

Coup d'état in all but name: NZ's descent to ethno-nationalism

By Elizabeth Rata, The Australian, 11 August 2022

New Zealand is on a long descent from our remarkable 170-year legacy of democratic governance into a tribal form of ethno-nationalism, aided by our government, our education system and a compliant media.

Unrecognised as such at the time, the descent began nearly 40 years ago, when the 1985 Treaty of Waitangi Amendment Act set in motion a radical constitutional agenda, whose aim was to shift the country from democracy to tribalism.

Over the last four decades, a corporate tribal elite has privatised public resources, acquired political power, and attained governance entitlements. Activist judges have created treatyism – a new interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi – as a “governance partnership,” while intellectuals supply the supporting racialised “two world views” ideology which is now permeating society.



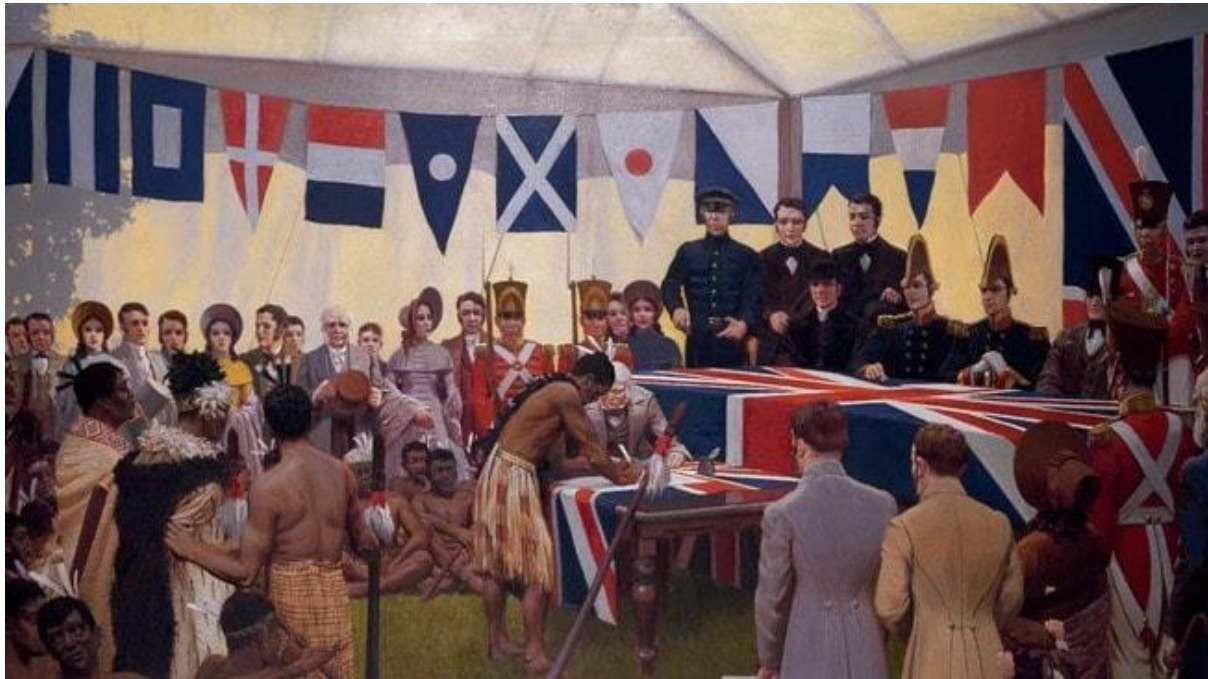
Traditional waka crews perform a haka on Waitangi Day. Activist judges have created treatyism – a new interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi – as a ‘governance partnership’.

In his book *The Open Society*, philosopher Karl Popper identifies those who would take us back to the past, to that closed tribal society from which we are all descended. He describes how throughout history those who “could only make themselves leaders of the perennial revolt against freedom”, those “incapable of leading a new way” will return us to what he called “cultivated tribalism”.

It is this colossal failure of vision for a democratic future that has taken New Zealand to the crossroads. Democracy is one path ahead; ethno-nationalism is the other.

Treatyism’s success can be seen in how comprehensively “partnership”, “decolonisation”, “co-governance” – whatever term is used – is inserted into all NZ’s government institutions,

into the universities, and into the law. It is an ideology that tells how we are to understand our country's history and how we are to envisage its future.



