

## The Treaty of Waitangi: Our 'Founding' Document

...

Our Nation's Story is a 1940's school textbook that holds a positive view on the events surrounding the Treaty of Waitangi. The extract I have read has made me think that the author was probably an educated, white immigrant due to referring to Britain as 'she' and does point out anything the British may have done wrong to the Maori within the Treaty itself. Firstly, this extract states "To this day it remains the fairest Treaty ever made between Europeans and a native race; indeed, in many ways, it was much fairer to brown man than to white". I have a few problems about this passage regarding the Treaty. Yes, it was quite fair to Maori, but that was only because of the sign of a changing time in humanity when we were slowly beginning to realise the value of all lives. I believe if say Australia or Brazil or even the United States was colonised at the time surrounding the Treaty signing then the same basic humanitarian rights would be given.

①

②

③

The Wikipedia article on the Treaty of Waitangi's meaning and interpretation holds a negative view on the Treaty I believe. In the second paragraph of the article the author has no issues saying right off the bat that the English and Maori versions differ, which has continued for many years to undermine the effect of the Treaty. It lists three critical differences in English-Maori translation – Kawanatanga (governance), which was ceded to the Queen in the first article; rangatiratanga (chieftainship) instead of the word mana, which is retained by the chiefs in the second; and taonga (property or valued possessions). Very few Maori had an understanding of either sovereignty or governorship. This makes me believe if the Maori truly understood the Treaty and what it meant. The article lists Ruth Ross, a notable scholar and expert on the Treaty of Waitangi, as saying that mana would have been a better translation for sovereignty. Mana is an intangible presence of authority and prestige in Maori culture, and if this word was used instead of kawanatanga then the Maori would never have signed the document as giving up their prestige and authority to a woman from a far flung land would be absurd. The translation issues continue to cause frustration even today for policy makers of New Zealand. With the word properties being translated into taonga which means treasures or precious things. Different cultural understandings have caused such disputes such as the foreshore and seabed controversy, less than 10 years ago. The article continues on to talk about how the pre-emption clause (second article) is not well translated and that Lieutenant-Governor William Hobson didn't even understand the concept of pre-emption. If the man charged with creating a balanced Treaty didn't understand an entire clause, then what hope could he hold for Maori to understand? The oral nature of Maori society meant Maori present at the signing placed greater value on what Hobson himself said instead of what was actually written, so he could have spun the words a little bit to swing the Maori into his favour. Nopera Panakareao is noted for saying "the shadow of the land is to the Queen, but the substance remains to us". This is what he and many of the other Maori at the Treaty signing had believed from the Maori version of the Treaty. However, one British official is noted for later saying that "the Maori will discover that the British had had acquired something more than the shadow". This makes me believe the British were willing to spin the truth a little bit to persuade Maori to sign.

④

⑤

⑥

⑦

A neutral view on the Treaty of Waitangi is held by the NZ History Online website. I believe that it is a neutral view as it shows perspectives from both Maori and English at the time. It tells how Hobson and others "stressed the Treaty's benefits while playing down the effects of British sovereignty on rangatiratanga (chiefly authority). From this, I believe that if the truth of

⑧

⑨

how the Maori would lose their rangatiratanga were to be bought into the open for Maori to understand, then they might not have agreed to it. The article continues to say how the English version "guaranteed 'undisturbed possession' of all their 'properties' but the Maori version guaranteed 'tino rangatiratanga' (full authority) over 'taonga' (treasures, which may be intangible)". From this, I believe that the Maori and English were confused a bit about the meaning of the Treaty, both cultures would have thought the other had the exact same document, when in actual fact it didn't. The article states how different understandings have been subject to debate for a long time, especially since the 1970's when Maori demanded through protesting on Parliament and occupying land that the terms of the Treaty be honoured. Different meanings have made it difficult to honour the Treaty, while not having any ill effects on the general population (e.g - foreshore and seabed).

10

All the people who wrote their perspectives on the Treaty are later commentators on the event; however, NZ History Online and the Wikipedia article are both much more modern than the article by Our Nation's Story. I believe that the latter was written from the perspective of a white male in New Zealand who was probably a respectable community member. The way he would have grown up would have been to sugar-coat the Treaty and leave out the nasty parts of history.

11

Although I appreciate the information given by the Wikipedia article more than I do the NZ History Online article, the latter gives me more of a modern meaning to the Treaty. As hard as it is to decide which perspective is more convincing, I would choose the Wikipedia article as there is more information surrounding discrepancies within the Treaty of Waitangi.

12