

Thursday, May 09, 1991

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RUNANGA IWI ACT REPEAL BILL : In Committee

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In Committee

11.13 p.m.

Clause 1. Short Title

Clause 2. Repeal and revocation

Clause 3. Transitional provisions

11.35 p.m.

The Committee divided on the question that clauses 1 to 3 be agreed to.

Ayes 48 Anderson Gresham Muldoon Sowry Armstrong Hancock Munro Storey Banks Hasler Neeson Thomas Birch Kimber Neill Thorne Bradford Kyd Peters, W. Upton Cliffe Laws Reeves Whittaker Cooper Luxton Revell Williamson Creech McCardle Richardson East McCully Robertson, J.S. English MacIntyre Rogers Falloon McLauchlan Ryall Tellers: Fletcher McTigue Smith, L. Carter Grant Meurant Smith, N. Hilt

Noes 22 Austin Gregory Moore Tirikatene-Sullivan Blincoe Hawkins Prebble Wilde Braybrooke Hunt Robertson, H.V.R. Dalziel Kelly Sutherland Tellers: Davies Maharey Swain Hodgson Elder Matthewson Tennet Wetere

Majority for: 26

Clauses agreed to.

Bill reported without amendment.

RUNANGA IWI ACT REPEAL BILL : In Committee

Third Reading

Hon. WINSTON PETERS (Minister of Maori Affairs): I move, That this Bill be now read a third time. Most of the arguments surrounding this Bill have been recited for quite some time now. Arguments both for and against the Bill were recited at the time that the Runanga Iwi Bill came before the House in the three readings before it became an Act of Parliament. There has been much discussion in recent months about the viability of that legislation. It is, therefore, the Government's wish, and has been for some time---in fact, the National Opposition at the time made a statement to the effect throughout the 1990 election campaign---to repeal the Runanga Iwi

Act and to put in its place a policy in which the tribes could voluntarily liaise, work, and co-operate with the Government, but there would be no compulsion about the shape, character, and form of government, so that it could not be alleged---[Interruption.] I tell the member who is trying to interject that this is a serious matter, and that it is not about a lot of frivolous debate. I am grateful for the offers of support that have come from---

Hon. Fran Wilde: There's no camera tonight, Winston.

Hon. WINSTON PETERS: We can see why the member would never generate any television interest. The member's credibility is about zero. The Runanga Iwi Bill was introduced with very little public support. There was a great deal of confusion in Maoridom about it. The policy that replaces it, with the greatest of respect to the Opposition, is, as Opposition members know, substantially supported by Maoridom. There is about 99 percent support, if my correspondence is anything to go by, for that initiative. It should be given a chance. I recall that when the former Minister of Maori Affairs took office in 1984 I promised him 2 years of silence, and he got 2 years of silence, because that is the Maori way. I am not asking for any such favours, because I have a much easier collection of colleagues to work with. They are much more amenable to reason and to logic. Consequently, if they feel that they want to tackle or scrutinise any Maori measure they should feel free to do so. That offer is made to Opposition members by the Government.

RUNANGA IWI ACT REPEAL BILL : In Committee

Hon. K. T. WETERE (Western Maori): I listened with great interest to the Minister speaking on the third reading of this Bill. While he may have given the Labour Government 2 years of silence, the difference is that I was able to lift the vote from \$67 million to about \$250 million, which is what we are talking about. The Minister will know that only 2 weeks ago the supplementary estimates took away about \$40 million from the Education vote. That had something to do with the sessional grants to kohanga reo. I tell the Minister that in the next week or two the Opposition, like a number of other people, will ask where the Minister was when the estimates were presented to Cabinet, and why the kohanga reo grant was cut to the extent that it was.

While I listened with interest, as I said before, about the direction in which the Minister intended to go with this great policy, the Opposition's concern is whether he will be able to hold that vote together and to do what he has told us tonight. That is the concern. I have listened to Maoridom, as well, and I am still listening, and I am still waiting. The indications from all around this place, and even within it, lead me to believe that there are some matters that need to be tidied up. If the Minister can assure the Opposition that that is incorrect, that is fine.

Hon. Winston Peters: The member has my word on it.

Hon. K. T. WETERE: Is that word like the word the Minister gave the Opposition on the introduction of the Bill, when he said that he would not lose one cent? Can I take it that we still have that word? The vote has been changed in the supplementary estimates.

Hon. Winston Peters: No, it hasn't; it's being negotiated right now.

Hon. K. T. WETERE: Yes, there are some changes, and I simply tell the Minister that some questions will be asked at the proper time. Obviously, some rethinking has been done and that is the reason I am making those assertions, because they are true. I have read the supplementary estimates, as well. It does not add up. If the Minister has the confidence of his colleagues then the Opposition will wait with anticipation and interest to find out where he might be going with the new policy.

