

British immigrants face a hostile reception after Maori call for curb

By Paul Chapman in Wellington
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Maori warriors: Maori leaders believe there is a campaign to prevent the 'browning' of the country

Britons considering making a fresh start in New Zealand might find a less than warm welcome awaiting them after Maori politicians demanded curbs on immigration to the islands.

Lured by the attractive climate, majestic scenery, a high standard of living and the use of English, thousands leave the United Kingdom each year to make new lives on the other side of the globe.

But yesterday Maori nationalists called on the government in Wellington to limit the number of migrants from Britain.

They accused the government of running a secret campaign to prevent the "browning of New Zealand" by encouraging large numbers of white immigrants so that they outnumber those of Pacific and Asian origin who would align themselves with the Maori minority.

The proportion of Maori in the population, currently 13 per cent, is expected to grow rapidly over the next few decades because their birthrate is more than twice that of white New Zealanders.

The number of non-Maori New Zealanders would be falling without the net gain from immigration, mainly because tens of thousands leave for Australia every year.

Tariana Turia, the founder and co-leader of the Maori Party which holds four seats in parliament, said: "What we are talking about is the number of people coming into this country and what that means for Maori political representation. The prediction is that we are going to see a considerable browning of New Zealand with Maori, Pacific islanders and Asians, and maybe this is the way the government combats it."

The demand by the Maori Party is significant because it could hold the balance of power in the proportionally elected parliament after the general election due next year.

The number of Britons moving to New Zealand has soared since the Lord of the Rings films gave the country's majestic scenery a high profile, boosted by the government introducing a minimum English language requirement that effectively cut arrivals from Asia. Britain represents by far the biggest source of migrants, with 22,400 entering the country last year to take up permanent residence. [...]

Although the Maori Party demanded curbs on migrants from other mainly white countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia, their numbers are dwarfed by those from Britain.

The level of British migration is at its highest since New Zealand, like Australia, ended a policy of assisted passages for settlers known as "Ten Pound Poms" in the early 1970s.

Businesses and civil authorities increasingly recruit in Britain in an effort to counter a crippling shortage of skilled staff.

Helen Clark, the prime minister, dismissed the Maori Party's demands as "ridiculous". She said: "Our country has been built on migration, you're part of it, I'm part of it." [...]

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