

The right-wing record of the New Zealand M?ori Party

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The New Zealand ruling elite is heading towards a crisis election on October 14, with the two major parties that have buttressed capitalism for almost a century, Labour and National, deeply unpopular.

Labour has crashed to its worst result in six years in a 1News-Verian poll released Monday, dropping four percentage points to 29 percent. Labour assumed office in 2017 with then Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and was returned in 2020 with an historic majority under the country's proportional voting system of 50 percent. National is on 37 percent and, allied with far-right ACT on 13 percent, could form government.

National and Labour, which together once commanded 80 percent of the vote are now, however, struggling in the mid-60s. Whichever takes office after the election will need to engage in horse-trading with one or more of the minor parties to form a coalition. For Labour, this means the Greens, currently at 12.0 percent and Te Pati M?ori (The M?ori Party, TPM) on 3 percent.

Labour, National and their allies have all engaged in stirring up a furore over "cultural" and racial issues, largely in order to divert attention from the right-wing agenda that is shared by the whole political establishment. This has included manufactured outrage over bi-lingual M?ori -English road signs and tribal "co-governance" of water infrastructure.

TPM is aiming to play a role beyond its small numbers. It has two MPs in parliament, Debbie Ngarewa-Packer and Rawiri Waititi, thanks to Waititi's 2020 win in the Waiariki electorate, one of seven exclusive M?ori seats. A Labour cabinet minister, Meka Whaitiri recently defected to the party, declaring she will join the "unapologetic M?ori political movement" at the election.

The collapse in Labour's support is the product of its right-wing, pro-corporate record. Despite assuming office in 2017 promising a "transformational government" to attack child poverty and inequality, it has done the opposite. Labour's win in 2020 was mainly due to its initial success in combating the COVID pandemic through public health measures, which it abandoned under pressure from big business in late 2021, resulting in over 3,200 deaths.

Labour enters the election as a party of war and austerity, highlighted by its ongoing support for the US/NATO proxy war in the Ukraine, confrontation with China and attacks on the working class at home. Prime Minister Chris Hipkins has ruled out any wealth or capital gains taxes despite escalating crises in health and education.

In a desperate attempt to rescue Labour, petty bourgeois commentators are promoting TPM as a new "left wing" prop. This involves a considerable amount of deception: TPM is a capitalist party which represents indigenous business interests and was part of the right-wing National Party-led government from 2008 to 2017.

The "liberal" *Daily Blog* has been active publicising TPM's tax policy—calling it "as close to socialism as we are going to get"—and its policy of military neutrality. In fact, the party proposes only a small tax hike for the rich: its top rate of 48 percent for people earning more than \$300,000 is well below the top income tax rate of 66 percent in the early 1980s. TPM also proposes a modest tax on wealth (between 2 and 8 percent for net wealth over \$2 million), as well as a tax-free threshold for people earning less than \$30,000.

TPM knows that even these modest policies—which would not resolve the social crisis or end widening social inequality—will never be implemented by a Labour Party-led government which it plans to join. Hipkins has ruled out a wealth tax or any other major tax changes.

On foreign policy, Waititi has said the party wants "neutrality policies" similar to Switzerland. TPM calls for withdrawing from the Five Eyes spy network led by the United States and includes Australia, Canada and Britain. "We will no longer be a political football in the wars of imperial powers," Waititi boasted in a statement in February, calling for "a M?ori-centric foreign policy and a M?ori-centric defence policy."

TPM supports funding the military as a "support force for the Pacific, for our Polynesian world." This dovetails completely with New Zealand's role as a minor imperialist power in the Pacific; the Defence Force maintains close ties with countries such as Tonga and Samoa, a former NZ colony.

New Zealand's bourgeoisie has maintained a close alliance with the United States since World War II—supporting the wars against Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and now against Russia and the build-up to war against China—to guarantee US support for New Zealand's colonial role in the Pacific.

Should it become part of the government, TPM will quickly discard its "neutrality", posturing in the same way that the Green Party has done. The Greens' policy platform also calls for New Zealand to leave the Five Eyes, but this did not stop it from joining the Labour government and supporting its pro-war policies and increases to military and intelligence spending.

