

That night two further events occurred. On board his ship *Hobson*, assisted by Williams and the British Resident, James Bushby, drew up the final version of the treaty and Williams translated it into Maori. We know from the later evidence of Busby that this version was not that discussed that day because Williams suggested some changes, although we do not know what they were. And down on the beach a dispute had broken out. A distribution of gifts, mainly tobacco, authorised by Hobson had been mishandled. Some chiefs who had not obtained their share left in high dudgeon. Others had not expected a lengthy meeting and had brought no provisions, and they left too. Hobson's gathering of chiefs was leaking away.

The missionaries decided therefore that the meeting must be advanced to February 6 and next morning the remaining chiefs gathered. Hobson was fetched and came in civilian clothes (not in uniform as usually depicted) short of breath and out of temper that his arrangements had been changed without consultation. He snappishly announced that there would be no further discussion, the treaty would be read and the chiefs would sign. At this point Colenso stepped forward and clearly stated that in his view the chiefs did not understand the treaty and should be given time to digest it. At this intervention Hobson lost his temper entirely, and interrupted Colenso to say: "If the native chiefs do not understand it is no fault of mine." And he turned from Colenso to Williams who invited the chiefs to come forward and sign. Nobody moved, and it was not until Williams called them out by name (beginning with Hone Heke) that they moved forward and made their mark. Each was given a blanket and the deed was done.

This was very far from the way we perceive the Treaty of Waitangi, but what did it all mean? At the time, very little, and that different to the various parties. Many of the chiefs of the area had gone home and did not sign. Others subsequently did so but many more did not. In particular the powerful Waikatos would have no part of it and always



Chief advisor to the Ngapuhi, Rev Henry Williams... nobody moved until he called.

referred to its slightlying as "the Ngapuhi thing". Others who had signed subsequently repudiated their signatures. What they thought they were signing is hard to say. They did not sign on February 6 what they had discussed the day before. There are five outstanding texts in English, two of which are different in significant ways from the other three and from each other. There is also a Maori text which is not a translation of the English tests and which is also significantly different. Had the Maoris known what was to come, they would almost certainly not have signed.

It was never taken seriously by the British authorities. Hobson regarded it as a tedious chore. It was subsequently described by one official as "a harmless device for pacifying naked savages." Colonial politicians were even more scathing: Alfred Domett in 1851 expressed his "utter contempt" for it and

that its recognition of Maori right to their land was "absurd"; Colonel Robert Trimble in Parliament in 1881 said that it should be "relegated to the waste paper basket". In 1843 it was produced in a land dispute in Auckland and was declared by the Chief Justice, Sir William Martin, to have no validity in law. In that limbo it has since remained.

Whatever we might think of it today, and whatever significances we may impute to it, within the context of its times the Treaty of Waitangi might very well deserve to be called: The treaty that never was.

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