

## TINO RANGATIRATANGA IN THE 1990s - POTENTIAL FOR ALLIANCES \*

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This decade has seen a major shift in Pakeha thinking and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi. The deluge of debate, writings, seminars and workshops has lifted the Treaty's profile amongst Tauwiwi - to the extent that many now believe that real progress has been made toward solving the 'problem' of the Treaty.

A number of political, academic and media commentators now concede that in achieving this 'progress' the Treaty has been rewritten via the concept of the 'principles' and sidelined, and that Pakeha governments will never voluntarily reinstate te tino rangatiratanga o te iwi Maori. They stress the need to recognise the treaty symbolically but not literally, and turn instead to addressing social disadvantage and cultural sensitivity within the existing structures. David Lange and Sir Robin Cooke recently described this as a "subtle cultural repositioning". Others use the terms 'bi-culturalism' or 'partnership'. Many of the same commentators recognise the dangers of Maori rebellion if expectations are not met. But they assume that this will not happen, that Maori will be reasonable, that Pakeha will accept 'bi-culturalism' as a necessary evil, and that the state will remain in control by consent not by force. In effect, sufficient political, economic and symbolic concessions will be made to secure Maori allegiance within what the economy, constitutional structures and the Pakeha electorate will tolerate.

This complacency is naive and dangerous. Naive, because it ignores the debate which is now occurring throughout the country amongst Maori over whether or not te tino rangatiratanga - Maori independence, autonomy, sovereignty - can be achieved through neo-colonial legal and political structures. Dangerous, because the myth-making surrounding the 'Treaty partnership' is leaving Tauwiwi ill-prepared to understand and respond constructively to this challenge.

The role of the Pakeha anti-racism movement in this process has at best been marginal. At worst it has actively - and not always unwittingly - collaborated in moves designed to forestall Maori self-determination. A critical and somber reflection on the 1980s is well overdue.

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## The Grand Diversion

For Pakeha involved in the anti-racism struggle - the majority of whom were women - the late 1970s and early 1980s were comparatively straight forward. The battle lines were clearly drawn and the 'enemy' was up-front and visible. Government, courts, Waitangi Tribunal, bureaucracy, police, education and welfare agencies were all hostile and seemingly intransigent. The role of a vanguard movement dictated a strategy of public and private exposes through protest, media and racism awareness programmes.

From 1982 to 1984 the dynamic changed. The political space opened up by the activists of the 1970s matured into a concerted challenge to the Crown by so-called radical and conservative Maori to honour the Treaty. Although this was essentially a Maori initiative, Pakeha supporters did play a positive role in shifting the Pakeha psyche. A handful of long-established groups ran sustained campaigns against institutional racism and their anti-racism workshops had some success in raising Pakeha awareness. New groups, drawn together by increasing awareness of the treaty, joined in enthusiastically although often without direction. Some lasted, some didn't. Protest groups organised around high profile events, bolstered by the aftermath of the 1981 Springbok tour kept the pressure on government. Sector groups in churches, workplaces and government departments launched sustained attacks on institutional racism in their own back yards.

By February 1984, as the Hikoiki approached Waitangi, Maori seemed poised to recapture the militancy of past resistance movements. It was clear that benign neglect or symbolic recognition of the Treaty were no longer viable political options for either political party. They really only had two choices. They could ignore or suppress the Maori voice, risking serious disorder or active rebellion by Maori. This would also mean abandoning the national ideology of benevolent colonisation and a voluntary cession of sovereignty. Alternatively, they could take the initiative and attempt to defuse Maori discontent by promising to address the Treaty. Labour committed itself to the latter, before it was elected.

What followed has been a massive diversion. No-one can deny there have been changes. But those changes have resulted from consistent pressure levied against a fundamentally reluctant government, not the benevolence of the state. They involve compromises which present a facade of sincerity and progress while retaining the essence of state power intact. Government, at times quite deliberately, has promoted

divisions between the Maori pragmatists, who have taken what's on offer in the belief that something is better than nothing, and the Maori realists, who point out that a parcel of nothing gift wrapped is still a parcel of nothing. None of this is surprising. Colonial economic and political structures have always protected their own interests and defused militant threats to their power through divide and rule. But the process in the 1980s has been more subtle. This time the struggle has been fought primarily at the level of ideology - in particular, in the name of the 'bi-cultural partnership' under the 'principles of the Treaty of Waitangi'. Few Pakeha, caught up in the rhetoric and racist backlash it spawned, have really understood this process and its long-term implications.