Hon. Winston Peters: Its support is overpowering me.

Hon. K. T. WETERE: Is it? How was the construction of the new agency reached in the new policy the Minister is talking about? I think that it was in the second reading---or was it in the estimates in another set of discussions on that matter---that the Minister said that the Ministry of Maori Affairs would continue with its present structure?

I am concerned, as I said then, that, under the Runanga Iwi Act, iwi would have been able to work alongside the ministry to ensure that there was accountability in the other agencies in relation to Maori matters. It seems to me that there are now some thoughts about whether that practice should continue or whether other parties or other agencies will be made responsible in their pursuits of Maori policy. I do not want to prolong the debate. I simply say that there have been some concerns and that I agree with them.

However, I want to reassure the House about the progress I made and the steps I took as Minister of Maori Affairs, and that was to consult our people---not only here, but throughout the country. As the member for Southern Maori said, I did that not once, but three times. It was to follow Te Urupare Rangapu and to implement that policy. The Minister's officials said that that policy was still in place and that it was the policy that they were working to today. Therefore, to some extent the vacuum has now been created, in that there has been a movement between the Minister's office, his agency, and our people out there. That is the vacuum I referred to during the Committee stage as being created without a process the Minister could work with. I look forward to that implementation taking place. As I understand it, the Maori Congress wants to be part of the implementation process.

Hon. Winston Peters: Everybody does.

Hon. K. T. WETERE: That is fine. I shall wait with bated breath to see how it happens.

Michael Laws: Ha! Ha, ha!

Hon. K. T. WETERE: I can understand the laughter of the member sitting alongside the Minister. He is a very inexperienced member who has only just come to this place, but if he stays long enough he may learn something about things Maori. He has not done a good job thus far, but he will learn that the legislation the House is repealing was, for the first time in the history of Maoridom, permissive, and enabled Maori people themselves to construct an organisation of their making.

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Dr BRUCE GREGORY (Northern Maori): I listened carefully to the Minister's remarks tonight and I am concerned about the continuous attempts to denigrate the Labour Government's legislation---the Runanga Iwi Act---and I believe that even the Minister was attempting to do that. When the Runanga Iwi Act was being formulated the former Minister of Maori Affairs travelled throughout the country. The question of time was important. In relation to the repeal Bill, people have been asking what the point was of bringing the legislation back to a select committee. The number of submissions heard was insignificant in comparison with the number of meetings about the Act that had been held throughout the country. The number of submissions made to the select committee about the Bill was minimal. The number of those people who were for and against the Act was almost the same.

What does all of this say? To me it says that the Act put in place by the Labour Government is still relevant. The repeal Bill that has been brought before the House is of no consequence because the

debate has already taken place. Even the Minister said so tonight. Therefore, the reality is that somehow the Government is doing a double-wash of the same Bill. Different terminology has been used, but, in essence, there are aspects that as yet have to be confirmed. We have had the Ka Awatea report.

Hon. Maurice McTigue: The spirits of the past are coming back.

Dr BRUCE GREGORY: I can tell the Minister of Employment that at this time the report is hardly worth the name Ka Awatea, and that it may be more important to use the word kapo and all of the connotations that go with that term. Strangely enough, they are often used in the same expression in Maoridom. For the Minister's sake I hope that the promises he is making tonight come out from Cabinet word for word. That has yet to be seen. So far it has taken 2 months and we are still not sure whether the report has got to Cabinet. There must be some truth in the Minister's comment that there have been some leaks to the news media, to the extent that people have already been notified as to their future positions within the department.

Hon. Richard Prebble: Have they?

Dr BRUCE GREGORY: That is what is reported in the newspapers, and I understand that the Minister has not denied it. That must mean that changes have been made in relation to the report and that the report is causing some concern. The repeal legislation was a significant development, in that the Runanga Iwi Act was referred back to a select committee, and one has to ask why. There was no debate at the select committee, as the submissions were almost non-existent. The substance of the measure that would replace the Act was not known at that time. Only now has it come to the surface and we are still not sure where it will go. There is no clear pathway as to what will happen.

Hon. Richard Prebble: There's no policy now, is there?

Dr BRUCE GREGORY: That is right. [Interruption.] Of course, members are waiting for those interjectors on the Government benches to give the Minister of Maori Affairs a directive as to whether they will support him in total or in part. The Minister knows that, and Opposition members are watching the debate with interest.

Debate interrupted.

Sitting suspended from midnight to 9 a.m. (Friday).

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