

Are we there yet? Resetting and settling the settler society

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The year 7 is a year for anniversaries and centenaries. Since we are talking of colonies and independence today, I note that 2007 is the quatercentenary of the founding of Jamestown in what is now Virginia, the first thrust by the English to steal North America from the Indians. It is the 60th anniversary of the retreat by the English from India and coincidentally of New Zealand's adoption of the Statute of Westminster which certified this country as an independent state. It is also the centenary of the founding of professional rugby league in this country and the twentieth anniversary of the stockmarket crash when New Zealanders learnt (though have since forgotten) that risky finance is indeed risky -- just as Americans have failed to learn the lessons of the banking Panic of 1907.

The Panic of 1907 is not part of this country's folklore. The 1987 crash on Wall Street is. In 1907 New Zealand was safely and securely inside the British Empire and its financial industry was untouched by Wall Street. Eighty years later New Zealand was nakedly exposed to the balmy breezes and icy winds of international finance. That transition is a kind of allegory for this society's elision from colony to independence.

Of course, to get to empire, independence had first to be lost. The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, backed by the imperial army in the 1860s, did that. The many self-governing parts of Aotearoa going by the names of waka or tribal founders were subjugated and subsumed into the English realm and a settler society set down here. Maori became subordinate beings, subjects of a distant Queen. That is the way of empires.

The way out of empire is by revolution. A revolution may be by force, as in Russia in 1917 (another famous anniversary) and Aotearoa-New Zealand in the 1860s. Or a revolution may be by changing the value system, as in Russia after 1987. Either way, a successful revolution is accompanied by, or driven by, a change of mind, a change of mentality, a change of worldview. A revolution which is not accompanied by such changes is at risk of reversal.

My argument is that such a change of mind, mentality and worldview took place in this outlier settler society in the late 1970s and the 1980s. There was a revolution of values. Now we are independent. Independence is not a set of laws and constitutional arrangements. It is a state of mind. We are independent now. We were not in 1907 -- or 1947 or even 1967.¹

Independence is not just nationalism. David McIntyre, in his lucid and readable account comfortably describes Prime Minister Sir Joseph Ward as both "nationalist and imperialist".² Ward and his fellow-travellers contemplated dominion status would more accurately represent, in the words of the soon-to-expire *New Zealand Times* (again, as quoted by Professor McIntyre), "an independent people making our own laws, entitled to an equal voice with other self-governing states in whatever touches imperial interests"³ -- that is, an autonomous region within the empire. Ward was later to donate a battleship to the Royal Navy in preference to developing a national navy as Australia did. A decade later the wartime coalition government, of which Ward was part, submitted New Zealand troops to the

¹ This paper is a companion paper to one delivered at the Political Studies Association conference, Wellington, 30 August 2007, titled *Independence in an outlier society: five Prime Ministers*, which explores the evolution of independence in relation to five prime ministerships and available at http://www.colinjames.co.nz/speeches_briefings/Political_studies_07Aug30.htm

² McIntyre, W David, *Dominion of New Zealand: Statesmen and Status, 1907-45* (New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Wellington, 2007), p40

³ McIntyre, p19

command of British officers and the mercy of their brutal discipline -- again, unlike Australia.

And just where did Ward think Maori fitted in his new dominion? McIntyre again, quoting Ward's Dominion Day message: "Preserve the purity of your race from every undesirable mixture..." Given the amount of miscegenation over the previous 90-odd years, Ward could not have been arguing for ethnic cleansing of Maori and part-Maori along with keeping the yellow peril out of his New Britain. More likely, Maori were to Ward un-thought-about honorary whites or soon-to-die-out natives, a sort of dated footnote in the story of empire. The Young Maori party of the 1900s decade had no choice but to accept the loss of independence and work out how iwi and hapu and individual Maori could fit in and make the best of the British settler society and economy if they were not, indeed, to become a mere footnote.

But did not that all change under the Savage-Fraser Labour government? Did not New Zealand break ranks with Britain in the League of Nations over Ethiopia? Did not New Zealand champion the cause of small nations at San Francisco in the formation of the United Nations and become a founder member in its own independent right and run its own foreign policy?

Yes, indeed. New Zealand had formal, legal, independence -- statehood. It had yet to achieve nationhood.

