

OREWA REVISITED - PROTECTING MAORI RIGHTS

Orewa Rotary Club Address

Wednesday 14th September

MIHI

Today is a special day. Today is Maori Language Day. In 1972 Nga Tamatoa campaigned for the right for Maori Language to be taught in schools at a time when Pakeha society thought Maori was a dead language and when even Maori were embarrassed to push for their own language.

Today as a result of their efforts, Maori language is celebrated in all its glory throughout the nation.

Maori is an official language of this country. Maori is taught in pre-school, in primary schools, in intermediate schools, in secondary schools, in tertiary institutions, and in homes and offices throughout the nation.

We sing our national anthem in Maori at the start of all our sporting occasions, and we revel in the power and the majesty of the spine-chilling haka when the All Blacks take the field.

We turn on our Maori radio stations to listen to Maori stories and we celebrate Maori music in all its splendor as it has emerged, blossomed and flourished right across the world.

We learn Maori from our television station and we take pride in seeing our people carry our language and our culture onto the international screen.

We have Kohanga Reo, we have Kura Kaupapa, we have Wharekura, and we have Wananga, where Te Reo Maori is honoured as the language of instruction. Our schools of learning have been adopted all around the indigenous world as the model for language retention and revitalisation.

We look to Maori culture and to Maori language to sustain our booming tourism industry and we share in the immense pride that Maori exhibitions bring to our nation.

In 2000, the Maori Broadcasting Advisory Committee endorsed the words of Sir James Henare, who said "Ko te reo te mauri o te Mana Maori". The Committee went on to say "The Maori Language is the cornerstone of all that is Maori. Without it we are lessened as individuals and weakened as a nation.

Our vision is for a time when the Maori language can be seen and heard, and cherished by all New Zealanders; for a time when hearing the Maori language on mainstream radio and seeing it on prime time TV is commonplace”.

And Don Brash would put an end to all that ... if we let him.

The 27th of January 2004, marked a dark, dark day in our nation’s history, when the leader of the National Party, Dr Don Brash, unleashed a wave of racism upon our people – a wave which has continued to grow, as Labour threw their own weight behind Brash’s attacks.

When Don Brash spoke at this very place, and said that National would do their best to eliminate Maori rights, there was a huge swing of Pakeha voters away from Labour, to National.

Labour then had to make a choice – to fight for their principles or to play the same game as National, and abandon Maori rights in an effort to win those Pakeha voters back. What Labour did, clearly showed which option they chose.

Yes, the National Party has been provocative and offensive about it’s intentions regarding Maori rights. But Labour’s response has rocked Maoridom to the core.

Labour's betrayal of their covenant with Maori forged in the time of Ratana, and tested over many elections since, has been both malicious and insulting.

And while Labour is saying that a vote for the Maori Party is a vote for National, it is more true for Maori, to say that a vote for Labour is in fact the same as a vote for National.

RACE-BASED FUNDING

Last year, when Don Brash said that National would cut 'race-based' funding, he chose a phrase deliberately designed to inflame racial hysteria, portray Maori as a drain on society, and blame Maori for government failings. He also presents 'race-based' funding as being an unworthy notion, while suggesting that 'needs-based' funding is somehow more socially acceptable.

Instead of contesting that view, Labour's Trevor Mallard said that he would give the public "an assurance that policies and programmes are targeted on the basis of need, not race". He then took steps to remove ethnicity weighting from school decile funding, a decision which will have massive and adverse effects on children from more than 900 schools.

The threat to abolish race-based funding is dangerous, and centred on ignorance, and the blind acceptance of the ability of state agencies to cater for Maori needs.

Statistics however, confirm that for more than 150 years, governments have not only failed to cater for the needs of Maori, they have in fact been guilty of keeping Maori deprived, with poor educational results, in poor housing, on low incomes, at the top of prison populations, in poor health, and suffering high mortality. But now, Maori providers, with less than a decade's experience in trying to make genuine and long-lasting changes, will suffer for the generations of abuse by government departments.

