

Māori party co-leader ejected from parliament after performing haka in racism row

Rawiri Waititi had accused the opposition of racism and was asked to sit down by the speaker, but instead performed the ceremonial dance

Tess McClure in Christchurch

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Māori party co-leader Rawiri Waititi has been thrown out of New Zealand's parliament after denouncing rhetoric from the opposition as racist and performing a haka.

Waititi said the opposition was inciting racism across New Zealand through its stance on Māori healthcare. The haka is a ceremonial dance for Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand – it can represent a challenge, and is sometimes performed in moments of conflict.

The altercation comes after weeks of escalating debate, in which the opposition National party has accused the government of a “separatist agenda” and creating “two systems by stealth”. Their arguments began after the government announced expanded, independent health services for Māori, who typically have far worse health outcomes than other ethnic groups.

“This has incited racism with venom towards Māori, because of this type of propaganda and rhetoric – we won't stand for it any more,” Waititi said, speaking to reporters outside. “The opposition leader has been constantly bashing Māori to gain the votes of her Pākehā [non-Māori New Zealander] constituents. That's all it is.”

Waititi was ejected from the House by speaker Trevor Mallard, after making a series of points of order. “Over the past two weeks there has been racist propaganda and rhetoric towards tangata whenua [indigenous people]. That not only is insulting to tangata whenua, but diminishes the mana [dignity] of this House,” Waititi said.

“When it comes to the rights and views of indigenous peoples – those views must be from those indigenous people,” he said, in a second point of order.

When asked to sit down by Mallard, he instead stepped into the centre of parliament to perform a haka, and was subsequently thrown out.

“There are various worlds here, and they are colliding,” Labour MP Aupito William Sio said, as members of parliament continued to debate. “Because the system here is not an indigenous system ... there's a duty of care in how we approach it – how it's handled in this House has ripple effects for the wider community.” He said some of the discussion of race and policy in the House was “painful” for minority groups. “There's a line that's often crossed here”.

“Tangata whenua are a minority in this House, and are unable to express their offence [under the current rules],” said Green party co-leader James Shaw. Co-leader Marama Davidson said via Twitter that she applauded Waititi and co-leader Debbie Ngarewa-

Packer Ngarewa-Packer for “calling out the absolute ongoing racist comments from Judith Collins in the House just now”.

“This House absolutely deserves better,” she said.

Speakers for ACT and National said the House needed to allow for free and open debate.

Mallard made a ruling “asking people to take care as they express themselves, to think of the wider consequences as they do”. He said he would not rule against MPs saying that policy was race-based or racist, or that the views of other members were racist.

In February, Waititi was ejected from the House for not wearing a tie. He said he had chosen to wear cultural dress in defiance of dress code: Waititi has dubbed ties a “colonial noose” and wore a pounamu, or greenstone, necklace in place of a necktie. House rules were subsequently revised to remove the necktie requirement.