Te Whiti o Rongomai

Parihaka

Te Whiti and Tohu

Jim Consedine recounts the story of Parihaka – a black stain on British colonial history, yet a wonderful story of a Maori campaign for peace and justice

Though the lions rage, still I am for peace… Though I be killed, I yet shall live; though dead, I shall live in peace which will be the accomplishment of my aim.
Te Whiti o Rongomai (*5 November 1881*)

If one were to ask any group of New Zealanders to name iconic figures in their history, certain names might readily spring to mind: Edmund Hillary, Janet Frame, Ernest Rutherford, Michael Joseph Savage, Whina Cooper. Perhaps also James K. Baxter, Colin Meads, Jean Batten. Peter Snell, or Kiri Te Kanawa. How many, I wonder, would name Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi?

Yet at one time, the names of Te Whiti and his compatriot Tohu were as well known in New Zealand as are the names of Jonah Lomu and Helen Clark today. For in the late 1800s, Te Whiti and Tohu co-ordinated a series of daring non-violent campaigns to halt land confiscation, catching the imagination not just of the nation but becoming widely known throughout the British Empire.

Along with the creation of our welfare state and nuclear free laws, knowledge of these remarkable men and their leadership at Parihaka should form part of the spiritual DNA of every person born in this country. Their movement of non-violent resistance to state tyranny deserves to be placed alongside the movements a century later in India and the US led by Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jnr. Indeed, there is evidence Gandhi knew of and was inspired by the resistance at Parihaka.

The context

In the 1860s, Te Whiti and Tohu had emerged as natural leaders of their people, grounded in the spiritual traditions of Maori as well as the Christian Scriptures. "Te Whiti and Tohu... were Christian pacifists and promoters of spiritual and economic growth."

By 1860, the number of European settlers matched the number of Maori and the government felt obliged to supply land to new settlers. They made it clear they were willing to use force to colonise the North Island if other means failed. The New Zealand Settlers Act (1863) made it possible to confiscate land if Maori refused to co-operate in its purchase. They were deemed to be in rebellion. Although warned by the judiciary that such confiscations were illegal, the government confiscated three million acres (1.2 million hectares), much of it in Taranaki where Te Whiti and Tohu lived with their people at Parihaka.

With a further inflow of settlers in the 1870s, the government set its sights on acquiring further large land blocks including Parihaka. Te Whiti had observed at close quarters the land wars in the 1860s in Waitara and elsewhere, where Maori had taken up arms to defend their land and lost both their lives and the land. He saw violence as counterproductive.

The campaign

By early 1879, it was clear that government greed for land knew no bounds. A new strategy was required by Maori. On 26 May 1879 a campaign led by Te Whiti and Tohu was launched whereby across Taranaki a disciplined corps of ploughmen started to plough settler's land using either horse or oxen-drawn ploughs. Te Whiti's instructions were clear:

Go, put your hands to the plough. Look not back. If any come with guns and swords, be not afraid. If they smite you, smite not in return. If they rend you, be not discouraged. Another will take up the good work.

If evil thoughts fill the minds of the settlers and they flee from their farms to the town, as in the war of old, enter not… into their houses, touch not their goods nor their cattle. My eye is over all. I will detect the thief, and the punishment will be like that which fell upon Ananias.

The first modern planned campaign of non-violent resistance to state tyranny was under way. As the inevitable arrests occurred and ploughmen were imprisoned, others took their place. The plough protests started at Oakura, spread to Pukearehu and then to Hawera. It was a province-wide campaign. Te Whiti maintained that that he was not

remembered

- Prophets of Non-violence

Tohu Kakahi

targeting the settlers "but ploughing the belly of the government".

The government's response was drastic. By August 1879, about 200 had been taken into custody. In all, about 420 were to be imprisoned. Of these, only 40 were ever sent for trial. These were eventually held for 12 months in prison in New Plymouth. The remaining ploughmen were imprisoned without trial and sent to prisons in Dunedin, Hokitika, Lyttelton and Ripapa Island. In effect, the rule of law had been suspended.

The government then expanded its push for land. A force of 600 armed constabulary started to build roads right through some of the most fertile land in Taranaki. Without consultation, the constabulary pulled down cultivation fences around gardens to allow for roadways. Properly fenced gardens were essential to Maori health and economic well-being. They had huge acreage planted and stock to feed the several thousand who lived there. By June 1880, the new roads had reached the outskirts of Parihaka.

The resisters changed tack. As soon as the fences were pulled down, Maori rebuilt them. Inevitably the surveyors' pegs were removed. Again the government moved to arrest the 'fencers' as they came to be called. In all, 216 were taken into custody. None ever appeared in court. They were simply shipped to prisons in the South Island. This was illegal.

News of these imprisonments was widely reported in England, and pressure was brought to bear on the government to act more justly. Ignoring recommendations from the West Coast Commission, a pro-government tribunal set up to investigate ways of dealing with the land issue, the government decided to take all the remaining land it wanted including the Parihaka block which the Commission had set aside as a reserve. New legislation pushed through in parliament allowed for imprisonment without trial with up to two years hard labour. The scene was set for the final confrontation.

