



NEW ZEALAND CENTRE FOR POLITICAL RESEARCH

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NEW ZEALAND'S MAORI CHILD WELFARE PROBLEM.

By Brian Giesbrecht

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Foreword

New Zealand is not alone in the rise of an indigenous underclass. In this paper, Brian Giesbrecht, a retired Canadian judge and a senior fellow with the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, shares his insights into the problems and solutions.

The parallels between the Canadian experience and New Zealand are as striking as they are disturbing. Brian challenges the modern-day narrative that indigenous people are victims of colonialism and the self-serving view advocated by indigenous leaders that an "indigenous" solution is the best path forward for children of indigenous heritage. That experience directly confronts the advocacy of some that the solution to the shameful social statistics of the Maori community lays in tribalism and *the Maori way of doing things*.

Brian also challenges our politicians to look beyond the risk-averse policies of appeasement. He says, "A child is a child. Keep racial politics out of it, and just see to that child's best interests".

I cannot commend this compelling and important work highly enough.

Muriel Newman

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The New Zealand Centre for Political Research is a public policy think tank established in 2005 by former MP Dr Muriel Newman. This article may be downloaded from NZCPR.com.

The Canadian experience

I will state at the outset that my views are very different from those advanced by Indigenous advocates and our current government. Their view is that Indigenous people are victims of colonialism, and a host of other evils inflicted on them by the “settlers” - settlers being everyone who is not Indigenous- and everything must be seen in that victim-oppressor context. In fact, over the last few years in Canada there seems to be a simplistic, but growing belief that under the banner of “diversity” people are either “oppressors” or “victims”. (It gets complicated when people have their feet in both camps.) According to that view mainstream Canadians are oppressors, and the perpetrators of an ongoing genocide against Indigenous people. This sounds quite ridiculous, but it was actually the finding of a very recent report into the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIW). The Prime Minister of our country agreed that, yes, he was indeed the leader of a country engaged in an ongoing genocide against Indigenous people. I find that view preposterous and will say more about it further on. I mention it to place my opinion in context. Mine is the opinion of an outlier.

I should also mention that the direction Indigenous matters have been moving in Canada - at least since 1996, when the Royal Commission On Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) charted a distinctly separatist course for aboriginal people - has been towards the notion that each of the 600 plus Canadian Indian reserves are in fact separate and sovereign nations, entitled to make their own laws and enter into international treaties with Canada. I should mention here that Canada has been “colonized” for 500 years, and there has been inter-marriage and partnering for all of that time. Who is and who is not “indigenous” is often just a matter of self-identification.

The “parallel system” is a dead-end quest that is doing damage to our country, while condemning the Indigenous underclass to a welfare dependent, life-wasting purgatory.

Although this idea involves a separateness for each reserve, or “nation”, it is also assumed that Canada would continue to finance the operation of these communities. Indian reserves in Canada are massively subsidized, and have always been. In most cases there is no reasonable prospect that these reserves, or “nations”, will be anything but permanently dependent on the federal government for their survival. These reserves are not independent nations in any meaningful sense.

Needless to say, I am an ardent opponent of this “parallel system”. One reason I retired from the bench when I did was to advocate for one set of laws for all Canadians. It is my belief that the incredibly expensive pursuit of the so-called “parallel system”, or “nation to nation” system is a dead-end quest that is doing damage to our country, while condemning the Indigenous underclass to a welfare dependent, life-wasting purgatory.

Finally, I will mention that I am a believer in integration. I will later refer to a strong and successful Indigenous middle class that has been steadily growing in Canada. Most of these people passionately identify with their Indigenous culture, and yet that has not stopped them in any way from participating fully in the economy, and being fully integrated Canadian citizens. At one time an Indian who made his way in mainstream society was called an “apple” by fellow Indians - red on the outside, but white on the inside. It was an insult that accused the Indian of selling out. I believe that those days are past, and that Indigenous Canadians can be both successfully integrated citizens, and culturally proud Indians at the same time. Integration is the answer, but it is regarded as a bad word by many - even by those who have successfully integrated. And did I mention my belief that the present political movement towards a goal of 600 odd separate nations within one nation is both foolhardy, and damaging to everyone concerned?

"About half of those children in care are referred to as being “developmentally delayed”.

With those initial remarks I will describe my involvement with Indigenous child welfare, and what I view as the currently hopeless state of Indigenous child welfare policy in my country.

