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 **Māori Issues**

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Māori Issues

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In the latter part of 2007, relations between Māori and the New Zealand government came close to the breaking point. A raid carried out by a New Zealand Police armed defenders squad in full combat gear

traumatized a small Māori community in the central North Island on 15 October, just weeks after the NZ government had joined Australia, Canada, and the United States to vote against the adoption of a United Nations declaration on indigenous rights. The raid coincided with the release of a government report showing that almost 20 percent of Māori currently live in Australia. Many had left New Zealand for better economic opportunities, but also "to escape the perceived prejudice of Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) and mainstream negativity about Māori issues" (Hamer 2007, 14). Yet by mid-2008, with polls indicating the likelihood of a change of government in the upcoming general election, Māori started reaping the benefits of a government desperate for our support, particularly in settling Māori land claims. **[End Page 162]**

On 15 October 2007, the first reports of early morning police raids around the country started appearing, as environmental and Māori sovereignty activists were targeted for alleged terrorist activities. Both the commissioner of police and the prime minister had been briefed prior to the raids, several of which involved single households in urban areas where there was minimal disturbance to neighbors and the wider community. But in Ruatoki, a small, remote Māori community in the Urewera Ranges located in the heart of Tūhoe tribal territory, the media reported a massive police presence. The Māori Party later reported that seventy armed police were in Ruatoki that morning when three people were arrested (Māori Party 2007a). A roadblock was set up on the only road out of the community, with people, cars, and a school bus being searched and photographed. Houses and property were inspected and some were damaged. Four rifles and 230 rounds of ammunition were seized. Many people were detained and transported to Rotorua, only to be subsequently released to find their own way home. The whole community was traumatized, including preschool children, who referred to the black-clad, helmeted, gun-carrying paramilitary police who boarded their school bus as "the ninja army" (Māori Party 2007b).

Ruatoki is the home of the well-known Māori rights campaigner and

activist, Tama Iti. He was one of the seventeen people from around the country arrested and charged under the Firearms Act, and one of six held in custody while the police tried to gather evidence to justify charges under the 2002 Terrorism Suppression Act. According to police, those arrested had been running terrorist training camps in the very remote Urewera Ranges. However, the Māori media quickly identified the so-called "training camps" as camping sites used by local hunters. According to media reports, the evidence police appeared to have relied on was mainly recordings of conversations, including telephone conversations, texts, and e-mails. Eventually, the solicitor general refused to allow terrorism charges to be laid and the six people held in custody were released on bail.

In Parliament, the Labour minority government's Māori members remained silent, claiming it was a police matter (*NZH*, 29 Oct 2007). The Māori Party, however, bitterly attacked the police and the government for violating the community of Ruatoki and leaving the Tūhoe people traumatized. Māori Party mp Hone Harawira drew particularly strong personal criticism and abuse from Pūkehū for speaking out against the police actions. He responded by issuing a press release citing the full text of his attack in Parliament and refusing to back down (Māori Party 2007c). His claim that his statement accurately reflected the feeling in many Māori communities around the country was supported by the results of a survey showing a high level of concern about the raids among Māori participants (Māori Party 2007d). In his statement he said, "I will not sit quietly by, while State forces terrorise my people. If this requires of me that I speak out against the rule...

subsidies for various local businesses and government agencies. A real, substantial difference from the practices of previous administrations remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, all indicators showed that the country's economy was not performing well. The tourism sector continued to decline, and many territorial services did not function well, due to constant changes of staff positions depending on the current governments in office. These effects can be ultimately linked to the country's political instability, which is deplored by all sectors (TPM, May and June 2008).

On 29 June, the territorial holiday commemorating the enactment of the 1984 statute of internal autonomy, as well as the annexation of Tahiti by France in 1880, was celebrated by the presidency with great pomp. During the evening of the controversial holiday, Temaru and his supporters held their traditional ceremony at a monument in Faa'a to honor Tahitian soldiers who fell during the resistance to French colonization in the 1840s. This year, Gaston Flosse, who had briefly attended parts of the autonomy celebrations in the morning, participated in the Faa'a ceremony for the first time. He laid a wreath and spoke in honor of Polynesian resistance against France, including on his home island of Mangareva. He called for a greater, more visible monument to be built (TP, 30 June 2008). Since for decades Flosse had denounced the monument and Temaru's commemorations as anti-French propaganda, his shift in attitude once more caused widespread consternation (TPM, Aug 2008).

LORENZ GONSCHOR

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MĀORI ISSUES

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