THE NEW ZEALAND HUMIC COMPOST SOCIETY:
MORE THAN A GARDEN CLUB.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1940s were a period of crisis for many people around the world. The Second World War created many fears and doubts that resulted in the questioning of the current way of life and provoking thought about the future of mankind.

New Zealand, although far from the Nazi threat, had to cope with the possibility of a Japanese attack, as well as facing the reality of a rapidly changing world with increasing mechanisation and urbanisation, and new advances in the fields of science and technology. A world, moreover, in which the values that had stood people in good stead for many years now came under attack.

Faced with these threats, as well as the spectre of a potential food shortage because of the demands of war and the perceived inability of land to keep up with demands, certain groups of people reacted differently. Some turned towards science as the answer to all problems, while others turned away from science and technology towards the individual and his relations with the land, advocating a better understanding of the basics of life to improve the quality of life and pave the way for the future. The New Zealand Humic Compost Club was an example of people favouring the latter approach. To such people the maintenance of the nation’s health was vital for the continued existence of democracy, and at the root of their health was the health and fertility of the land.

The soil’s fertility had been put at risk by its exploitation over previous years, and during wartime the maintenance of the supply as well as the quality of food was vital for survival. To ensure this, efforts had to be made to guarantee the fertility of the soil in the present and for the next
generations. To do this, the correct methods of cultivation had to be promoted while at the same time, changing people's attitude to the land, and treat it with the respect that it deserved.

To the founders and supporters of the Compost Club, this then was their focus. While their young men fought the war abroad, they would fight the war against possible starvation and poor nutrition at home. Compost became the focus of activity as a symbol of the fertility that humus could give back to the soil.

The aim of the Society was to foster and increase health by returning to basics and putting back what was obtained from the land. Underlying this symbol though, was a deep conviction that it was the responsibility of man to correct the abuses he had subjected the land to, in order to ensure the continuance of his very civilization.

Here the Compost Club will be examined from its origins in the pre-war conditions and writings to its beginning in 1941, through to the end of that decade, when the Club's original fervour began to die down somewhat and its organisation went through modifications. Through the study of the Club's formation, activities and ideology an attempt will be made to discover to what extent it was more than purely a gardening club to encourage the growing of vegetables. It will be seen that such an assumption would be to ignore its principles and deeply held convictions of its role in first maintaining life during the war and then in building up post-war society. It showed more concern for what the prolific growth of plants stood for than the plants themselves.

By looking at the movement through the Club's magazine, the official mouthpiece for its ideology, it is possible to see the
extent to which they regarded their role as vital for the continuance of life and prosperity.
The New Zealand Humic Compost Club was founded in 1941 by Dr Guy Chapman to foster the replacement of artificial forms of manuring with humic compost made from animal and vegetable wastes and thus improve human health and the human species, the decline of which was blamed on the unhealthy state of the soil.

Its origins do not lie in a parent organisation, indeed it appears to have been the first such organisation of its kind, with the Australian equivalent growing directly out of the New Zealand club, and its ideas spreading across the Pacific. Instead, the background to the Compost Club relies on various writings appearing in the first forty years of this century, most especially those of Sir Albert Howard. Howard was considered to be the pioneer of the fundamental principles of organic agriculture and one of his most notable works, aptly titled 'An Agricultural Testament' [1] became the bible of the Compost Club in New Zealand and was the keystone of the organic movement. 'An Agricultural Testament' was first published in 1940, but was preceded by writings such as 'Waste Products of Agriculture' in 1931, in which the first detailed account of the Indore method of composting appeared. The object of the book was to draw attention to the loss of soil fertility, brought about by the vast increase in crop and animal production, and the resulting disastrous consequences such as the general unbalancing of farming practices, increasing plant and animal disease and a loss of soil
by erosion. To repair such losses, it was necessary to maintain soil fertility through humus replacement in the form of compost.

Sir Albert Howard (8 December 1873-20 October 1947) was educated at the Royal College of Science, London, then at St John's College, Cambridge in the fields of agriculture and botany. He lectured in mycology and botany in the West Indies before, in 1905, taking up appointment as the Imperial Economic Botanist to the Government of India, and thus beginning a long association with that country. In 1924 he became Director of the Institute of Plants at Indore, which proved to be the place where most of his theories on organic agriculture would be formed, and Adviser to the States in Central India and Rajpulana until 1931 when he retired.

During his time in India, including time spent there after his retirement, he was able to investigate and develop his interest in the health of animals, man and plants, and the connection with the fertile soil. Sir Albert examined the history of agriculture in many societies and concluded that those most closely approximating nature's methods of husbandry had the longest histories.

Although the use of chemical fertilisers was a relatively new development, Howard went as far as to observe, as much as it was possible to upuntil that time, in India, that the natives with the healthiest crops and animals were those who rejected chemical fertilisers in favour of natural manures and this formed the basis of thought behind 'An Agricultural Testament' and subsequently the Compost Club.

Howard's main thesis was that reformed methods of cultivating the Earth's surface, including the return of all wastes to the
soil in the form of freshly prepared humus, was the only way to ensure the maintenance of human health and a happy life. During his life he devoted himself to advocating the value of natural organic fertility in building up productive soils capable of growing full crops.

While in India Sir Albert was able to develop a system of making compost from waste vegetable matter to incorporate and supplement animal manure which stressed the important role of humus in animal husbandry, in nutrition and in public health.

Considerable opposition towards the new theories was encountered by Howard from the traditional school of Scientific Agriculture, represented by the research centre at Rothamsted in England. They regarded organic agricultural techniques not as a source, by itself, of fertility, but rather as a basis for the economic application of artificial fertilisers in commercial use. Throughout the years they continued to question the validity of claims made for compost and were the target of much hostility from Composters. This was however only a surface matter and the effectiveness or otherwise of the compost represents only part of the ideology of the Club. What compost stood for was in the long run more significant than what it did.

The Compost Society therefore gained their main ideas from Howard, following him in advocating natural fertiliser instead of artificials like super-phosphate which attempted to replace natural nutrients, but left the soil barren. Organic matter is able to do to the soil what artificials can not, such as restore the crumble structure of the soil after erosion.

Writing after Howard's death, Guy Chapman, the inaugural member and first President of the Club, describes the profound impact
that he had on him and the Club,

"My own conviction that mankind made a grave mistake by adopting a purely chemical approach to soil management dates back to my first readings of Sir Albert's work." [2]

Howard was seen as a man breaking away from tradition to propagate his own new practical methods of soil conservation and rejuvenation, "fighting against ridicule and disbelief, with his back to the wall". [3] Just as Howard's interest lay not purely on the gardening aspect alone, nor did the Compost Club's. Their interest in the continuing fertility of the soil reflected their concern in the continued existence and prosperity of mankind, doubts about which had been generated after the first World War and which were strengthened with the approach of World War Two.

On its formation, Howard became Patron of the Club which continued to draw on his readiness to help and regarded him as its "Master and Friend" [4]. Thus Sir Albert's importance lies in the fact that he and his ideas represented the originating point for the movement. Other writers on soil fertility were drawn on, but they too really only reinforced and amplified on Howard's original thesis. [5]

Howard was responsible for the system of composting used by the Club, the Indore Process, together with the later invention of their own brand of his system, known as the Petty System, (after its inventor). The Indore Process stresses the importance of humus in the form of compost, as the most easily obtainable source of this necessary commodity. The process was developed in
Howard's major experiment conducted over a period of 25 years in India. During that time he farmed 75 acres, observing and testing the parts and the whole, rather than following the conventional form of research whereby teams of scientists worked on only a fragment of the whole and therefore limited their ability to draw conclusions from the results. [6]

The Indore System involved a process to produce a biologically balanced and chemically stable heap, and was initially developed to assist cotton cultivators of India who provided a large portion of the funds necessary for the foundation and maintenance of the Institute at Indore. The working out of the actual process took seven years, but the foundations on which it was based took more than 25 years. [7]

Two independent lines of thought and study produced the final result. The first of these concerns was the nature of disease, since it was observed that the maintenance of soil fertility was the real basis of health and resistance to disease. Only when the biological system breaks down due to improper agricultural methods and soil impoverishment, did parasites apparently become effectively active. [8]

The second line of thought occurred, according to Howard, during his time spent at in plant breeding at Pusa (1905-1924), when he realized that certain varieties could only survive and prosper when the soil was adequately supplied with humus. Improved varieties by themselves could give an increased yield of ten percent, compared with when better soil conditions were provided, increasing the yield up to 100 percent. [9]

The Indore process proved popular because of its adaptability to all systems of farming and gardening and acted as
a firm launching pad for those who wanted to modify it at later stages. This simplicity is important, for no method is likely to be widely adopted unless it is exactly that. The technique is simple but exact, with the actual manufacturing process taking place in heaps or pits. The materials needed are animal and mixed vegetable wastes, a base for reducing acidity (earth, wood ash, sea sand), air and water. The loss of nitrogen usually occurring in an ordinary manure heap is avoided, as well as the bad smell and formation of fly breeding sites, factors usually deterring people from making compost and which the Compost Club tried to overcome.