I became a judge in 1976 and was involved in child welfare and criminal court issues - largely involving Indigenous people - on a daily basis until 2007. Since that time I have been writing and advocating on various issues, but mainly on matters pertaining to Indigenous - also called aboriginal, native, or Indian - issues.

What is referred to as the Indigenous child welfare issue is the massive overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the country’s provincial child welfare systems. The provinces have

jurisdiction over child welfare, but the federal government has jurisdiction over Indian affairs - thus, there is overlapping jurisdiction in the case of Indigenous child welfare. To give you an idea of the scale of the problem, I will refer to the numbers in my home province of Manitoba. Although the Indigenous population of Manitoba is less than 10% of the total, Indigenous children represent 90% of the children in care. At the present time there are about 11,000 children in the care of child welfare agencies in the province.

But that number doesn't tell the whole story. About half of those children in care are referred to as being "developmentally delayed". That is bureaucratic code for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Effects (FASD) - that is, children who were exposed to alcohol in the womb and now have permanent brain damage. What's more, the 11,000 are just the tip of the iceberg. There are multiples of that number who are living hopeless lives in inadequate homes - usually with a parent or parents with substance abuse issues. That substance was almost always alcohol in days gone by, but now include a cornucopia of horridly addictive and damaging drugs. How many of these children living such lives are FASD is not known, but a recent study showed that at least half of the homeless people living on the streets of Winnipeg, Manitoba were former child welfare wards. Winnipeg winters are very cold. Trying to stay alive on those mean streets with mental difficulties and substance abuse issues makes for a life that is truly nasty, brutish and short.

There is a kind of group denial when it comes to the truly awful Indigenous FASD problem. Neither governments or Indigenous advocates are interested in investigating the depths of the problem, insisting that it is no more of a problem than in the general population. These people are deluding themselves.

Except for the types of drugs, this situation has not changed significantly for many decades. Indigenous children from inadequate homes have been massively over represented in child welfare systems for generations. FASD has been a major problem for decades now. Some northern communities are doomed, so many of its residents are affected.

Child welfare workers have very difficult decisions to make when deciding if a child can be left with a troubled parent, or must be apprehended. There is no magic in apprehension.

Generally, Indigenous children have not done well in the care of agencies. And yet, leaving a child in a bad home could have tragic consequences. It is truly a Hobbesian choice.

Before the apprehension of Indian children on reserves became possible in the 1960s, as a result of a provincial/federal agreement, residential schools were used as dumping grounds for the children of alcohol abusing parents. These children tend not to do well in life, as the violence and chaos inherent in that kind of alcoholic home are very damaging to children, especially in their early years. Much of the sad legacy of residential schools in Canada has to do with the fact that many of the children placed in those schools from the 1950s and 60s arrived there as damaged children - damaged by their parents' drinking.

After apprehension on reserves became possible in the 1960s, social workers went overboard on the apprehension of children from these homes. The truth is that social workers first entering Indian reserves were shocked at the dysfunction within the reserve underclass population. Up until that time, reserves were isolated and largely forgotten communities. The social workers were entering what to them was an alien and frightening landscape. They saw young lives at risk.

"To understand the Indigenous child welfare issue, the explosive topic of reserve binge drinking must be discussed".

This resulted in what is now called the "60s Scoop". Many of the social workers in the 1960s were young and idealistic. They saw children in intolerable conditions and were determined to save them. So it is largely true that they were over zealous in the removal of children from homes, but it was never true that children were apprehended from homes simply because the parents were poor. The fact is that everyone on reserves was poor. There were many of those poor people who functioned perfectly well as parents. They were not part of the binge drinking class. It was that binge drinking, welfare dependent group that failed their children. History is now being rewritten to portray unfeeling social workers ripping children from the arms of poor, but good parents. That is not the way it was. I was there and saw the agony workers went through deciding whether it was possible to leave children with parents who insisted on putting their drinking ahead of their responsibilities to their children, or if they had to sever the biological bond to save the child. In most cases the parents chose liquor over their

children. The sad reality is that so many of the Indigenous children did not do well if they were left with their parents, and did not do well if they were apprehended.

