

“The Rangatiratanga of the Queen”: Hobson’s printed circular to hapu, 27 April 1840

Context

When Captain Hobson arrived at the Bay of Islands as the delegated representative of Queen Victoria, he was sent as a Consul to the Confederated Tribes, to negotiate for a cession of sovereignty to the Queen that would establish his commission of Lieutenant-Governor¹. The long arm of British law was finally reaching out to New Zealand, to rein in fugitives, to establish civil government among British expatriates, and to bring settled peace and order to the country.

To the British missionaries and law-abiding settlers this was welcome news. To the land sharks, speculators, and various fugitives evading justice, the establishment of British law spelt an end to their liberties and to their schemes.

Even after the Treaty signings at Waitangi, at Te Waimate and at Hokianga, subversive incitement persisted. Europeans whose interests were inimical to law and order in any form, saw that their only hope lay in arousing Maori hostility to affect an overturning of the Treaty, and a repulsion or rejection of the Governor.

Assailed by this dichotomy of counsel, who were Maori leaders to believe? Persuasive, self-interested traders, who cheated them in deals, and speculated in land, or the Protestant missionaries with their track record of integrity? What was the reality of commitment to the Queen and to her Governor, and the future of tribal autonomy? Who, in these times of untested change, was telling the truth?

On the 17th of March 1840, the *Westminster* anchored off Kororareka. On board was the Colonial Surgeon, John Johnston, appointed in February by the Governor of New South Wales to serve under Lieutenant-Governor Hobson. His first impressions on arrival, recorded in his personal journal,² only confirmed reports already received.

“The inhabitants” (of Kororareka) “consisted of Storekeepers and grog sellers... runaway debtors from Sydney, Land Sharks as these were called who came from Sydney to purchase land of the Natives, runaway sailors and convicts, and adventurers from various parts of the world... “

“The arrival of an established Government caused universal consternation. The storekeepers and grog sellers were not certain that their trade would be improved, the land sharks saw their ‘occupation gone’ by the Clause in the Treaty of Waitangi a short time before signed by the Chiefs, which gave the pre-emption of all land to the Queen, nor did they feel quite satisfied that their titles would be granted. The runaway sailors imagined that there might be a possibility of being delivered up to their Ships, and the convicts slunk off to the bush without delay.”

“The officers of the Government were received therefore with fear and dislike which was very visible on our landing. We here first heard of the Lieutenant-Governor having been seized with an attack of paralysis about three weeks before.”

While on board the *Herald* at Waitemata to the south, the Lieutenant Governor had suddenly fallen ill, and had been taken to the mission station at Te Waimate to recuperate. Upon Johnson’s arrival the Colonial Secretary, Willoughby Shortland, immediately instructed him to proceed to Te Waimate to oversee the health and recovery of the Governor, which he did the following day.

Cared for in the mission house of Richard Davis, Hobson steadily recovered his health. Meanwhile, the seeds of distrust continued to be actively sown among Maori by those who still hoped to restore their lost fortunes by rousing disaffection- even martial revolt- against the Governor. Early in April, politics broke in again upon the peace at Te Waimate, firstly as rumours, then next day in more tangible form. Johnson noted all of this in his diary.³

“April 6. We heard from Kororareka that they were in much alarm there from a supposed intention of the natives to attack and plunder the place. I believe this to be a mere invention of the ill-disposed, to embarrass the Government. There was however much dissatisfaction and suspicion of our intentions among the Natives.

April 7. Several chiefs from Caicoi (Kaikohe), Tyami (Taiamai), Waitangi and the vicinity of Waimate waited on the Governor to tell him: " Our hearts are dark and gloomy from what Pakehas have told us. They say, that the missionaries first came to pave the way for the English who have sent the Governor here, that soldiers will follow, and then he will take away your lands and shoot you, which is easy as the Missionaries by making you Christians have unfitted you for defending yourselves." The Governor in answer pointed out the reasons for these men so speaking. He told them that he was commanded by the Queen to prevent them from selling all their lands to white men, instead of coming to take them away that the Queen would only buy such lands from them as they did not require and that they would see that what he said was true. They listened with great attention and one chief rising expressed his belief in what the Governor said in a grave and expressive manner and ended by saying, " Our hearts are made light by the words of the Kawana."