The process is also significant in that it combines the main factors that were promoted in Howard's theories of research,

"When the Indore process in its final form was devised... the scientific approach to the utilization of crude organic matter left much to be desired. The chief organic residues—farmyard manure, green manure, vegetable residues, municipal wastes, sewage sludge, were all being studied separately, and not as parts of a single subject. Much of the scientific work had been done, but various fragments were lying around in the literature much like the materials in a builder's yard, before the building itself is erected. On the practical side difficulties were being experienced and results were often erratic." [10]
The Indore system however was able to solve these difficulties as it joined the separate fragments together into a single well ordered method. Moreover, with its method of using all residue waste, and its claim of producing a high degree of resistance to disease in crops and livestock following application, it appealed to people in wartime who were eager to be able to find a profitable use for all excess material, and through it, be seen to be contributing something to the effort to keep the enemy at bay, whether this enemy be the Japanese or Germans, or malnutrition and famine.

The claims of producing high measures of immunity from infective and parasitic, as well as degenerative diseases proved to be an important focus for advocating the use of compost. Thus Howard provided the practical and theoretical knowledge central to the formation of the movement. These are however all the more important when one considers the circumstances of the time, when concern about the future was at the forefront of most peoples' minds, faced as they were with the potential threat to their civilisation and the apparent decline in food and resources.

Undoubtedly then, the conditions that existed in New Zealand were an important factor responsible for the foundation and development of the Club here. The decrease in health, coinciding as it did to a significant degree with the increase in the use of artificialis in the soil, caused many to link the two and search for ways to reverse the process. "Formerly, in the days when artificialis were used, cases of colds, measles and scarlet fever used to run through the school." After the vegetables consumed in the school were raised with Indore compost however, such illnesses tended to be confined to the single
case imported from outside."[14] Although this case occurred in a London preparatory school, similar connections were made in New Zealand.

Professor Worley, Chief of the Department of Chemistry at the University of New Zealand expressed in his book "The Poor Earth" [15] many of the same fears shared with the Compost Club, the consequences of which, they would try to avert. Writing on the use of chemical fertilisers, which Mrs Ysabel Daldy, founder of the Physical and Mental Welfare Society of New Zealand Inc. states, manures the soils the whole of N.Z. food supplies are grown on, Professor Worley comments,

"By what we add, as well as what we fail to restore to the soil, we are profoundly affecting its chemical composition, its biological content and its physical nature. We are thus affecting the quality of food grown on such soil, and in consequence, the health and vitality of the population. It is now recognised that much of our food has serious deficiencies, and that very many of our ills are due to this cause."[16]

In New Zealand by 1939, ills did seem to be prolific. Although its population had increased 36 percent since 1918, in the same period the birth rate had declined from 23 to 17 per thousand of the population. From 1930 to 1936 there had been no increase in actual births and then the birth rate per thousand increased only by .65.[17] Natural increase of the population, (that is births over deaths) declined progressively, from 31.19 per thousand of mean population in 1876, to 8.22 in 1938. [18] In 1938 the
largest ever recorded number of deaths were registered (up to that date that is excluding the 1918 flu epidemic), with a death rate of 9.71 per thousand.

Such statistics created great concern about the quality of life and the possible decline of the European race in New Zealand. At the same time as the apparent Pakeha decline, there was a corresponding Maori upsurge. There was a belief among many Europeans at the turn of the century, that Maoris would soon die out. On the contrary though, the Maori population was on an upsurge— from 42,113 in 1896, to 56,987 in 1921, to later 115,676 in 1951. [19] The Maori birthrate was higher than the non-Maori rate and this meant that they began to increase as a proportion of the total population. European New Zealanders tended to rank people by race. Europeans were considered superior to non-Europeans and they wished that a British style life could continue, thus any threat to the health and fertility of Europeans that would endanger the physical and moral superiority was to be avoided, and the prospect of a stationary European population caused many to search for the source and its cure.

Admissions into public hospitals increased by up to 126 percent [20] and maternal mortality was relatively high, in comparison with, for example Great Britain. Infant mortality was certainly one of the lowest in the world but the incidence of illness among N.Z. children two to five years of age was great. Each year 80 percent of such children were found to be 'physically defective' [21] in some way. The Ministry of Health stated that 30 percent of all preschoolers suffered nose and throat infections and 23 percent suffered gland troubles.

H.B. Tennent, agricultural editor of the Weekly News wrote in
"Of all primary producing countries in the world, New Zealand is probably most lacking in the important soil elements essential to healthy plant and animal growth. Animal sicknesses and the increasing populations of hospitals and mental institutions can...be directly traced to mineral and other deficiencies in foods produced from improperly balanced soils".[22]

It was therefore against this background that Dr G.B. Chapman took an interest and showed the concern in health and fertility on which the Club was built. Chapman, previously of the Physical and Mental Health Society, conducted feeding experiments in 1936 to reinforce his faith in the belief of the relationship of humus and health.

One experiment began at Mount Albert Grammar School on 60 boys, teachers and staff. The school had a history of severe colds, septic tonsils, influenza, dental caries and other preventable complaints. Naturally produced food replaced the previous supplies and to counter the effect of still receiving meat and bread from outside sources, and therefore the product of depleted soils, vitamins were provided. As a result of the change over, it was noted that the incidence of colds and flu decreased. The measles epidemic which hit in 1938 affected those boys who had been at the hostel for a year or more to a lesser degree and their recovery was quicker than the new boys.[23] Also, there appeared to be a marked physical growth and development and improved dental condition among the boys.
Although it is difficult to ascertain to what extent such changes occurred as a direct result of the new diet, or to other factors such as the vitamin treatment, the importance lies in the perceived effect the natural process apparently had, acting as it did to reinforce the beliefs held by the advocates of the natural process and increasing the determination to spread such knowledge to others to ensure the general increase of health and vitality, hopefully throughout the whole nation.

Thus, in a background of apparently declining health and fertility of the population and the land and faced with the war which threatened existing Western civilization, the Compost Society came into being. It was an original organisation, whose origins lie in the writings and philosophy of such men as Sir Albert Howard and Guy Chapman, propelled into action by the events and circumstances of the day to avoid the destruction of society.
CHAPTER ONE : ENDNOTES

[8] ibid, p40
[9] ibid, p39
[10] Balfour p56
[12] ibid, p62
[14] ibid, p130
[16] Worley, quoted in Balfour, p131
[18] ibid p87, 1940
[19] King, Michael, *Between Two Worlds*, in Oliver, W.H.,(ed) *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Wellington, 1981. p280. Note however that such fears were unnecessary, as Maoris had a higher death rate and infant mortality rate than Pakehas.
[20] *The New Zealand Year Book*, p147
[21] Balfour p131
[22] ibid, p132
[23] *Nature*, 8 June, 1940
CHAPTER II

THE NEW ZEALAND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MOVEMENT

In this chapter the growth of the Club will be looked at during the 1940s, from its foundation in 1941 until the conference in 1949, marking the end of the first stage of its existence. Some of the activities that it became involved in will be examined to try and discover the extent to which the Society was more than a gardening club alone.

The Compost Club Magazine

The New Zealand Humic Compost Club was inaugurated under the Presidency of Dr. Guy Chapman in March 1941, with the first issue of the Compost Club magazine appearing in March 1942. The magazine was seen as serving the purpose of providing the Club with the means of conveying the compost idea to others, and giving its members the information needed to restore life to the soil. The magazine, in this study, will be the major source of material about the Society, acting as it did as the main mouthpiece for the organization and reflecting the development and the changes within the Club during its first nine years in existence.

