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Maori Issues

Margaret Mutu

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Thurston, John Stevens, and W O Smith, the architects of the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, have been reincarnated as Harold Rice, Patrick Barrett, and Earl Arakaki. The Kamehameha trustees have disappointed the people who look to them for leadership and passively yielded to the demands of our adversaries, much like the cabinet that abandoned our last queen, Lili'uokalani, in her hour of need. As I write this, America is celebrating its Independence Day (July 4). Will the Hawaiian people once again be able to celebrate their Independence Day? Or, will history repeat itself and relinquish the Hawaiian Nation to a footnote in history?

TRACIE KU'UIPO CUMMINGS

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### MĀORI ISSUES

In a year dominated by the approaching general election, Māori have watched the government, including Māori members of parliament, steer away from any public debate on Māori issues. In recent years, Māori members have come under sustained

attack from the conservative opposition and the mainstream media whenever they have attempted to articulate Māori aspirations for greater control over their lives. Calls from non-Māori lending support to those aspirations generally receive little or no media coverage. So on Waitangi Day in February 2002, when Pākehā groups at Waitangi, including the Green Party, publicly stated their support for Māori sovereignty, it went unreported in mainstream media. Several days later it was partially reported when the Green's leader signaled a softening of the stance on Māori sovereignty because "many people find the term very frightening." Yet even the Ministry for Māori Development, Te Puni Kōkiri, advocated restructuring local government to ensure that Māori have greater control over their own affairs. In the final weeks before the July 2002 election, as right-wing parties were attacking the Treaty of Waitangi and promoting a cut-off date for all Māori claims against the Crown, the largest mainstream newspaper ran a story on Māori views of Māori sovereignty. It had to admit that a significant number of Māori interviewed wanted Māori sovereignty recognized, yet the article concentrated on reporting Māori giving reasons for why it should not be recognized.

Mainstream media coverage of Māori issues has continued to be a matter of concern on several occasions in the past year. Claims that the media were Māori bashing surfaced on several occasions. A television documentary on the "Treaty Industry" interviewed a disgruntled historian and two disaffected former employees of the Crown Forestry Rental Trust, a

body that administers many millions of dollars of rental paid on Crown-owned forests, and allocates some of its income towards the research and settlement of Māori claims to those forests. The trust has been under investigation by the Māori Affairs select committee for corruption. The television program sensationalized an alleged “Māori mafia” and attempted to blame Māori for the parlous state of the settlements. Of the 908 claims registered with the Waitangi Tribunal over the past twenty-six years, fewer than 20 have resulted in any land being returned to the claimants or compensation being paid out. Furthermore, not a single claimant group has received all the land and compensation they are entitled to. In the past year the Labour-led coalition government has partially settled just one claim, that of Ngati Tama in the Taranaki region—where, the tribunal stated in its 1996 report, Māori had suffered a holocaust. Ngati Tama lost more than 30,000 hectares. The settlement returns just 1,870 hectares and 14.5 million dollars. The three other settlements achieved under the present government have been similarly mean-spirited.

Yet the “Treaty Industry” television program made no mention of the real reasons for the chronically slow and inadequate process of treaty claims settlement. The main reason is that every government in power over the past decade has refused to take any Māori advice on the need to radically reformulate its unfair and unjust settlement policy. Then there is the ongoing underfunding of the Waitangi Tribunal. There is also the pivotal role of the “experts” in the industry—the lawyers, historians, and government

bureaucrats who seem content to prolong the process and charge exorbitant fees for as long as they can. The overwhelming majority of these people are non-Māori. Despite its lack of funding, the Waitangi Tribunal has intervened to try to speed up its hearings and reporting process, fast-tracking the Gisborne district hearings through in seven months in contrast to others that have taken more than four years.

The media coverage of the kidnapping of the eight-month-old daughter of a lawyer and a High Court judge, both of whom are Māori, caused further consternation. The fact that the child had been adopted from within the couple’s extended family according to Māori custom was incomprehensible to mainstream media. Several newspapers tried to imply that Māori were somehow to blame for the kidnapping, despite Māori protestations to the contrary. Yet when the baby was found and the kidnapper arrested and sent to jail for eleven years, there was very little discussion of the fact that he was Pākehā and that his sole motivation for the kidnapping was money.