Michael Joseph Savage's "where she goes, we go, where she stands, we stand" declaration of war against Britain's foe, Germany, in 1939 reflected a deep attachment to Britain that went beyond the logic of opposing 1930s fascism, beyond a statement of New Zealand's national interest and beyond today's mantra of kinship in conflict-as-a-contest-of-values. In the 1950s Sir Sidney Holland could say: "I have always been proud to be British. I have always been proud that this country flies the British flag. I have always been proud to belong to what I am happy to call the British Empire, the greatest power for good that the world has ever known. ... our dear old Empire ..."⁴

So at Dominion Day's half-century Holland's New Zealand was, in James Belich's felicitous phrase, still engaged in making a "better Britain"⁵. It had "recolonised", tightened the nexus with the homeland.⁶ Dominion Day persisted in calendars in my youth and I used to observe, as a journalist, "dominion conferences" of the National party until the 1980s.

Of course, that did not make New Zealanders Poms. There was a conscious difference, shaped in part by landscape, in part by birth (for those born here) and in part by the experience of being an outlier society. The writers of the 1930s reflected that. But there was also a sense of belonging to the source society. Belich: "New Zealand culture was hybrid, existing both inside and outside New Zealand ... indigenous but also part of a transnational network."⁷

Bill Oliver, poet and historian, captured this ambi-nationalism: "The two worlds we inhabited were ... rich enough. We were untroubled ... by any thought of disjunction between the inherited world across the seas and the acquired world near at hand. It was simply a matter of

⁴ Sidney Holland, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, 2 November 1950: 3956, as cited by Nigel Roberts, "New Zealand Prime Ministers and New Zealand Independence, 1947-2007: Sidney Holland, 1949-1957", Powerpoint presentation of a paper at the Political Studies Association conference, Wellington, 30 August 2007.

⁵ Belich, James, *Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Allen Lane, the Penguin Press, Auckland, 2001), p21

⁶ Belich, pp11-12 and passim, notably pp76-86

⁷ Belich, p345

looking at the immediate world through the eyes of the encompassing world and at that world through the eyes of the one close to hand. As a child I ... felt glad to be a New Zealander, and especially glad that being a New Zealander was ... also a matter of belonging, even if in a less intimate way, to all the other places on the map coloured pink and especially to other small pink bits strategically placed at the upper centre ... called Great Britain ... It was ... a matter of being more at ease in a roomy place than in a narrow one, of not being lonely in the great world."⁸

Thus, the outlier society was also an insider society. Those of talent could aim for a place in the metropolis and still be in a sense at home. Many did. But this went both ways. Belich's "neo-Britons" in the white dominions "saw themselves as ... co-owners of the British Empire and of Old British culture and heritage. Living standards, egalitarianism and some other public goods were typically superior in the neo-Britains than in the Old. 'Recolonisation' is therefore also intended to imply a strand of inverse colonialism."⁹

Belich dated "decolonisation" from 1973, Britain's desertion of its most devoted offspring for the lures of Europe. But if by "decolonisation" Belich meant "independence", he was looking in the wrong place. The independence did not come from outside. It came from within. By 1973 a new generation which was not "hybrid" had reached a noisy young adulthood.

This generation -- born in or after the second war, blessed with unprecedented economic security and prosperity and the first generation to have wide, near-free access to higher education -- made what some have called a revolution of values in our sorts of societies around the world. Its challenge to its parents' moralities of frugality, traditional religion, sexual constraint and nuclear mum-dad-and-kids families was not the usual adolescent rebellion. It demanded, then lived out, a liberation: personal freedom and personal enrichment of all sorts, from material goods to spiritual paths to altruistic causes.

When those of this generation in this country went to Britain, they did not go "Home" with a capital H. They went on "overseas experience", "OE". When they turned their hands and minds to the arts and crafts, music, dance and films and to a re-examination of heritage and history, they did so as inhabitants of their own place, no longer needing to be self-consciously not British. When they turned up in business, they were brash and adventurous and outward-looking. When they turned up in politics, they made a policy revolution.

There had been precursors. Colin McCahon's early hills are inescapably of this place and he chose to be here. Maurice Gee's writing was unselfconsciously local: his novel, *Plumb*, in 1978 is a landmark. Sir Keith Holyoake and Norman Kirk expressed decidedly born-here nationalist views. The difference was in the profusion. All of a sudden in the late 1970s we made our own music and our own stories and they really were our own and we made a lot of them. We had our own voice and it had volume. We were a nation in the making.