The magazine in the early years reflects the aims that the first president had in mind when he formed the Club. "The great purpose of the Compost Club is to get people to use compost." As such, the information that appeared was more on the functional
side, in the form of practical questions columns and readers' letters citing the success of their compost, under the column 'They say- What do they say?', as well as basic advice about making compost. Such information would later be conveyed in Club leaflets and at local meetings, as the magazine became preoccupied with other, more important, issues often of a philosophical nature.

Apart from an alteration in form of the Magazine in 1943, when it was changed to a small booklet, the first major transformation came with the editorial change in volume two, number five, (1943) when Mr. A.R.D. Fairburn took over the editorship of the magazine from Ernest Satchell. Editorials began to appear regularly and the tone of the magazine changed, reflecting the changing perceptions of the role of the Club held by the Executive in Auckland.

Attention began to be focused on issues other than general composting, a prime example of this being concern over the use of town wastes in conserving the soil, to be discussed further later on in this paper. That issue dominated the Club's activities over the following six years, and reflects the move away from gardening problems on a small scale, to an attempt to involve the authorities in restoring the lost fertility on a large scale. This exemplified the concern that was felt over the apparent threat that this decline in soil fertility held for the population.

Furthermore, the magazine not only concentrated on promoting the municipal composting issue, but it became more involved with expressing the underlying ideology of the movement, its motivations and significance for the existence of mankind.
Membership and Growth

The Society, when it was formed, was the first of its kind in the world. An Australian branch followed New Zealand's example in 1946, known as the 'Australian Organic Farming and Gardening Society', and in England the equivalent organisation did not start formation until 1945, taking shape finally in 1947 as the 'Soil Association'.

From its beginnings in 1941 the Club in New Zealand expanded quickly, despite reactions from sceptics, scoffing at claims made by often overzealous members. It was felt, that, to secure the restoration of New Zealand's soils, the Club required a large membership and the active aid of all members in helping to spread the word throughout the land, thus it was searching continuously for new converts especially at the beginning of its foundation. "The humus-ertilisation movement requires the power of numbers. Every member can help spread the gospel and everyone should." [3] Not only would members be helped with the management of their own soils, but they would be contributing to the improvement of New Zealand's health.

The organization was based in Auckland and branches quickly spread throughout the country, firstly in New Plymouth and Wellington in September 1942, and the membership correspondingly grew. From an initial count of 186, up to 220 by December 1941, the May 1942 issue of the magazine claimed a total body of members of 500, increasing to 1,200 in the November issue. As of 31 December, 1942, numbers had reached 1,456, the thousand mark having been made in August, 1942.[4]

At the beginning of 1943, attempts were made to set up a branch
in Wanganui, with displays at many Spring shows and a series of talks to women's organisations, including the National Council of Women, Women's divisions of the Farmer's Union, Women's Institutes in five country districts, Townswomen's Guilds and to members of the Health and Beauty movement. Branches were also soon set up in Dunedin, Christchurch and the Hutt Valley. By May-June 1943, membership had reached 2,000 and further branches were being established in Kumeu, Tauranga, Hastings, Inglewood, Invercargill and in Hawkes Bay. The existence of branches was vital for the everyday running and work of the Club, as it left the Executive free to concentrate on forming the body of ideas policy that established the Club's identity in the minds of many.

Significantly, in March 1944, a separate Auckland Branch was formed. Hitherto, the National Executive had been responsible for all the work in the Auckland region as well as the country-wide administration. However with the expansion of the Club, there was less time to give to Auckland affairs, thus necessitating the creation of a separate office to serve its local members better.

By 1945, numbers peaked at 5,400, overseas members being 200, with a total number of branches of sixteen. That year also marked the year when Guy Chapman resigned from an active role in the Club, to be replaced by T.W.M. Ashby as President. Also in that year, the Club changed its name to the N.Z. Humic Compost Society Inc., in an attempt to try and establish a more serious image than the label of a 'Club' was able to confer.

With the end of the War, it was generally to be expected that a decline in membership would result for a time at least, as the motivating effect that World War Two had had in creating concern over certain issues began to wear off, leaving only those who
were more dedicated to the Society's cause.

The drop in numbers was not, however, very great and overall membership was maintained. From its peak in 1945, the Society's numbers dropped to 4,861 in 1946 [5], a trend which continued until 1949, by which time membership fluctuated between 4,000 and 4,500 in 12 branches.[6] The drop in numbers reflected not only a drop in interest, if this contributed at all, but also the concentration in the middle years of the decade on the support of certain key issues, especially that of municipal composting, rather than spending time promoting new memberships.

The case of the Canterbury branch reflects the decline in support experienced by the Club after the War. Although relatively successful in keeping up the numbers, with the general monthly meetings reasonably well attended, on average between 50-70 during 1946-7, by 1948 attendance figures were dropping to 30-45. Financial membership also reflected this trend, with there being 327 financial and 90 non-financial members in September 1944, 440 members in March 1945 [7], dropping to 294 in 1946 [8]. There was a slight rise again in 1947, up to 312. possibly because of the range of activities in Christchurch offered by the Club,[9] but in the annual report for 1948, at which time there were 253 members, the current president, T.D. Lennie noted the difficulty of maintaining membership and the consequently declining financial position. [10]

The period under examination saw three Presidents in office. The first, and founder, Dr. Guy Chapman, D.D.S., L.D.S., L.R.C.S., had roused interest in forming the Society through his regular broadcasts from N.Z. Broadcasting Stations, in which he used material from the authorities that would later become the
basis for his ideology—Albert Howard, Dr. G.T. Wrench [11] and the Chester Local Medical and Panel Committees.[12] During Chapman's time as President, 1941-1945, there had been a rapid growth in membership and the successful dispersal of the compost idea.

T.W.M. Ashby took over briefly at the head of the Society from 1945-1946, but the demands of his work as Auckland City Town Clerk forced his withdrawal.

In 1946 D.M. Robinson (knighted in 1970), became President of the Compost Society for what became a vital seven year period. His involvement in the Auckland Drainage League had drawn him to the Society, and inevitably his interest in that League was reflected strongly in the direction that the Society took during his contact years.

From 1947-1949 the activities of the National Council became directed towards the development of municipal composting on a national scale, involving interaction with local bodies throughout New Zealand, and considerable contact and exchanges of information with authoritative organizations and soil experts in various parts of the world. As well as this focus, attempts were made to widen the range of issues dealt with and action taken, including farm compost, the prevention of erosion, preservation of forests, rehabilitation and enrichment of rural life, and the development of better relations between the town and country.

The emphasis placed on this particular trend in policy, as opposed to the "more purely domestic service to the home composter" [13], in the form of gardening advice and so on, was considered by the Executive of the Society to come at an opportune time. Having defeated the enemy in Europe and the
Pacific, attention was turned to defeating the spectre of starvation at home when post-war crises in food production brought the question of soil fertility to the forefront on the national and international scenes. During these years the Society became somewhat controversial because of its avid advocacy of its causes and was regarded by many with a degree of suspicion.

The Annual Conference of 1949 marks a watershed in the history of the Society, in that a move was made to make the organization more regionally based in the hope of extending membership to its previous high and becoming more involved with the individual members again. The enlargement of numbers was particularly important when one considers that the financial position of the Society at the end of the 1940s was far from healthy. Although all accounts were paid up and commitments were covered by anticipated revenues, to expand the scope and value of the Society's work, it was felt necessary to reorganise Head Office, a not inexpensive operation, that could not be catered for with its current finances. To run the headquarters from Auckland was besides quite costly, and many branches resented the use of their fees in the maintenance of Auckland. As a result, the organization was decentralised somewhat and new territorial boundaries were set controlling branch affiliations and payments.

The organization as it had stood, had been top heavy and, as a result of the 1949 conference, the Head Office Secretariat was reorganised. The position of a full time salaried National Secretary was created with a paid assistant. This it was hoped would be paid for by the prospective increase in membership and revenue.
During the 1940s, the various branches organized their own activities in order to promote the ideas of the Compost Society. In Christchurch, the Canterbury branch held monthly meetings at which talks were given by various local and visiting speakers, all stressing the value of the Compost ideology. For example, in 1947 at the 27 February meeting, L.N. McCaskill spoke on the "Relation of the Soil to Health."

