



## THE PARIHAKA PROJECT 1996 - 2007

### The Present Situation

On 31st October and 5th November every year, our nation celebrates two festivals, Halloween and Guy Fawkes Day. Since Halloween is relatively new to NZ, many adults still look incomprehensibly at the little figures "trick or treating" at their front doors. The children, however, have learned about it from American TV programs or, in recent years, at school.

Guy Fawkes Day most adults do comprehend, as a night for fireworks and a bonfire. It celebrates the capture and execution of Catholic activist Guy Fawkes for his attempt in 1605 to blow up England's Parliament building. Many NZers, I suspect, would rather cheer his attempt than his capture, but only because they don't know he was trying to assassinate a lot of people - the Protestant king (James V), his queen, his son and his cabinet ministers. Both festivals are colourful, especially for children, and can be a lot of fun but what values are they communicating from generation to generation?

### Halloween

What exactly is Halloween? The name simply means the "e'en" or evening before November 1st, the church festival of "All Saints", so it is "hallowed". Like Christmas Eve, Halloween is only significant in the church calendar because of the day after. However, outside of the church, October 31st does have its own significance. It is the celebration of Samhain, or summer's end in the Northern Hemisphere. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "trick or treating" originated in the ancient practice of placating demons in order to protect the following year's crops: "In the north of England, Oct 31 is (still) observed as "mischief night" marked by tiresome tricks with no serious underlying purpose, meaning or history... Mischief-making on this occasion by boys and young men took such forms as overturning sheds and outhouses and breaking windows, and damage to property was sometimes severe. In later years the occasion has come to be observed by young children, who go from house to house demanding 'trick or treat' " In the USA, the festival gained so much ground that most of October is spent marketing it but do we actually want this in NZ? At best it is irrelevant in the Southern Hemisphere and at worst, it is a tacit acceptance of occultic spirituality and extortion. After all, what are the spells and potions of witchcraft? A calling on spirits and chemicals to unashamedly manipulate people. The children's part in Halloween festivities is to dress up as ghosts, goblins or witches and go in the evening from door to door in their neighbourhoods, asking for "treats" such as lollies or biscuits and "tricking" those who won't oblige. My question is, what values and motives are being communicated and encouraged in this fun-time for the children?

## Guy Fawkes Day

When I was a kid, we stuffed old clothes to make a "guy", an effigy of Mr Fawkes, and carted it from door to door in the morning before school, asking for money by chanting:

"Guy Fawkes Guy! Stick him up high,  
Stick him on a lamppost, and then let him die"

I can't remember the middle part but the last lines went:

"A loaf of bread to stuff his head,  
And a jolly good fire to roast him.  
Christmas is coming, and the geese are getting fat,  
Please put a penny in the old man's hat,  
If you haven't got a penny, a ha'penny will do,  
If you haven't got a ha'penny, God bless you!"

The money was to buy the fireworks we set off at night around the bonfire where the effigy was burned. Why did we do this? Because the festival was established by an act of the Protestant Parliament in 1606, to rub the noses of English Catholics in their failure. In recent years, most of us have civilised these rituals by excluding the burning of the "guys", but again I have to ask, what ideals are being passed on to the children? Do they learn from Mr Fawkes that we should change the political system by gun-powder, tempting though that may be, or from religious politicians that we should burn our opponents in effigy, ad infinitum? Worthy of Celebration?

There's no doubt that these celebrations fill a hole in our national need for festivals, fun and a bit of exotic colour. But why are we still celebrating the death of a villain 400 years ago on the other side of the planet, and the end of the Northern Hemisphere's summer when ours is actually beginning? Are we in NZ today so lacking as a people that we have to import another nation's history and culture? Well, we are if we have to lean on our TVs instead of our imaginations AND if we don't know our own country's history well enough to recognise an event here truly worth celebrating! On November 5th, 1881, the pa at Parihaka was invaded by a rogue government. This day saw the arrest of their two leaders, Te Whiti O Rongamai and Tohu Kakahi, two of the most determinedly peace-loving leaders of all time. From 1869, under the guidance of Te Whiti and Tohu, the people of Parihaka had actually practised peaceful protest and resistance to injustice here in NZ by beating their "swords into ploughshares".