International experience suggests that in fact, indigenous providers deliver a far higher quality of service for indigenous people than mainstream providers – given the same level of resources. Aotearoa should be building on that international experience, and local successes to ensure that models of excellence are identified and replicated, not terminated.

TREATY

Last year, Don Brash said that National would scrap all references to the Treaty in legislation. Again, Labour did not challenge National's view, and indeed Trevor

Mallard was noted to have said that "...at some later date, a review of statutory references to the Treaty of Waitangi may be undertaken".

We should look to our past for guidance, and we should look to the Treaty to help us face our past, and build our future together. The Treaty is the founding document of our nation. It provides the basis for good relations between all citizens of Aotearoa; it sets out how resources can be managed for the betterment of all; and it provides the framework for an ethical and inclusive society. To deny it's rightful place in our society is to deny our past and to limit our future.

A nation secure in it's place in the world would not shy away from the possibility that the Treaty could be enshrined as our nation's constitution, and that the Treaty might have a real place in guiding our legislative procedures.

TREATY SETTLEMENTS

Don Brash says that Treaty claims are to be lodged by the end of 2006, and settled by 2010, and that the Waitangi Tribunal and the Office of Treaty Settlements will be wound up. Labour has announced a different time frame but essentially their position is no different. So what's wrong with this?

- The first is obvious – one party to the Treaty is determining what the relationship is going to be between the two signatories. This does not make for a harmonious marriage – in fact it is the basis of an abusive relationship.
- The second point is that contemporary grievances will be ignored, and Maori will no longer have a body that can address wrongs committed against their Treaty rights.
- The third point of course is that our tupuna never envisaged the Treaty ending on a particular date, and we have no right to abandon their dream in such a cavalier fashion.

Certainly in terms of Treaty claims, the process to date has been traumatic for Maori. The process has in fact been a denial of Treaty rights, and the settlements too small to adequately address social and economic disparities between Maori and Pakeha [in fact, settlements to date have been less than 3% of the value of the claims].

The process has also been hard to understand and accept for the rest of the nation, but putting deadlines on the process will not bring justice, nor will it bring peace.

Settling injustice is the first step in nation-building, and we must be bold enough to accept the importance of a valid claims process that seeks to at least provide just compensation for past wrongdoings.

ABOLITION OF THE MAORI SEATS

And the final blow is National's threat to abolish the Maori Seats on the assumption that Maori will be best served by those elected to General Seats. Don Brash's blind ignorance on this matter is matched only by the coldness with which this suggestion has been received within Maori circles. And again, Trevor Mallard has said that Labour agrees with National's position by stating that "over a period of time the Maori seats will go ..."

In my travels, I have not canvassed a matter which has drawn such despair, scorn, and outright hatred than this threat to abolish the Maori Seats.

I have been congratulated far and wide for my measured response to Don Brash's speech on race relations in Whangarei, but it took a lot for me and others not to react in the time-honoured protest fashion at the time. The Maori Seats ensure that tangata whenua have representation in parliament. Maori are in a fragile zone right now, and the abolition of the Maori seats would not be a wise move to make.

I also note the comments in yesterday's Herald. Te Atiawa Iwi spokesperson Peter Love said that Maori considered the seats to be a "hugely significant taonga." Historian Ranginui Walker said he was horrified by National's plan and added that he would not be surprised if there were huge protests. The Labour Party's elder stateswoman, Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan has warned of "an uprising" if National abolishes the Maori seats, and said she "would expect even stronger protests than the seabed and foreshore hikoi."

When conservative Maori warn of protests greater than those over the foreshore and seabed, then mainstream New Zealand needs to take heed. These are not the rantings of the violent, the radical, or the revolutionary. They are the concerns of the measured and conservative voices within Maoridom – and if they are to be ignored, it will be so at this nation's peril.

If it's true that the General Parliamentary Seats are already entrenched in legislation, then there is no reason why the Maori Parliamentary Seats can't be given the same legislative guarantees. To suggest that they be abolished for the purpose of winning votes based on irrational fear, is mean-spirited and unbecoming of a party aspiring to power. The Maori Seats should be protected until such time as Maori freely choose through referendum to change the status of those Maori seats.