Especially popular was work done through local schools and bowling clubs encouraging the use of compost and documenting and publicising the successes. In New Plymouth, for example, pupils of local schools made models of compost pits and competitions were held for the making of compost. On bowling greens, humus was promoted as being more beneficial than artificial fertilisers.

Field days were held most commonly in the early years, as efforts were made to increase general awareness of compost and to overcome the rather negative image it had as bad smelling and an attractor of flies and for example, in Christchurch, talks were given to the Horticultural Society Rose Show and the New Brighton Show. Once membership had been raised however, such activities frequently fell off somewhat as attention was turned from practical knowledge to the theories behind the beliefs, in an effort to spread the basic ideology.

During the War the Compost Society actively supported the 'Dig For Victory' Campaign to 'grow your own', encouraging the use of compost to produce nutritious vegetables. The Society participated in activities associated with the campaign, for example, at the February 11 1944 'Dig for Victory' Exhibition held in Wellington and attended by nearly 33,000, a compost stand
was set up demonstrating the techniques in setting up a heap. In Christchurch, the local branch helped the Women’s Land Army establish compost bins at Abberley Park for the 'Dig for Victory campaign'.[14] Such demonstrations contributed greatly to attracting new members and were an important part of the initial activities of the Club.

A film was made in 1945 by E. Pinkney of Henderson depicting large scale composting of city wastes, as well as showing the production of compost by the Indore method using household wastes and its application. It was widely shown throughout New Zealand including to members of the House of Representatives and contributed a great deal to spreading public awareness of the purposes of the Compost Society.

During 1947, the Canterbury branch activities included visits to St Andrews College Young Farmers Club, N.Z. Forest and Bird Protection Society, Woodend Garden Club, the Vegetarian Society, and the Women’s Institute. Similar activities occurred every year, with debates and films being run, all to promote and spread the value of composting.

Such a wide variety of activities was necessary in the first step of the Compost Movement, which was raising awareness of the usefulness of organically produced and balanced fertiliser and its significance for the health and survival of the human race. After the initial stage of attracting people to it, the Club could turn its attention to other than general gardening matters, ones that held greater significance for the Society’s existence and made it more than 'just' a gardening club, but instead, a group of community minded citizens concerned about their future.
Because of its importance and the attention that was focused on it, a quick examination of the municipal composting issue will briefly be made to see what influence and effect the Compost Society actually had.

The issue of the use of town wastes to conserve the soil was raised as early as 1944 in the Club’s magazine and came to represent a dominating policy area through that decade.[15] The basis of their claims was the feeling that much fertility left the soil for good through sewage, equalling an offence against the land and sea, polluting as it did the coastal waters, and impoverishing pasture. The aim was to stop this waste by turning sewage and household refuse into compost.

This was not a novel idea as such a system was being used overseas with success, from places such as Kingston-on-Thames in England to the Union of South Africa where 15 townships produced compost from waste.

From a practical point of view, there was no reason why such a scheme could not be put into action. This use of wastes represented potentially, one of the best large scale means of re-fertilising the land. The process was relatively straightforward, involving a five step process to produce a brown, earthy substance after the removal of salvage and ash, and the pulverisation and composting of the remains. It was practicable and could operate in towns of up to 50,000 inhabitants.

The issue of municipal composting also had underlying significance for the ideology of the Club, concerned as it was
with uniting the urban and rural sectors of the community. From
the point of view of farming, towns had become parasites,
depending on the Earth's fertility for their survival, through
the provision of food and resources. The use of town wastes would
enable the town to contribute to the maintenance of the fertility
that it was reliant on.[16] The issue was also connected with the
basic question confronting the post-war world of soil
conservation to cope with expanding populations.

The interest taken in composting town wastes attracted the
attention of D.M. Robinson and reflects the degree to which so
much of the Club's action was focused around Auckland. The
origins of the concern about the use of sewage arose from the
proposed Auckland drainage scheme, whereby the sewage of Auckland
was to be carried to Brown's Island, treated, and discharged into
the Hauraki Gulf. This was seen as a huge waste of fertiliser as
well as a menacing source of pollution, and efforts to prevent
such a potentially dangerous practice took form in a call to
instead use the waste profitably. The Composters claimed that
such waste held value not only as a fertiliser but as a source of
revenue benefitting the council and ratepayers, as the resulting
manure could be sold, as had been done elsewhere in the world. In
the United States, for example, Milwaukee had once polluted the
waters of Lake Michigan with its sewage disposal, but in 1945 the
city derived instead an annual revenue equalling 100,000 pounds
from the sale of sludge and effluent.[17]

With the election of Robinson as President, the move for
municipal composting gained momentum, one of his objectives being
its adoption by every local body in New Zealand.[18] Towards that
end a petition was presented to Parliament asking for a Royal
Commission into "the utilization of town and country wastes, and sewage, in the manufacture of organic fertiliser, as a means of restoring fertility to the soil and health to plants, livestock and human beings." As a result, a provisional committee was set up to investigate the need for such a commission.

In Christchurch, which for many years had had a sewage farm, the Compost Club concentrated its efforts on promoting municipal composting of all wastes to avoid the waste inherent in a municipal garbage tip. On April 4, 1946, the Executive of the Club visited the Christchurch Drainage Board's Bromley farm to view it in operation, in order to help in the planning of the campaign for a modern town waste and sewage disposal scheme.[19] To follow this up, on July 11, T.D. Lennie, Y.T. Shand and C.G. McKellar met with the Mayor, E.H. Andrews to discuss the advisibility of calling a public meeting to consider proposals for the disposal by composting of sewage and city wastes.[20]

By 1947 the attitude of the public towards the utilization of sewage was changing and local bodies were giving great support, as in Papakura, Masterton, Napier, Hastings, and Stratford, and the Dannevirke Borough Council had begun its own scheme. A pilot scheme had also been set up in Auckland.

Sceptics remained but the tide of opinion had generally changed. This was seen especially in newspapers who tended to take the matter more seriously. The 'Auckland Star' and the 'Listener', both which had in the past shown mild and sometimes hostile interest in the idea of sewage utilisation, began to emphasise the importance of the subject in its articles.[20]

By 1948-9 therefore, the Society had succeeded in several spheres of influence, raising the question of compost as a matter
of national importance. Furthermore in September 1948, the Society, in cooperation with the Auckland and Suburban Drainage League (A.S.D.L.) presented evidence before the Royal Commission on the Sheep Farming Industry in an effort to show the ease and benefits of using compost on the land. As a result of that evidence, the Commission commented favourably on, and endorsed proposals for, the production of organic fertiliser through the composting of town and rural wastes.[21]

The Compost Society also cooperated with the A.S.D.L. in presenting evidence to the Auckland Drainage Commission in March to April 1949, resulting in the recommendation that, "municipal authorities should be encouraged to conduct experiments in composting garbage and other wastes." [22] By that stage however, various councils and branches had already begun to do that, for example in Christchurch, Hutt Valley, Dunedin and Rotorua.

Therefore by 1949, the Club had made advances in achieving its goal of seeing municipal composting schemes taken up by New Zealand's local bodies. It was able to exert pressure and influence those in power to investigate the claims it had made.

The Municipal Composting campaign represented only one, though possibly the most important, embodiment of the aims of the Compost Society. It caused controversy and thus increased the attention given to the Club, facilitating the dissemination of its ideology and activities. Its focus on such issues, furthermore, negates the idea that the Society was only a gardening club, interested as its members were in the wider implications that soil fertility or the lack thereof had for the future of the country.
CHAPTER TWO: ENDNOTES

Minutes of the Club.
[10] By 31 March, 1949, membership in Canterbury was down to 210, under half of the 1945 total.
[12] The Medical Testament, issued by the County Palatine of Chester Local Medical and Panel Committees. Hon. Sec., Dr. Picton.
[14] reported in the Christchurch Star Sun, Feb. 18, 1944
[18] C.C.M. 6:5:3 -message from the president
[22] C.C.M. 9:6
[23] C.C.M. 8:6:32
CHAPTER III

THE COMPOST MOVEMENT - SECULAR MILLENNIALISTS?