To understand the Indigenous child welfare issue, the explosive topic of reserve binge drinking must be discussed, although it is considered offensive to do so. One Indigenous author stated frankly that a white man who uses the words "Indian" and "alcohol" in the same sentence will be forever branded as a racist. This is because there has always been a racist stereotype in Canada - the stereotype of the drunken Indian. This stereotype has been hurtful and has obviously never been true. In fact, there is good evidence that the percentage of Indigenous people who do not drink at all is higher than the percentage of non-Indigenous teetotalers in the general population. And yet it is also true that from the earliest times a large underclass of idle binge drinking people on reserves have created chaos for themselves and others. A discussion of Indigenous child welfare issues would be meaningless without an appreciation of how profoundly binge drinking has damaged reserve populations.

The child welfare cases I heard involving Indigenous people almost always involved alcohol abuse. The history of binge drinking on Indian reserves goes back to the fur trade days.

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This problem drinking was exacerbated enormously when the modern welfare cheque made its debut in the 1960s. Until that time most Indigenous people on reserves were poor, but still at least partly self-reliant. Once the modern welfare cheque, with its steady supply of money came along, things became very grim on most reserves. Binge drinking fuelled by welfare cheques became a way of life for far too many people.

The modern welfare cheque has truly been the "poison pill" for the Indigenous underclass, both on reserves and in the city. The stigma and ethic concerning welfare that limited the assistance in mainstream society largely to people in need were simply lacking in Indigenous society. The result was that virtually everyone took the cheques, and by doing so condemned succeeding generations to a life of dependence, and all of the social dysfunction that goes with that dependence.

A very large Indigenous underclass has been the result. Many of these people drift back and forth between reserve and city; some stay on the reserve; some live permanently in the poor areas of cities - particularly in the western and northern parts of the country. It is not accurate to describe many of these people as “unemployed” because most of them have neither the ability nor the inclination to have meaningful employment. It is from this underclass that the highly disproportionate numbers of Indigenous people in our jails and child welfare systems come from. This underclass also has the worst health numbers, poorest educational performance, and other such dismal statistics. Chronic unemployment, poverty and substance abuse are common features.

I should mention at this point that there are many Indigenous families on reserves and in cities who have none of these problems. Children are successfully raised, jobs are attended to, and successful lives are lived by at least 50% of the Indigenous population. In fact, the Indigenous middle class - and high income earning class - is growing in a very healthy way. Indigenous politicians, businesspeople, lawyers and other professional people, as well as a growing Indigenous blue collar population are very much in evidence in Canada today.

But the underclass is large and growing. And the binge drinking common to that underclass is far more harmful than are other kinds of social drinking. Typically, binge drinkers will drink until the liquor is gone. Parties can last days - and even weeks. During those binges, much harm can be done. Fights break out, often with tragic consequences. But most tragically, girls get pregnant- too often giving birth to FASD babies, and unwanted babies. Indigenous FASD rates are very high in large part because of the nature of binge drinking. Unwanted babies fuel the child apprehension numbers. This situation is immensely complicated by the fact that the more children a woman has, the higher are her welfare benefits.

But even if the child is born healthy, and the mother wants to keep the baby, these girls and women are too often in no position to look after children properly. Experts tell us that if you want to give your child almost no chance to be successful, get pregnant as a single girl with no partner, no job, and little education. When this grim list is combined with substance abuse issues, the child’s chances of success drop almost to zero. And those are the exact conditions for so many girls and women in the Indigenous underclass - both on the reserves and in their

urban offshoots. It also helps explain why the children who are taken into care tend to do so poorly. Noted author Thomas Sowell tells us why uneducated, unemployed single mothers on welfare, and absent fathers, make for a hopelessly entrenched underclass.

But what is our federal government's response to these very serious problems? The government response is to deny almost everything I just said. Instead, the politicians pretend that if they only reorganize the child welfare systems a bit more, provide more money for their operation, apologize a bit more, "deconstruct colonialism" (whatever that means), or further "Indigenize" the system, or place helpless children even more under the control of Indigenous activists - the problems will go away. And governments have been living in this fantasy world for many years now. They simply mouth the words that Indigenous activists tell them to use, and the problem gets more serious with each passing year. The reality is that governments don't know what to do about this intractable problem, and want somebody to take the problem off their hands.

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Above all, governments go along - and even encourage - the view that Indigenous people must at all costs be regarded as permanent victims of this or that kind of oppression. That is, instead of urging personal responsibility, Indigenous advocates and their government allies insist on giving underclass people excuses - it is not their fault, because of colonialism and the like. This is perhaps the biggest single reason why no real improvement is possible.

