

New Zealand: M?ori Party leader says M?ori are genetically superior race

Tom Peters
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In an interview with TVNZ on Sunday, Rawiri Waititi, co-leader of Te P?ti M?ori (TPM, the M?ori Party) defended the blatantly racist statement: “It is a known fact that M?ori genetic makeup is stronger than others.”

The statement was made to the *Northland Age* in September 2020 by TPM candidate Heather Te Au-Skipworth while outlining the party’s call for a \$100 million fund to invest in “M?ori sport.” It was then added to TPM’s website and was only removed last year after the far-right ACT Party complained about it.

TPM did not issue a public retraction or apology. Now, with an election approaching on October 14, Waititi has doubled down on defending the claim that indigenous M?ori are a superior race.

His comments reveal the utterly reactionary character of M?ori nationalism, a form of racial identity politics that is dressed up as progressive by the New Zealand political and media establishment. They highlight the sham being perpetrated by liberal commentators such as the *Daily Blog* and pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), which are supporting TPM as a “left-wing” party.

Speaking to TVNZ interviewer Jack Tame, Waititi defended the comment by stating: “How can it be racist when you’re trying to empower a people that are climbing out from the bottom of the bonnet [sic] of colonial violence for the last 183 years?”

He continued: “We’re trying to rebuild our people... [after] years and years of colonial violence on our people. And so why can’t we call ourselves magic? Why can’t we call ourselves proud? Why can’t we believe in ourselves? And why can’t we say to our people that your genetics mean something, that you can be proud of that?”

The belief in the superiority of an ethnic group’s

genes is a cornerstone of racist ideology, including that of white supremacists and the Nazi regime in Germany. The fact that M?ori were dispossessed by the British Empire during the 19th century, and that many M?ori continue to suffer from racial discrimination, does not change the racist character TPM’s and Waititi’s statements.

The purpose of Waititi’s outburst is to divide the working class into rival races and to cover up the deepening class division within the M?ori population. His reference to “our people” is a political fraud. The reality is that TPM represents the interests of a narrow layer of tribal capitalists and upper middle class layers.

This elite minority has profited from multi-million dollar Treaty of Waitangi settlements handed out to the tribes over the last three decades. These have been used to create lucrative businesses in tourism, agriculture, fisheries, property and other industries.

TPM’s central political demand is for increased payments under the Treaty to expand the wealth of M?ori capitalists. In return for such payments, the party joined the right-wing 2008-2017 National Party government and supported major attacks on the working class, including an increase to the goods and services tax and tens of thousands of job cuts.

The wealth and political influence of the M?ori nationalists has grown during a sustained assault on the working class, including M?ori who are among the most exploited and impoverished workers. As class tensions have become more pronounced, the capitalist parties are all, to one degree or another, seeking to confuse and divide the working class by blaming social problems on white people, immigrants or M?ori.

TPM’s racist positions are not an aberration, they are a central feature of M?ori nationalist ideology.

Ranginui Walker, New Zealand’s most prominent

Māori nationalist academic from the 1970s to the 1990s, denounced immigration in 1993 as an “Asian invasion” that would increase crime and unemployment and undermine the “first nation status” of Māori. The same slogans were used by New Zealand First, a right-wing nationalist party founded in 1993 with a platform of opposing Asian immigration.

In February 2007, TPM’s founding leader Tariana Turia supported Walker’s positions in a statement declaring that immigration had to be “managed in such a way as to prevent Māori from becoming an even smaller minority in their own land.”

In 2017 Hone Harawira, who led the Mana Party as a splinter from TPM, called for the death penalty to be reinstated for “Chinese drug dealers.” Harawira had been glorified as a champion of the oppressed by the ISO, Fightback and Socialist Aotearoa, pseudo-left groups that joined the Mana Party from 2011-2014 and fraudulently presented it as “left wing.”

Until recently, TPM’s website contained an “indigenous first” housing policy that called for immigration to be “curbed” and blamed it for the housing crisis. After complaints from migrants, last month TPM deleted the anti-immigrant statements and apologised on X/Twitter.

Waititi’s racist statements, however, have not been condemned by Labour, the Greens or the pseudo-left groups, which see TPM as an important ally. TPM is positioning itself as a prop to support a re-elected Labour government. It is calling for modest reforms such as a wealth tax and lower taxes for working people, which it knows Labour will never implement.

Labour’s support has collapsed from 50 percent in the 2020 election to around 26 percent in recent polls as a result of its right-wing policies. The government has handed tens of billions of dollars to big business during the pandemic in the form of bailouts, subsidies and tax breaks.

Social inequality has reached record levels and public services, including health and education, are crumbling. COVID-19 is out of control, putting hundreds of people in hospital each week, due to Labour removing all public health measures against the spread of infection.

Labour and National, and the entire political establishment, have nothing to offer the working class except more austerity and the diversion of billions of dollars to the military to prepare to join a US-led war

against China.

In this context, the parliamentary parties are seeking to divert social tensions into the most reactionary channels. The 2023 election campaign has been dominated by racial dog whistles and mutual accusations of racism by the parliamentary parties.

These have included far-right ACT Party leader David Seymour labelling gang members “subhuman” and joking about wanting to blow up the Ministry for Pacific Peoples. NZ First leader Winston Peters (who is part Māori) is campaigning against the use of Māori language by government departments, and recently made the provocative statement that Māori were “not indigenous” because their ancestors came from other parts of the Pacific.

The Labour-Greens government has for its part supported various forms of “co-governance” to benefit the Māori tribal elite. This includes supporting the creation of reserved Māori seats in local councils and on water infrastructure governing bodies, and separate “by Māori, for Māori” healthcare services. Any criticism of this divisive and anti-democratic agenda, and of the Treaty of Waitangi itself, is denounced by Labour and its supporters as “racist.”

The Socialist Equality Group opposes all forms of nationalism and racism. We call on the working class to oppose Māori nationalism, and all forms of racial identity politics, from the left—that is, on the basis of a socialist perspective. Genuine equality can only be achieved by fighting for the unity of working people of every nationality and ethnicity, based on their shared class interests, to overthrow capitalism, end the division of the world into rival nation states, and place society’s wealth in common ownership. This is the only way to put an end to racism, xenophobia and every other toxic prejudice that is whipped up by the ruling class to divide workers and keep itself in power.



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