



Prophetic Truth in a Time of State Sanctioned Racism

Rev. Alec Toleafoa © 20 April 2025

*“Woe to you who legislate evil—
who make laws that make misery for the poor,
that rob destitute people of dignity,
exploiting defenseless widows and taking advantage of homeless children.”*

[Isaiah 10:1–3 \(The Message version\)](#)

Let me take you to a moment in time a moment in history.

To a family home in the inner-city suburb of **Arch Hill**, a group of young Pasifika and Maori gathered for a meeting, a meeting that would ignite a revolution in the way mainstream New Zealand treat Pasifika & Maori. A meeting that would give Pasifika communities a megaphone through which to articulate and amplify our stand against the everyday racial prejudice and discrimination we were experiencing at the time. And so the Polynesian Panther Party was born on 16th June 1971.

Our dreams were bigger than our bank accounts, but we had something more valuable, three powerful principles that would light our way through the racism we were experiencing:-

1. · **Non-violent resistance to racism**
2. · **Mana Pasifika** — Empowering Pacific people
3. · **Educate to Liberate** — Liberating our minds

We were teenagers—Just kids really average age 16—but we were wielding something infinitely more potent than fists. We wielded *a vision*.

We shone a floodlight into the dark corners where injustice festered in our community:

- **Tenants support-** Protecting tenants from unscrupulous landlords who were charging exorbitant rents for substandard rentals and if anyone complained, they would be evicted. We exposed these landlords and organised rent strikes.

- **Legal aid support**- We desperately needed to know our legal rights
- **Police investigation patrols**- holding Police accountable
- **Food and labour cooperatives**, Affordable quality food for our community. Dignity and solidarity were the main currency
- **Education classes**- Growing critical thinking and thinkers
- **Homework centres** - Learning support hubs

We weren't just protesting.

We were *protecting*.

We weren't just resisting.

We were *reimagining* what justice could look like for our people.

Our Legal Aid booklet was a response to police brutality, unlawful arrests and detentions, frequent in our community. Long story short we just didn't know our legal rights and were easy targets for a biased Police organisation.

With the help of Auckland's top criminal lawyer **David Lange**, may he rest in peace, who was as alarmed at the disproportionate arrest rates for Maori & Pasifika. Maori & Pasifika were 8 times more likely than a Pākehā to be convicted for the same offense.

Together we crafted a legal aid booklet, we translated the legal rights every person should know into every major Pasifika language & English.

It was revolutionary. It was life changing and the impact was immediate. Police arrest rates **plummeted**.

Why?

Because suddenly, our people were armed with **Law**

With this knowledge in our back pocket, we could look Police in the eye and say, "No, you may not do that. I know my rights."

This wasn't just legal information.

This was a shield.

This was an *armour of dignity no longer are we going to be visible only as a deficit statistic in an outdated justice system'*

We didn't stop there.

Our **Police Investigation Patrols** followed the notorious "Team Policing Units"—who routinely Policed areas where large numbers of Pasifika and Maori congregated.

We carried notebooks.

We were there to witness.

To make them think twice.

To shine light in the shadows.

To let people know there was someone there for them.

Why did we have to protect ourselves from those *meant to protect us*?

Because their badges bore not just numbers, but the weight of **systemic racism in a blue uniform**.

Then came 1981. And the nation could no longer look away.

During the **Springbok Tour**, New Zealanders watched in horror as police batons cracked skulls, bloodied and bruised the faces of Middle-class mums. Bearded dads.

University students. Priests, Ministers and Nuns.

Beaten like criminals for standing up to apartheid.

And perhaps for the first time, the nation caught a glimpse of our **daily reality**.

That was how the Rule of Law was upheld. Long batons, barricades, barbed wire, excessive use of force.

It was absurd. It was horrific. It was a mirror.

And in that mirror, Pākehā New Zealanders saw the truth Māori and Pasifika had known for decades.

But I want to turn now to something sacred.

To a **church**.

To a **Sunday**.

To a scene that should be serene.

Families gathered in worship—men, women, elders, children, babies.

Their voices lifted in prayer. Their praises soaring to the rafters, Their minds stilled in scripture.

The burdens of the world paused for a moment—because in church, there is supposed to be *peace*.

And then—**boom!**—the doors flew open.

Police stormed in.

No warrant. No explanation.

Only fear.

Children screaming.