To understand just how far ahead of the times they were, in the Wild West on October 26, 1881, Wyatt Earp and Doc Halliday were gunning down the Clanton gang at OK Corral; Geronimo and his Apaches were still on the war-path. Mahatma Gandhi, India's greatest hero of the peaceful resolution of conflicts, was still a teenager. Mahatma means "great soul" and today he is rightly recognised and honoured internationally. In the 1970's the Americans created a new national holiday to celebrate the life and works of Martin Luther King Jr., and his "I have a dream..." still echoes around the world but what of New Zealand's "great souls" of a hundred years earlier? Many NZers, let alone other nations, have not yet learned of the extraordinary courage, ideals and humour of these two leaders and their community and I believe the time has come to change that. What follows is necessarily a very brief synopsis but for more details, Dick Scott's book "Ask That Mountain" and Hazel Riseborough's "Days of Darkness" are excellent and readily available (see footnote 1).

## The Day

The invasion of Parihaka on that Guy Fawkes Day of 1881 was accomplished by about 1,500 volunteer troops consisting of infantry and cavalry, with an artillery piece to demolish any fortifications. There were no fortifica-

tions, nor were there any armed Maori warriors. What the advancing troops encountered were children, playing stick games on the road! Behind the children stood their mothers, aunts and grandmothers, singing and dancing with poi. Behind the women stood all the men, including Te Whiti and Tohu, insisting that they would not fight, no matter what the provocation. The troops were plainly unnerved by this unprecedented event.

The troops were led by the self-proclaimed "Honest John" Bryce, Minister for Native Affairs who rode on a white horse for the occasion.

Dick Scott writes that during the ensuing tense stand-off, a dog came out of the pa and, watched in fascination by all, wandered up to the top of hill overlooking the village where the cannon was located, primed and ready to fire. There, to the huge amusement of the locals, he first sniffed and then cocked his leg on the cannon's wheel, doubtless demonstrating what many of them were feeling! The kaumatua, however, say this actually happened in a dream the preceding night, Te Whiti interpreting it to his waiting people as a confirmation that the troops would not open fire and urging them to hold true to their principles of non-violence.

The troops didn't open fire but they did make their way through the crowd to arrest Te Whiti and Tohu, charging them with sedition (a serious form of disturbing the peace). Two days later, on 7th November 1881, the troops of the armed constabulary began to loot the village and rape some of the women, infecting them with venereal diseases, tear down the meeting house, destroy the acres of crops and forcibly disperse the citizens.



#### The Crime?

And what exactly was the crime of this community? Disturbing public order by insisting that the courts of law needed to hear the disputes over the land being illegally occupied by the European settlers. Te Whiti and Tohu could see that armed opposition to the encroaching new settlers was only effective in the short term, since the settlers could then call on the troops to restore order and the land could then be "legally" confiscated. The New Zealand Settlements Act of 1863 authorised the confiscation of lands from those in "rebellion" in any district of NZ. (See footnote 2). Te Whiti's answer to this dilemma for the Maori was peaceful protest designed to draw attention to the injustice.

Two years earlier, in May 1879, volunteers under Tohu's direction had begun to plough the disputed land, ignoring the European boundaries and crossing from farm to farm. The settlers then had called for the constabulary to remove the peaceful ploughmen who were under strict instructions to not

resist at all, not even to use bad language or insults. However, since any charge of trespassing would have meant the courts examining the real issue of land ownership, no charges were laid against the supposed tres-

passers! In direct defiance of the very law they were supposed to be upholding, that no one can be held in custody without charge, the constabulary proceeded to take the ploughmen into custody. As fast as they did that, new ploughmen volunteered to the work until about 200 men had been so detained.



Several months later, the N.Z. Parliament passed the Maori Prisoners' Trials Act which was back-dated to suspend the legal rights of these prisoners and to declare that whatever measures the settlers had had to adopt to deal with the threat to their well-being were deemed to be legal! When asked what he was trying to do with the ploughing, Te Whiti replied that he was "ploughing Governor Grey's conscience" but the Governor did not appear to have had one in this instance. Te Whiti and Tohu then developed another strategy, putting up fences around their land, fences which went across the new roads the settlers were building to give themselves better access. As often as the surveyors would tear down the fences and start again with the road, the people of Parihaka would wait until they had gone home, restore the fences and replant the land. The armed constabulary began to arrest the fencers until 216 had been sentenced to two years jail with hard labour for obstructing a thoroughfare through their own land. It was this quiet endurance and peaceful response that eventually drove the rogue government to arrest these "trouble-makers" on November 5th, 1881.

"There were no fortifications, nor were there any armed Maori warriors... What the advancing troops encountered were children, playing stick games on the road.."