GENERAL STATUS OF MAORI

Yesterday's New Zealand Herald also provided statistics that showed Maori were worse off than Pakeha in: tertiary qualifications, adult literacy, employment, median hourly earnings, work-life balance, incomes, and living standards; but better off than Pakeha in one area, tertiary participation. In the year when Labour is taking credit for 10,000 Maori tertiary graduates, it's ironic that the bulk of those graduates come from Te Wananga O Aotearoa courses that are now being canned by Labour. Overnight, Maori tertiary participation will decrease to the point where yet again, Maori will be behind Pakeha.

WHERE TO FROM HERE

These threats from both National and Labour, signal a very dangerous time in our nation's history. By even suggesting they might happen, they give hope to those who would deny Maori full participation in today's society. By saying that they will become policy, they give cheer to those who would bludgeon Maori back into the dark ages, they lend despair to those who have struggled to improve our society, and they create fear and anger amongst Maori.

We are here at the Orewa Rotary Club where race relations took a turn for the worse. Both National and Labour are signaling that Maori interests are best served by Maori giving up their rights. Clearly, as the Foreshore and Seabed Hikoi showed, Maori will not accept that argument.

Maori don't trust National, but its time we sent a clear message as well to Labour - don't expect Maori to believe that you have our interests at heart. You have followed mindlessly the road laid out by National, and you have made us feel like slaves in our own land.

Helen Clark has scoffed that she would only talk to the Maori Party if it was the last cab off the rank. Well Helen, that last cab is gaining more and more passengers as the election draws nearer; and that last cab is starting to look more and more like a train.

Maori are the political football of this election – and we are getting kicked harder and harder as the major political parties vie for the Pakeha vote.

Society needs to step back from the brink of civil unrest, and consider where things are going.

My message to all citizens of Aotearoa is to cast these fears aside; to ignore the threats to turn back the pages to a darker time, and to refuse to buy into the racial fears that are being promoted by National.

Instead I urge us all to not be afraid of moving forward together in the search for a better, more tolerant society. Courage is needed in these dark times if we are to banish this specter of racism to the shadows. And we need to be bold and innovative in presenting the alternative. We must not cringe in fear, and we cannot afford to be accommodating of those who would bring our nation to its knees.

The world looks to us to provide leadership in race relations, and we aren't. But it isn't the world that matters. It's us, and we have an obligation not just to future generations, but to ourselves to sort this out in our time.

Aotearoa is founded on a troubled past. Attempts to colonise Maori have failed, and we remain a country divided. It seems that now, more than ever, Maori need to have faith in themselves; and to be confident in their ability to determine their own future; to work alongside their Treaty partners in meeting their obligations; and to work with anyone who can help stop the racist rot that is spreading throughout this country.

Aotearoa is a beautiful country, and contrary to popular belief, Maori welcome Pakeha to these shores. But that relationship is dependent upon respect for the rights of tangata whenua. Maori are here to stay; so are Maori rights.

I love my homeland, and I want my mokopuna to grow up in a country where he can walk down the street as a citizen of Aotearoa, comfortable in his Maori identity, aware of his rights under the Treaty, confident, secure and pro-active in all aspects of his life, and respectful of all others in his society.

The great Native American warrior, Geronimo once said "It is better to die on your feet, than to live forever on your knees"

Our own Nga Tamatoa have paraphrased those sentiments, and I leave them with you here today ... "Tama tu, tama ora. Tama noho, tama mate. Tamatoa."

As we head into this most historic of elections, I see clearly that there is only one party that can ensure a positive future for Maori – and that is the Party born of the dreams and aspirations of tangata whenua to achieve self-determination for whanau, hapu and iwi within their own land; to speak with a strong, independent and united voice; and to live according to kaupapa handed down by their ancestors. That is the party that bears our collective name – the Maori Party.

E te iwi,

Tena koutou, tena koutou, kia ora tatou katoa

ENDS

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