

ment sensitive to Maori problems and keen to treat Maori and Pakeha equally in its handling of the Depression ills, and by a whole-hearted Maori war effort which even brought Waikato into its embrace. These then were years of optimism among most Maori. To take part in elections was indeed meaningful.

3. Finally, in the years following 1946, the sad sight of non-voting at Maori elections soaring and soaring to over 50% by 1969. What of these post-war years! They were characterised by near-continuous National government, by rapid urbanisation and cultural disorientation and by niggling reminders of continuing Pakeha ignorance of that unique relationship between the Maori and their land.

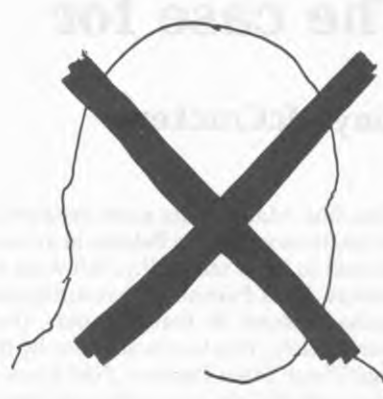
What does all this mean! The figures show clearly that disaffection with the political process is not just an urban Maori phenomenon. Certainly it is most pronounced in the urban setting. But disaffection has been apparent too in the less stressful non-urban setting. In 1969 65%-plus of urban Maori showed no interest while 40% of non-urban Maori showed no interest.

### WHAKAMA

Does this mean really that vast numbers of Maori have transferred to General rolls and now vote accordingly! I find this very hard to believe. I cannot believe that urbanisation has so permanently damaged Maoritanga that Maoris are abdicating their special electoral arrangements, arrangements which had become so deeply rooted in Maori culture.

I have to concede that some Maoris have seen fit to register and vote on General rolls, perhaps in a manner calculated to increase their political effectiveness or perhaps because the local Pakeha MP is more accessible. However, I see in the alarming non-voting figures warning signs, a warning that Maoris are dissatisfied with the political process because life for them has become less than satisfactory, less than fulfilling. I see a warning that increasing numbers of Maori are withdrawing from the mainstream of New Zealand life. The facts about alcohol, crime, unemployment and education attainment certainly bear out the notion that cultural disorientation since the War has been severe.

When and if the disadvantages of being a Maori in modern New Zealand have been eliminated, when and if life becomes rich and satisfying again for the Maori, then might we see a reversal of the whakama that besets Maori politics today. In the meantime, the four Maori seats must remain an important link with our decision-makers in Parliament. To abolish them now would be to remove a major support-post of Maoritanga. It would also serve only to confirm in Maori minds what they see as indifference to the Maori point of view.



## THE MAORI SEATS

### Robert Mahuta

Students of Maori politics attribute both non-enrolment and the low proportion of valid votes cast to the difficulties facing people endeavouring to enrol and vote on the Maori roll. For example, if we look at the Maori roll, enrolment forms and voting papers have been available only at certain centres, whose locations have often been poorly publicised. Where a polling booth has no Maori roll, then voters have to cast a special vote which involves complicated form-filling and the presence of witnesses. The special efforts made by the authorities and political associations to ensure enrolment and get people to the poll have not effectively been extended to Maori people. Finally, enquiries amongst those Maori who have enrolled and voted on the general roll established that they do so, not because they reject identification, but for practical political reasons. In voting for a Pakeha member of parliament they feel they have readier access to the member of a smaller localised electorate (especially in urban areas), and they feel also that their votes are politically more useful where the contest between the parties is closer than in Maori electorates.

If we look at the 1978 elections, we find that two things happened. There was a record increase in the numbers of registered Maori voters between elections. Despite this record increase of 40,000-odd voters on the Maori roll, only 43% actually cast a valid vote! This was a record low. Why the dramatic increase of registered Maori electors between 1975 and 1978! And having enrolled, why did they not vote! I would argue that it is in the interests of our two-party political system to keep the rolls in their current state of confusion. No way do they want 150,000 additional voters on the general roll. The balance of power is volatile enough without adding an ethnic-class element to it! Probably the two most significant events over the past three years were the Hunua case and the defection of Matt Rata from the Labour Party.

### HUNUA

Had the Hunua election petition been repeated in a Maori electorate, the Electoral Court would have been forced to declare the elections in the four Maori seats invalid on the grounds that the rolls contained an unspecified number of unqualified voters. The Wicks Committee recommended a complete voter re-registration. However, the Justice Depart-

ment decided against it because of their progress in cleansing the rolls. The outcome of the Hunua petition and the findings of the Wicks Committee was that the Maori electoral rolls in particular were in a mess and that a lot of work needed to be done to rectify the situation.

The law at the present time does not allow the Electoral Office to tell people that their votes are invalid because they had failed to register. In the 1980 Northern Maori by-election, 2,429 (or 84%) of the special votes cast were disallowed. Most of these votes were disallowed because constituents had not enrolled. My understanding of electoral procedures is that it is mandatory for people to register on the roll. If this is the case, then many Maori were breaking the law and should have been prosecuted. The system did not pursue this option, perhaps mindful of the Pandora's box it would open. Here we have the law saying one thing and its executors doing the opposite.

### MANA MOTUHAKE

When Matt Rata resigned, I could understand his motives and his observation that Labour's indifference to the needs of Maoridom in the interests of efficiency and unity showed the power of