

Maori Representation — The Labour View

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In order to understand current policies on Maori representation and to place in sharper focus the difference between the major parties on this issue, it is necessary to go back to the history of the Maori seats.

In 1867, the Maori Representation bill was introduced into Parliament. This provided that Maoris should elect 4 members who (after it was amended) had to be Maoris. The act was originally regarded as a temporary measure, as some members thought that the Maoris should Europeanise their land and eventually vote on a common roll. It was brought in for 5 years then renewed for another 5 years in 1872 and made permanent in 1876.

So even at the outset, there was some reservation about separate Maori representation. On the other hand, there was also pressure to increase the number of seats to at least seven, since the number of Maoris seemed to warrant it. A number of Bills were introduced to increase the seats between 1872 and 1886, but none were passed.

SAME RULES

In 1893, the law relating to Maori representation became part of the Electoral Act, and gradually over the next 50 years the same rules regarding registration and voting as applied to the Pakeha voter were applied. Open voting, for example, which had been replaced by the ballot for Pakeha voters in 1870, was replaced for Maori voters in 1938. Maori rolls were not compiled until 1948 and elections were held for the Maori seats on the same day as for general seats from 1951 onwards.

Another controversial issue was the question of who was Maori. Until 1902, those of half or more Maori blood had to vote as Maori — with some provision for those who were seen to be living as Europeans. After 1902 those who were half Maori were given a choice of roll.

However, the law was still that only those of half or more Maori blood could vote for the Maori members. This caused considerable confusion with the increase in inter-marriages, and resentment from

those people who regarded themselves as Maori, but who could not prove that they had the necessary proportion of Maori blood. In 1975 the Third Labour Government changed the Act to provide that all adults of Maori descent had the right to register on the Maori rolls if they wished.

It was also made possible for the number of Maori seats either to increase or decrease depending on the numbers of Maoris who decided to opt for Maori rolls, rather than general rolls.

In 1976 the Act was amended yet again with the number of Maori members being fixed once more at 4 by the National Government.

LABOUR'S POLICY

Labour is concerned that some of the flexibility introduced in 1975 has been lost. The number of Maori seats should be determined by the Maori people themselves, rather than by Parliament. The message being received at present is that there should be more seats. The Maori people are under-represented compared with their numbers in the total population.

Another problem caused by the present system is the size of the electorates. The member for Southern Maori, for example, must cover an area which extends from Wairoa in the north to Stewart Island in the south. Even if she were to spend all of her time travelling it would not be possible to get to some parts of the electorate more than once a year.

It is Labour Party policy to increase the total number of seats in Parliament to 121. This will mean that the number of constituents per electorate will be reduced. Since the same formula will be used for determining the number of Maori seats, if the same or an increased number of Maori electors opt to vote on Maori rolls there will be an increased number of Maori seats.

CONFUSED METHODS

Labour is also concerned about confusion that arose in 1976 through methods used to determine whether people wanted to go on to Maori rolls. Labour believes that a number of Maori people who might have wished to vote as Maori unintentionally ended up on general rolls.

We feel that use of the Census where options are clearly stated is the most effective way of constructing the Maori roll. Under Labour, all Maori electors will be placed automatically on a Maori roll unless they indicate at the time of the Census their desire to be placed on a general roll.

The present Government has set in train procedures for the exercise of a Maori option in 1982. However, although this may be seen as a referendum, Labour feels that it may not get a full response from Maoris. The Labour Government will consult fully with the Maori people before acting on the outcome of the 1982 exercise of the Maori option.

There is a new growth in awareness of Maori identity among our people. Maori people are asserting their Maoriness — and demanding recognition in all spheres of New Zealand life. Labour will make it possible for this increased self-awareness to be translated to the ballot box.

The time for decision is now

R. Makutu, Social Credit, Southern Maori

The Maori people have reached a point in growth and maturity where we are at last ready to move forward in a major way.

But the basic decisions needed for us to move forward as a people must be made by the individual. We have paused on some plateaus long enough.

The Maori people are a faithful people. We have accepted up till now without question the guidance and advice of the white man, even to the detriment of the people.

We know of the tragic results of