'Bi-culturalism' is a policy (although often not a practice) whereby Maori staff and cultural behaviours are accommodated within the broader framework of neo-colonial institutions, while Maori community agencies are given superficial administrative responsibility but remain dependent and subservient to Pakeha power brokers. It is a soft option which avoids addressing Maori self-determination and provides a modern day, more culturally sensitive and saleable form of assimilation. Many who consider themselves progressive stress the need for Pakeha to understand and embrace this 'bi-culturalism' - and assume that the extent of any further concessions to Maori will depend on how far and how fast Pakeha are prepared to move along this path.

But bi-culturalism is not tino rangatiratanga. It explicitly avoids addressing the constitutional relationship between iwi and hapu and the Crown - between the relative authority of tino rangatiratanga and kawanatanga. It therefore has nothing to do with the Treaty. This distinction between biculturalism and the Treaty is crucial. Yet it is constantly glossed over in public debate, and is quite deliberately and cynically blurred in government's propaganda. When combined with the government's rewrite of the Treaty via its 'Crown principles', aided by the interpretations of the courts and the Waitangi Tribunal, the state has sought to excise te tino rangatiratanga from the Treaty debate. This is a short-term strategy which has bought it time, although even this much has been costly politically for Labour within the Pakeha electorate. But refusing to deal with tino rangatiratanga comes as a heavy price. Far from making it go away, this strategy has engendered a frustration and Maori militancy reminiscent of 1984.

### The Pakeha anti-racism Movement

What role did the Pakeha anti-racism movement play in this diversion? While the state may have become more sophisticated, we did not. By and large we either remained locked into the analysis and strategies of a bygone era, or became co-opted by the state. We were at best irrelevant, and at worst counter-productive.

Some continued in protest mode, usually attracting small numbers with minimal impact on media and events. Against the backdrop of a more sophisticated government strategy they were made to appear outmoded and extremist, refusing to acknowledge the significant progress-being achieved through a constructive engagement between Maori and government.

Others continued to work mainly with church, women, unions and other community groups. Over time their work has helped increase awareness of racism and of the Treaty. But accusations that they emphasise the negative, polarise Maori and Pakeha, and unfairly place the responsibility on individual Pakeha for the past and the present are common. The result can be a paralysing sense of personal guilt, requiring Pakeha to reject their own culture and their place as New Zealanders. This is fair comment on some, but not all, such programmes. But even those who have worked constructively have really reached very few, and impacted positively on even fewer.

Many, but not all, Pakeha feminists found parallels between their critique of white male patriarchy and the Maori sovereignty debate in the early 1980s. But that critique rarely moved beyond the 'personal is political' to address economic and political structures, and resulted in liberal reformism or indulgent isolationism.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of this era is the growth in Treaty 'consultancies' and experts working with government agencies, commercial organisations and professional bodies. Some are motivated by a misconception that changing the hearts and minds of personnel will produce a benevolent and enlightened state which, if only the issues are explained to them properly, will see the light and hand over part of their power. Such naivety has no foundation in the history of liberation struggles. True, there have been some positive moves in some departments and agencies, but most have been minor or cosmetic and reversible. The spawning of isolated ministries risks greater fragmentation of marginalised sectors reducing rather than increasing their power. It is true also that these initiatives

have fed a rising tide of expectations, creating tensions within government agencies and disillusionment when those who seek to put the rhetoric into action find a lack of political commitment.

But these are limited benefits. They are a product of attempts to stave off more radical change, not the result of a newfound enlightenment. And they come at a price. The ritual incantation of *bi-culturalism* and the '*principles of the Treaty*' in charters, mission statements and employment policies and workshops by Treaty consultants have bolstered the facade of a bureaucracy and administration which is genuinely interested in change and to the Treaty. Even more insidiously, Treaty workshops have trained bureaucrats to produce more sophisticated and rhetorically robust versions of their previous policies.

More disturbing still are those who have established a financial stake in the policies of bi-cultural enlightenment. These enterprises run a real risk of conflict of interest, compromising the tino rangatiratanga to meet the demands of the market and the explicit or implicit parameters set by their clients. There has been far too little evaluation of the costs and benefits of these enterprises. It is not enough to say that "it's better that we do it than someone less sensitive" or that "Maori people are doing it too". Such consultancies have become part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

### Preparing for the 1990s

If we wish to play a meaningful role in the next decade we must be prepared to rethink our role from scratch. This means a disciplined and systematic analysis of all aspects of the Treaty debate as we move into the 1990s, identification of the major barriers to the exercise of tino rangatiratanga, and the most effective and realistic programme to break those down. This, in turn, requires an understanding of the future direction of the economy, the Maori dynamic and the complex interaction of gender, class and culture within Tauwi.

