

Report on Waitangi Hui

Ngaruawahia from 14th September to 16th September 1984

by Charlton Clark

A major event in the Maori world in recent months was the Treaty of Waitangi hui at Turangawaewae Marae, Ngaruawahia, in September, which came up with some important recommendations for the future of race relations in Aotearoa.

In the following pages, *Tu Tangata* presents three articles by Waikato Times Maori Affairs reporter Charlton Clark, two of which that paper published as backgrounders to the Maori people's concern and anger over the treaty and a further article, specially written for *Tu Tangata* by Clark, is a report from the hui itself.

The ink on the Treaty of Waitangi was barely dry before it was in trouble.

The first to feel cheated were Maori landowners who were quite willing to sell land, but found themselves prevented from doing so by the treaty's pre-emption provisions, which the Crown interpreted as meaning it had the sole right to buy Maori land.

Maori chiefs complained that this was not what they had understood when they signed the treaty, but to no avail.

Hobson had little money with which to buy land for the Crown, and in any case was quite candidly cynical about it when pressed by settlers to interpret the pre-emption clause more liberally: "There is no necessity for doing so, for having no competitors in the market, we can do so on our own terms whenever it is convenient to do so."

The irony of it all now is that in those early days many Maori people were queuing to sell land, as settlers were queuing to buy. But events were to show that successive British and New Zealand governments preferred to acquire Maori land on much more favourable terms than would have been the case in a free market.

Little more than a year after the treaty was signed, laws began to be made that were designed to part the Maori people from their land — on pakeha terms. The first of many was the Land Claims Ordinance of 1841. (See accompanying story).

But before condemning the early settlers out of hand as rapacious land grabbers, it is wise to consider the widely differing value systems of Maori and pakeha.

Putting aside for the moment those white people were little better than greedy speculators — and there were enough of them — the pakeha conception of land was a material, economic entity, meant to be used to support material prosperity.

It does not take much imagination to understand their feelings on arriving in a vast and empty land where millions of hectares lay idle — at least in their

terms it was idle. Why shouldn't they be allowed to use it if the Maori people weren't "using" it. There certainly seemed to be plenty to go around.

The Maori people, however, felt about the land in a way that it is probably true to say that pakeha people still find difficult to understand. They endowed it with spiritual qualities, calling the Earth, Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother from whom humanity was originally born to whom it eventually returned. The land was called whenua, which was also given to the afterbirth, which was always buried in the soil under a tree to complete the human life cycle, and preserve the integrity of the unity of Mankind and the Earth.

Land contributed to the mana of the chiefs and tribes who laid claim to it, and mana was one of the most powerful motivating influences in classical Maori society.

There was also a belief among the pakeha people that theirs was an intrinsically superior form of society, and that they had a divine mission to bring the "benefits" of their society to the "ignorant savages" living in cultural and spiritual "darkness". Maori society was not physically pretty to pakeha eyes, and the cultural and spiritual sophistication of classical Maori society was not readily apparent to pakeha people underneath its "primitive" language and technology.

So it was not surprising that the cultural clash soon gave way to physical conflict. In the 1843 Wairau Incident, the Ngati Toa chiefs Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata attempted to stop a surveying party entering land in Marlborough which the tribe claimed. The clash developed into a shoot-out, in which Te Rangihaeata's wife was the first person killed. The surviving surveyors were rounded up and executed, apparently despite Te Rauparaha's pleas for clemency.

War broke out in Northland when Ngapuhi chiefs, led by the treaty's first signatory, Hone Heke, realised that the pakeha now considered they ran the country. The Ngapuhi were eventually

crushed at the battle of Ruapekepeka Pa, the attack on which demonstrated the British hypocrisy — the army hit the pa on a Sunday while the inhabitants were at church, an event the Ngapuhi chiefs thought unthinkable.

In less than 20 years the Maori chiefs moved from being willing to sell land, as long as it was on fair terms, to being alarmed by the rate at which the pakeha was reducing Maori landholdings.

The pakeha's main tool for doing so was the law, and as long as their acquisition of land was within the law, they felt justice had been done.

But the Maori people rapidly came to suspect that justice and British law had little to do with each other. The law was made by the British, administered by the British, and changed by the British for British purposes and according to British values. The Maori people and their values were not considered worthy of a place in the law-making process.

In the same period New Zealand established its own Parliament, and in time more and more MPs were people who had had nothing to do with the treaty.

So when Maori people complained that their rights under the treaty were being violated, it was easy for the new settler government to pass the buck to the British government, which of course passed it straight back, saying it had no rights to interfere in New Zealand affairs.

By the late 1850s the treaty was beginning to slip from pakeha consciousness, but it was still very much a live issue in Maori minds. It was all they had to protect themselves, short of physical force.

In 1858 several Maori tribes formed the Kingitanga and chose their first king, the old Waikato warrior chief Potatau Te Wherowhero, to protect Maori interests against the incursions of the pakeha on Maori land and sovereignty.

Predictably, pakeha people saw the Kingitanga as a threat to the authority of Queen Victoria. Tensions mounted as they viewed the Kingitanga's military might, and imagined it was planning to drive out the pakeha.

In 1860, some tribes held a major hui at Kohimarama, Auckland, to discuss the treaty. If it achieved nothing else, it served to remind pakeha people what Maori people were thinking.

Within a year or two, Maori people in several places were beginning to physically resist the encroachment of pakeha people on to their land.

Tensions rose to war fever as frustrated, land-hungry settlers demanded the interfering savages be removed to prevent their further impeding "progress".

Fighting broke out in Taranaki, and the tribes there appealed to King