If a year is needed for future anniversaries of independence, I would nominate 1978, for *Plumb*, the Limbs Dance Company's first national tour, Vincent Ward's *State of Siege* and Jack Body's *Duets and Choruses* recording, or 1980 for Greg McGee's *Foreskin's Lament* and Circa Theatre's bumper year of seven first-run New Zealand plays in its playbill of 10 and glass sculptor Ann Robinson's emergence as a major artist. In between came Richard Killeen's first stunning collages; through this time Robyn Kahukiwa's arresting modern Maori images were winning notice. But any date is arbitrary: there was from the late 1970s an efflorescence of high and popular culture which in due course led on in the 1980s to a re-examination of our history, most strikingly Belich's revisionist *New Zealand Wars* in 1986.

⁸ Oliver, W H, *Looking for the Phoenix: a memoir* (Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2002), pp54-55

⁹ Belich, pp11-12

They made, the people of this effervescent generation, an independence revolution. They indigenised. They left the empire. They moved New Zealand from statehood to nationhood. They reset the coordinates. They began to settle the settler society.

But decolonisation doesn't decolonise only the colonisers. It also decolonises the colonised, unless the colonised have been completely decultured. Joe Ward implicitly presumed iwi and hapu had been decultured: his new dominion in 1907 was "pure" British. In the late 1970s it became obvious he had been wrong. The revolution that stripped Aotearoa of independence in the 1840s and 1860s turned out to have been incomplete. Too many Maori had kept too much of their heritage intact for submersion. Parallel with the settlers' settling-in revolution was another: the reindigenisation of iwi and hapu.

The reassertion of tikanga Maori, the claims to land and for the redress of injustice, the insistence on equal respect for taonga and the bid for autonomy in the form of rangatiratanga was another product of the postwar generation's reformation of values. In once-settler societies such as the United States, Canada and Australia, as well as here, the notion of indigenous rights developed as a special dimension of human rights. In this country Maori are a much greater proportion of the population than in those other ex-colonies; the articulation of and demand for indigenous rights had here a particular force, revolutionary force.

The result has been that New Zealand's coming to independence is very different from that of the United States in 1776 or of Australia 40-odd years ago. The post-colonial majority culture in New Zealand is significantly, and increasingly, influenced by the minority culture. That shows in words in everyday language, in little ceremonial adjuncts such as a simple mihi, in kapa haka in schools, in the Maori and Pacific Islanders' dominance in hip hop and ascendancy in other popular music, in the vibrancy of Maori graphic and plastic art. Maori are making our art and our music different and distinct and in turn non-Maori are tapping into and developing that distinctness and difference. No other people can be like us.

We are becoming Pacific: no longer a settler society stranded *in* the Pacific but a settling society *of* the Pacific. A hundred years on from Ward and his nationalist-imperialist triumphalism on Dominion Day we are a distinct society, rooted in our geography.

But this is not a steady-state society, any more than the dominion was a steady-state form of governance but became a stroll to statehood, with even an independent foreign policy. Much in this society has yet to be settled.

A symptom of this flux is that we don't have a 4th or a 14th of July or a 26th of January (Australia Day) and we can't agree on one. Dominion Day clearly doesn't qualify. Anzac Day has for some become a sort of de facto national day but commemorating defeat is hardly the statement of a confident and secure nation. Waitangi Day won't do because it freezes the national debate an evolving society needs in a Treaty of Waitangi framework that is narrow and encumbered with fictions.¹⁰

My argument is that the Treaty, while an historical, legal and moral reality (at least for now), is also a legal and political fiction. Those who argue that it is a bigger reality, the constitution of this nation, are mistaken, for it was a treaty of cession and protection, enabling but not constituting the constitution -- and moreover, the Treaty having been the instrument for extinguishing the independence of iwi and hapu, it cannot be, in an inextricably mixed society, the instrument by which iwi and hapu can regain independence. Another mistaken

¹⁰ For a fuller explanation of the argument that follows see Colin James, "Making a future nation", an address in the Te Papa Waitangi Day series, 8 February 2007, archived at http://www.colinjames.co.nz/speeches_briefings/Waitangi_07Feb08.htm and <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/TePapa/English/WhatsOn/Events/Webcasts/Treatydebate/Treaty2.htm>

argument based on the Treaty is that it can be the "idea" on which this nation rests, much as the United States rests on the "exceptionalist" idea of a "manifest destiny" embodying individuality, liberty and opportunity. I think that is not the case because today, while the Treaty unites, it also separates.