On 5 November 1881, an armed military force of 1589 armed constabulary and volunteer militia invaded and occupied the unprotected Parihaka. Native Affairs Minister John Bryce himself, mounted on a white charger, with sabre and in military uniform, led the assault. On the marae, 2500 unarmed adults sat waiting with Te Whiti and Tohu in their midst. The soldiers were made to walk past rows of children playing with tops and dancing and singing, past rows of women to where the men waited. The two leaders along with several others were arrested and led away. They did not resist.

In the days that followed, 1600 people were forcibly dispersed, while 600 were allowed to remain. Houses and crops were destroyed, animals slaughtered. After Parihaka was destroyed, the constabulary fanned out over the countryside to wreak more extensive damage. Still there was no violent resistance. Not one shot was fired, not one life lost. The spirit of non-violence prevailed.

Te Whiti and Tohu were charged with sedition. Te Whiti told the judge: "It is not my wish that evil should come to the two races, My wish is for the whole of us to live peaceably and happily on the land." Both were sent to Addington Prison in the South Island where they served 16 months. Upon release, both returned to Parihaka, which in the mid-1880s rejuvenated but to nothing like its previous status. Te Whiti continued to preach non-violence and promote harmony with the settlers and was imprisoned twice more over land issues. Both Te Whiti and Tohu died in 1907. Remarkably, only two weeks separated their deaths.

Conclusion

The ongoing spiritual legacy of Parihaka is one of living in harmony with the land and humanity. It is also a legacy of non-violent resistance and a belief in the peaceful and respectful coexistence of Maori and Pakeha. Given the impact of these two men on historic events and given the almost universal disquiet at levels of violence in contemporary society, one wonders why neither Te Whiti nor Tohu have gained the status of iconic New Zealanders along with Ed Hillary and the rest. Surely they are role models for what most want our society to become – just, fair, peace-loving, non-violent.

Why isn't their story and the story of Parihaka as well known as the Gallipoli story? Why isn't the Christian-led non-violent Parihaka resistance a compulsory part of Religious Education programmes in our schools? And finally, why is 5th November still known as Guy Fawkes Day when it could be Parihaka Day? ■

Parihaka c

. . . by students from Chri

In a gesture of solidarity and peace, students from the four Christian secondary schools of Dunedin gathered around the World Youth Day Cross to commemorate and acknowledge the suffering of the people of Parihaka. On the initiative of DRS Colin McLeod and chaplain Fr Gerard Aynsley, students from Kavanagh College invited their fellow students to a joint procession and ceremony based on the Emmaus story *and the* Feeding of the 5000. *The invitation was enthusiastically accepted by the other three schools.*

In an historic occasion on 11 June, the four Christian schools of Dunedin came together around the World Youth Day Cross to remember the atrocity wrought upon the people of Parihaka, and the Parihaka prisoners brought to Dunedin. St Hilda's Collegiate School, Kavanagh College, John McGlashan College and Columba College gathered at the Andersons Bay inlet to learn more about the cross. From here the group processed across to *Rongo*, the monument dedicated to those who lost their lives imprisoned in Dunedin between 1881 and 1898, and those who supported them.

After a mihi to acknowledge the people and the events, the students sung *Purea Nei a Waiata* to clear and free those things that bind and restrict us. This was followed by prayers read by students of each of the four schools. After a final waiata we returned to the inlet to read the Gospel and to share food before returning to our respective schools.

The World Youth Day cross has been carried by young people around the world including Ground Zero in New York, Rwanda, Kosovo, the border between North and South Korea, and many other places of human suffering including Aramoana, near Dunedin, site of NZ's worst mass murder which took place in 1990.

The cross is a reminder to us of the call to peace and that Christ chose to stand with those who were outcast, thought less of, and had no rights in their society.

Many students reported a sense of peace and a sense of purpose in the public acknowledgment of both the service and the procession of the cross. It was particularly powerful to witness the young people sharing the carrying of the cross and sharing food together.

Fr Gerard Aynsley, Katrina Kerr-Bell and Colin MacLeod played significant

Photos: Marelda Gallaher

celebrated

istian schools in Dunedin

roles in making this possible, with Colin enabling a powerful yet simple statement of faith and unity to happen. The Chaplains of St Hilda's, John McGlashan, and Columba all appreciated the invitation shown by the young people of the schools, participating enthusiastically to this very different call. In many ways it symbolised that as Christians we have more in common than we might appreciate.

In the mihi we heard the words imprinted on Te Whiti's tomb: *He honore he kororia ki te Atua, he maungarongo ki te whenua, he whakaaro pai ki nga tangata katoa* – that is, "Honour and glory to God, peace upon the land, and good will to all people". Those who perished unjustly rose to the challenge of their leaders by acting in peace and in a spirit of love. Te Whiti and Tohu taught from the wisdom of their ancestors, and their understanding of Christian teaching. They would have supported the symbol of hope and the unity of different faiths acknowledging their sacrifice and the love that motivated them. It was a contrast perhaps to their experience of some who claimed to be Christians and instead caused them to suffer.

Te Whiti O Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi built the Pa at Parihaka as a place to support those forced from their homes and land. The Pa gathered the dispossessed from all areas of Aotearoa-New Zealand creating a community of peace, to resist more loss of ancestral land, and to maintain their identity. Many of the non-violent methods used by Te Whiti and Tohu were known and used by both Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

The Parihaka leaders died in 1907.

Richard Kerr-Bell