The main thesis around which the Club was founded, was that the future of the world depended on the health and effort of the people. Health and stamina were supported on quality foods which could only be grown on fertile soil. Where the land was depleted, therefore, a threat existed to that health. In fertile soils the humus content is high, permeability is satisfactory, there is no crusting and little wind erosion. Therefore to maintain the humus content so important for the soil, it must be put back in the form of humic compost. Artificial, mineral manure only acts as a stimulant to growth, and is only temporary, adding nothing to the soil.

Scientifically, the value of humus is unquestionable, a fact attested to by microbiologist Samuel A. Waksman. "Among various factors contributing to the fertility of the soil, none occupies a more prominent place than soil organic matter."[1] It has a fourfold effect on the soil. It serves as a storehouse of plant nutrients, such as phosphorus, nitrogen, and ammonia. Secondly it has an important physical effect on the soil, improving structure, aeration, increasing the water holding capacity and having a binding effect on the soil. Humus also has certain chemical effects on soil constituents, rendering phosphorus and other elements more soluble, and neutralising toxic substances. Lastly it has an important effect on the biological state of the soil, making it a more favourable medium for the development of
root systems of plants and for the growth of micro-organisms essential for soil processes. [2]

Therefore the major effects that humus has on the soil lay not with its direct fertility value, though this is important, but with its physical and biological functions which artificial fertilisers are unable to provide by themselves. This then was the practical argument behind the claims for using humic compost.

At the centre of the movement, the focus of activity and their symbol, was the compost heap. It was of prime importance in giving back to the land that which had been taken from it and acting as a tool to rouse the towns to participate in the restoration of the soil and thus narrow the gap between the towns and country.

This practical promotion of compost tends however to obscure the issues that existed below the surface. Compost was the means to an end, as well as an end in itself. The New Zealand Humic Compost Society was more than a gardening club, as behind the call for composting lay an ideology concerned with the propagation of mankind and his sustained health. Those dedicated to the ideology were thinking beyond the present and looking towards the future when any abuses of the land would truly be felt.

It is not the task here to examine the validity or otherwise of the Society's claims, it is enough that they believed wholeheartedly in them. Rather the task is to examine the underlying ideology of the Club and the reasons for its members adopting such a belief system. Because of the similarities, an analogy will be made with popular millenarianist sects to try and give some form to the organization and their beliefs.

The basis of the ideology revolves around the improvement of
the nation's health in all aspects, to ensure the continuing survival in a world under threat of destruction and famine. It thus embodies strong salvationist and social consciousness aspects. Included in the beliefs was a move against artificial means of maintaining and improving health, and thus against the proponents of larger technology who were the supporters and producers of it. This is not to say that they were rejecting science completely, but rather that they were advocating the combining of nature and science in a rational manner.

They were also concerned with the economic future of the country. They felt that a 'get-rich-quick' mentality was exerting pressure through the country, resulting in taking from the land what was possible and not thinking further than the present, when later, such action could deprive New Zealand of the valuable resources that were depended on for the income of its people.

A new age was perceived to be coming, following on from the existing age of destruction and decline. Many of the writings that the Society used to form and convey their ideology, came from writers looking back in history to past periods of disaster and attempting to avoid a similar thing happening, for example the writings of Friend Sykes[3]. Also, works were used of writers who had examined the use of the land by other people in past times who had done better than present day men, and advocated the adoption of those methods of use, as for example G.T.Wrench did. [4]

A useful tool in helping understand the society's formation, structure and thought, would be a comparison with the popular millenarianist sects that have arisen periodically throughout the
centuries, though significantly mainly in times of stress or crisis. The analogy made, will of course be from a secular and not a religious perspective on the side of the Composters.

J.F.C. Harrison, writing in "The Second Coming"[5], saw that the study of millenarianism might inform not just about religious beliefs, but also about the structure of popular thought, and be useful as a way of penetrating the mental world of men and women.

As such, the analogy between the Compost Club and the millenarianist sects is useful as a conceptual tool to explore aspects of their thoughts and help explain why the beliefs held proved so attractive. This is not of course to imply in any way that the Compost Society was a millenialist sect, but rather, that similarities in character and action, and to a lesser degree thought, exist and bear closer examination. This makes a comparison therefore useful in an attempt to see their beliefs in a different light. It is very difficult to understand the minds of people through their own eyes and when seen through the distortion of others’ prejudices and convictions, as in newspapers for example. Information obtained from such sources must be interpreted, while trying not to assume that everything that is written is necessarily true.

Before proceeding, it would be useful to examine what is actually meant by the doctrine of the millenium and the second advent. It is worth mentioning that, while to the purist, the millennium refers only to the fixed period of 1000 years found in the Judaic-Christian tradition, it can also be applied figuratively to any conception of a perfect age to come, by an act of regeneration and lasting for varying lengths of time.[6]
In brief, millenialism is an ideology of social change and is rooted in theology, specifically in eschatology—the doctrines about last things, and more specifically in the apocalyptic, a more limited group of ideas about the last things.[7]

The term 'millenialist' is one which is difficult to use precisely because of the diversity of thought on it, however there is agreement in theology that the world will be transformed by the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of God on Earth. This state would last 1000 years, after which would come the last judgement. Different views exist however between Christians believing that the Second Coming would precede the millennium (pre-millenialist), and those believing it would follow the millennium (post- millenialists). The former felt that the establishing of the millennium would be by divine cataclysmic action, while the latter felt the Kingdom of God would come gradually, as a result of Christian human instrumentality.

Ernest Lee Tuveson goes further and gives the name millenarian to those expecting the imminent physical return of Christ, and millenialist to the believers in the gradual triumph of Christian principles, culminating in the millennium or holy utopia. [8] The former is usually pre-millenialist and the latter, post. Here for our purpose however, the distinction is not of vital importance, and the terms millenarianist and millenialist will be used as synonyms, combining as the Compost Society does factors of both. The two positions in any case, represent extreme ideals and differences in interpretations and emphasis were many and varied. The significance in their application to the Compost Society lies in the fact that they
share certain features in character and trends in thought, and not in the exact details of that thought.

Significantly, two works on millennialist study recently appeared at the same time, on the same period— that of the transitional period of the late 18th to early 19th centuries.[9] This period was one of acute social and economic change, a time of the reshaping of men's perceptions of themselves and the world. From that aspect, the time was similar to the period in which the Compost Society was formed as the 1940s was a time of disruption and change also.

An ideology attempts to explain and justify the stability and equilibrium in society. At a time when the stability of life is upset and traditional beliefs and attitudes are felt to be increasingly inadequate, there is a need for the ideology to take account of the changes and find a stabilizing system or a new ideology will be formed.

For some in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the answer was found in millenarianism, directed not at going back to restoring the past, but looking forward to the future, to a better time, a point shared in common with the Composters. They were concerned with overcoming the present time of danger and transformation and preparing the way for a new and better order to follow.

From an organizational, compositional point of view there were great similarities between the Millenarians and the Composters, and this will help in an understanding of the latter. Millenarianism tended to appeal to the socially deprived and there was frequently little variation in the character of its
members, consisting for example in 1780-1850, of mainly labouring men and farmers, with a small circle of female disciples. The Compost Club too had little variety in its members, and there tended not to be a broad spectrum of society in its ranks. Because of its basis in the towns there were few large farmers or labourers and the members tended to be from the 'middle of the road', aspiring classes, with few of the 'lower' classes.[10]

At the top of the millennialist sect there was usually a prophet or messiah who was necessary to give the movement its coherence and was the bearer of ideas. In the terms of Max Weber, such a person was a "purely individual bearer of charisma, who by virtue of his mission proclaims a... doctrine or divine commandment".[11] Charisma here means less a personal quality than a relationship. It implies acceptance of the leader by his following and endorsement of his personality,[12] and when the special claims of a prophet are acknowledged by his followers, his leadership becomes charismatic.[13]

The message of the prophet took many forms, but his revelations represented a unified view of the world derived from a "consciously integrated and meaningful attitude towards life".[14] Such a view was essentially practical and attempted to systemize all manifestations of life in the light of the perceived needs. In the context of the ideas followed in the Compost Society, this does seem to have been the case, as conditions at the time were used to reinforce the claims made by the Society and to fulfill the need of reassuring its followers at a time of strife. The view as presented in the ideology will be looked at closer later in this chapter.