Mothers crying.

Elders stunned and bewildered.

People scattering for places to hide from the attack.

The sanctuary defiled.

This didn't happen in some war-ravaged land, or in a country that persecutes people for their faith.

This happened in **Grey Lynn**, just across the road on **Crummer Road**.

During the height of the **Dawn Raids**, under orders signed into law by those who "legislate evil."

Even the minister was hauled off like a criminal.

Worship turned to wailing.

Faith turned to fear.

Nothing was sacred anymore

The Immigration Act 1964 gave the authorities jurisdiction to do exactly what they did in Crummer Road and everywhere else before and since.

It was an Act built on the scaffold of 'Racism' that had its origins in Europe but clothed and embedded in settler colonial culture and ideology. It was this ideology that informed the raids on Parihaka, Orakau, Okahu Bay, Rangiaowhia and Te Urewera.

Racism needs Power it needs violence to support it.

And Isaiah's words blaze their way across 3 millennia and speak to the law makers of our time

"Woe to you who legislate evil, Woe to you who made Crummer Road happen"

The Law makers and enforcers denied that there were racially targeted Dawn Raids and Random Checking. But the numbers tell a different story.

30% of illegal immigrants were Pasifika. 70% were European, from the UK and North America, but Pasifika accounted for 86% of deportations.

Across a 3 day weekend in Auckland 200 homes were raided, 856 people randomly stopped on the street and asked for proof of their immigration status.

We can better grasp the full impact of this when we understand that in a typical Pasifika household at the time there would be , mum, dad, at least 5 children including infants and at least one other relative some times more. But let's just stick with the number 8 and multiply that by 200 homes and add 856 random checks that's total of 2456 people.

But of that number, only 23 illegal immigrants were captured.

The 23 illegal immigrants represent less than a % of the 2456 people, less than a % but 100% of the 2456:-

- felt 100% of the violence,

- A 100% of the Fear,
- A 100% the humiliation,
- A 100% of the indignity & Trauma.

2,433 were innocent 2,433 had every legal and moral right to be in New Zealand.

These are the hidden 'figures' the people we were never supposed to know about.

There was not a single Dawn Raid or Random Check in the suburbs where the majority of illegal immigrants from the UK, North America were likely to be living.

In 2023, 2 years after the Government's apology for the Dawn Raids a Tongan family was Dawn Raided. Immigration called it an 'Out of Hours Compliance' visit. For Pasifika it was more than just a fancy name for 'Dawn Raid', **It was a betrayal of trust.**

In the ensuing outrage Pasifika voices were joined in one accord with the voice of mainstream New Zealand, demanding a **'Please explain'** from the Government. It ignited a review of the legislation around so called Out of Hours Compliance visits.

[\(The Heron KC and Barrow Review\)](#)

The review simply moved some of the legal architecture around but did not remove the practice of Dawn Raids.

What fell out of the review was the fact that from 2015 to 2022 the number of prosecutions and deportations by means of 'Out of Hours Compliance' visits represents less than 1% of the total number of deportations achieved by other means across that period.

These numbers mirror the less than 1% in that egregious 3 day weekend over 50 years ago. Join the dots.

'Why then does the current Immigration Act still sanction 'Dawn Raids' if they only ever yield less than 1%?' **It makes absolutely no sense!**

Isaiah's words are not just words of judgement there is also hope and restoration because God's justice is not blind:-

- It sees the marginalized of our world
- It hears the cries of despair
- It sees innocence of that frightened child as it watches its parents led away in hand cuffs at Dawn.

So, what now?

Now, we preach.

We remember. Remembering is empowering.

We *resist*.

We make that one more courageous step.

That one more hymn.

That one more prayer.

We make our protest a prayer and our prayer a protest.

To build that world we sang about earlier - "We'll Build a Land".

'Where justice rolls down like water and righteousness flows like a mighty stream'.

Because those who legislate evil still walk the corridors of government.

Because Racism still holds a pen, still writes policy, still knocks on doors at dawn.

But we.

We Walk with memory.

We Walk with courage.

We stand with Isaiah and whole prophetic tradition

And we walk with a different law—

The **law of aroha-love**.

The **law of liberation**.

The law that empowers us to believe

Another world is not only possible—it is already being born.

Let it be so.

Meditation / Discussion Question

- What thoughts, feelings or potential actions did today's service inspire in you?