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POLITICS STORY
Labour party celebrates 90 years

07 July 2006

The Labour Party hopes to raise up to \$1 million a year through a new fund being launched at its 90th birthday celebrations.

The Labour Party was formed on July 7, 1916 in Wellington as the independent political party of the union movement.

It is holding more than 20 functions around the country to commemorate the event, including a Beehive function which Prime Minister Helen Clark will speak at, and a larger party in Manukau City featuring live entertainment.

Labour wants the functions to mark the contributions it has made in 33 years of office.

It will also launch the Labour Century Fund, a pledge system which will see people make direct, monthly donations to help raise money for future election campaigns.

The Century Fund will replace the current Victory For Labour Fund launched in the 1970s.

People who sign up to the Century Fund at the events will receive a founder badge and a commemorative CD containing a computer screen saver of Labour Party images from the past 90 years.

Labour Party president Mike Williams yesterday said the objective of the fund was to keep Labour in power "at least until it's 100 years old".

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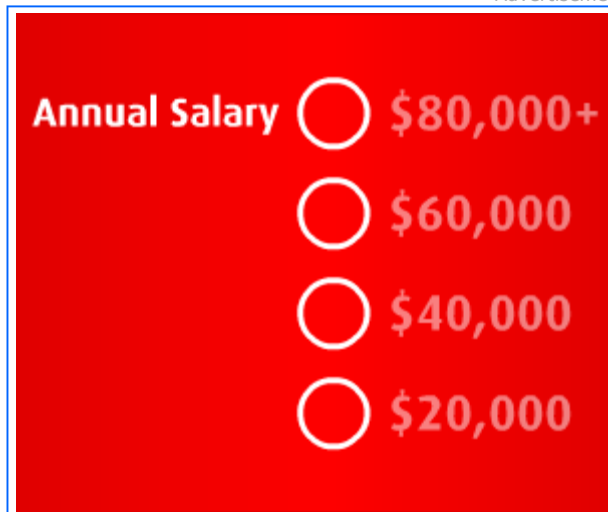
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Mr Williams said the Victory for Labour Fund had been very successful during the 1980s but support for it had dropped off during the

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Rogernomics era.

"Our membership's building at the moment and we think it's time for a relaunch."

"We need to raise more money. We were outspent by the National/Exclusive Brethren party by \$2 million."

National had spent \$800,000 to \$1m on its billboard campaign before the official election campaign period started.

"We didn't budget for that," Mr Williams said.

"If we get 4000 or 5000 people giving us 10 or 20 bucks a month, then we can get that extra money."

It was aiming to get another \$500,000 to \$1m on top of what it got now.

Mr Williams said Labour stood yesterday for the things it had when it was first formed.

With the 90th anniversary tomorrow, he had been reading early conference papers "and their concerns were universal health, good level of housing, access to higher education for everybody, just a sort of fair go".

The party has seen some interesting times, from the election of Michael Joseph Savage in December 1935 as the first Labour prime minister, to the splits and divisions of the 1980s over Rogernomics.

Some of its senior people are now in their mid-50s – Miss Clark is 56 – so in the next decade it needs to look at young talent coming through its ranks.

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But Mr Williams said the party was "in pretty good heart".

"We're pretty united. I can't think of any outbreaks of factionalism since I've been around," he said.

Mr Williams started working for the party in 1978.

He was working for the Australian Labor Party during the splits over Rogernomics.

Centre-left parties have a tendency to blow apart and Mr Williams credits Miss Clark for keeping it together in recent years.

"I've never seen the party more united. But of course nothing succeeds like success.

"There are people in the party to the left who really won't argue with the lowest unemployment in 25 years."

The 90th anniversary, however, was an opportunity for the party to "reconnect", particularly in the provinces.

Labour lost a few provincial seats at the election including Wanganui, Timaru, East Cape, Tuketuki and Napier.

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