



The case against

the modern party system. His action at the time, however, did not go far enough. If he had set out on a course of political martyrdom, then he should not only have severed his ties with the Labour Party, but also encouraged the Maori people to denounce a political system which leaves them with little effective power. So far his actions have not really brought into focus the real question, which is the effectiveness of maintaining separate ethnic representation. The Maori seats conveniently back our people into a corner and are a major factor in discouraging either party from being sensitive to Maori needs. In the light of Social Credit's emergence, it will be interesting to see how they capitalise on the situation.

I do not expect Rata to gain support for his move from his former parliamentary colleagues. After all, they have a vested interest in the present system and are not likely to voluntarily join the ranks of the unemployed after the 1981 elections. I think if Rata were to appeal to Maori youth and explain the realities of New Zealand politics and the place of the Maori within the system, he could initiate a groundswell of Maori support to exercise their political clout.

Given the current economic climate and the volatility of the political scene, Rata's move — thought through and articulated clearly — might just prove to be the catalyst for concerted Maori political action. If politics is about who gets what, when and how, then the Maori are not even in the hunt. They stand outside mainstream politics which isolate them ethnically by including them within the structure of party politics.

THE POLITICAL FUTURE

Given this background, several issues become apparent. New Zealand's politi-

cal scene is made up of two ethnic segments — Maori and non-Maori — each separate and with its own representation and regime. The continued presence of the four special seats places the Maori in a clearly subordinate position in what is otherwise a territorial system of representation. The fact that four seats are reserved for Maori is something of a paradox. For here we are, as a country, taking pride in the harmony of our race relations and emphasising that a fundamental tenet of our society is equality. Yet upon closer inspection, what do we find! The same people accepting, largely without question, the continued existence of two separate patterns of parliamentary representation. One is based on universal suffrage, regardless of race, and on the other on ethnic considerations. Whilst the general electorates exemplify the goals of equality and fairness that we profess internationally, the electorates seem to negate these principles at every point.

Because of these factors, we operate at the present time under a dual handicap. Ethnically, we are a minority group, in that we comprise something like 10% of the total population. Politically, we are a minority in that we comprise something like 5% of the total number of seats in Parliament. Yet somehow we have been led to believe that as a double minority we have a privileged status, not only within the country, but also when compared to other groups such as the Aborigines and American Indians.

ALTERNATIVES

What then are the alternatives open to us. We could play it safe. Proponents of this view argue, "Let's keep what we have and fight for more of the same. The Maori seats, like the Maori All Blacks, are an essential part of our Maoritanga." Others, like the New Zealand Maori Council, seek changes within the current set-up to enable the number of seats to be increased. They have set out to work towards this objective over the next two elections.

There is another school of thought which seeks change in the electoral system itself to enable Maori, as well as other ethnic minorities and interest groups, to be adequately represented. Proportional representation, federalism and other variations are proposed. Alan McRobie, from Canterbury's Political Science Department, presented submissions calling for the abolition of the four seats and suggesting that these should be replaced with an electoral system based on multi-member electorates with Members of Parliament being elected on a simple transferable voting system. The adoption of such a system would mean the Maori seats could be abolished, yet a Maori presence in Parliament would still be guaranteed. This system would also enable significant minority ethnic groups to be provided with parliamentary representation from people of their own ethnic group. In brief, it would provide proportional, as well as ethnic, representation. This system would enable significant geographical, cultural and ethnic minorities to be fairly represented within a single electoral system.

CONCLUSION

Norman Kirk, when speaking about the future of this country, used to say New Zealand needed the "guts of Israel, the skills of Sweden and the heart and soul of Polynesia". Given our present position, the Maori may well have to acquire the "will of Palestinians" too to make this country realise that we too belong. We too have a homeland, we too have identity, we too have a language and we too have a vision of the promised land.

Many people think that the Maori enjoys a privileged status in this country. So do monkeys in a zoo. Everyone tells us what is good for us. Only the wearer of the shoe can tell where it pinches most. It is not surprising, therefore, to read that Maori dissatisfaction over a number of issues has been simmering for some time. We only need to look at the Land March, Ngati Hine, Bastion Point, Tauranga, Wanganui and Taranaki, to name a few. Couple traditional issues with the current malaise within society such as land rights, education, unemployment, and it will only be a matter of time before the facade is shattered.

Effective participation in the political process, power-sharing at all levels, and a general willingness to initiate change, are crucial to our survival as a country. I believe that party politics have kept us in political limbo, in "no man's land". The only way we are going to change our condition is to change to the present system. The abolition of the Maori seats and movement onto the general roll would enable our demographic reality to be expressed in political terms. Auckland (4), Wellington (2), Hamilton (2), Rotorua, Whangarei, Kaitia, the