Māori views of the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th were also ignored until the initial furor began to die down. While Māori were appalled at the incident, they were not surprised. Māori radio stations interviewed Māori elders from around the country, many of them ex-servicemen, shortly after the bombing. All of the elders expressed views that the United States could not keep attacking and making war on other nations without expecting some form of retaliation. It was several days before similar views started to surface in the mainstream

media, and the Green Party went on record as opposing New Zealand troops being sent to Afghanistan.

In the 2000–2001 reporting period, the country's largest newspaper had run a campaign against Tainui. This year it was the turn of Māori television to be targeted, with the *New Zealand Herald* listing no fewer than eighty articles on its website (the same number listed for Tainui last year). Criticism of Māori television has been going on for more than six years, as mainstream media backed by government officials ignore Court of Appeal rulings and battle to keep Māori out of the industry. When the chairman of the Māori channel's board attacked the media for Māori bashing in April, they retaliated by closely scrutinizing all the workings of the channel. When they discovered that the Canadian chief executive officer had falsified his qualifications, the number of articles per day attacking Māori television peaked. The day after the board sacked the officer, ten articles, including an editorial, ran in the *New Zealand Herald*. The media appeared to be rather stunned, however, when the officer was subsequently jailed for six months and denied bail, a punishment that legal experts saw as fitting the crime. Then the *Herald* was silenced completely by the appointment in May of an interim chief executive officer, who is one of the very few Māori millionaires and a very experienced businessman. He refused to speak to any mainstream media and in interviews with Māori media said he was not interested in anything that the mainstream media had to say.

The one Māori member of parliament prepared to take on the mainstream media, Tariana Turia, did so in

March 2002, referring to the media as “hysterical, hostile and ill-informed” over her reference to a Māori holocaust in 2000. She predicted that the media would attack her during the campaign for the 2002 general elections. Her prediction appears to have been sufficient to stop them from doing so. Turia traveled around the country attending many Māori gatherings (*hui*), including those organized in different tribal regions for ministers of the Crown to meet Māori in their own territories. Although the media attended such events, they were not interested in what Māori were saying there. Requests to the prime minister during these *hui* to be more outspoken in support of Māori drew the response that whenever she did say such things to the media, they did not report them. In the main she considered that the media were only looking for incidents that would allow them to report Māori negatively.

Yet there were also the occasional bright patches. In February, the film of the Māori-language version of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* played to rapturous audiences throughout the country. Despite the historic and cultural importance of the piece, in particular because of the endangered state of the Māori language, it received minimal media coverage. Yet a four-star rating and an excellent review from a Pākehā film critic appeared in the *New Zealand Herald*. Massey University later conferred an honorary doctorate on the producer, Don Selwyn, for his many years of stage, television, and film work, and his training and mentoring of young talent.

And then in May, a tribal radio station topped the ratings to become

Auckland's most-preferred radio station. Ngati Whatua's MAI FM caters to Māori and Pacific Islander youth and features rap music, rhythm and blues, jazz, hip-hop, and more recently, New Zealand-produced music. While its popularity had displaced mainstream radio stations in the polls, it follows naturally from the fact that among the population in Auckland who are twenty-five years of age and under, 20 percent are Pacific Islanders and 16 percent are Māori. That, and the fact that a survey of MAI FM listeners indicates that they don't watch television because it does not reflect them. Likewise mainstream advertising.

