

New Zealand M?ori Party MP's racist attack on Labour Party members

Tom Peters
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T?kuta Ferris, a MP for Te P?ti M?ori (TPM, M?ori Party), published a blatantly racist social media post on September 4, which denounced white people, black people, Asians and Indians for supporting the Labour Party's candidate in a by-election in the T?maki Makaurau electorate in Auckland.

The by-election was triggered following the death in June of TPM MP Takutai Tarsh Kemp, who narrowly won the seat in the 2023 election. On September 6, TPM candidate Oriini Kaipara was declared the winner of the by-election, beating senior Labour MP Peeni Henare.

T?maki Makaurau is one of seven reserved M?ori seats in parliament, which people who identify as M?ori can vote for. The seats have historically been won by the Labour Party—currently the biggest opposition party—but more recently by TPM, a M?ori nationalist party representing tribal capitalists.

In the lead-up to polling day, Ferris posted a photograph of Henare's multi-ethnic campaign team along with the statement: "This blows my mind!!! Indians, Asians, Black and Pakeha [white people] campaigning to take a Maori seat from Maori."

In other words, the T?maki Makaurau electorate belongs to the M?ori race, and therefore to TPM, which portrays itself as the only party that genuinely represents M?ori and is not contaminated by other races.

Following a backlash in the media and from the Labour Party, TPM's leaders issued an apology saying the party "does not condone the language" used by Ferris and had instructed him to remove the post. The statement declared: "Our movement is, and always has been, for the people. We leave nobody behind."

None of this is credible. Ferris' social media post was not an aberration; it is entirely consistent with TPM's

toxic and divisive racist identity politics.

In the lead-up to the 2023 general election, for instance, TPM co-leader Rawiri Waititi defended the racist statement: "It is a known fact that M?ori genetic makeup is stronger than others," which had been published on the party's website.

Hone Harawira, a prominent former TPM MP and leader of its now-defunct offshoot the Mana Party, repeatedly agitated against Chinese migrants. He launched Mana's 2017 election campaign with a demand for the death penalty to be reintroduced specifically for Chinese drug smugglers.

The aim of such statements is to stoke divisions between M?ori workers—who are among the poorest and most exploited in New Zealand—and working people of other ethnicities and nationalities, in order to prevent a unified struggle against the capitalist system.

Ferris' racist outburst was embarrassing for Labour and the Greens, which see TPM as a potential partner in a future coalition government. Labour's prominent M?ori MP Willie Jackson was forced to denounce Ferris' comments as racist but struck a conciliatory note in an interview with Waatea News, saying Ferris was "better than that" and was "a good advocate for M?ori."

The middle class, pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation—whose members previously joined the Mana Party—also fraudulently portrays TPM's racial politics as progressive.

In a July article, the ISO described TPM as "a more radical opposition voice in comparison to Labour" and claimed that the party's "initiatives... increasingly intersect with class politics, particularly as M?ori communities disproportionately face precarity and labour exploitation."

In fact, the M?ori population is deeply divided by

class. TPM's program "intersects," not with the aspirations of workers, but with the interests of a small, privileged layer of Māori capitalists.

The party's central demand is for increased payments to Māori tribes through the Treaty of Waitangi settlements process—supposedly as reparations for the crimes of colonisation. Since the 1990s, hundreds of millions of dollars have been handed over by National Party and Labour Party governments in order to create lucrative tribal-based businesses, with interests in fisheries, agriculture, tourism, property and other sectors. None of this has benefited the Māori working class.

TPM also calls for a separate Māori parliament, healthcare and judicial systems—in short, a parallel state structure based on race. This separatist agenda, which is hailed by the ISO, would do nothing to improve the lives of Māori workers but would create new opportunities for upper middle class bureaucrats.

Over the past two years, TPM has led protests against the right-wing National Party-led government's anti-Māori demagoguery. It has also called for a modest increase in tax on the rich and for ending the military alliance with the US—policies that the party would immediately discard should it enter government.

For nine years, from 2008 to 2017, TPM was part of a National-led coalition government, which attacked the working class following the 2008 financial crisis—including by privatising electricity companies and raising the goods and services tax—and repeatedly deployed troops to the criminal US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In exchange for TPM's support, National made record payouts to Māori tribes.

Because of its record, TPM remains deeply unpopular: it received 3 percent of the votes in the 2023 election. TPM's Kaipara won the Tamaki Makaurau by-election with approximately twice as many votes as Labour's Henare, but voter turnout was just 27.1 percent—about 12,000 people out of more than 44,000 enrolled. This reflects widespread distrust of both parties among working class Māori.

As the social crisis worsens, New Zealand's capitalist parties are all, in one way or another, seeking to scapegoat immigrants and minorities—and, in TPM's case, "white people"—for the soaring cost of living, over-crowded hospitals, rising homelessness, poverty and unemployment.

Nationalism and xenophobia are also being promoted in order to prepare the country to join future US-led imperialist wars, particularly against China.

The right-wing nationalist NZ First Party leader Winston Peters, foreign minister in the National-led government, delivered an anti-immigrant tirade on September 7 at the party's annual conference. Channelling US President Donald Trump, he declared there were too many migrants "who don't salute our flag, don't honour the values of our country, don't respect the people living here..." Changing a few details, Peters' poisonous rhetoric is essentially no different from Ferris' social media post.

Meanwhile the libertarian ACT Party (also part of the coalition government) is denouncing identity politics from the right, falsely claiming that all Māori have been given special privileges under previous Labour-led governments. ACT, which advocates the driving down of wages, privatisation of health and education and ultra-low taxes for the rich, ludicrously pretends to support "equal rights" for all New Zealanders.

As for the Labour Party, it has sought for decades to deflect blame onto migrants, especially those from Asia and the Pacific, for unemployment, the housing crisis and other social problems. Labour and the Greens formed a coalition government with NZ First from 2017 to 2020, which adopted Peters' demands for major restrictions on immigration. The Greens had no difficulty working with the overtly racist NZ First, declaring that the two parties had much in common.

Workers and young people who want to oppose racism and xenophobia must reject all forms of nationalism, including the Māori nationalism of TPM. They must fight for workers of all countries and backgrounds to unite based on their shared class interests. This means fighting for a socialist and internationalist program to put an end to the capitalist system, which is the root cause of social inequality, war and all forms of racism and national chauvinism.



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