In all facets, the figure of Albert Howard correlates with the
above model of a prophet. He was the originator of the basis of the Compost Movement's set of beliefs, and was seen as their "guide and philosopher".[15] To Guy Chapman and others he was "a prophet whose message the world sadly needed".[16] It was the role of the Club to "spread his gospel of Live Soils, to a growing clientele who will become...benefactors to the race."[17]

The prophet through his role and message, frequently broke with the established order and thus stood apart in society as a potential agent of change. He was seen as different, yet provided something for which there was a felt need.[18] Howard had indeed broken away from the orthodox line, in science, and had rebelled, striking out alone towards a new form of traditional agriculture. He rejected the past doctrines of theoretical knowledge for a renewed emphasis on practical methods of soil conservation and rejuvenation through direct experience and experimentation.

The crusade that Howard launched and that the Compost Society took up, was usually spoken of as a revolution. But it was that sort of revolution "which was essentially a reaction- a reaction against a very recent revolution that had proved to be a dismal and even disastrous one; the revolution that had put the field under the control of the laboratory." [19] What Howard, and as a result the Compost Club, were trying to do, was to bring the people back into contact with the land in order to understand it and get the best from it.

The importance of Howard was such, that his death in 1947 was felt deeply by his followers and although his teachings were preserved, the Society lost some of its impetus. The President at the time was D.M. Robinson who had not really succeeded to any
extent in gaining the degree of popularity that Chapman had built up over the years. Robinson himself had split interests, having a great deal to do with the Auckland Drainage League at the same time. He was therefore not possibly as wholeheartedly devoted to the Club, except as a way to propagate his other spheres of interest as well. With Howard gone, there was no immediate successor to his place, although his wife did assume some of his aura and became a patron of the Society. Yet the Club had lost its primary source for its ideology and began to decline somewhat as a result.

Around the prophet gathered a small band of personal devotees, some of whom may also possess charismatic qualities, and a wider circle of believers supporting them with time and money, seeking to proselytize and organise. In the New Zealand case, the Executive of the Club was most obviously the higher echelon in the organization, especially those centred in Auckland and controlling the magazine. They were concerned with propagating Howard's ideas and ensuring the growth of the Club. This model was duplicated in the regional branches also, with a dominating Executive controlling the action in their areas and maintaining the fervour in the belief as much as was possible.

Dr Chapman was an example of one of the more dominant disciples at the top of the organisation. Chapman was a dentist and expert on nutrition whose research into the relationship of dental caries and food showed the link between dental health and sound nutrition. He acquired charismatic qualities, especially in his role as President, and later took over Howard's place as Club mentor, philosopher and figurehead of the movement. He was obviously deeply committed to the Club, even
after his direct involvement in it ended, and he continued to exert considerable influence in the organisation and direction that it took. His writings continued to assume a prominent place in the magazine over the next 20 years.

The wider circle of believers obviously made up the main bulk of the membership. Their commitment varied to a greater degree than that of the Executive because of their more tenuous contact with, and devotion to the ideology. Many were attracted by the initial zeal of the movement during war time, offering as it did a chance to contribute in a concrete way to New Zealand’s effort.

During peacetime, though, when other activities were more attractive, membership fell off or became alienated by the direction that the Club was taking. Many became discontented with the almost missionary nature of the writings in the magazine, when frequently they were seeking no more than advice on how to produce more and better vegetables. Such a complaint was printed in volume 6 number 4 (1947) issue of the Club Magazine. The letter criticized the contents of the magazine, "I am writing to ask if you can do anything to make the compost magazine more interesting." He requested the magazine be more suitable for the 'backyard' gardener, with information on, for example, new seeds. "As it is at present, it (the magazine) is miles above the heads of the average person and interests but few...and is as dry as dust." The reply sent emphasised the role of the magazine in spreading the broader issues in order to carry weight in them. The regional branches were supposed to cater to members such as himself with gardening circles etc in order to try and keep such members inside the club's confines.[21] To what degree this was actually carried out
though is doubtful, if a point raised at a meeting of the Canterbury branch is anything to go by. At the 1946 A.G.M. one member recommended that the lectures given should be more practical and less theoretical. However, it should be noted that the Canterbury branch appeared to take the theoretical approach extremely seriously, a characteristic that continued throughout the 1940s more than perhaps was the case in other regional branches. However, still only the more dedicated tended to stay and support the Club's ideology as expressed in the magazine.

Thus the Compost Club seems to hold closely to the millenialist form of sect, reflecting the rigidity in structure and emphasizing the seriousness with which it regarded itself and its ideas.

From the secular viewpoint, millenarianism represents a kind of social consciousness, presenting a vision of a different order and raising awareness of the conditions maintaining life,[22] thus creating a secure context when those conditions had been achieved. Such thought represents a form of 'this worldly' salvation.

The idea of salvationism, as a type of millenarianism, was directed at replacing the existing form of society with a new one. Wilson, in 'Magic and Millennium'[23], classifies salvationists by their response to the world, identifying seven types.[24] Of all of the types, the one probably most fitting to the Compost Society in the context, is the reformists who are trying to amend the world gradually as a result of insights given from another source, often in the religious sense, supernaturally. This is close to the position of secular social reformers, differing only in positing divine guidance, although in a sense, the teachings of men such as Albert Howard could have
been viewed in such a light.

Because of the intention of replacing the old with the new, such thought was viewed with suspicion by governments and general society. This goes some way to explaining the often negative reaction that the Compost Society encountered. But the Composters were not advocating the total destruction of the world as it existed, rather they were trying to circumvent that stage of destruction, and instead create a new world out of the old, salvaging the parts that had worth and creating the new world by rational procedures leading to a new way of thinking. This is the basis of the Compost Club ideology. The new way of thinking arose out of the troubled context of the age and stimulated the people to do something that would add to their security and stature.

During the twentieth century when ideas of calamity and survival were rife, it was not surprising that questions about the continuance and the creation of new life had been developed. Such apocalyptic thought became common and was derived largely from the pressure that the expanding population exerted on the environment. With war, the fear was accentuated and raised fears of a possible end to the world. Thus, people searched for ways to save themselves by their own methods with the creation of their own faith.

The book, 'Faith for Living'[25], used extensively in Compost Club thought and writings, exemplifies such an attitude. Mumford sees the need for a new set of standards to form a way of life embodying the principles of the family and the importance of renewing relations with the land to create a new home for the future. The necessity for such a revision of life arose because it was observed that the moral cement holding Western democratic
society together had disappeared, thus giving the Fascists the opportunity to take advantage of the weakened resistance. To overcome the poisoned situation, a change of mind and of heart was necessary within the individual and community, to enable them to work together to conserve values and produce the seeds for the future.[26]

Two measures were seen as necessary in the attempt to break away from the catastrophe arising from the lack of moral direction and ideological decay undermining society. First, a common goal for living had to be erected to give new meaning to life, and secondly, there had to be a readiness to scrap those institutions and edifices not contributing to the safety of the country or the enlargement of human life.[27]

This is exactly what the Compost Club tried to ensure with the creation of their own new faith for living. They were trying to form positive values for a new life revolving around the concern for the health of the soil and thus the health of the human species. "Man's chief purpose...is the creation and preservation of values: that is what gives meaning to our civilisation... and what gives significance to individual human life."[28] The Club and thence its magazine was set up to spread the new faith and set of values that was based around the concern for the cultivation of the soil in the correct way and the promoting of the compost philosophy. As a result of the unity of purpose, they became a "strong united brotherhood, who worked the soil, lending to it and bringing to it the seeds of plants" [29]

The new faith that those involved in the Humic Compost Club supported, involved the building of live soils for the benefit of future existence and prosperity. The land was seen as the source
of mental and physical health and as such it had to be maintained in a fit state. Here the salvationist and social conscience aspect of the ideology came to the fore. "The land is our heritage, our motto-our existence-our health-the very basis of our civilisation and existence on this planet." [30]

As trustees of the land, their 'mission' was not only to show how to use the land and gain a good living from it, but leave it in a better condition for the next generation and beyond, primarily by reversing attitudes towards the land and use of it that had proved harmful. [31] There were two things to be done to achieve this. The town public had to be educated to the point of seeing that their interests depended ultimately on the right use of the land. Then the present trustees of the land, primarily farmers, had to be actively helped and advised in putting the right methods into operation. This meant the end of exploiting the soil for quick returns, and returning to the principles of husbandry based on the law of returning organic residues.

