

The case for

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The four Maori seats were created in 1867 by the Pakeha government to offset the new seats required for Pakeha in areas of population growth, areas whose people were believed to have unhealthy, left-wing political leanings, e.g. in the West Coast mining districts. Thus Pakeha had superimposed a Pakeha institution upon Maori society for Pakeha reasons. Be that as it may, the four Maori seats put down deep tap-roots into Maori society. It is fair to say that by the time the Young Maori Party, in the form of Te Rangi Hiroa, Maui Pomare, Timi Kara and Apirana Ngata, was combining Maori upbringing with Pakeha education and hence fulfilling parliamentary duties to a high standard, the four seats had become an integral part of Maoritanga.

It is this oneness of the Maori seats with the Maori culture that underpins my other arguments. To appreciate the continued need for separate Maori representation, think about the following, which perhaps create the context for this debate.

UPHEAVAL

The last fifty years have witnessed the major demographic upheaval in Maori society. Urban migration has been so great that now at least 60% of Maori live in urban areas, and probably more than 75% live away from their *turangawaewae*. Accompanying this change has been cultural disorientation, the importance of which cannot be overstressed.

Cultural disorientation has found expression in a large number of ways:

- i. diminished reliance on the extended family occasioned by Pakeha town-planning and architectural norms;
- ii. diminished confidence in a world structured by Pakeha for Pakeha;
- iii. diminished authority of traditional leaders;
- iv. exposure to lifestyle alternatives which may or may not undermine Maori culture — I suspect temporarily only;
- v. competition, often unequal, with Pakeha for a share of whatever life in New Zealand has to offer;
- vi. disparate attainment in an education system not always sensitive to specifically Maori needs;
- vii. lack of clear identity among young Maori coupled with relative inability to cope with competitive study, a competitive job market and an often incomprehensible legal system has compounded the problem adjustment;
- viii. floundering parenthood, a feature of Maori and Pakeha society, has especially sad consequences for the minority culture.

Finally, as the Maori population has urbanised, so too has the Maori electorate urbanised. In 1928 just under 10% of all voting-age Maori lived in urban areas. In 1969 it was just over 54%. To-

day the figure must exceed 60% considerably.

To sum up then, the last fifty years have been characterised by large-scale urban migration accompanied by substantial cultural disorientation and, most significant of all, have been reflected in the new preponderance of the new urban Maori electorate.

DEBATE

Against this backdrop of change, the four Maori seats and their continued existence have been the subject of considerable debate among Maori and Pakeha alike. Advocates of abolition have raised a variety of arguments in support of their stance. These include:

- a. The view that separate representation contradicted the once widely accepted goal of integration, a euphemism in its time for assimilation. Happily these terms have given way now for the theoretically more realistic goals of bi or multiculturalism.
- b. The view that separate representation likens New Zealand's system of government too much to that of South Africa (in my opinion a wholly erroneous view).
- c. The view that separate representation is a special privilege inappropriate for a parliamentary democracy, a view held by the late J.R. Hanan, Minister of Maori Affairs and Justice in the 1960s.

OPTING IN

Most importantly, the view that the decline of numbers of Maori enrolling for and voting in Maori electorates can only mean that Maori are opting increasingly for participation in the general electorates (or European electorates, as they were once called).

It is my belief that this last view is the one most likely to gain acceptance if it is not placed under the microscope for fine scrutiny. But this view is too easy, too simple and too convenient. There are other factors to account for the diminishing size of the active Maori electorate.

The mechanics of actually enrolling and voting have in the past proved to be insuperable for many Maori electors. The need to re-enrol after every census

and boundary adjustment has seemed difficult to understand, especially since Maori electoral boundaries have remained unaffected.

The indifference of officialdom to the peculiar needs of the Maori voter has also contributed to Maori frustration and to disaffection with the political process. The lack of Maori rolls at post offices, especially in the 1960s, meant that interested Maoris could not check their eligibility to vote. Also the pettiness of too many polling booth officers in denying special vote facilities for Maoris proved discouraging — all the more so when Maori polling places were too few and scattered far and wide.

In the years before 1974, zealots from both parties worked like beavers to uncover pockets of "Maoris" whose insufficient degrees or proportions of Maori ancestry did not entitle them to Maori status for electoral purposes. It is only since the 1970s that Maori have been free to declare themselves subjectively, to be what they feel they are, without regard for the fractions of non-Maori blood flowing through their veins. Nevertheless, by the 1970s many of less than half Maori ancestry who otherwise identified as Maori, and many did, must have felt discouraged altogether from participation in the political process.

RELEVANCE

But the single most important factor contributing to the fall-off of Maori voting must be the question of relevance.

I would like to suggest that the Maori voter of the last fifty years has behaved in an authentically Maori fashion. When the electoral process was seen to be relevant to Maori aspirations, then participation in Maori elections rose. Conversely, when the electoral process was not seen to be serving Maori aspirations, Maori interest in Maori elections declined. The available census and elections figures point clearly to:

1. Quite high (30%) non-voting among all adult Maori in the elections of 1928, 1931 and 1935, a period characterised by three-party confusion and then severe depression which only heightened the suffering of many Maori who were already accustomed to depressed circumstances anyway.
2. Quite spectacular revival of interest in the political process after 1935 until non-voting claimed only 15% of adult Maori in 1946. The decade to 1946 was characterised by the politicisation of 20% of the Maori population by W. Tahu Potiki Ratana, by a Labour govern-