On top of all of these formidable hurdles is the fact that - what is referred to even within Indigenous circles as "the Indian Industry" - depends on the misery of the Indigenous underclass for its continued existence. Canada's Indian Industry consists of a scramble - really, a feeding frenzy - for all of the money sloshing around in the system for Indigenous matters. It is huge money. To give you an idea of how much money is involved, the federal budget just to keep Indian reserves functioning is officially about 10 billion dollars per year, but probably closer to 20 billion dollars. The current federal government has spent a total of 21.4 billion

dollars in addition to those ongoing costs on what is referred to as “reconciliation”, but will probably go down in history as one of the biggest frauds ever perpetrated upon Canadian taxpayers. There isn’t space here to examine that topic, but suffice it to say that simply by uttering the word “reconciliation”, many privileged people - some of whom aren’t even Indigenous - have enriched themselves at the expense of the taxpayer, while the gap between the Indigenous underclass and mainstream Canadians hasn’t narrowed at all. The Indian Industry does not want the status quo to change. So the obstacles standing in the way of bringing about any real improvement in the Indigenous child welfare situation are big and they are many in number. The Indian Industry is one of the biggest impediments to meaningful change.

But, back to my experience with Indigenous child welfare. When I became a judge in 1976 they were just starting to talk about turning the control of child welfare agencies over to Indigenous groups. This changeover took place during the 1980s, and 90s. The theory advanced by Indigenous advocates was that there were far too many Indigenous children in care because white child care workers did not understand Indigenous culture and the Indigenous way of life. If only Indigenous workers and supervisors could take over, the numbers would go down. That didn’t happen. As the Indigenous agencies took over, the numbers went up instead of down. That remains the case today.

The changeover to Indigenous agencies in the 1990s was done quickly, and with tragic results. Generally, provincial governments were anxious to rid themselves of an impossible task. One highly placed bureaucrat told me that the question his colleagues asked themselves in relation to the Indigenous child welfare issue was “How could it possibly be worse than it was” if they simply delegated their child welfare responsibilities to Indigenous groups. After all, the Indigenous child welfare situation under government control was out control, and the government simply had no answer for it. How could things get any worse than they were?

It turned out that things could indeed get worse. And they did. The government turned over responsibility to the newly created Indigenous agencies - the process was called “devolution” -

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far too quickly and with almost no checks and balances. In reality, the senior provincial officials attempted to wash their hands of Indigenous child welfare responsibilities towards Indigenous children. They transferred this important responsibility to poorly prepared, ideological agencies. The senior non-Indigenous child welfare workers and supervisors in the old system were simply “put out to pasture,” and under qualified personnel took their places at both the junior and senior levels. This was a gross dereliction of duty by the provincial government, and many innocent Indigenous children paid the price.

For the next two decades a combination of incompetence and ideological zealotry condemned many Indigenous children to bleak lives. Children were regarded as the property of Indigenous tribes, and this led to tragedies. Children who had been in stable homes with loving parents since birth were taken from their homes and placed in Indigenous homes, simply because the foster parents were not Indigenous. In one particularly egregious case a young girl was taken from a stable home and placed in the home of strangers on a brutal northern reserve, where she was repeatedly gang-raped. She never recovered. There were a number of high profile deaths of children supposedly under the care of an agency that resulted from a combination of incompetent care at the agency’s hands, and placement with biological parents who were totally incapable of looking after children. Deaths were followed by inquiries that made many recommendations- most of which were not followed.

I presided at the first of these high profile inquiries in 1990. It looked into the death by suicide of an Indigenous boy who had received almost total neglect from the Indigenous agency responsible for his care. Immediately prior to his suicide he had been tied to a post in a school yard and sodomized by a serial child molester who was a relative of the chief. The chief and his councillors had repeatedly interfered in the work of the child welfare workers, as well as the police investigation, in order to protect the criminal. My report was hundreds of pages in length, so there is not space here to adequately describe all of my findings, but basically I found that the level of care given to the boy was far below any reasonable standard. This was so because of nepotistic chiefs hiring unqualified workers, leaders interfering in the day to day operation of the agencies, and a complete lack of supervision by the government. Among other things, I recommended that until the agencies could be brought up to the same standard as the agencies dealing with white children, they should be disbanded. I also strongly denounced the system of categorizing children by race, and stated that best interests should

be the only test for all children. The province basically disregarded my recommendations and went ahead “devolving” child care responsibility based on race only. Indigenous children became - in effect - the property of their racial groups.