Although the Club had achieved their first goal, they had only minimal success in the second. They were townspeople with their own livings secured, trying to convert those who depended on the current methods of using the land for their livelihood. What the Compost Club was advocating required time and labour, both of which were in short supply at the time, and thus it is not surprising that the movement remained urban and did not spread far in the rural sector. The Compost Club were advocating looking back in order to go forward. Farmers rejected this idea though as at that time there was an intensification of land use being based on the adoption of modern mechanised techniques with the introduction of, for example aerial top dressing with super-
phosphate, one of the Club's prime enemies.[32] The number of farm holdings increased from 80-85,000 in 1920, to 90,000 after World War Two, and they tended to be bigger, the majority being more than 1,000 acres, compared to Britain where the Club pointed out the high degree of farm composting, but where smallholdings were favoured, averaging little more than 20 acres.[33]

The mission that the Club had assumed was seen by them as being vital if the potential danger of famine and destruction was to be averted. To refer again to millenarianism, the social character that the two shared was often equated to progress or development in some form. In the Compost ideology, this took shape as a breaking away from purely scientific methods that had become entrenched and therefore inhibiting, viewing with suspicion large technology, and instead favoured looking to former techniques to achieve change. The focus of this became concentrated on the struggle against chemical and artificial fertilisers.

It had become clear through research, especially that of Sir Albert Howard, that insects and fungi attacked only unhealthy plants. They therefore acted as censors for pointing out crops that were imperfectly nourished. To protect such crops from pests by sprays (superphosphate, nitrate of soda) was considered wrong as it only succeeded in preserving material unworthy of survival. To destroy the pest alone, as such sprays did, only evaded the issue.[34] Instead, natural disease resistance should be the reward of healthy and well nourished vegetation, and to achieve this state a living soil had to be attained through the use of humus.[35]

Scientific farming was blamed for much of the trouble in the agriculture of the time that faced three types of hunger: the
local hunger of the rural population, including livestock; the hunger of the growing urban areas, the population of which was unproductive from the point of view of soil fertility; and the hunger of the machine avid for a constant stream of raw material required for manufacture. [36] These had added to the burden on the land and its fertility, a challenge that scientific methods had failed to meet. The machine had replaced the animal, thus depriving the soil of dung to contribute to fertility, resulting in the use of artificials and generating the 'NPK' mentality— a dependence on nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. By the use of these, the soil inevitably lost out as the process of growth was not balanced by the process of decay, and a sign of this was the increasing menace of erosion.

To avert this danger the process had to be reversed, whereby natural processes were resumed, even if at the loss of profitability, if in the long run continued fertility could be ensured. "The restoration of humus—the natural food of the soil—must be undertaken if our lands are not to become a desert, and we ourselves a finished race." [37] The system of organic farming which was being advocated by the Club, would mean ceasing to live on the capital of the land, ceasing to mortgage the future. It meant that machines would cease to be "as plentiful as tabby cats." [38]

The fear of famine previously mentioned, was a strong factor permeating much of the ideological writings produced by the Club and its supporters especially in the immediate post-war period. They saw their task as not to rebuild government, nor the machinery of trade and commerce, but to rebuild vitality. [39] An issue in 1944 stated, "...we may be faced with a famine situation
in a year or so... Anything we can do to help those millions to grow more food will be well worth while, not only for the period of the war, but for the period that will follow."[40]

The threat of famine arose from a crisis on the biological level, threatening a shortage of food and proper nourishment, "as would make depressions and atomic wars merely the by-products of a situation in which desperation forces the nations into violence and chaos."[41] Hence the agricultural renaissance that was advocated was seen to be an indispensable condition of stability and of physical, moral and spiritual well-being.

The practice of composting implied something more than the mere change over from the use of artificial soil stimulents to the use of humic compost. Ultimately it involved a completely different attitude towards life itself.[42] They carried the conviction that those living things depended on had to be cultivated and cooperated with in somewhat the same sense as humans had to cooperate with each other.

Thus overall, the thought of the Compost Club revolves around the belief that the health of man and the full scope for drawing out his every potentiality, turns more upon proper nutrition than upon any other single factor.[43] The whole of future civilisation depended ultimately on the physical and mental health of all those populating the Earth, on food and upon the quality of that food, and thus depended in short on maintaining the soil growing the plants in a healthy and natural condition.

The garden was therefore the key to life, an apt sentiment for a Society such as the Composters and reveals the deeper feelings of the movement. It was the door to sanity and right living. "It opens his thoughts to ideals that prove him one with the
stars. A man in a garden is the image and reflection of mankind in the universe." [44] Within the garden, the compost heap played a part of utmost significance in the human economy, for it 
"...balanced the cycle of life and decay, and decay and renewal, like the hub to the wheel." [45] In separating man from the land, a process that had been occurring and that the Society was trying to rectify, man had become "an unhappy rootless restless being" and to regain his integrity and wholeness he had to dig his roots afresh in his native soil.

In these sentiments one can see the almost religious rhetoric dominating the Compost Society's ideology, making the link with sects such as the millenarianists all the more valid. They believed that man had fallen and his plot of earth lay outside paradise. The task was to order his plot so he "can lift up his eyes and see the Gates of Eden." [46] The furthering and spreading of their ideology of the land was seen by them as a 'crusade' to save the world from destroying itself, overcoming the detrimental effects to mankind of increased urbanisation and mechanisation of the modern world and to bring back the basics of life. They were thus helping to institute a new beginning.

To attempt to explain why the Compost Club held the beliefs that they did is a difficult task, but the similarity with certain sects that has already been noted, can be used to help explain their existence too.

A common reason given for those people following a different belief system was insanity, but such an argument is unacceptable. Instead of being concerned with how others perceived them, more
useful would be how they perceived themselves and their needs and the world about them. The main explanation for the Club's existence can be sought in the social context in which they appeared. It is generally agreed that movements such as the popular millenarianists appeared in periods of crisis, when feelings of anxiety and insecurity were raised among certain sectors of the community, especially those who were deprived or oppressed in some way. In the setting of the Compost Club, this certainly seems applicable, especially in the foundation years and the first period of rapid growth.

The War was certainly a period of crisis. Just as in 1780-1850 the 1940s were a time of political, economic and to a lesser degree social upset. At such critical times questions are raised about man's future existence and prosperity, and doubts increase. Western style democracy appeared to be threatened and in New Zealand this threat was felt both directly, from the Pacific, and indirectly, through Great Britain.

Moreover, the anxiety and insecurity was increased by the possibility of food shortages and resulting famine. This fear was in turn amplified by the belief that modern techniques of cultivation was reducing the fertility of the land and the nutritional value of food, necessitating more to make up the deficiencies. Although such claims may be questioned today, more important than whether such fears were justified, was the extent to which the believers did think they were living in an age of crisis.

Undoubtedly this period did represent a time of crisis. Changes were occurring in general, in the fields of science and technology, whereby 'large' technology was taking over from small
man. Industry and farming was becoming less labour intensive and more capital intensive, and life was becoming more mechanized, with modern technology taking a part in everyday life. Existing civilisation was thus being threatened by attack from within and outside, through its own inadequacies as well as the actions of others. Rather than let life collapse around them, the Composters wanted to precipitate this happening and form a new way of living for the future.

For many this was an uncomfortable and traumatic time. Assumptions about stability and normality could no longer remain unquestioned. To counter this disruption and take account of the changes a new ideology was needed to fill the gap, and for some the Compost society filled this void. The beliefs of the Society were a response to the conditions of the time. It gave its members something to hold on to, to occupy their thoughts and energy.

This is of course a generality. Wartime is not depressing or unprosperous for all, and many have other belief systems that they turn to. But this serves to explain why only a limited number did turn to the Compost Society and why those joining it for the gardening club aspect of it soon became disgruntled with the direction that it took, and left.

