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| **Political Roundup: The Māori Party needs to come clean** How seriously does the Māori Party take issues of corruption and the untoward influence of big money in politics? Not very, based on how it’s handling a political finance scandal in which three large donations were kept hidden from the public. The party is currently making excuses, and largely failing to answer questions, about being referred to the Police for breaches of the Electoral Act for not declaring large donations it received during the election campaign, amounting to what could be corrupt practice. The news of the Māori Party being referred to the Police is in Claire Trevett’s news report yesterday,[Election donations: Māori Party referred to police over $320,000 in undeclared donations](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=f9b718cfd8&e=33257ad5dd). As the article notes, “Under electoral laws, political parties must disclose donations of more than $30,000 within 10 working days.” This is so the public, especially during an election campaign, is aware of who is funding the politicians. In this case, the Māori Party decided not to declare, as the law requires, three very large donations, which amount to nearly a third of a million dollars. The money donated comes from former party co-leader John Tamihere ($158,224), Aotearoa Te Kahu Limited Partnership ($120,000), and the National Urban Māori Authority ($48,880). It could be that the party didn’t have the correct processes in place, in what is a complicated area of operating a political party. Although the law is clear about what needs to be declared, the details of what should be included is a difficult area, especially if the donations amount to an amalgamation of “in kind” contributions and election spending by candidates. As Trevett’s article above reports, the party president “said Tamihere paid for some party costs out of his own pocket and the party had not realised it was supposed to treat those as donations.” Nonetheless, the ball is now in the Māori Party’s court to reassure the public, and their voters, that they have integrity when it comes to powerful vested interests. Unfortunately, they aren’t providing a lot of the necessary detail. About half of the money in question came from John Tamihere, who was less than forthcoming or contrite when replying to a journalist’s question on why he hadn’t been transparent, saying “Because I'm not as perfect as you” – see Tova O'Brien’s[Billy Te Kahika outs himself as second Electoral Commission referral to police over donations](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=33ed3d79a2&e=33257ad5dd). Party president Che Wilson is claiming ignorance and a shambolic state of affairs in the party as his excuse – see RNZ’s [**Māori Party undeclared donations referred to police**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=f7bbc9c152&e=33257ad5dd). Wilson is quoted saying, “We took over a party that had broken down and as part of the rebuild as volunteers when we got into the thick of the campaign we misinterpreted how we had to report things”. Similarly, talking to Newshub, Wilson conveys that “they were so focused on issues that needed solving in the lead-up to the election that meant they didn't have the correct processes” – see Rachel Sadler’s[Māori Party undeclared donations: Electoral Commission notified as soon as error was noticed – party president Che Wilson](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=61514d83d0&e=33257ad5dd). Evaluating the party’s responses so far, electoral law expert Andrew Geddis told RNZ’s Morning Report: “That doesn’t strike me particularly as a good excuse, given that these rules are in place for a good reason. And if you as party secretary are taking on the responsibility then its implicit on you to make sure you know what you are doing and that you’ve got the processes in place to be able to meet the legal requirements” – see: [**Rules around electoral donations very clear – Geddis**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=945b313c63&e=33257ad5dd). Geddis appears to believe a prosecution is required in this case, because “There’s no point having these rules if people can just ignore them and just walk away with a slap on the hand with a wet bus ticket.” But he adds that a judge might choose a lesser punishment for the party president if there are mitigating circumstances (such as the fact that they have come clean to the Electoral Commission). Former Labour Party president Mike Williams has spoken out today, saying there’s “no excuse” for failing to disclose the large donations, and the “law is perfectly clear” – see Waatea News’ [**Māori Party fails to report funding**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=5866a5fa52&e=33257ad5dd). According to this article, “Williams says John Tamihere, who is a former MP, would know the rules”. What’s more, Williams argues that the Māori