A reconstruction of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi showing Maori chief Tāmāti Wāka Nene signing in front of James Busby and Captain William Hobson. Picture: NZ History. READ MORE: [Revolution in NZ education](#) | [Ardern's recipe for privilege by an inherited tribal elite](#) | [NZ children face education tragedy](#) | [Democracies can die, Ardern warns. She should know](#)

The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi was, like all human products, of its time and place. One aim, shared by British and Maori signatories alike, was to establish the rule of law by imposing British sovereignty through British governance. Sovereignty and governance go together as two sides of the same coin, with intertwined meaning. In the decades which followed, the treaty lost relevance in the new colonial society. This is the case with all historical treaties.

Revived in the 1970s as the symbol of a cultural renaissance, the treaty was captured by retribalists in the 1980s to serve as the ideological manifesto for the envisaged order – a reconstituted New Zealand. It was given a “spirit” to take it above and beyond its historical location so that it could mean whatever retribalists say it means.

This treatyist ideology successfully promotes the false claim of partnership between the government and Maori tribes. However there is a deeper, more insidious strategy propelling us to tribal ethno-nationalism – the collapse of the separation between the economic and political spheres.

The separation of the economic from the political is absolutely essential for democracy. When economic interests and political ambitions are merged there is no accountability to the people; consider all those totalitarian leaders whose power gives wealth and whose wealth gives power – a merger broken only when (and if) the people revolt.



A woman waves the New Zealand flag at the Treaty Grounds on Waitangi Day. Picture: Getty Images.

When the combination of reactionary politics and wealth accumulation is justified by “myths of past perfection”, we have what I call the neotribal capitalist version of the wealth-power merger.

The corporate Maori tribes of NZ have already acquired considerable governance entitlements; the next and final step is tribal sovereignty. It’s a coup d’etat in all but name, accomplished not by force but by ideology.

Given the enormous success of retribalism is it too late to reclaim New Zealand from the relentless march to blood and soil ethno-nationalism?

That depends upon our willingness to understand, value, and restore democracy – that remarkable and still uncommon form of government described in Abraham Lincoln’s famous words as “government of the people, by the people, for the people”.

Its three pillars are interdependent; the citizen, who has a duty to society but also personal interests arising from kin, cultural and other social loyalties; the state, simultaneously the capitalist state generating economic wealth and inequality and the secular democratic state, guaranteeing political equality and regulating wealth distribution; and, lastly, the nation, unified in facing the future, yet diverse in its past.

Democracy is peaceful battle within and between each of these three pillars. This bloodless conflict is only possible when individuals are partially loyal – that is, they have contradictory loyalties simultaneously. They identify as a family member, a member of an ancestral group, a tribe, a religion, or an identity group defined by sexuality, while at the same time loyal to a diverse society and to its governing system that is not personal.

These two different loyalties – one a deeply personal identity, the other a rational commitment to an idea – is why democracy is so difficult. It is much easier to fall back into loyalties of emotion, not reason.



Prince Charles at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds. Picture: Getty Images.

After all, from different, even conflicting interests how do we decide where our loyalty lies – is it to New Zealand? To an identity group? An ancestral group? To those “who look like us”?

It is a question that someone in a tribal society, an autocratic society, a religious society would not have to ask, or be permitted to ask, because the answer is already provided.

Traditional tribal societies allowed one identity, fixed by birth status and kinship ties – not open to individual choice. Loyalty was non-negotiable because total loyalty ensured the group’s survival.

Autocratic regimes impose total loyalty – not for the survival of all, but for the elite, and this loyalty is imposed by might and by ideological indoctrination.

The ease and attraction of such total loyalty favours ethno-nationalism; it is profoundly anti-modern and anti-democratic, yet also profoundly seductive.

And New Zealand is being seduced by it. Already, our education system is indoctrinating children into retribalism via the so-called “decolonisation” and “indigenisation” of the curriculum. But decolonisation will destroy the very means by which each generation acquires reasoned knowledge, and in so doing, the ability to reason – which in turn provides the rationalism to counter the irrationalism of total loyalty.

By undermining the secular academic curriculum – that which creates the reasoning mind – we are destroying the partially loyal individual. Our fate – to be left with those capable only of mindless total loyalty.

When citizens abdicate their democratic duty, when the media abandons its responsibilities, when judges become political activists, when academics are intolerant of open inquiry, and when governments are subverted by an ideology – that is when a corporate tribal elite emerges to encircle the commons, to privatise what belongs to the public, to us the people, and to govern not in our interests but for themselves. In this way wealth and power are merged.

Tribalism and democracy are incompatible. We can't have both. If we wish to keep New Zealand as a liberal democratic nation then, as we derive our citizen rights from the nation-state, so we have a duty to ensure that the nation-state which awards those rights, remains democratic and able to do so.

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