In the evening Neni ...called on the Governor to take counsel with " his father, the Governor" and to tell him that the "wicked Pakehas" were endeavouring to inflame the minds of the Natives against him, using the same arguments as had been expressed to the others. In their graphic mode of speaking by gesture, he made marks on the ground with his finger, and said, " they tell us the English will plant themselves around the Natives thus," pointing to the marks, "and then sweep us away," suiting the action to the word, by passing his hand in a sweeping motion. "But," he said, "I believe your words. I have found truth in the English Gentlemen" (Rangatiras) and I will, if you wish to, seize these wicked men and paddle them up the river in my own canoe and bring them here." He continued "all mouths are against me, accusing me of having brought the English here, but I care not, I know they are come for our own good."

April 8. More chiefs of Caicoi and Hokianga came to see the Governor and to "open their hearts" to him. They recapitulated the same story of the inflammatory speeches of white men; amongst others some Frenchman had told them that the English extirpated the natives in every country to which they came and had done so in Australia and all over the world; but that the French never did!" The Governor in answer said that if that were the wish of the English, they had ships and men enough to kill them all and take the Islands, and to prove that such was not their intention had he not come amongst them with only one servant and a friend (meaning me)- that the Soldiers are come to protect them and well-disposed Europeans from bad men- they expressed themselves satisfied with the "speech of the Kawana" and one Chief in particular spoke with great animation and fluency; and the Governor happening to say that some ill-disposed natives thought to attack him or the English, that all well-disposed and honourable Chiefs who had signed the Treaty of Waitangi would join and defend him."

By the morning of 16 April, Hobson was well enough to travel. The party proceeded to Kerikeri via the missionary cart road, embarking there on a vessel which conveyed them to Paihia. They arrived at Paihia that same evening, where, as Johnson tells us, the Governor had been assigned one of the residences in the Mission compound. Following Easter observance (17-19 April), Johnson was

preoccupied with the trial of Kihī at Kororareka and mentions nothing of the Governor.

Having verbally assured the various Chiefs of the Queen's intentions toward them through her Governor as expressed in the Treaty of Waitangi, Hobson must have decided to consolidate this in an official and written statement of affirmation in their own language. His temporary quarters at Paihia provided the perfect opportunity to consult with the Mission printer, who, being fluent in Maori, would have produced the requisite text. On the Lieutenant-Governor's instruction, one hundred copies in *te reo* were duly printed by William Colenso in Paihia on 27 April 1840, for distribution among the various chiefs and their hapu.⁴

On the evening of the 23rd, Johnson and the Colonial Secretary, Willoughby Shortland, sailed from Paihia for Kaitaia, to obtain further signatures of adherence to the Treaty of Waitangi. It is possible that a handwritten copy or draft of Hobson's letter was taken by Shortland to the meeting held at Kaitaia on April 28, as his address to the assembled Chiefs reflects both the issues brought before the Governor at Te Waimate, and the reassurances subsequently expressed in his Circular. As the Governor's representative, Shortland assured them that:

"The Queen would not interfere with their native laws or customs, but would appoint gentlemen to protect them"; and

"he beseeched them not to listen to the falsehoods of designing men, whose only aim was to bring them into trouble, but to believe that what he said was the truth, as they would ultimately see".⁵

Discussion

As a formal record, Hobson's printed letter to hapu forms an integral part of the process of extended negotiations for adherence to the Treaty after the Waitangi signing. It conveys a verbal and written affirmation of the terms of that agreement, and a formal clarification of the intentions of the Crown at the time. A translation and text of this document, confirming the "Rangatiratanga of the Queen" relative to the Governor and to the rangatiratanga of hapu, is provided below.

In a further communication to hapu, printed (by Colenso) in *te reo* and dated 2 May 1840, Hobson drew the attention of rangatira to a Law of the Queen applicable to all present, prohibiting trade in supplies issued to her soldiers: proclaimed on her behalf in the third year of her reign ("*a i te tuatoru hoki o nga tau o te Rangatiratanga o te Kuini*").⁶ A back translation provided by the printer, Colenso, refers to the Queen's reign as her "chiefship".⁷

The same understanding was graphically reiterated by a chief who had been present at the Waitangi signing, and further explained by Colonel Bunbury to Te Hapuku, on 21 June 1840:

"Before reaching our boat Te Hapuku overtook us, accompanied by a chief from the Bay of Islands district, named Hara. The chief Te Hapuku at first refused to sign the treaty, saying that he was nobody, and that he had heard that those who had signed it at the Bay of Islands had been made slaves. I therefore requested Mr. Williams to ask the chief Hara, who was one of those who had signed, how he came not to be made a slave of, and how many slaves he had seen at the Bay of Islands when he left the place with Mr. Williams' father? He endeavoured then to explain his meaning by a sort of diagram on a piece of board, placing the Queen by herself over the chiefs, as those were over their tribes. I told him it was literally as he described it, not for an evil purpose as they supposed, but to enable her to ensure the administration of justice and good government equally amongst her subjects. Her authority having been already proclaimed over New Zealand with the consent of the greatest number of influential chiefs, he would find that the tribes must no longer go to war with each other, but subject their differences to her arbitration. Strangers and foreigners must no longer be plundered and oppressed by natives, who, in their turn, were not to be injured by white men. It was not the object of H. M.'s Government to lower the chiefs in the estimation of their

tribes, and I said that his signature being now attached to the treaty could only tend to increase his consequence by acknowledging his title. He might therefore sign or otherwise as he thought best for his own interest and that of his tribe".⁸

Comment

These documents affirm the hierarchy proposed to and understood by hapu leaders at Waitangi. The Rangatiratanga of the Queen would not extinguish their chiefships, but under the delegated oversight of her Governor, and with certain necessary limitations, would affirm and acknowledge them. While Hobson would directly administer Pakeha, autonomous hapu would be protected and guided through advocates responsible to the Governor: The Protector of Aborigines and his staff.⁹

The explicit purpose of the Treaty of Waitangi, set out in the Preamble, was to establish a regular peace among all, and a settled form of Government. Such a peace can only be achieved by universal acceptance of, and submission to, a singular paramount authority.

References

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Acknowledgements

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Hobson's Printed Circular to Hapu, 27 April 1840

No Paihia, no te 27 o nga ra o Eperira, 1840.

Paihia, 27 April 1840

E hoa,

Friends,

Kua rongo atu te Kawana tenei ano tetahi Pakeha kino, tutu, aha noa atu, i roto i a koutou, e tohe
The Governor has heard there is a certain evil, mischievous Pakeha, and others like him, going round
ana kia wakaohokia ai o koutou ngakau, kia kino ai koutou ki te Rangatiratanga o te KUINI; e mea ana
among you stirring up your hearts to think evil of the Sovereignty of the QUEEN: they say, these evil
aua Pakeha kino, E tangohia o koutou wenua, a ka takahia rawatia o koutou rangatiratanga, me o
Pakeha, that she will seize your lands, and trample underfoot your chiefships, your customs and your
koutou ritenga tika. Otira hei korero kino tenei, hei korero teka hoki no nga Pakeha kino. Kaua
rights. But this is evil talk, the lying speech of malicious Pakeha. Don't listen to their evil words.
koutou e wakarongo ki a ratou korero kino. He pono pu te korero a te Kawana ki a koutou;
True are the words of the Governor to you: listen to him.
wakarongo mai ki a ia.

Ko a hau, ko te Kawana, e mea ana, He teka rawa te korero i korerotia e nga tangata kino ki a
I, the Governor, assure you, utterly false are the words spoken to you by those evil men.
koutou. Tenei a hau te wakahua atu ki a koutou i taku kupu i korerotia e a hau ki nga Rangatira, i te
I repeat to you here what I said to the Chiefs, at the meeting at Waitangi, at Hokianga also; the
huihuinga ki Waitangi, ki Hokianga hoki; ka tohe tonu te Kawana ki te wakau i nga tikanga, me nga
Governor will always strive to protect the customary rights and all the property of the maori people;
taonga katoa o nga tangata maori; a ka tohe hoki te Kawana kia mau ai te rongo, te atawai, me nga
the Governor commits also to maintain the peace, the harmony, and the prosperity,* of this land.
ahuwenuatanga, i tenei wenua. Heoi, mau e korero tenei pukapuka ki tou hapu.
So, please share this message with your people.

Na to koutou hoa,

From your friend

Na te KAWANA.

From the GOVERNOR.

**ahuwenuatanga: industrious activity, leading to an implied prosperity.*