

Pendulum theory

– Danny Keenan

There are trends through New Zealand history that swing back and forth, almost like a pendulum.

That's how it has been with power over Maori. Most of the time the Crown holds all of that power. But, occasionally, Maori have been allowed a brief share – or prospects of a share.

Then the power swings right back to the Government once more.

Here are some examples.

In 1844, Governor FitzRoy suggested setting up Native Districts, places where Maori custom and lore might be safeguarded. Maori were keen.

But London wouldn't hear of it. Instead, they sacked FitzRoy.

In 1852 the new New Zealand constitution ruled out Maori getting a vote. A section of that constitution, however, said that certain districts could be set apart for Maori to live their own lives – and to take control of their own affairs.

That bit, at least, sounded hopeful – a degree of autonomy for Maori, perhaps.

But Governor Grey vetoed it.

His idea was that Maori were to be assimilated into Pakeha society.

Again in 1858, the Native Minister, C W Richmond, dangled autonomy in front of iwi. His plan seemed to offer an eleventh hour alternative to war – but the minister's Government ruled it out.

In the 1860s, Grey offered Maori new institutions which, on the surface again, seemed to offer limited autonomy. But by now, Maori were suspicious.

They saw Grey's offer as a veiled attack on the Kingitanga – a back-door way to whittle away the king's authority. They weren't having any of it.

Nor were they impressed by moves the Native Minister, John Ballance, made in 1884. By now, Maori had become quite cynical about Pakeha motives.

Again, the 1900 land and health legislation promised much, and Maori

tried to make the new systems work.

That didn't last long, though. Within five years, the power had swung back to the Crown.

But Maori stuck at it, with each generation producing leaders who fought for autonomy. The 1930s and 1940s were no exception. At the forefront of the struggle in those days, was Paraire Paikea.

Paraire was born at Otamatea, near Kaipara in 1894.

His dad was Karaka Paikea of Te Uri o Hau and Ngati Whatua, and his mum was Tuhi Hariru, also of Ngati Whatua.

Paraire did all right at his native school – and won scholarships to St Stephen's and Wesley College.

He then studied for the Methodist ministry and was ordained in 1920, the year after he married Hinerupe Paraone.

But it was the new vision of Wiremu Ratana, rather than John and Charles Wesley, that won him over. From 1924 on, he was a Ratana man.

He was based in Northland and co-ordinated the movement's activities there, and in 1927 he moved to Ratana Pa.

The next year, Paraire entered politics, and was nominated for Northern Maori for the Ratana party.

He dipped out then, so he put his energies into seeking redress of Maori grievances, and Maori autonomy.

The movement asked him to work for Ngati Whatua to help their case for the return of Orakei.

He also became private secretary to T W Ratana himself and travelled with him on visits around New Zealand.

In 1931 Paikea was again a candidate for Northern Maori. He lost once more, but polled strongly against the sitting member, Tau Henare.

When Eruera Tirakatene won Southern Maori for Ratana, Paraire Paikea went to Wellington to help set

up his Parliamentary office. He again failed to win the Northern seat in 1935, but in 1936 Ratana allied himself with Labour.

Paikea now devoted energy to Labour Party politics and, in fact, was the key man in strengthening the relationship between Labour and Ratana.

He was also building a formidable network of committees nationwide, and in 1938 again won the nomination for Northern Maori. This time, he won.

Paraire became a dynamic MP. He was especially active on the Native Affairs committee, and championed Maori health and housing.

By 1941 his influence had grown to the point where he was elected that year to the Cabinet, with responsibilities for Maori.

All along, he'd nurtured the conviction that Maori villages and marae should have the authority to run their own affairs.

He pictured a vast network of tribal and hapu committees, working together, supporting each other, providing services for Maori more efficiently than the Government was doing – or could do. The Crown should merely play a support role, he believed.

In October 1939, the Government had agreed to Maori requests to form an infantry battalion of Maori soldiers. Within three weeks, 900 volunteers had enlisted, and the Maori Battalion set sail for the war in May 1940.

But as the war outlook grew more grave, the War Cabinet decided that more Maori war effort was needed. It asked the Native Department – a Pakeha-run bureaucracy – to supply a list of eligible Maori males.

It couldn't. So it asked Paraire Paikea. He jumped at the chance, as he saw it, for Maori to exercise greater control over their own affairs.

Out of that, the Maori War Effort Organisation was born.

Pendulum

Within six months, 315 tribal committees had been formed, with 41 executive committees to co-ordinate their work. All the tribes were involved – and things were done the Maori way, by Maori volunteers.

And that system delivered, too – the numbers of Maori enlisting shot up.

The Maori War Effort Organisation took on extra responsibilities. The tribal committees encouraged food production, they sussed out housing conditions, paid attention to education, job training and land use.

They appointed women welfare officers to help young Maori women who'd come to the cities to work.

The War Effort Organisation also helped keep essential industries ticking over. It knew who was who in their communities – and how best to deploy them. In some areas, meatworks and dairy factories wouldn't have been able to function without its help.

At first, the Government gave the organisation a six-month life. But in January 1943, Paraire Paikea asked for an extension.

It was, he said, a “revolutionary experience” for Maori to be given so much control over their affairs. And that was precisely why it had been so effective.

Thanks to its efforts, more than 27,000 Maori enlisted or were placed in an essential war industry.

In April 1943, Paikea again appealed to the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, for an extension.

He said the war organisation “is the greatest thing that has happened in the history of the Maori people, since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

“They feel that in the organisation lies the future prosperity, development, and happiness of their people.”

Then, while driving home to Ratana one evening in April 1943, Paraire fell ill. He was driven to Wanganui Hospital, but died the next day.

When Paraire died, the best advocate for autonomy in his generation was gone.

By mid-1943 the army had enough Maori recruits – and couldn't see the justification for retaining Maori recruiting officers. Treasury recommended winding up the organisation.

The Native Department, and its Pakeha minister, H G Mason, were keen to see it shut down. They resented intruders on their turf – even though the intruders were so productive and helpful.

The Maori MPs, meanwhile, hoped that the Maori war effort would stiffen

the Labour Government to honour a pledge made in 1925, to deliver *mana Maori motuhake*.

But the forces for compromise were overwhelming – and the Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act of 1945 left intact the all-Pakeha Board of Native Affairs, and the Department of Native Affairs.

Even though the tribal and executive committees were allowed to continue, the committees had to deal with Native Department officers on every aspect of tribal business.

The pendulum, once again, had swung away from Maori.



Paraire Paikea