parliament.

Following the 2005 election, he spoke of his concern about the impact which the reforms of 1980 had on the provinces, but went on to express his present confidence in the future of Palmerston North. He was described as “passionate about Palmerston North.”

Maharey said, “It’s been a real struggle to get things going again the city is on a path. It’s a fantastic place to live. It has a strong agricultural base and industry pays high wages.” [*The Tribune, October 2, 2005*]

P16-5 : Following the 2005 Election

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Passion for the provinces

Steve Maharey is passionate and committed to Palmerston North. **Jan Loney** caught up with him last week.

IT looks like business as usual for Palmerston North's Labour Member of Parliament, Steve Maharey. Although election night results haven't given a clear indication of the make up of New Zealand's new government, Mr Maharey feels that the special votes will only consolidate the election-night situation.

"The Greens may get one more seat, but the negotiating process is moving along," says Mr Maharey.

Mr Maharey is passionate about Palmerston North, having seen the provinces, including the Manawatu suffer at the hands of Rogernomics through the 1980s. While lecturing at

Massey during this time, dealing with public policy, Mr Maharey got more and more disillusioned with government reforms.

"The reforms of the 1980s impacted badly on the provinces."

And the 1990s were no better.

"The last six years have changed things around."

But those two decades have had lasting implications for the provinces.

He squeaked into parliament in the 1990 with the barest majority after Trevor De Cleene vacated the Palmerston North seat, also disillusioned with Labour's direction.

"It's been a real struggle to

get things going again, but I'm delighted to see (in Palmerston North) a lot of activity – visitors, industry coming back to town, the birth and growth of the International Pacific College.

"The city is on a path. It's a fantastic place to live. It has a strong agricultural base and industry pays high wages."

Mr Maharey has strong ties to Palmerston North, he went to school and university here, watched his brother play rugby for Manawatu and his sister lives here.

He feels the Labour Government's investment in the regions is the impetus which has fuelled this regeneration.

"There's still a lot to do. New Zealand is going through a phase in history. To make it successful we

need skilled people and we need the infrastructure to support this."

One of his key areas of concern is child poverty.

"This is not acceptable in our country.

"We've had a good start over the last six years, but

there's a long way to go yet. I'm keen to be part of that process – to make things happen."

Mr Maharey splits his time with great skill between his electorate commitments and his cabinet and caucus responsibilities.



Picture: JONATHAN CAMERON

PALMERSTON North MP Steve Maharey.

Source: *The Tribune*, October 2, 2005

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