### **Economic developments:**

Three economic factors will be central in the 1990s: the economic merger with Australia, control of the country's strategic resources and industries by international corporates, and the ongoing impact of a global market economy.

Politicians have just celebrated the merging - or submerging - of New Zealand's economy into Australia's. Already the government is talking of a shared economy, and limited joint political and legal processes. Yet Australia is looking to form an Asian trade block with the likes of Japan, Korea and Taiwan. If it succeeds, Australia will be a small league player. New Zealand will barely make the reserves. Whether or not there is a formal political merger, CER will mean losing what little remaining authority the New Zealand government has over key economic decisions.

Added to this, control of the country's economic infrastructure - communications, transport, energy, finance - is now dominated by a handful of transnational corporations. Whether they are New Zealand or foreign based is irrelevant. The driving force - international corporate profit - will leave most New Zealanders, whether Pakeha or Maori, even more economically vulnerable and powerless than they are now.

At the domestic level both National and Labour are committed to a market economy which will mean increased hardship for almost all Maori and many Tauwiwi. But for Maori the implications of all this go one step further. Growing disparities of wealth and poverty will not be off-set by the minimal 'needs-based' settlements which both political parties are currently promoting as Treaty settlements. And while the Crown may be an unwilling and recalcitrant party to the Treaty, international capital and foreign powers have no Treaty obligations at all. So when the state divests itself of its assets and its remaining control over the New Zealand economy, it also abandons its ability to deliver on the Treaty.

#### **Maori dynamics:**

The Maori dynamic for the 1990s will be volatile. Government moves to co-opt Maori by offering symbolic recognition of a 'bicultural nation' and granting limited powers to tribal authorities gravely under-estimate the historical commitment to tino rangatiratanga. Undoubtedly, some Maori will continue working within Pakeha political and judicial forums either because they believe the Pakeha system can deliver something or because they see no alternative. Increasingly, however, the strategies of litigation, Waitangi Tribunal claims, one-sided negotiations and government-dictated devolution are being challenged as contradictory, costly, compromising and counter-productive. There are clear signs of a strengthening move towards the unilateral exercise of tino rangatiratanga or sovereign authority, including tribal authority over human, natural and economic resources. The dismal

economic outlook for Maori in the 1990s, and the refusal to concede any real autonomy by political parties, will make this an increasingly attractive option for some. Who becomes the government in October 1990 will not determine whether or not this occurs, only its speed and intensity.

The result may well be a classic situation of divide and rule, ensuring the retention of overall Crown authority. But the costs for all will be significant. We need only look to Kanaky, Bougainville and Fiji to understand the longer term consequences if the issue of self-determination is not grappled with. But a country riven by violence and repression is not desired by anyone and is not what is being advocated. It could be avoided and working models of co-existence arrived at by negotiation, if the parties were sincere. But that would require much more than the so-called bicultural solutions currently advocated by liberals and the belligerent stance of both political parties.

#### **Pakeha dynamics:**

If the bi-culturalism of the 1980s has not satisfied Maori demands, it has also antagonised many Pakeha. In the absence of a constitutional dimension to the Treaty debate, focusing on the relationship between Iwi and Hapu and the Crown the Treaty debate has been presented as a racial issue of Maori versus Pakeha. Treaty claims against government were portrayed as cases of individual Maori against Pakeha landowners. Revisionist histories were seen as denouncing our Pakeha forebears and laying the blame for past wrongdoings on the present generation. Media-sensationalised stories of terrorist connections, corruption and ineptitude of Maori administrators have built on racist stereotypes. Gut level reactions, often channelled through the populist media, attacked 'special privileges' for Maori, accused Maori of dispossessing Pakeha landowners and fishers, and challenged the existence of any 'real' Maori. Politicians cynically capitalised on the near-hysteria as reverse discrimination based on skin colour. These negative elements combined to provoke a general defense of Pakeha identity and 'one nationhood', and brought to the surface a barely latent racist hostility.

It is not enough to sanctimoniously dismiss this as red-neck racism. If we seriously want to develop a constructive strategy for the 1990s, given the economic and Maori dynamic outlines above, we must understand where different sectors of Tauwiwi are coming from and why. In particular we must face up to the absurdity of a strategy

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which until now has focused our energies on government, Pakeha power-brokers and liberal middle-class women and men.