For those needing one however, the Society provided a new set of values and a chance to become involved in something of worth. It gave people a chance to take a part in the reform of society and set it back on the road to recovery. Significantly, those involved tended to be of the older generation, few of whom were able to take an active part in the war effort, for example in fighting. [47] The activities of the Compost Society were
therefore a chance to participate in another way. When the war ended, their work continued more under the guise of reform for setting up a post-war society that would ensure the prevention of another war.

To what extent the deprivation theory, as a reason for the beliefs, applies is questionable, but bears examining in any case. Absolute deprivation can be seen as occurring when a group suffers a lowering of a standard of living in terms of wealth and status, thus resulting in discontent which causes the adoption of new beliefs. In comparison, relative deprivation occurred when an individual or group had legitimate expectations that were not fulfilled, as for example in the case of technologyovercoming workers. [48]

Because of the limited availability of information about the members of the Compost Club, it is hard to ascertain the applicability of this to the Club. But it be safe to assume that the war did create some lowering of standards and unfulfilled expectations for the members. It appears at first glance, that there were few on the poor in the Club's ranks. This is not surprising when one considers that the owning of some land seemed to be a prerequisite to the arousal of interest in the land. Instead, the Club consisted of those in the middle levels of society, and of modest to upper social standing; small farmers, shopkeepers, professionals, for example C.E. St. John, dental surgeon, Y.T. Shand, lawyer, L.W. McCaskill, lecturer. Much as similar movements for change, the Compost Club the educated and well off, members of the middle classes who were devoted to the idea of social progress. Some of these were people in the main stream of society and thus would been able to make the Compost
Club's ideals all the more viable. Furthermore, the Society would have offered these people a chance to reverse any detrimental affects to their status. Their beliefs not only gave importance to themselves, perceiving as they did their role in advancing a new age of awareness, but gave them also a sense of worth in trying to bring to others the chance of survival and prosperity and prevent their own destruction.

In conclusion, it is necessary to say that it is possible to read too much into any similarities of the Club with millennialist sects. But for our purpose, because of the underlying depths of the Compost Club, the comparison is of use to explore the subtleties that are not immediately apparent at first glance. Millennialism is basically an ideology of change, focusing on developments taking place and promising the transformation of society, when all would be improved and renewed. [49] The Compost Society's ideology was one of change also, aiming as they were to changing the attitude of society towards the land in order to prevent the continuance of mistakes in use that had caused the threat to their existence. Just as millennialism was an activity arising from the anticipation of the end time, arising in periods of crisis, so the New Zealand Humic Society arose in a time of doubt over the continuance of society as it was then known. Both forms shared a manifestation as intense, salvationist, virtually evangelical movements.
CHAPTER 3: ENDNOTES

[2] op cit p145
[10] see Appendix I
[18] Harrison, ibid. p12
[19] C.C.M. 5:3:4
[20] The degree to which Robinson did this is shown by his tendency to dominate in Club matters. This fact was displayed by the reaction of the Canterbury Branch to his behaviour at the 1949 Conference, after which they sent a protest on the "dominating conduct as chairman" Meeting of Executive, 3 November, 1949.
[22] Wilson, ibid. p7
[23] Wilson, ibid. chapter 1
[24] The seven types identified were conversionist, revolutionist, introversionist, manipulationist, thaumaturgical, reformist and utopian.
[26] op cit p 189
[27] op cit p 195
[28] op cit p 208
[29] C.C.M. 1:1:7
[30] op cit, address of ben Roberts, M.P.- Land Development Chairman
[31] C.C.M. 7:4+5: 20
Note that the Compost society did not veto all sprays and insecticides— they supported the use of lime sulphur, condys and ulum, wettable sulphur, starch solution, pyrethrum extract, blood and bone, fish manure, slag, hoof and hornmeal.

See Appendix 1.
CONCLUSION

It has been the aim of this paper to examine the organization known as the New Zealand Compost Society and its significance as more than a gardening club alone. The end of 1949 sees a major turning point for the Compost Club, making it an appropriate place to stop in the examination of its development. The Conference of 1949 raised doubts over the continuation of the Club, with Guy Chapman going so far as to suggest that since the Society had achieved its goal of spreading the compost idea through New Zealand, the society should therefore stop. This motion was not passed, but the Club after that date did become more regionally based and more rationalised in organisation, head office moving to Christchurch in 1954. The Society began again to concentrate on building up membership and trying to regain its popular image and to attract those people who had been alienated by the ideological fervour in the 1940s. The Club's activities during the 1940s revolved around the question of restoring soil fertility and its importance for the continuance of the health and life of mankind. More than any gardening club, they had a strongly social reformist nature concerned as they were with the future welfare of the human species.

The Compost Society was part of the world wide movement to save and rebuild the soil to avert the period of famine and disaster that was seen to be coming after the War. When no such thing immediately happened, attention was turned to improving the quality of life, through nutrition. This created the encouragement behind the municipal composting scheme, attempting
as it did to ensure the survival of civilization by the maintenance of its health.

Their ideology was based around the natural law of growth and decay. The health of the soil depended on an adequate supply of humus, a proper population of correct fungi and other organisms.[1] Inorganic, artificial, manures tended to upset the balance, in the long run doing irreparable damage. The Compost Club may have exaggerated somewhat the virtues of natural soil in rejecting scientific factors contributing to soil conditions, but questioning the scientific basis of their beliefs has not been the issue here. Rather, it has been shown that their own beliefs existed and were held strongly enough to unite its followers into a group with definite and cohesive aims and ideals based on the doctrine according to Sir Albert Howard, Guy Chapman and others.

Those who thought of the Society as primarily being a means of assisting the dweller in the suburbs to make his gardening activities more interesting missed the true nature of the task that the Society had set for itself. The members saw their job as not just encouraging gardening as a hobby, but as awakening the general public to the crisis and showing them how to overcome it. Theirs was an attempt to lift themselves out of complacency.

By the time of D.M. Robinson’s presidency, beginning 1947, the Club had succeeded in making New Zealand compost minded, and thus, having established a base from which to work, turned to spreading the gospel of soil restoration.

Although it was true that many at first only joined the Society because of their concern for their own gardens, those remaining and assuming higher positions in the organization recognized the
underlying issues. Half the world may have been starving from a lack of food, but the other half was starving from a lack of quality.

Therefore, there was a great more involved in the question of soil fertility than just the making of compost. There was a philosophy, a completely new social outlook underlying it. The compost was a symbol of their action, a means to an end as well as an end in itself. The proponents of the compost ideology were aware that the urban trend of life of their day gave rise to certain dangers, not only to the land, but also to the human spirit. They made an attempt to correct the increasingly artificial way of living, both physically and mentally. They were trying to avert potential disaster and help create a new form of the world, and in doing that spread the realization of the importance of soil fertility, and the conviction of the belief that the "real arsenal of democracy [was] a soil in good heart, the fresh produce of which [was] the birthright of the nation."[2]

CONCLUSION: ENDNOTES

[1] C:C:M. 2:3:2 from A.H. Howard
APPENDIX I

The following is a selective list of members and occupations, primarily Executives, of the Canterbury Branch of the Compost Club. Their names were obtained mainly from the minute books of the monthly meetings held in Christchurch between 1943-1949. This is only a very small sample of the membership, but will hopefully serve to give some indication of the sort of people who were attracted to the Club's activities and ideas. Note the inclusion of only one labourer in the sample, and similarly, there were surprising difficulties in finding any examples of small farmers, especially considering the fact that there were many market gardens and such like around Christchurch at the time under examination.

Anderson, D.- insurance agent
Barnett, M.J.- superintendent of reserves
Combridge, D.- seedsman
Fleming, V.(Miss)-spinster
Griffiths, J.H.- sharebroker
Jennings, N.(Miss)- spinster
Lennie, T.D.- seed merchant
Lyons, M.E.- secretary
McCaskill, L.W.- lecturer
McKellar, C.G.- accountant
McPherson, R.- labourer
Roberts, G.F.- tramway motorman
St John, C.E.- dental surgeon
Tidswell, H.T.- auto mechanic
Townend, M.G.(Mrs)- widow
Webb, S. (Mrs)- widow
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