Party’s failure to disclose its funding during the election campaign may have been politically consequential: “It might have altered votes if people knew John Tamihere chucked in $158,00 before the election. That should have been reported before the election. That’s the point of the law”. **Questions raised about who pulls the strings in the Māori Party** The spotlight is now on the three big donors to the Māori Party. On Newshub’s Hui TV programme last night, Mihingarangi Forbes challenged the party president about the funding from the National Urban Māori Authority (NUMA), which John Tamihere is the CEO of, and is contracted to the government to provide Whānau Ora services. But Wilson refused to comment saying “We can only talk about what we've done and you'd need to talk to NUMA about that.” Political commentators Shane te Pou and Tau Henare appeared on the programme, and had very different interpretations of this donation. Te Pou, a former Labour candidate, said: “I think it's very important the police investigate. If Whanau Ora money has been used – and I use that word ‘if’ – I don't think that's a good thing at all. At the end of the day it's taxpayer money… If I was the minister of Whanau Ora, the first thing in the morning I would write to the Auditor-General and I would ask him to investigate” – see Dan Satherley’s [**‘That's the game’: Māori Party MPs warned attacks will come over donations scandal**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=5e95b71a1e&e=33257ad5dd). In contrast, Tau Henare called the scandal a “storm in a teacup”, and argued that the problem is with the law rather than the Māori Party: “The reality is we have a law that's designed to obfuscate, designed to... hide things… The law needs to be looked at, the law needs to be revamped so everybody is clear about their accountabilities. In terms of the Māori Party, I think it's a bit of a rookie mistake.” Rightwing blogger David Farrar argues today that the matter raises important questions about the Māori Party’s funding – especially from the mysterious entity, Aotearoa Te Kahu, which gave a single donation of $120,000 – see: [**Who are the mystery Māori Party funders?**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=c191b3e6bc&e=33257ad5dd). Farrar has been digging around to find the background of this donor: “Go to the register of limited partnerships and you find they act on behalf of Aotearoa Te Kahu GP Limited. Their shareholder is ATK Nominees Limited. And their shareholder is Morrison Kent Limited. It is fair to assume Morrison Kent are not the actual shareholders but are acting for someone. So this leaves the question who actually controls and funds Aotearoa Te Kahu and made the decision to donate $120,000 to the Māori Party?” **Has the Māori Party been a victim of racism?** At the same time that the Māori Party were referred to the Police, the Electoral Commission also said that the National Party had breached the rules by failing to disclose $35,000 donated last year in three instalments by real estate businessman Garth Barfoot. Che Wilson has suggested, in his interview with Newshub, that because National hasn’t been referred to the Police, it’s a case of the Māori Party being unfairly singled out: “That's just really sad that the system has its bias and potentially is racist”. However, the Electoral Commission has been reported as saying that the same rules are being applied, but it hasn’t yet decided whether to also refer National to the police. In her article, Claire Trevett states: “The Electoral Commission said it had asked for an explanation from the National Party and was still assessing the matter. It did not automatically refer all late donations to the police, but considered issues such as the party's past record and the timeframes involved.” Blogger No Right Turn has backed up the Māori Party on this, suggesting if the Police choose to prosecute, this will reflect discrimination on their part: “In the past the police (as opposed to the SFO) have generally refused to enforce the law (it’s not ‘real’ crime, you see, unlike someone smoking a joint or walking while brown). But given the party involved and the police's culture of racism and subservience to power, maybe we might finally see the law enforced this time, though for entirely the wrong reasons” – see: [**The Māori Party's hidden donations**](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=890cbd9204&e=33257ad5dd). Finally, the Electoral Commission is yet to release the details of the donations received by parties for the 2020 election year, but in February the donations to individual election candidates were published – you can see the details in Claire Trevett’s,[Shane Jones, Christopher Luxon, Anna Lorck – who got the most donations in 2020 election?](https://democracyproject.us16.list-manage.com/track/click?u=c73e3fe9e4a0d897f8fa2746e&id=4412b4b2b8&e=33257ad5dd).  |

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