What's To Celebrate?

What would the children and the nation gain if we were to celebrate this event? (i) True heroes to be emulated. Te Whiti's motto was "Peace on earth and goodwill among men". He and Tohu knew that European settlement was inevitable and actively welcomed the newcomers with these words. Their goodwill extended to re-



nouncing armed violence as a way of resolving conflicts and to instead teaching love and peaceful negotiation within the law (compare this with Halloween and Guy Fawkes!) The children of Parihaka were also heroes - it was after all the children who faced the armed troops that morning. (ii) A better sense of who we are as a people in NZ today, unafraid to face past injustices and honour those proven to be right. The Parihaka way of resolving disputes points the way ahead for us as a nation, calling for and acknowledging aroha/goodwill and justice amongst Maori and Pakeha. (iii) An event in our own history truly worth celebrating, upholding and teaching our children excellent values and motives. We shouldn't be afraid of directing the idealism of our young people.

#### The Celebration

How could we celebrate the day? We could aim to add a little bit to the previous six days so it's a week of celebrations, retaining all the fun, fireworks and lollies for the children, with the colour and excitement of the present but celebrating the values, hard work, self-discipline and community of Parihaka. Focussing on our children, starting on 30th October we could have some brief daily activities in every school in the country to foster a community spirit and the voluntary service of others: (i) On the 30th, every child can hear the story of Parihaka (ii) Leading up to this week, schools (Parent Support groups) can take note of elderly or shut-in neighbours whom the children could help on the 31st for a half-day e.g. mowing lawns, clearing sections, walking dogs, helping with shopping or errands (iii) Those helped must not be allowed to pay but can reward the children with lollies or treats (iv) For the rest of the week, a daily session bringing together many elements of peace-making already in the schools, such as peer mediation, communication skills and anger management. (iv) The climax of the week will be each city's fireworks display on 5th November.

#### The Campaign

We would need to ensure a co-operative and co-ordinated approach to ensure everybody in the country knows of the events at Parihaka and why we want to celebrate.

We already have:

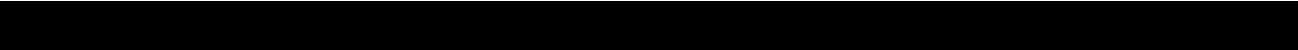
(i) the blessing of the kaumatua, kuia and community of Parihaka (ii) the support of many prominent leaders of our society including the Prime Minister, Members of Parliament from most of the parties, prominent Maori, civic and business leaders, journalists and artists. (iii) a high profile for Parihaka in the media thanks to the Parihaka Exhibition in Wellington City Gallery, a spontaneous emergence of articles in "Grace" & "Listener", "City Voice" and many other newspapers, TV documentaries in "Epitaph" and "Pounamu", and frequent mentions on radio programs and in speeches by, for example, our new Governor General (iv) support from some businesses with a commercial interest in the promotion of festivals e.g. Dick Hubbard, leader of Businesses for Social Responsibility; Stephen Tindall of The Warehouse has promised his support as soon as we can show him there is a wide enough interest in changing the festivals. We can build on these and co-ordinate efforts.

We have yet to do:

(i) to influence our education system, via Teacher Training Colleges and the Waitangi Tribunal resource kits, to teach more of our own history to the children from their earliest days at school. At the moment our education system is actively and powerfully promoting Halloween, cashing in on American TV's children's programs. This can be changed as a policy and alternative resources provided. (ii) an achievable goal is that Wellington's annual city-wide fireworks on 5th November be redesignated as a tribute to the people and message of Parihaka, in response to the exhibition, "Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance". (iii) a feature film, rather than a documentary, to tell the story accurately and powerfully in epic style, like "Gandhi" or "Chariots of Fire", for international release. Roger Randall-Cutler, Academy Award-winning producer of "The Commitments", is willing to produce it and is related by marriage to Ngati Te Whiti.

Footnote 1: Dick Scott, "Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka" (Reed/Southern Cross, 1975); Hazel Riseborough, "Days of Darkness: Taranaki 1878-1884" (Allen & Unwin, 1989)

Footnote 2: It was found by the Royal Commission on Confiscated Lands in 1928 that almost three and a half



million acres were initially confiscated, of which approx. 800,000 were eventually legally purchased and another 800,000 were returned to Maori owners, so that over one million acres remained unfairly confiscated. Visit the Waitangi Tribunal's official findings on Parihaka

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