This pattern continued for many years - substandard care, ideology over common sense - best interests trumped by racial considerations. To their credit, the Indigenous agencies have now largely managed to get their acts together, and they are coming closer to the standard of care that existed before they took over decades ago. There is at least passing mention of the best interests test. But racial considerations are still given far too much emphasis, and the numbers of Indigenous children are still going up and not down. It turns out that culture was never the problem. Children need loving, stable homes. Racial, religious and ethnic considerations are secondary.

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The response from governments while this process has been unfolding is to appease Indigenous advocates, who continue to claim that if only there is more money for the system, and if only Indigenous leaders can have yet more control over the system, the situation will improve. Our current federal government has been particularly vocal in this regard, blaming colonialism, residential schools, and a host of other excuses for the alarming state of Indigenous child care. No one will speak of what should be obvious - namely that unless individual Indigenous people and their leaders will begin to take responsibility for their own conduct, no amount of extra money or reorganization will make a dent in the numbers.

The reasons for the reticence to oppose the Indigenous leaders in their rather extremist separatist views are rather obvious. Anyone who attacks the prevailing orthodoxy risks being labelled a racist. No politician is willing to take that risk.

Therefore, in Canada we have settled into a stagnant pattern on the Indigenous child welfare issue - and generally on all Indigenous issues. Indigenous advocates argue for the continuation of the separatist status quo, but with more money and power for themselves. When Liberal governments are in power they try to appease the Indigenous leaders by giving them what they want. When Conservative governments are in power they simply try not to offend the

separatist Indigenous sensibilities. Both parties simply send cheques to the chiefs, and hope that the chiefs will keep things reasonably quiet, and not make too many demands. The chiefs' main concern is to keep the money flowing. No politician dares to publicly oppose this separatist, racialized dystopia, and expose it for the nonsense that it is.

An example of a Liberal government appeasing Indigenous politicians for purely electoral purposes is the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Inquiry (short form, MMIW) that I referred to earlier. This issue is not strictly relevant to the child welfare issue, but I will outline it briefly to provide an example of how extreme the racial politics in Canada has become.

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Every year a significant number of women go missing in Canada, and every year women are murdered. These are women of all racial and ethnic groups. (In fact, more men are murdered and go missing than women, but this has never become a political issue.) A disproportion of these missing and murdered women have drug issues and have been involved in prostitution. This is a sad fact, and it is something not unique to Canada. The fact is that these women are highly vulnerable, they live a high risk lifestyle, and they too often end up as victims of solved or unsolved murder cases. A disproportionate number of those vulnerable women are Indigenous, just as a disproportionate number of Indigenous people are in jails, in the child welfare system, and in similar unpleasant categories. This is an underclass issue. (The policing issues relating to these cases have been the subject of previous inquiries, and police procedures have been modified accordingly.) The crime solve rate for missing Indigenous women is the same as the solve rate for non-Indigenous women. In short, the missing women are a tragedy, but there was no issue here that needed an inquiry.

The issue that definitely did need an inquiry was the astounding fact that Indigenous women are about ten times as likely to be abused or murdered by their partners than are non-Indigenous women. The Liberal government, to its credit, insisted that the MMIW examine the entire subject of male violence to Indigenous women. But the MMIW was so determined not to do this that they propounded their preposterous and illogical theory that Canada was committing an ongoing genocide against Indigenous women. The MMIW was practising deception by employing this device.

At this stage you might be asking yourself why this group of agenda-driven pseudo-academics (in theory, led by a judge) would do such a thing. The answer is crystal clear. Because almost all of the abused and murdered Indigenous women are abused or murdered by their Indigenous partners, or other Indigenous acquaintances or family members. The actual number of Indigenous women abused or murdered by non-Indigenous men is quite small - almost infinitesimal in most geographical areas. However, so determined were these MMIW ideologues to hammer away at the racism issue - and now the "genocide" issue - that they simply refused to acknowledge the fact that it is Indigenous men who are abusing and murdering Indigenous women, - and not genocidal mainstream Canadians. When they did mention this inescapable fact, in passing, it was always accompanied by excuses that they gave to the men for their violence. In Canada, that list of excuses usually starts with the tired "colonialism", then descends through bad government policy, racism, residential schools, and on and on. (It should be noted the "colonialism" continues to be trotted out 500 years after Jacques Cartier arrived here, while "residential schools" is used as an excuse even in the vast expanses of Canadian territory that didn't even have such things.) The point is that Indigenous male violence towards Indigenous women will never stop as long as the violent men are given free passes (namely the excuses) to continue that violence. The fact that Indigenous advocates and the federal government insist on excusing their conduct in advance is shocking enough - but here we have the MMIW commissioners themselves telling Indigenous men that it is understandable that they abuse and murder Indigenous women - it is someone else's fault, not theirs.