Whichever political party is in power in the 1990s international economic demands, the temper of the Pakeha constituency and the ideological base-line of unitary sovereign supremacy mean government will not voluntarily deal with demands for recognition of Maori self-determination until it is forced to. The country's major corporate actors have also made it clear that the Treaty is not just irrelevant, but impedes the efficiency of the market economy to the detriment of the 'national economy' and, they would argue, to Maori themselves. Amongst architects of the global economy, Maori self-determination is dismissed as fantasy. That, too, is unlikely to change in the decade ahead.

The reaction of Pacific island communities is less predictable. While some will see the connection with tangata whenua rights, others will retain their current preference for multi-culturalism. Other immigrant communities, attracted to New Zealand because of its political blandness, quality of environment and social services and potential for economic exploitation, are likely to withdraw - literally or figuratively.

As for the liberal middle-class Pakeha for whom 'taha Maori' and Maori language provided a stimulating new adventure, but no real threat to their power or privilege, we can expect expressions of goodwill, calls for patience and continuing subtle obstruction. Liberal feminists who remain committed to reformist solutions, or dismiss Maori society as sexist, are unlikely to be better allies unless they see something in it for them. More radical feminists who are already marginalised, and who may become more so in the 1990s, may have more to offer.

But judging from the 1980s the most hostile reaction can be expected from Pakeha working class. Bi-culturalism, and government's Treaty policy, antagonised many working class Pakeha women and men. Faced with a struggle to survive under Rogernomics, they saw Maori as gaining special privileges and themselves as the victims of racial discrimination. Maori became the scapegoats for the ills of the country and for the dispossession of those Pakeha already dispossessed by the 'free market'. Increased economic hardship in the 1990s could provoke reactions varying from apathy and scapegoating to anger and rebellion. This could be directed at either government or Maori. The experience of the 1980s gives little cause for optimism that Pakeha working class will support Maori assertion of self-determination in the



next decade unless something dramatic is done. Yet it is at this most polarised level that Maori and Pakeha have the greatest common interest.

#### Future options for Tauwi:

It is clear that current bi-cultural and welfarist solutions will not pre-empt Maori assertion of tino rangatiratanga and the most severe reaction is likely to come from those who already feel most insecure. Avoiding that, or minimising its effect, requires the building of a sense of identity between all those who feel powerless and dispossessed by our current economic and political system. Given the prevailing political apathy within the Pakeha population, that seems a tall order. Yet there are examples of cross-sectoral popular resistance overseas in situations not too different from our own - like the battle over the US-Canada agreement in the last Canadian elections, the recent English and Scottish rebellion over the poll tax. And the 'democracy' movements of Eastern Europe and Asia prove that people can still mobilise to affect their destinies. Faced with political and economic crises in the 1990s such a groundswell of resistance could occur here, and the struggle for New Zealand's national and economic sovereignty could provide a source of common interest between Maori and Pakeha. Pakeha may even embrace the Treaty of Waitangi as a tool in the struggle against economic and political dispossession and seek to ride once more on the backs of Maori. Our challenge will be to convert this willingness to exploit the Treaty into a genuine recognition of the legitimacy of Iwi Rangatiratanga. As women, workers, mothers and human beings we need to understand our own history and our place within this country, and how the current structures oppress us. The potential for constructive change in this country lies in building alliances and an understanding that the struggle against powerlessness, dispossession, disenfranchisement, poverty is common but that the solutions which exist for Tangata Whenua and Tauwi are different.

If this is a viable strategy, where do we start? Some Maori groups are currently calling for a boycott of the coming election - turning a passive no-vote into a positive statement by signing a Tino Rangatiratanga register. Many women and male workers who are not Maori also feel alienated from a social, political and economic system which claims to represent us. There is a potential for hostile and racist reaction. But there is also a real potential to build an understanding of Maori frustrations and demands for self-determination. But it will require sober and realistic strategies which identify clearly the goal and work systematically through the options for achieving them. Doing it wrong will be worse than not doing it at all.

This critique does not suggest that we abandon everything we are currently doing. Protest has its place provided the goals have been clearly identified and the costs and benefits weighed up in relation to the larger picture. Anti-racism workshops are also important. To understand the place of Maori and Tauitihi in this country today we must understand the history of repression. To understand Maori demands we must also understand the Treaty. Nor should we discount moves towards genuine biculturalism. There is an urgent need for greater cultural sensitivity in our society and its institutions, and the Treaty debate should not displace anti-racism initiatives on the personal, cultural and institutional level. Exploring and validating Pakeha identity also has its place. But above all we must become more responsible about what we do. Too often we have made the struggle for Maori even harder. Hit or miss is simply not good enough.