

New Zealand M?ori Party in chaos

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For the past few months New Zealand's M?ori nationalist Te P?ti M?ori (M?ori Party) has been consumed with a bitter internal power struggle, which may well result in a split.

On November 10, the party's co-leaders Rawiri Waititi and Debbie Ngarewa-Packer announced the expulsion of MPs Mariameno Kapa-Kingi and T?kuta Ferris. This was the culmination of an intense, long-running dispute between Kapa-Kingi and Ferris and party president John Tamihere. In a lengthy Facebook post a week earlier, Tamihere accused the pair of seeking to "destabilise" the party and "take over" the leadership. He said they were motivated by "greed, avarice and entitlement."

The two MPs, one-third of TPM's six-member caucus, have accused Tamihere of acting like a "dictator" and may mount a legal challenge against their expulsion. In an interview with Radio NZ on November 25, Ferris claimed that the leadership had mistreated the late MP Takutai Tarsh Kemp by trying to oust her from her seat while she was suffering from terminal illness (she died in June). Tamihere called the claims "innuendo" and "hearsay."

While each faction is accusing the other of bullying and toxic behaviour, no one in the party has expressed any differences over TPM's right-wing political program. The party represents indigenous capitalists and promotes divisive racist identity politics. Its main demands are for increased payments from the state, through the Treaty of Waitangi settlements process, to benefit tribal-based businesses, and for more political power to be given to the tribal elites.

TPM has worked with both the major parties of big business to achieve these aims. At present, it is positioned to support the opposition Labour Party in next year's election, but from 2008 to 2017 the M?ori Party was part of a coalition government led by the conservative National Party.

Because of its right-wing record, TPM does not have mass support among M?ori workers, who are one of the most impoverished sections of the working class. The party got just 3 percent in the 2023 election, whereas M?ori are more than 15 percent of the total population.

Various liberal commentators and middle class, pseudo-left groups have sought to boost TPM as an ally of the Labour Party and as a mechanism to divide workers along racial lines.

As the National Party-led coalition government carries out vicious austerity measures, workers of all races and backgrounds are seeking to fight back, as seen in the mass public sector strike on October 23. The established parties, including Labour and its allies, want to prevent any unified mass movement that could threaten the capitalist system itself. The chaos that has engulfed

TPM, however, poses a serious threat to its usefulness.

The precise chain of events that triggered TPM's internal power struggle remains unclear. An early sign of inner-party divisions was in September, when Ferris made a blatantly racist social media post attacking the Labour Party's multi-ethnic campaign team during the by-election held in the T?maki Makaurau electorate following the death of TPM's Tarsh Kemp. Waititi and Ngarewa-Packer apologised for the post, which undercut TPM's alliance with Labour, but Ferris refused to apologise.

Ngarewa-Packer told the media on November 10 that "part of why the decision had to be made" to expel Ferris and Kapa-Kingi was to "repair" TPM's relations with non-M?ori and "to have an Aotearoa [NZ] that is inclusive of everyone." Waititi insisted that the party was having "positive and constructive" discussions with the Greens and Labour about how to defeat the government.

Asked whether he could form a coalition with TPM, however, Labour leader Chris Hipkins sought to distance himself from the party, telling the media on November 24 that it was "unclear whether there is even a M?ori Party left or whether there are multiple different factions now doing their own thing." He criticised TPM for being too focused on identity politics, saying "identity alone is not enough."

This is thoroughly hypocritical. The 2017–2023 Labour Party-led government was relentless in stoking gender and racial identity politics, even as it oversaw surging social inequality, increased homelessness and poverty, with working-class M?ori among the worst-affected. Labour sought to forge alliances with the M?ori tribal leadership through the "co-governance" of water resources, by promoting separate "by M?ori, for M?ori" healthcare services, and by guaranteeing that at least 5 percent of government procurement contracts were awarded to M?ori-run businesses.

Last year the Labour Party and the Greens supported protests led by TPM against the far-right ACT Party's racially divisive Treaty Principles Bill. The proposed legislation was intended to inflame racial divisions by falsely implying that all M?ori enjoyed a privileged status because of the way the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi had been interpreted by successive governments.

The three opposition parties worked together to channel mass anger over the Bill—and the government's broader assault on workers' living standards—into support for M?ori nationalist politics. The slogan "Toit? te Tiriti" (uphold the treaty) was promoted to glorify the treaty between British imperialism and M?ori tribal chiefs, which facilitated the colonisation of New Zealand. Since the 1980s, successive governments have paid multi-million dollar treaty settlements to the tribes, creating a wealthy layer of M?ori capitalists.

