

# Gloves off at women's forum

by Lucy Grigg

The gloves came off last week with further debate over proposed tax cuts at the Women's Political Forum hosted by the Auckland University of Technology.

Eight female representatives from all the major parties were invited to share their views on topics relevant to women and families, including work, parenting and childcare.

But the focus soon shifted to become a tax cut debate and whether it was the answer to the problems of low-income families.

The two main parties, Labour and National, both saw the need to increase help for families but once again were divided by the tax issue.

"Parents are the best people to know how to raise their kids. We want less tax for families so they will have real options of how to manage their lives," said National's Judith Collins.

Labour's MP Judith Tizard disagreed with Collins.

"Income is not the only issue, but it is important. We've already put a lot of money into other areas, such as PHO's, which are a huge benefit to women."

When Collins was responding to a question about tax cuts, there were numerous objections from Tizard, who made it clear this was not the answer to the enquirer's problems.

She disagreed with any candidate who offered substantial tax cuts for everybody, often rebutting with a loud "no" in



WOMEN'S FORUM: National's Judith Collins (centre) prompted debate over whether tax cuts would be the best option for low-income families.

between checking emails on her mobile phone.

"You should be asking your employer for a pay rise. Just because we have a \$7 billion surplus doesn't mean it's money there to be spent. It's operating equity."

Act's Deborah Coddington used her time to push the idea of a sex offender database, listing all convicted offenders.

Alliance's Jill Ovens attacked National's policies, which she saw as extremely divisive. "People should be looked at individually. We see a world where diversity is celebrated. Racism will not be tolerated."

Others remained on topic and within their allocated two minutes, selling their party's policies to the sceptical crowd.

Other speeches focussed on giving women the choice whether they wish to raise a family rather than work, and this decision should not be entirely based on money.

Tizard summarised: "It should be a choice women should be able to make. It seems completely crazy that some women I know are working hard as well as having families."

Judy Turner, deputy leader of United Future Party, agreed.

"A woman takes time out (from work) for their family, and they are penalised. Families should have the choice."

National's Collins went further.

"We're (New Zealand) still acting like parenting is not a real job. Women in caring positions earn far less than people that fix cars."

Maori Party candidate Angeline Greensill and Greens candidate Catherine Delahunty appeared aligned in their promises.

Greensill spoke of raising the minimum wage to over \$12 as did Delahunty, and both were mainly concerned about helping women who were "vulnerable and at the bottom".

"We need to revive paid parental leave. Women get attacked for staying home and looking after the children," said Greensill. Delahunty agreed.

"We need to teach our children how to cook and live, because we've lost the plot."

United Future's Judy Turner took the argument further, wanting to introduce income splitting for families and have the first \$3000 earned income tax free.

## Rerekura to take on 'Westie' candidates

by Fiona Robertson

A wild card in the closely fought Tamaki Makaurau electorate is Sam Rerekura, who is standing as an independent following his defection from the Maori Party.

Maori Party co-leader Dr Pita Sharples dismisses Rerekura's chances saying his only competition is Labour's John Tamihere.

But Rerekura, who is of Ngapuhi and Ngati Whatua descent, says he would not have entered unless he thought he had the numbers to win.

"I know the Maori demographic and I also know the tribal make-up here," says the former Maori Party campaigner.

He thinks his advantage lies in being a candidate close to South Aucklanders' hearts, as opposed to what he calls the "Westie" candidates, Sharples and Tamihere.

But Sharples says his support is strong among Ngapuhi due to his work in kohanga reo, kapa haka groups and marae in South Auckland and other Ngapuhi areas. Polling has also shown strong support for him.

"I've been working with them now for 40 years," says Sharples.

Both educationalists and opponents of the Government's handling of the foreshore and seabed issue, Rerekura and Sharples appear to have had much in common.

Rerekura had been working for the Maori Party soon after it was launched, fundraising and recruiting, and founded the Ngapuhi branch. He was also the youth delegate from Tamaki Makaurau on the Maori Party National Council.

His initial alliance with the Maori Party was based on a loss of confidence with other parties, believing that

Tamihere and Labour have denied the tangata whenua their indigenous rights.

But Rerekura says his relationship with Sharples was tense from the beginning.

"It was a personal vendetta between him and I."

It was not until the Maori Party list was announced in late June that the fallout occurred. Rerekura had been expecting a high ranking but came in 57 out of 62 candidates.

Rerekura says after that he decided he "may as well grow some balls" and is now funding his own campaign.

While he says the Ngapuhi community has been loyal to him, he has been met with hostility and even threats from others.

However, the mood is amicable at the Manurewa markets as Rerekura hands out flyers alongside the Maori Party stand.

Rangi McLean, who is standing for the Maori Party in the Manurewa electorate, says there is no animosity between the Maori Party and Rerekura.

"At the end of the day we're all Maori."

McLean says there is "no doubt" Rerekura will win some support due to Ngapuhi's size, but he says many Ngapuhi still support the Maori Party.

Rerekura's main campaigning line as an independent, along with his "South Auckland for South Auckland" catchcry, is his two-year experience in Parliament as coordinator of Maori Cultural Services.

"Experience is important in Parliament," he says.

He believes Maori are beginning to make more use of political systems. "I know now that the Maori community is becoming very politically aware and I believe that I can make a contribution," he says.

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