

RIGHT OF WAY

The Far Right in New Zealand

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Paul Spoonley is a lecturer in the Sociology Department of Massey University. His special area of interest is the field of race and ethnic relations, and in 1976-77 he carried out research in Britain on the extreme right wing, particularly the National Front. Since then, he has looked at similar groups in New Zealand.

There is so little media space given to the activities of the extreme right that the public could be forgiven for thinking that they do not exist in New Zealand. But they do. The fact that they attract so little attention might say something about the conservatism of New Zealand society, particularly in matters of politics or race relations. Their low profile also reflects the fact that the New Zealand groups have not adopted the aggressive and often violent approach of similar groups in America or Britain.

This difference was brought home to New Zealanders by the death of Blair Peach more than a year ago. The British National Front have consistently sought to provoke violent counter-demonstrations by deliberately marching with offensive banners and chants directed at the local coloured population. Less obvious but more insidious is the National Front's contribution to racial tension in local neighbourhoods, where their attitude and actions have encouraged a growing number of attacks on coloured people.

The issue of whether the National Front should be allowed to continue their disruptive and damaging activities, often with police protection, is a debate which generates strong feelings. New Zealanders, for their part, are unlikely to appreciate the seriousness of the situation or the fact that Blair Peach was only one casualty amongst many in a country with a lot of racial tension. The National Front were unconcerned by the death, particularly as they saw him as an "imported communist stirrer" and an example of "race chaos", a reference to the National Front's belief that Peach was partly Maori. Indeed the British National Front have always had a strong interest in New Zealand, principally because they see it as a country of white supremacy. The founder of the National Front, the late A. K. Chesterton, argued that the Maori

should have no special rights because they are "not native to New Zealand but comparatively recent newcomers".

The New Zealand branch of the National Front has never been in a position even to begin to contemplate the same activities as its British parent. Individually, members of the Front have been active in New Zealand since 1967 when the organisation first began in Britain. But it was not until March 1977 that a New Zealand branch was formed. This development was greeted with delight by the British National Front and they gave considerable space in their publications to descriptions of the new group. For a brief period, comments from the local chairman and deputy-chairman were reported in the New Zealand press, particularly after the latter went to Britain to study National Front tactics and came back predicting "race violence" in New Zealand. The other flurry came when members of the National Front claimed they were also members of the National Party. The National Party responded by declaring that Front members could not also be members of the National Party, and that the policies of the two groups were incompatible.

The policies of the Front revolve around the belief that intermarriage between Polynesian and Pakeha threatens the "unique talents" of the Anglo-Saxon. Front members felt that Pacific Islanders should be repatriated and a policy of separate development, essentially apartheid, should be instituted for Maori to avert the impending "racial disaster". Not surprisingly, the National Front argue for closer links between white New Zealanders and South Africans.

In a political sense, the National Front had little impact in New Zealand and by mid-1978 the organisation had folded because it could not find anyone who was willing to accept the responsibility of being chairman.

The other two extreme right-wing groups that the public might have heard of recently are the League of Rights and the National Socialists (Nazis); the first because of a TV programme and a *Listener* article and the second because two of its members have the distinction of being the only people to have been prosecuted under the Race Relations Act.