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NEW ZEALAND CENTRE FOR POLITICAL RESEARCH

ONE IN SIX

By Muriel Newman

On Tuesday international “race relations day” - a day to promote the elimination of racial discrimination - will be celebrated by schools from all over the country.

In New Zealand, the foundation for racial equality was laid with the Treaty of Waitangi. Under Article One of the Treaty, Maori ceded their sovereignty to the Queen. Under Article Two, property rights were established. And under Article Three, all New Zealanders were given equality under British Law. (An excellent analysis of the Treaty of Waitangi by Hon Sir Apirana Ngata is available exclusively through the NZCPR.)

It remains a puzzle, however, that in a country where it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of race, racism is being actively encouraged by the government. Racial discrimination by the state has fuelled deep divisions within New Zealand society. The existence of the Maori seats exacerbates the problem.

According to the Electoral Commission, when the 1985 Royal Commission on the Electoral System considered the future of the Maori seats, it concluded that “the seats had not helped Maori and that they would achieve better representation through a proportional party-list system”. The Commission therefore recommended that if MMP was adopted, “the Maori seats should be abolished”.

Nowadays, as they predicted, Maori representation in Parliament has increased through the party-list system. As a result a majority of New Zealanders now believe that the Maori seats are redundant and should be abolished. The National Party recently announced that it would tie the abolition of the Maori seats to the conclusion of the Waitangi Treaty claims process in 2014.

That brought a predictable response from the Maori Party - which depends on the Maori seats for its survival. Hone Harawira warned that a promise to abolish the Maori seats could compromise post-election arrangements:

“We won't be doing deals with parties who plan to silence our peoples' views. It took us 150 years for our voice to be heard in the halls of power, and our people won't stand for anyone trying to take it away again. Political parties may be pushing for deadlines on

lodging claims, but they shouldn't for one minute think that settling claims for less than 3% of their value means that Maori will accept having their independent voice in parliament choked off at the same time”.

It is these increasing demands by radical Maori that have fuelled the racial divide. Tribalism is a primitive culture that modern societies have shunned.

A recent study by Paul Hamer for Te Puni Kokiri, highlights this fact. Back in 1966, one in fifty Maori lived in Australia. Today it is one in six! Increasing numbers of Maori are leaving New Zealand for Australia, not only to take advantage of the opportunities provided by higher living standards and a more buoyant economy, but to also escape the negative effects of racism and tribalism.

In his report Paul Hamer describes how many Maori in Australia welcome being regarded as “Kiwis” - ‘New Zealanders’ first and Maori second.

In the report, many Maori in Australia expressed their overwhelming sense of relief on being “free of Maori culture”, of being able to “get away from the rigid beliefs of our elders”, of being “away from tikanga Maori and whanau dynamics or pressures associated with being whanau”.

Others spoke of being able to escape the whanau environment after years of being in it, living it, breathing it, eating it, without even realising it: “you know the story marae, whanau hui, whanau politics, continuously fighting each other but still whanau in the end. It feels like we are able to live our lives without being answerable or having to think is this good for the rest of the whanau”.

Kelly Te Heuheu, the National Maori Crime Issues Specialist for the Sensible Sentencing Trust, is this week's NZCPR Guest commentator. In her opinion piece “Grief, Pain & Division of our People over Maori Land and Tribal Politics”, Kelly shares a similar experience:

“Since early childhood, I remember the punch-ups and arguments between our people over land and tribal politics. The worst issue with Maori Land is most of it is in multiple ownership which is disastrous. For the children playing around the Marae we got used to this fighting as the norm of our lifestyle. Many of our people moved away from home due to friction and fighting.

Families broke up, the feud lasted for many years - sometimes a lifetime”.

She explains, *“Even worse, animosity goes down through generations like a plague. Grief, pain and division between whanau (family), hapu (sub tribe) and iwi (tribe) over land and tribal politics is so bad that many of our people distance themselves from our culture”.* (To read Kelly’s article see nzcpr.com)

This need to distance themselves from Maori culture is clearly a factor in driving many Maori to Australia. One survey respondent put it this way:

“It is paramount that the New Zealand government begins to recognise that Maori are achieving and are successful when living away from New Zealand, and they have to begin asking themselves why is this not happening in New Zealand? To oppress a people and manipulate politics to achieve their own means will only see more and more Maori recognising that they do have a future and they can be successful and live in a flash house, and drive a flash car, and have a healthy bank account and still retain their Maoriness – unfortunately they have to leave New Zealand to do it”.

It is a sad fact that while most Maori do very well in Australia, government policy at home keeps Maori down. Running a country with economic policies that reduce living standards, means that many families will never enjoy the benefits of a decent income. Having an education system that forces children to go to failing state schools, means that many children from poor families totally miss out on the benefits of a good education. Keeping families dependent on welfare, robs hope, and results in many turning to booze, drugs and crime.

New Zealanders should not have to live under laws that foster failure. Nor should we – Maori and non-Maori - have to live under laws that foster racism. The

vast majority of New Zealanders want laws that treat us equally and treat us well - laws that allow us all to succeed and prosper. Tribalism and separatism do not do that.

I will leave the last word to Alan Duff, from an article “Maori Underperformance” that he wrote for the NZCPR last year:

To continue with the collective, whanau, hapu, iwi societal model is a fatal mistake. A fatal mistake. For in not developing individuality we continue down the declining slope of anonymity in a collective. Of no-one willing to make decisions – especially unpopular decisions – for fear of standing out from the crowd, going against the collective will. Individuality is as fundamental to a society’s development as property rights.

The quality of debate in this country on Maori issues is poor, cowardly, non-analytical, and none of it serves the Maori people well. You see we’re having thrust upon us, rammed down our throats in fact, this “Maori as we were” model (before, it is implied, the Europeans came along and ruined us morally and culturally.) Its advocates are insisting that we think differently – yes, we do, but it shouldn’t be assumed we can’t change, not if the same thinking is holding us back from advancing – we have a different world view, we have greater difficulties adapting to Western culture. So just give us the money and we’ll figure out the solutions to our own problems. When demonstrably we can’t. Why not? Because our base line is a Stone Age societal model which patently does not work in this modern world. When are we as a nation, starting with government, going to say “enough is enough.”?

The poll this week asks: Do you think the abolition of the Maori seats would make New Zealand a better place to live, a worse place to live, would make no difference?

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