

MAORI SOVEREIGNTY: A Pakeha woman's response.

For many of us Sovereignty suggests the Kings and Queens of England - the bits of history we learnt - 1066 and all that - the rise and decline of the British Empire - all those red spots on the old school atlas - the spread of the various colonizing powers throughout the world - the raising of the flag over areas and islands as they were "discovered" - the establishment of "law and order", of "christianity", of "civilization", of "sovereign rule", disregarding any claim of indigenous peoples.

Our forebears coming from the other side of the world, irrespective of the country from which they came, had only these cultural concepts to offer, but we, several generations later cannot use any such excuse, if these outmoded ideas continue to block our acceptance, that the Maori had sovereignty over Aotearoa, by their possession of the land, and through the network of tribal authority and custom.

Because the concept of sovereignty was different, we cannot argue that it did not exist.

What most of us today are not willing to acknowledge, and accept is, that the Maori did not surrender Sovereignty by the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi - that our forebears misinterpreted, misrepresented, ignored, or were not capable of understanding this - does not leave the gate open for me - or your my Pakeha sister to perpetuate the one sided benefits accorded to descendants of one of the signatories -

Two Sovereign peoples signed the Treaty of Waitangi.

Any style of analysis of our Society shows, that only one group has continued access to all the goodies of this land, and the current institutions are so geared that this will be perpetuated.

There has been a whole heap said and written about "the one people, one nation", and this is the myth we Pakeha's have all bought to a larger or lesser extent - without being honest enough to admit, that what we mean by that is Pakeha ways, Pakeha culture, Paekha nation.

At the Kohimarama hui in 1860, Donald McLean made it clear what Governor Browne wanted: "His object and earnest aim is to induce you to adopt European customs." What was at stake then and still is to this day, is the unwillingness of us to recognise the fundamental right of the Maori to their own ethnic identity and future on their terms.

Having gained possession of the land itself, having diminished the culture, having all but destroyed the language, we in turn have denied ourselves the opportunity to extend our own horizons, and develop insights which may have placed us in a position to be a model to the whole world.

From the beginning of our time together in this country, to this day Pakeha sovereignty has meant Pakeha ways are the "norm", therefore "one people one nation" in reality means our way is not only the best way, but the only way. Of course we "allow" equal opportunity on our terms, taking no heed to what this has done and continues to do, to the language, culture, spiritual life of the idigenous people of Aotearoa.

As I see it, Maori Sovereignty calls me and you to cut the umbilical cord tying us to Britian, Europe - wherever - and become a person of this land - this doen't mean becoming a white maori, even though the expectations of the past called upon the Maori to become brown Pakeha - but if there is any future for this nation, it has to do with what it means to be committed to freely giving over power, resources, space and time, to redress the imbalance we all know is present.

For me its about a crisis point in the history of this country -
with the Maori Affairs Bill coming before Parliament - there is an opportunity for the Maori to devise and set up total areas of self-determination - the Maori Council and other Maori groups have made their wishes known - but what I've read and heard about the proposed Bill to date, doesn't come within a stone's throw of meeting the needs which have been expressed -
Pakeha sovereignty is alive and thriving -

For me its about long ignored waring signs -
from Hone Heke to Kotahitanga 1984 the signs have been before us Pakeha people - Maori Sovereignty speaking through the voices of the Tangata Whenua, - warlike, peaceful - assertive - strong - negotiating - one people (Maori)
one nation (Pakeha)
Pakeha sovereignty reigns.

For me its about how unjustly our society acts -
our handling of education, justice, language, power, health, religious systems and institutions -
by our - I mean yours and mine - the Pakeha -
no full partnership in present systems or full autonomy in parallel systems and institutions, whichever the Maori would choose -
Pakeha sovereignty reigns in control of all.

For me its about the Treaty of Waitangi -
No wonder we Pakehas want to celebrate -
in whose hands are the bulk of the land resources?
and how did they get there?
who sits around all the board and committee tables thoughout the land, making what sort of decisions to benefit who etc."etc. ?
who else are we allied to and what other treaties have we signed ? - e.g. Anzus - for what reason ?
Why do we keep some "holy", and others we acknowledge once a year?-

There's been a vast amount written about the Treaty of Waitangi over the years - if it had been fully taken into account every step of the way in building the bi-cultural partnership of this nation, the vision, language, way of living would I believe be vastly different -

For a start we would all be bilingual -

the negotiations between two vastly differing cultures - both I affirm having aspects to offer each other and future generations - would have created a harmony which instead of belonging to the "now" - belongs to the vision of the future - instead Pakeha sovereignty reigns.

Above all Māori Sovereignty challenges me as an individual, and Pakehas collectively to examine our own culture and its history - to celebrate what is of value and take that into the future, being prepared to devalue - disregard what is demeaning to me and others.

It challenges us to look at,

and get to try and understand how Aotearoa was, before European contact, through to the present day,

to examine, challenge and change all Pakeha controlled systems and institutions,

to meet the needs and aspirations of the Maori, as defined by them -

to give over power and resources to set up alternative or parallel structures as the Maori requirements arise -

This means placing individual and collective time and resources at risk, and certainly accepting that the access being white gives us, is made available for change.

From where I am, it looks more like getting our own house in order,

to help Pakehas come out from behind the myths, that have sheltered us for

so long, and begin focusing on the difficult realities and discrepancies that

are present in our society - endeavouring to initiate change rather than respond

to crisis - to take risks with other Pakehas, specially those in power, and know

that there will be resistance, and retaliation.

In most discussions I hear, Pakehas react to the thought that Maori Sovereignty means all of us Pakehas leaving on the next boat - going back to where we came from - and many have been born here -

I have no crystal ball about the future - but it may be that for some of us - we ought to go where the heart is -

if we yearn for some place across the sea, but for those who choose this land as being where their heart and soul likes, we need to accept that the covenant made by our forebears rests squarely on our shoulders -

we have still an opportunity to be an honourable people -

what the cost is individually and collectively can only be discovered in the process of change, and the first step is the recognition that Maori Sovereignty has claim to our allegiance, commitment and action.

So ultimately what I hear myself saying as I wrap this up,
is that my response to Maori Sovereignty is not spelling out an A.B.C. on
what Maori Sovereignty is,
but rather having an understanding of what Pakeha Sovereignty is and does
in this country -
being part of a process to dismantle that,
this creates the climate for Maori Sovereignty to take its just and rightful
place in Aotearoa -
by being part of the dismantling of the one,
I will also be part of the recognizing of the other.

JOAN COOK. 10.4.1984.