The crisis in TPM appears to be driven by rivalries between different sections of the M?ori bourgeoisie and upper-middle class, who are fighting for control of the party.

Political commentator and academic Bryce Edwards, in a November 20 article, placed the blame on Tamihere, who in addition to being the party president is also the highly-paid chief executive of the Waipareira Trust. This organisation runs numerous social welfare, health and education services that have been privatised under the Wh?nau Ora scheme—a product of the 2008–2017 National Party government’s alliance with TPM.

According to Edwards, the Waipareira Trust has net assets worth more than \$104 million and over \$75 million in cash reserves, a 24 percent profit margin and senior executive remuneration averaging \$511,000. The trust has loaned and donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to Te P?ti M?ori’s campaigns.

“Tamihere has effectively created an indigenous elite class whose interests no longer align with those of the M?ori working class,” Edwards wrote. “The rhetoric remains about uplifting wh?nau [families and communities], but the material outcomes disproportionately benefit those at the top.”

He accused Tamihere of hijacking the party and running it as a “family business,” noting that Tamihere’s daughter is married to the party’s co-leader Waititi. “Parties that want to take on elite power do not purge members who ask questions. They empower them,” Edwards wrote.

Tamihere’s opponents, however, offer no alternative: they represent similar privileged layers. Prior to entering parliament in 2023, Kapa-Kingi was the chief executive of Te R?nanga Nui o Te Aup?uri Trust, the business arm of the Te Aup?uri tribe.

In 2012, the National Party government gave Te Aup?uri a treaty settlement worth \$21 million. According to the trust’s draft financial statement for the year ending June 2025, its net assets, including fisheries, forestry and agricultural businesses, have now reached \$63 million.

According to Kapa-Kingi, a recent meeting held in her electorate of Te Tai Tokerau called by Te R?nanga Nui ? Ng?puhi, another tribal corporation, supported her call for Tamihere to step down. Ng?puhi has net assets of \$97.1 million.

The tribes, known as iwi, appear to believe that Tamihere has too much personal control over TPM. The powerful Iwi Chairs Forum, representing 88 tribes who together control billions of dollars in business assets, has called publicly for an end to TPM’s infighting and opposed the expulsion of Kapa-Kingi and Ferris.

Former leaders and members of TPM have called for negotiations between the factions to prevent the party from imploding. Hone Harawira, who led a previous split from TPM in 2011 and founded the breakaway Mana Party, said in a statement on November 19: “The solution isn’t in blaming anyone or in one side winning and the other side losing.”

The short-lived Mana Party was joined by the pseudo-left International Socialist Organisation (ISO) and Socialist Aotearoa and members of the Unite trade union, who hailed it as a supposedly “left” alternative to the pro-business M?ori Party, which was supporting the National government’s austerity measures and attacks on the working class. In fact, Mana had the same pro-capitalist program as TPM. Mana collapsed after it

formed an alliance with multi-millionaire Kim Dotcom’s Internet Party in 2014 and Harawira made racist calls in 2017 for the execution of “Chinese” drug smugglers.

In the 2023 election the ISO called for votes for TPM, falsely claiming that it had “adopted policies which reflect the interests of working class people.” It pointed to TPM’s calls for a small increase in tax on the rich and the abolition of the goods and services tax—empty pledges that will be abandoned the minute TPM enters a coalition with Labour or National. The ISO has not made any public statement on the current crisis in TPM.

The sordid spectacle of a fight for influence among members of the M?ori bourgeoisie has once again exposed the fraud perpetrated by the middle class pseudo-lefts—as well as “liberal” publications like the *Daily Blog* and the BHN podcast—which portray TPM’s divisive racial identity politics as progressive.

Working people confront unprecedented social inequality, homelessness, food insecurity, the collapse of public services, and the integration of New Zealand into US plans for a catastrophic war against China. This historic crisis produced by capitalism will not be resolved by handing more wealth and power to indigenous tribal corporations or to organisations like Tamihere’s Waipareira Trust.

The working class—M?ori and non-M?ori, immigrants and workers of all countries—must be united on the basis of a socialist program. The system of private profit must be abolished, and the wealth hoarded by the super-rich must be expropriated, placed under the democratic control of the working class, and used to eliminate poverty and social inequality.



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