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‘Dominic O’Sullivan, Te Tiriti, Equality, and the Future of New Zealand Democracy’

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Dominic O'Sullivan, *Te Tiriti, Equality and the Future of New Zealand Democracy* (Auckland University Press, 2026), 264pp. eCopy. NZ\$39.99. ISBN: 978-1-7767-1236-6.

I do not believe that I have ever seen an academic book have so much build-up as this one. I think I first heard about its forthcoming publication a year ago! I expressed an interest to review it with the publisher several months ago and overall, I was not disappointed. O'Sullivan's book joins a plethora of publications on Te Tiriti in a modern context that have appeared in recent years. I have reviewed several of these myself and this is one of the main reasons that I was also keen to review this book.

Te Tiriti, Equality and the Future of New Zealand Democracy from the outset takes some quite radical positions, which for anyone familiar with Dominic O'Sullivan's work will not be surprised. Firstly, he makes clear that he does not approach Te Tiriti in a modern context as a partnership between two different groups: Māori and Pākehā as many authors do, not least because O'Sullivan highlights that the relationship between them is not an equal one. Secondly, he is quite critical of seeing 'The Crown' as a benign, overarching authority above the two, through which the New Zealand state derives its authority to govern.

In contrast O'Sullivan argues that Māori themselves are a part of the governing system of Aotearoa New Zealand. He underlines this by maintaining that Māori do not have to subscribe to a system as junior partners, when their own governing structures form part of that very system: *tikanga* and *kaitiakitanga*. Furthermore, according to O'Sullivan a 'Republican Commonwealth' should replace the current 'Crown-subject' system in Aotearoa New Zealand.

O'Sullivan goes into quite some detail about what he especially means about 'Commonwealth'. He asserts that he is not referring to the Commonwealth of Nations of former British colonies and settler societies, or the Commonwealth of Australia, or even the four States of the United States of America who define themselves as Commonwealths. Instead what he means by 'Commonwealth' is drawn from the 17th century political concept in the United Kingdom, which designated an organised political community, republic, or state. In this vein O'Sullivan believes that Aotearoa New Zealand could become this if it became a republic. And its political authority or legitimacy would be derived from its people, both Māori and Pākehā.

However, I do not want to give the impression that O'Sullivan's book is just theoretical. He devotes quite some space and time to illustrating how a 'Republican Commonwealth' would operate in practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. This includes in education, local government, and public utilities such as water. One of the most fundamental points that O'Sullivan makes is that under the current 'Crown-subject' system Māori especially are in an unfavourable position due to them being a minority in their own country, but this is compounded by the fact that the system is structured in such a way to favour Pākehā.

Therefore, O'Sullivan strongly believes that it is only through the introduction of a 'Republican-Commonwealth' in Aotearoa New Zealand will Māori especially fully realise their rights which were guaranteed by Te Tiriti but also gain access to the same opportunities as Pākehā. *Te Tiriti, Equality, and the Future of New Zealand Democracy* is certainly a very thought-provoking book and offers quite a radical solution to the many of the challenges that Māori especially face in Aotearoa New Zealand today. But perhaps the times we live in today demand radical solutions. In any case I recommend the book to readers, although it will probably appeal more to specialist readers rather than general, as the book can be quite dense at times.

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