

Newman Weekly

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The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

Time to Look Forward Not Back

The 2006 Maori electoral option, which opened in April, closed last week with 15,000 more Maori having enrolled on the Maori roll. This was well down on the 24,000 additions in 2001 and the 18,000 in 1997.

In spite of all of the effort by government and a major campaign by the Maori Party - not to mention the \$4.6 million of taxpayers' money spent on the campaign - not only did fewer Maori move onto the Maori roll, but over 7,000 moved off it and onto the general roll.

The decision on whether there will be one more Maori seat - which would take the number of Maori seats up to 8 and the number of general seats down to 112 - will be announced next February. But with a widespread view that Maori MPs elected in the Maori seats are more interested in separatism and sovereignty than in the good of the country, it is surely worth asking the question of whether the Maori seats are now helping or hindering New Zealand?

A Royal Commission on New Zealand's electoral system looked at the future of the Maori seats in the mid-eighties and concluded that a separate racial franchise had not helped Maori. They believed better representation for Maori would be achieved through MMP and recommended that the Maori seats be abolished.

The Maori seats had originally arisen, not as a result of the Treaty of Waitangi, but because the right to vote had been based on the English system of individual property ownership. Since this system disenfranchised most Maori, who owned land communally, as well as goldminers, in 1862 a law was passed to allow goldminers to vote and in 1867 the Maori seats were formed to enable those Maori, who did not meet the property requirements, to vote.

While property requirements as a condition of

voting were abolished in 1893, the Maori seats remained. What we need to ask ourselves, however, is what 139 years of separate political representation has achieved for Maori and for New Zealand?

When we take a cold hard look at the statistics, it is easy to conclude that separate representation is not the answer: in spite of Maori being only 14 percent of the population over half of prison inmates are Maori, the women most likely to be the victims of family violence are Maori, the children most likely to drop out of school are Maori, the youths most likely to appear in the Youth

Court on crime charges are Maori, the children most likely to be abused and neglected are Maori, and the teenagers most likely to get pregnant are Maori.

Just last week, the retiring Governor General, Dame Sylvia Cartwright, in her final farewell speech - this week's NZCPD guest commentary - lamented our record of violence calling it our "dark

secret". She had this to say:

"Sometimes when I listen to a foreign leader praise our efforts in the environment or our willingness to assist those in war-ravaged countries, I hope that our dark secrets - for they remain hidden to the rest of the world - will never become known internationally. I am concerned that these countries that so admire us might soon learn that we have a terrible rate of family and other violence, that although we have one of the finest, least corrupt Police Forces and Court systems in the world, this violence remains unacceptably high".

"We need to focus for a while on the problems at home, and concentrate our world-class skills on resolving these issues that are our nightmare in the otherwise beautiful and peace-loving country we live in". To read speech see www.nzcpd.com.

Another way to look at this issue is to ask why is

it that such dysfunction surrounds a minority group of New Zealanders that have had political representation at the highest level for 139 years? I suspect that a part of the reason is that, like the Maori Party MPs, much of their focus is backwards looking, locking in victim hood, holding onto tribalism, and promoting separate racial development as the way forward.

Unfortunately, this approach, which has dragged Maori down, is the antithesis of self-reliance and personal responsibility, qualities needed for success in a modern world. Further, in the quest for sovereignty, the decimation of the Maori family - largely caused by social welfare - has occurred under the public radar. The effects, however, are now being exposed as an article by New Zealand journalist Jamie Whyte, "This is New Zealand's Dark Secret", published this week in the UK Times, indicates (to read article see www.nzcpd.com).

While welfare dependency is at the heart of the breakdown of the New Zealand family and the resulting social dysfunction, controversial claims surfaced this week that Maori may also carry a 'warrior' gene that makes them more aggressive and more prone to violence.

Dr Rod Lea, Enviromics Programme Leader at the Institute of Environmental Science and Research, revealed that he has been examining the 'monoamine oxidase' gene, which has been

linked to aggression, risk-taking, and addictions. In a radio interview, he stated: "this gene has been linked to different anti-social behaviours and risk-taking behaviours, but the link that's been made has been usually quite weak, and often is only present in association with non-genetic factors - that is, other factors such as upbringing, socio-economic circumstances, other lifestyle factors" (to find out more about Dr Lea's work, see www.nzcpd.com).

Clearly if there is a warrior gene, raising children in a dysfunctional family environment will simply exacerbate what has already become a major problem for society. We know that children need the security of a stable family life, with a mum and dad to provide them with love, guidance and protection. And surely they deserve a government that regards the strengthening of the family unit as a key priority.

New Zealanders want to see that every child born in this country has an opportunity to achieve their full potential and lead a rich and fulfilling life, and if a race based electoral system has contributed to this goal becoming unattainable, then surely it is time to change the system.

The poll this week: *Do you think separate Maori representation is having a positive or negative effect on New Zealand?*

Why are Maori so dysfunctional given they have had political representation for 139 years? I suspect that a part of the reason is that, like the Maori Party MPs, much of their focus is backwards looking, locking in victim hood, holding onto tribalism, and promoting separate racial development as the way forward.

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