I mention this in connection with the Indigenous child welfare issue only to demonstrate how extreme the racial politics has become in Canada. The MMIW spent 100 million tax dollars to keep the Indian Industry - and its lucrative victim sub-industry - chugging along. It was a gigantic scam.

And one final component of this very complicated mix goes back to the growing Indigenous middle class that I mentioned earlier. These are people from all walks of life, and includes academics, senators, politicians. (Musicians and other creative artists are particularly well represented.) Most of these people were lucky enough to have parents or grandparents who realized that if their children were to have a chance in life they must get them off the reserve

and see to their education. The one common feature here is that all of these successful Indigenous people live essentially the same lives as any one of us do. They get up in the morning and go to work, make their mortgage payments with the paycheques they get every other week, and drive their kids to soccer. In short, they are all fully “integrated”, “assimilated”, “acculturated”, or whatever term we might use. They went to school, worked hard and earned their success.

But some of these people - particularly the most privileged - academics, writers highly paid bureaucrats, and the like - deny that they have integrated or assimilated. Instead, they insist they are somehow a unique category of human being, and born with special features - such as an “Indigenous worldview” or some kind of special ecological awareness and special “steward of the land” ability. All of these claims are pure bunkum, but these people are not used to being called out, so their quasi-eugenic views become more and more extreme.

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So, the MMIW radical view is just at the far end of this odd thinking - highly privileged people accusing a country that has given them a very good life of “oppressing” them, while they help themselves to all of its bounty. Professor Hymie Rubenstein, formerly of The University of Manitoba refers to this warped thinking as “Indigenous exceptionalism”. It is a new type of racism, and plays a part in the racial political games that are being played in the Canada of today.

The most damaging of the ideas of many of these successful Indigenous advocates and their political allies is that members of the poor Indigenous underclass living hopeless lives on reserves should stay right where they are so that their “culture” can be preserved. The fact that the “culture” these middle class people insist their poor cousins endure is one of desperate poverty and unemployability - almost completely unrelated to how their self-reliant hunter-gatherers ancestors survived and flourished for thousands of years - is not even mentioned. It is self-evident that there is no future for most of the young people on the most isolated and unproductive of the reserves, but the current orthodoxy tells those doomed young people to stay put and sacrifice themselves to their “culture”. Perhaps it is overly

cynical of me to suggest that the special financial privileges of the new Indigenous intelligentsia depends on the continuing misery of their poor country cousins - but I will suggest it anyway.

All the above has made for a toxic stew. The large Indigenous underclass that produces the child welfare problems is mired in chronic unemployment and dysfunction even as more and more money is spent appeasing middle class Indigenous advocates. The country is mired in totally unnecessary and pointless racial politics, with special interest groups of all types playing the victim game - claiming that they are the victims, and that others are the oppressors. Victim inquiries compete with one another to see which one can make the most outrageous claims, and which one can demand the most expensive taxpayer funded "fixes" - none of which fix anything. Meanwhile, politicians fall over themselves apologizing for this or that historical wrong.

And for all of this, the state of Indigenous child welfare is no better than it was when Indigenous child welfare agencies took over - by some measures it is a whole lot worse. Those neglected children have become pawns in the political games that are now playing out federally. Parents who have clearly failed their children are let off the hook by advocates claiming that it is not their fault that they drank and made a mess of their children's lives - it is society's fault, or it is because of colonialism or residential schools - or almost anything going back five hundred years that might have affected their long dead ancestors' lives. The irresponsible parents are told that they are victims. Never mind acting like a grownup, getting off welfare and starting to support your family. To the contrary, accepting personal responsibility and changing one's behaviour is considered an old fashioned and discardable notion. Forget the best interests of the child - permanent victimhood and racial politics are where it's at. But I will stop.

As I said earlier, I know little about the New Zealand situation. I simply don't know if there are similarities between Canada's Indigenous situation and the Maori situation in New Zealand. But if I am allowed to give just one word of advice on the subject of child welfare, it is this: "A child is a child. Keep racial politics out of it, and just see to that child's best interests."

