

Democracy and Tribalism

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“The history of progress in the world is the history of ‘detrribalisation’, and the race or ethnic politics that goes with tribalised societies.

We see enough of these in today’s world to know better than to romanticise tribalism – or do we?”

“The case for ‘co-governance’ between the government and “iwi” {aboriginals} is justified, according to cultural recognition and ‘social justice’ beliefs. However, that is to make a fundamental error – one that ignores the dangers of including ethnicity into the political arrangements of a democratic nation.

” ‘Ethnicity’ refers to ‘race’ – that is, the concept that a socio-cultural group is defined in terms of its genetic ancestry. This doesn’t, of course, mean that ethnicity/ race is a scientific term. We are in fact 99.9% the same, with the remaining 0.1% being differences between individuals, not between groups.

But some groups like to define themselves in terms of their genetic ancestry, as do New Zealand’s ‘retribalists’...

“Interestingly, ‘ethnicity’ has nudged race aside only recently. By the beginning of the 1970s, almost no one used the term ‘ethnicity’. By the end of the decade, almost everyone did. If our ‘Race Relations Office’ had been established even one year later than it was, it would have the ethnicity title.

“But changing a word doesn’t change the concept signified by that word. Ethnicity still means race; still means a genetic criteria for membership.

“Earlier this year, the Herald and the NZCPR published a piece I had written about the incompatibility of tribalism and democracy. Recently, I discovered that the ‘Nigerian Observer’, in referring to my article, had used my conclusion – that there is a fundamental incompatibility between the two sociopolitical systems – to say this:

“There is urgent need for robust public discussion, review and referendum—if needed—on the democratic and political systems in Africa, with focus on the re-introduction of parliamentarism. We need to move forward.”

“What is fascinating is that progressive discussion in Africa is advocating moving towards parliamentarianism while in New Zealand {and Canada} we, or a significant number of the politically influential, are seemingly unaware of the jewel that we have in our own parliamentary system... In that innocence, they are unaware of the threat to that system.

“From the 1980s, the rather benign idea of recognising Maori culture in the wider society became a political biculturalism that has enabled a small but extremely influential group of ‘retribalists’ to capture the moral high ground of ‘social justice’ – but in their own interests.

(It shouldn’t be forgotten that the numbers of Maori in poverty has actually grown during the bicultural decades.)

“On the way to elite status – with its associated political power and economic wealth – the retribalists have successfully manipulated the rather naïve belief that social justice comes from cultural recognition – a belief which got support for biculturalism in the first place.

“Biculturalism has a new political meaning but its ongoing support lies in the old cultural one. It now means that two so-called ‘ethnic’ groups have different political interests, which should be recognised institutionally.

{The widely-discredited ‘Separate But Equal’ nonsense.

Indigenous racism is forcing Western nations to retrace their steps...}

“This institutional recognition – beginning in education and health – began a veritable march into the heart of government.

The re-interpretation of the Treaty as a so-called ‘partnership’ {just as in Canada} is providing the mandate for the march into the institutions...

We see this in recent months, with the assumption that ‘co-governance’ is the natural next step...

“But what is the nature of the group that will be ‘co-governor’? What are the implications for New Zealand’s parliamentary democracy?

“The justification for this elite’s power is its claim to represent a tribal people – so, such a people must be created and maintained – hence, the aggressive retribalisation {‘decolonisation’} that we have seen in recent years. Access to Treaty settlements requires individuals to belong to a tribe... Educational scholarships require applicants to name their tribe...

‘Detribalisation’ is described as the problem, so ‘retribalisation’ is to be the solution – a slogan that assumes tribalism is a progressive form of social organisation – that it is worth having, that it should not have been destroyed.

“So, let us look at what the tribe or clan is.

“It is the oldest way to organise a social group. The cement is kinship. As the group gets larger, it becomes a race or ethnic group.

The group’s distinctiveness is the result of a shared history which may be very long, as with Australian Aborigines, or relatively short, as with Maori. However, a shared history does not mean that the tribe, or any group for that matter, should have a distinctive political system that never changes.

“If there is no change, then those people are locked into a kin-based political system for all time. There can be no modernity, no progress, no future.

“One of the benefits of colonisation, and there are a number, is the destruction of tribalism.

“For slaves and lower caste people, it was liberation.

“Of course, the chiefly caste did not agree and today we see the resurgence of those who would be their inheritors.

“The new elite is a self-proclaimed aristocracy, justifying their ambition in romantic appeals to an Arcadian past.

“Tribalism must be destroyed for democracy to exist. Democracy’s superiority as a political system is that it is the final stage in the separation of the kin/race character of a socio-cultural group, from its political character.

“It has achieved this separation by creating the secular public space where politics takes place, and by creating the citizen as the political subject for that space. The separation has not been easy, even in its final stages, as the turmoils of the 19th and 20th centuries remind us.

“We get fascinating accounts of the beginnings of the social-political separation from historian Peter Munz and anthropologist Alan Macfarlane. Munz describes how the Roman invasion of Europe allowed three intertwined movements to weaken European tribalisation so successfully that the pre-conditions were established for new non-kinship forms of governance – although democracy was still a long way into the future.

“The Romans brought Greek civilisation, Roman law, and Christianity. This was a heady combination that undermined tribalism and laid the pre-conditions for the break-up of kin and race-based political structures.

“In his ‘Making of the Modern World’, Alan Macfarlane...also traces the rise of the modern world to the early break-up of tribalism. He refers to the legal right of women in Anglo-Saxon England to will property outside the kin-group, to show the weakening of kinship as a public political organising force by the 8th and 9th centuries.

“The history of progress in the world is the history of ‘detrribalisation’, and the race or ethnic politics that goes with tribalised societies...

“Tribal politics is necessarily undemocratic because of the criteria for membership and the system of leadership... This suits those who would lead the tribe because it guarantees a population that only they can represent. Leadership is also undemocratic because there is no clear separation of kin status and political status.

“So, the question for us is not why the ‘iwi’ elite is using retribal strategies to gain increasing political power and economic wealth – any emerging elite that chances upon a direct and easy means to get its way, will take it. The intriguing question is how has a population with 161 years of democracy under its belt allowed this to happen.

“Whatarangi Winiata, the Maori Party’s ideologue, was the brains behind the division of the Anglican Church into three racial groups in the 1980s. He must be good because here was the ‘Universal Church’, one that had played a major role in the break-up of kinship organisation since the first centuries AD, meekly accepting a return to race-based division. Winiata has said that the Church’s three-party model is the model for New Zealand. ‘Co-governance’ is the current step...

“As an academic, I find the skill of the retribalising elite’s manipulative strategies fascinating. As a New Zealand citizen, I despair for our country when we do not know the value of what we have got.”

–‘Democracy and Tribalism’,
Dr. Elizabeth Rata, November 17, 2013

<http://www.nzcpr.com/democracy-and-tribalism/#more-9879>

“The greatest danger to democracy comes from tribalism.

“In most of the world, democracy usually fails as a direct result of tribalism. People divide up into tribes based on ethnicity, or religion, and vote exclusively along tribal lines.

“The result is that it doesn’t matter what the issues are, or who the candidates are. The result is foreordained..

“Whether we’re talking Shiites in Iran, or Xhosa in South Africa, northern Italians or Japanese nationalists, tribalism covers up corruption and makes free institutions difficult to sustain. Issues don’t matter, the candidates don’t matter, charges of corruption don’t matter. What matters is power, what matters is tribe, and you follow along.”

<http://www.danablankenhorn.com/2013/05/tribalism.html>

Petition to END RACE BASED LAW:

<http://endracebasedlaw.com/petition>

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