Although the prime minister claimed to be supportive of Māori, her apologies to non-Māori sectors of the New Zealand society drew some bitter responses from Māori. In February 2002 she apologized to the Chinese community who were forced to pay a poll tax from 1881 until 1944. Then in June she apologized to the Samoan community for the New Zealand government's role in allowing the introduction of a devastating influenza epidemic in 1918 and the gunning down of Mau protestors in 1929. Yet Māori have yet to receive any overall apology for their on-going ill treatment at the hands of successive colonial governments and the numerous breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi perpetrated against them. Māori commentators noted that while the prime minister was apologizing to others, Māori on the East Coast were protesting to stop their lands being sold to American developers, Māori elders in Northland were being arrested for attempting to defend their sacred sites,

the police in Whāngarei were being repeatedly criticized by the courts for their treatment of Māori youth, the chief justice sent a Waitara policeman to the High Court to defend a charge of murdering a young Māori student, Raglan police were criticized by a district court judge for chasing two Māori onto a *marae* and scuffling with them inside the sacred meeting house, and a conviction for not giving a name and address to a policeman was overturned by the High Court when it ruled that it is not an offense to answer a policeman in Māori, one of the two official languages of New Zealand.

Yet the government is well aware that Māori receive unfair treatment. Apart from its own *Closing the Gaps* reports highlighting the huge and growing disparities between Māori and non-Māori achievement, its report on the tertiary education sector has resulted in tertiary institutions being warned that unless the recruitment, retention, and completion rates for Māori improve markedly, they will be stripped of some of their government funding. Yet local government reforms did almost nothing to address the lack of roading, water supply, electricity, housing, and basic living standards for many rural Māori communities. Apologies and remedies for all of these and many other indignities still suffered by Māori are long overdue.

It is doubtful that the answer to Māori difficulties lies within the existing parliamentary system. In June the prime minister announced that the country would go to a general election four months early, at the end of July. The main election issues for Māori were treaty settlements, education, and housing. Genetic modifica-

tion of crops is also an issue, with Māori largely opposed to it. The apparent lack of performance of many Māori members of parliament was another issue. One commentator noted that of the sixteen Māori members in the last parliament, fewer than six could be relied on to advocate for Māori and only one, Tariana Turia, was prepared to fight publicly in support of Māori issues. The poor performance was not unexpected, given the severe attacks from both the media and conservative opposition parties on any outspoken Māori members and the fact that party loyalties have effectively prevented their acting as a single bloc.

Yet the July 2002 elections saw a record number of 20 Māori members in a parliament of 120, with 11 representing their own electorates and the rest as list members for their parties. But none of these were independents. All 7 Māori electorate seats remained with Labour, with the Labour Māori caucus at a record 10 members within the full Labour caucus of 52. Yet despite the strong Māori numbers, shortly after the elections the Māori caucus indicated that it was requesting just three ministerial appointments inside cabinet and three outside cabinet in what it appears will be a Labour-led minority government.

Of the remaining parties, the traditional mainstream conservative party, National, returned only 27 members, with their vote dissipated among right-wing minor parties. Only 2 of their members are Māori. Of the other three right-wing parties represented in the house, New Zealand First gained 13 seats, while ACT and United Futures each gained 9. The New

Zealand First party is led by a Māori, the charismatic Winston Peters, and despite a general impression that he is Māori bashing, 6 of his 13 members are Māori. ACT has 1 Māori member, while United Futures has none. The left-leaning Green Party gained only 8 seats, 1 of which went to a Māori. The Progressive Coalition has 2 members, neither of whom are Māori. At the time of writing, Labour had entered negotiations with both the Greens and United Future about the composition of the next government.

MARGARET MUTU

#### TONGA

The triennial general election was held again in March 2002. Democracy supporters claimed that their win of seven of the nine People's Representatives' seats was a conclusive victory for the movement throughout the kingdom. Other observers did not find the outcome so clear-cut.

The Tonga Human Rights and Democracy Movement (THRDM), which was formed in 1998 to replace the Pro-Democracy Movement, did not formally field candidates for the election because, as it claims to be merely a mass movement that seeks political change, the conditions under which it receives funding from various overseas agencies prevent it from doing so (*MT*, May 2002, 12–16). After the outcome, however, the movement was quick to claim a win. The most vocal of its representatives—'Akilisi Pohiva, Dr Feleti Sevele, and 'Isileli Pulu, who became the Tonga-tapu No 1, No 2, and No 3 People's Representatives respectively—claimed