Why tensions between Māoridom and the coalition Government are reaching boiling point – The Front Page

By Chelsea Daniels

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Tensions between Māoridom and the coalition Government have been bubbling since the latter was sworn in last year.

Outrage over the proposed Treaty Principles Bill and cuts to services for Māori have seen multiple protests, most recently the "Carkoi" rally across the motu on Budget Day.

Act Party leader David Seymour wants to refine the Treaty of Waitangi principles to include all New Zealanders, believing its current format gives people different rights based on birth.

"The proposed Treaty Principles Bill does not rewrite the Treaty. It will define the principles of the Treaty, which have been twisted over time by the courts. The recent census shows our population has continued to diversify. All New Zealanders should be valued equally, regardless of their race or the date they arrived here," Seymour told ***The Front Page***.

The use of the term "all New Zealanders" has been likened to "all lives matter" – a slogan created as a negative response to the Black Lives Matter movement, a pushback on a campaign meant to highlight injustices faced by black people, not one insinuating that only black lives matter.

Co-editor of the *Māori Law Review* and honorary adjunct professor in Māori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, Dr Carwyn Jones, told *The Front Page* it's a good analogy.

"Because in terms of the Government – [it] has a responsibility for all New Zealanders," Jones said.

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“What Te Tiriti does is think about what are the particular ways in which the Crown has guaranteed to respect Māori authority. So, to erase Māori from Te Tiriti is kind of the equivalent of taking the focus off of where the issues really sit.”

A Te Pāti Māori spokesperson told *The Front Page* weaponizing the use of the term “all New Zealanders” against Māori is a very dismissive term to the inequities faced by tangata whenua.

“The use of “all New Zealanders” as an umbrella term assumes we are the same. It does not acknowledge the very inequities, systems, and ways of being that have resulted in the disproportionate statistics across health, well-being, and prosperity that Māori are subject to.”

Seymour refuses to budge on the reference to “all New Zealanders”.

“Act talks about “all New Zealanders” because all New Zealanders have the same dignity and the same rights. In fact, Article 3 of the Treaty promises all New Zealanders the same rights and duties,” Seymour said. “The Treaty Principles Bill proposes to treat Māori the same as all other New Zealanders.”

Last week, thousands across the country took to the streets to protest the Government’s policies and how they affect Maori. Te Pāti Māori issued a declaration of political independence and called for a separate Māori Parliament.

Jones said seeing Māori mobilise like this was very significant.

“At all of these activations, there’s been a really strong presence of Pākehā, non-Māori as well, in support and participating, and choosing to be quite active in that support.

“Some of the discussion that we had at the National Hui held at Ōmahu Marae last Friday was thinking about ways in which there might be something like a Māori Parliament.”

Talks included thinking about the idea not as one that separates Māori – but instead, how two spheres of authority can coexist and have a working relationship with one another.

“We ought not to be thinking about a parliament that just looks like the House of Representatives we have now. But, thinking about how we reflect the kind of authority and autonomy of iwi and hapū, maybe even whānau, and thinking about that to create a House of Unity rather than a House of Parliament that might organise that rangatiratanga sphere, that sphere of Māori authority,” Jones said.

Te Pāti Māori say a Māori parliament is the true assertion of tino rangatiratanga, or Article 2 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as determined by and for Māori.

“There is nothing to be afraid of for Māori wanting to assert their own kāwana and rangatiratanga over our own, in a co-existent situationship,” a spokesperson said.

“We must always come back to rights first as asserted in Te Tiriti o Waitangi,” a Te Pāti Māori spokesperson said, “A Treaty Principles Bill is trying to enable a government who operates in a Pākehā Westminster, democratic agenda to determine and rewrite their ideal of the ‘correct’ version of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, without consulting either treaty partner, Māori or the Crown.

“That is divisive because it is on consent of Māori through Te Tiriti o Waitangi that this very Westminster system is operational today. You cannot rewrite the very document that is enabling tauiwi to be here, without Māori involvement.

“That is the racist divide and conquer approach this coalition is enabling with this bill.”

Seymour told ***The Front Page***: “The current situation, where in order to establish your rights you need to consult your family tree, is stoking racial division. Treating every New Zealander equally – as Article 3 of the Treaty promises – will have the effect of unifying New Zealand.”

Listen to the full episode to hear more about the tensions over Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori attitudes towards the coalition Government.

***The Front Page* is a daily news podcast from the *New Zealand Herald*, available to listen to every weekday from 5am. The podcast is presented by Chelsea Daniels, an Auckland-based journalist with a background in world news and crime/justice reporting who joined NZME in 2016.**

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