Significantly, despite Waititi declaring that NZ should not “stick its nose” into the Ukraine war, this did not prevent him and Ngarewa-Packer from joining the government in hailing Ukraine’s president Volodymyr Zelensky after he addressed the New Zealand parliament in December. Zelensky’s regime is a stooge of Washington, which is using hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians as cannon fodder in a war aimed at defeating and dividing up Russia.

TPM’s “left” posturing is aimed at channelling oppositional sentiment among impoverished and alienated Māori—about 15 percent of the population and among the most oppressed members of the working class—back into the dead end of capitalist parliamentary politics. TPM aims to take more of the Māori seats off Labour, whose Māori MPs are severely compromised by the government’s failure to resolve the extreme social crisis.

TPM represents a privileged layer of indigenous capitalists who have benefited from multi-million dollar Treaty of Waitangi payouts, purportedly for the historical crimes of colonisation. After more than 30 years of reparations, most Māori still live in poverty while tribal business interests control \$NZ70 billion in assets.

TPM, however, is demanding greater control over land, resources and finances, advocating, for example, tribal “ownership” of the country’s water to be recognised and for tribes to be compensated accordingly. This means further elevating the indigenous elite amid the worst cost-of-living and social crisis facing the entire working class, including Māori, in decades.

The oppression of the Māori people has not been alleviated by having four Māori seats, later increased to seven, in parliament since 1867. Occupants of these seats have always been nationalist and pro-imperialist. Apirana Ngata, the best-known Māori politician of the early twentieth century encouraged thousands of young Māori to enlist to fight in the First and Second World Wars.

TPM’s class orientation is exemplified by its president, John Tamihere, a former Labour cabinet minister. Tamihere has gained considerable prominence and wealth as CEO of the Waipareira Trust, a nominal “charity” which receives millions in government funds for providing social services in West Auckland. In the year to June 2022, the trust had revenues of \$69,544,616, and held cash or term deposits of \$50,379,806. Fifteen senior staff members earn an average of \$288,000 each.

TPM’s program centres on identity politics, which has been used for decades to divide the working class on ethnic lines. It calls for “self-determination,” and says it will hold other parties to account on progressing a “Te Tiriti [Treaty]-centric Aotearoa [New Zealand].” TPM’s “self-government” platform calls for a Māori parliament that would establish a parallel system of government based on race.

The fraud of TPM’s purported leftism is exposed by its history. The party was founded in 2004 as a breakaway from the then governing Labour Party after the Foreshore and Seabed Act removed the right of tribes to establish traditional ownership rights over the intertidal zone, thus eliminating lucrative business opportunities in areas such as aquaculture.

As part of the National-led government from 2008, TPM

supported National’s attacks on welfare beneficiaries and youth, thousands of public sector job cuts, and its increase to regressive Goods and Services Tax. The government gave tax cuts to the rich and made drastic inroads into living standards.

TPM’s main initiative, the Whanau Ora program, privatised the delivery of welfare services to benefit organisations like the Waipareira Trust. While the party became deeply discredited for collaborating with National’s brutal austerity measures, the National-TPM coalition passed 46 Treaty settlements into law, worth \$1.23 billion to Māori tribal corporates.

In 2011, prominent TPM MP Hone Harawira quit, declaring the party had “betrayed” its constituents and set up the Mana Party, designed as another fake “left” trap. Like TPM today, Mana postured as representing poor and oppressed Māori but its policies were steeped in nationalism and were profoundly anti-working class. It proposed abolishing the dole for the unemployed and advocated discrimination against immigrants by “prioritising the employment of New Zealand residents.” None of this prevented New Zealand’s pseudo-left groups and a number of union bureaucrats from flocking to promote Mana as a “radical” alternative.

Mana collapsed after Harawira lost his seat in 2017. It did not contest the 2020 election and returned to its roots, endorsing the Māori Party. Deeply unpopular due to its collaboration with National, TPM won no seats in 2017. Although the party’s share of the country-wide vote declined from 1.18 percent in 2017 to 1.17 percent in 2020, winning Waiariki gave it the right to full proportional representation with two MPs.

There is nothing remotely progressive or “left-wing” about TPM. The race-based identity politics on which it rests is promoted to divide the working class as it comes into struggle against the assault on living standards at home and war abroad. In particular, it is used to undermine the striving of the working class for unity and the fight for the socialist alternative to the predations of capitalism, carried forward by the Socialist Equality Group (NZ).



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