

# New 'cultural cringe' not the answer

The history of every nation is crowded with revolutions and overthrows. Every legal system arises from ancient conquests. Queen Victoria owed her throne to a revolution which, 150 years before (the same period that separates us from the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi) overthrew the existing dynasty and eventually replaced it with German Protestant usurpers.

Yet Maoris accepted Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth as lawful monarchs. Sooner or later, we must let go of the wrongs of the distant past and deal with the present.

Justice is a social virtue. Its purpose is the common good. As a matter of definition, any treaty settlement which would bankrupt the country, significantly harm our prosperity, and render the State incapable of aiding anyone, including, of course, other Maori claimants, cannot be just.

Yet some Maoris have claimed that "just" settlements for them would mean national bankruptcy, thereby preparing the way for future claims to compensate for an "unjust" settlement now. Other parties have legitimate interests. Justice involves mutual forbearance, not blind restitution.

Innocent third parties — European New Zealanders — have purchased, for good value, lands that were perhaps unjustly acquired long ago. These lands may have changed hands many times, and over time the common prosperity has been greatly enhanced.

These third parties have legitimate moral interests and rights. To remedy one injustice by ignoring those rights creates another, more recent and graver injustice. The simple passage of time renders justice a complex question.

Besides, what is to be restored? European plants and animals, labour and skill, knowledge and civilisation have made an overwhelming contribution to our country. They have immea-

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surably enhanced the usefulness and value of land. Even the poorest of us lives far more comfortably than pre-European Maoris. To insist, as some Maoris do, on the return of land that is equivalent to land taken is a grave injustice.

Almost the only Crown lands remaining lie in the conservation estate. Those lands are not the Crown's private property, but belong to us all. They are also nearly all economically unproductive, no suitable base for a prosperous future. State-owned enterprise lands would be much better for settling genuine claims.

To give away our conservation lands and make us trespassers in the land of our birth would also be an injustice to long-suffering nature. We European New Zealanders are gradually learning that we do not own the natural world. This is a natural truth. Maoris should learn it also.

We have an inferiority complex. Once our "cultural cringe" was to Europe. Now it is to Maoridom. The racial masochism and unquestioning assumption of guilt put forward by some sincere but misguided European New Zealanders is not only pathetic, but worrying.

The deafening silence of the anti-apartheid movement in this country

after Colonel Rabuka's racist coup in Fiji surely made it clear that the motivation of the anti-racism movement was not just opposition to racism, but also the racist belief that brown people are always right and white people are always wrong.

Many — not all — European treaty activists are people unfamiliar with their own ancestral culture. They are somehow rootless, disliking what they themselves are, and searching for some non-European image of perfection to worship. There is a good dose, also, of self-flattery, and of the sanctimonious holier-than-thou attitudes which are always prominent in the New Zealand puritan and wowsy tradition.

Some, doubtless, will find this observation offensive. It is no more offensive than being labelled an "eco-Nazi" and "eco-Fascist" as at least one prominent Maori leader labels conservationists, simply because they doubt the wisdom of handing our conservation lands over to Maori.

I have lost count of the times my own views have been attributed to some defect in my character or personality. To remark on the gullibility and inferiority complexes of some of my fellow-citizens is only self-defence.

European civilisation was hardly perfect. Yet Maori society, for all its poetry and courage (which the British had also), was a warlike, environmentally destructive stone-age culture with social stratification which any democrat would condemn, and where a slave's life was worth very little.

Uncritical worship of Maori society is no basis for future good race relations. Neither is the instilling, in those of part-Maori descent, of a never-to-be satisfied belief that they have been wronged.

The Treaty of Waitangi is still, mercifully, not part of our law. It has legal influence only in so far as various statutes require its elusive "principles" to be respected.

Courts have on occasions been guilty of some disgraceful political adventuring in applying treaty "principles". Even so, the courts still hold that the Treaty has no independent legal validity, that the relationship between Maori and the Crown is only "akin to" a partnership, and that the "partnership" is not of equals. If we do nothing, however, the myth-making now occurring round the Treaty may lead to its appearance in future as some surprising legal principle.

We must be compassionate and just; but we must not be fools. God calls on us to be good, not to be stupid.

Long before the Maoris settled here, the Anglo-Saxons learnt that paying the Danes off with gold only prompted them to break their agreements and return demanding more. Sooner or later, one simply has to say "No".

Perhaps some who share these views are racist. That cannot be helped. No idea is responsible for its followers; the noblest ideals can be perverted to bad ends. There is certainly abundant racism among pro-treaty activists. Are not those who are desiring Maori rule for New Zealand also racist?

We are told daily of mysterious spiritual links between Maori and the land, which no sensitive European, even a sixth-generation New Zealander, can hope to understand. Is it genetic? Presumably. Who am I to say?

Treaty claims complaining of genuine injustices have very probably all been lodged already. Many claims we see now have nothing to do with justice, but are merely wishes in treaty disguise.

The decency and reasonableness of European New Zealanders is mistaken for weakness and appeasement. It is time to bite the bullet. For the common good and future racial harmony, the Waitangi Tribunal and the whole insane, lucrative treaty industry should be abolished. It is time, too, to have a Minister of Justice who is concerned for justice for everyone.