

have been under discussion for a while; White alluded to other approaches much earlier in the 1870s.⁷ As he addressed the sequence of telegrams to Sheehan, not Grey, one might reasonably assume Sheehan was the crucial figure. They had plenty of opportunity to meet; both men lived in Napier, worked on Maori land matters and had business and legal associations with the Maori chief Henare Tomoana. Matters may have been initially thrashed out on such an informal level. Since Grey was the Premier he must have given the final authorisation. His own Maori scholarship, his lengthy acquaintance with White and his public endorsement of the project suggest he was just as involved in the initial decision to proceed. Beyond that his precise role is unclear, but judging from later comments, including a suggestion that he was supposed to have at least supervised the work's English translation, he may have been led to expect a larger place in the project.⁸

The published terms of White's employment listed certain key conditions. These included an annual salary of £450, that all the manuscripts translated for the history project would become government property, and that White would be available for other work in the Native Department. Unfortunately the new government installed after 8 October 1879 was not so generous. To cut his departmental budget the new Native Minister John Bryce turned the matter over to the Colonial Secretary, then responsible amongst other things for New Zealand's external relations. Using a comment by Bastian, that the work would be to the credit of New Zealand and the world, Bryce argued that it ought to become the Secretary's responsibility.⁹ The process toward a radical altering of the work's conditions had begun.

Early in 1880 parliamentary members began to campaign in the House for changes to the planned work,¹⁰ and shortly thereafter Cabinet decided to cut the salary to £200 for three years, with a £500 bonus payable on completion.¹¹ In Parliament the same day, a motion was put to cut the salary to £50 as part of a general drive to slash incomes. The proposers were also unhappy that no cut-off date for the project had been imposed.¹²

The work, however, had its defenders who stressed the intrinsic worth of the historical material. There seemed a genuine concern that if some effort was not made the knowledge would disappear. Grey, though amongst its defenders, questioned the size and scope of the proposed undertaking. In his view preparing a Maori history at that time was unrealistic; the project had to be seen as a collection for some future historical work. Nor did he know how long such an enterprise would take; he cited his own collecting of traditions over the previous thirty-five years.

Maori parliamentarians were lukewarm about the whole venture. Hone Mohi Tawhai, who came from White's old stamping ground around the Hokianga, thought the proposed salary would not be