The Treaty unites because its signing sanctioned the inextricable intermingling of two peoples: he iwi tahi tatou, we two peoples are one nation. It separates by lending formal credence to the claim that only those with Maori ancestry are people of the land and others cannot ever be, regardless of contribution and number of generations lived here. A country cannot be a nation unless all people feel fully part of it and that requires that all are people of this land. The very word "nation" implies nativity.

As we move from the seventh to the eighth and then the ninth generation of ex-British -- and ex-Irish, ex-Chinese, ex-Danish, ex-German, ex-Indian, ex-Samoan and so on -- non-Maori will less and less accept exclusion from full belonging here. Can a single mixed marriage or casual liaison 10 or 100 or 200 years earlier confer tangata whenua status yet seven or eight or nine generations farming a much-loved territory not make a person of the land? The fiction will wear thin.

The clue lies in the emerging Pacific nature of our society and day-to-day culture. We are not an offsite new Britain, as in Ward's day. We are becoming a Pacific nation. That is changing the way we think about ourselves and the way we conduct ourselves and the way we govern ourselves. Over time that is making and will make us all the people of this land because there is no other land for us.

An optimistic forward history looking ahead 39 years -- the lifespan of dominion status -- would picture us combining in that people-of-the-land status both of the defining characteristics of a nation, "idea" and "folk". The "idea" -- the "fiction" at the nation's base -- could be that our special land-sea-forest, embedded in Maori whakapapa and celebrated in the clean-green myth, both distinguishes us from other nations and generates a national project: to make our first priority the sustenance of this land-sea-forest of ours and the songs and stories and pictures and energies that grow out of it. And if we adopt that "idea", maybe we will find to our happy surprise that 39 years from now we are a "folk" here, the "folk" of a nation -- that in 39 years time in our social evolution and mentality we will have moved on from the Treaty of the 1840s, just as New Zealand moved on from dominion status in the 39 years after Dominion Day.

But there is much to be done before we get to that point -- before we get this nascent nation fully settled. This may be not a 39-year project but a 100-year one.

First, the unsettled settler-descended society must reset the link with its ancestral society. It must do that as a distinct equal but also to learn to own and integrate its ancestral heritage. Shakespeare and the 1688 Bill of Rights and Newton and Wellington and Watt are part of us. For much of the past 25 years the confidence of leading Maori in their heritage has been stronger than that of non-Maori. The pre-1980s cultural cringe towards Britain was substituted in liberal circles in the 1980s with a cultural cringe towards Maori.

That was the reaction of an adolescent, overstating independence from parents. Te Papa severed history at the time of arrival. There was no "before". But of course there is and always has been and always will be a "before". That is so for Maori now reconnecting with the ancestral Polynesian societies who have come here eight centuries or so after they did. And it is so for the English and Scots and Irish and Welsh and Dutch and Chinese and Indians and all the other more recent arrivals. If there is no "before" there can be no solid "now" and certainly no confidence about the "next".

Only then might the cultural attachment to this place and to this society become so deep that it subsists through emigration and is embedded in the emigrants' descendants' subconscious. Now the children of our emigrants do not link back here, as, for example, do those of the Irish. They are exclusively the children of another culture.

Second, we lack strong symbols. Symbols don't define us. Otherwise, our seemingly irreversible adoption of an irascible nocturnal flightless bird as our emblem would make of us a circus freak and it doesn't. But what are outsiders to make of a society which has no symbolic day to celebrate itself and its heritages, of which the titular head of state lives in London, the flag features another country's flag, the national anthem enjoins it to leave everything to God and the name evokes a flat and soggy part of northern Europe? The kiwi plus all that risks consigning us to the margins of sensible world society, truly an outlier, not just in the inescapabilities of geography and demography but in our conception and projection of ourselves.

A fully settled society needs symbols that tell a confident story to the world.

That points us to the third challenge for the century ahead: to ensure that we remain independent *in* the world, not independent *from* the world -- that we are outward-looking in an increasingly connected, globalised world, not inward-looking, self-obsessed and insular. Isolation is not independence.

Ward's settler society asserted autonomy within a global empire. That way an outlier society could be also be an insider society. When the empire imploded in the second world war, a nervous settler society at the end of long, thin lifelines sought to alleviate its loneliness by huddling with American kin. We also sought, after 1935, to seal our economy from the shocks of unpredictable international capitalism. It didn't work.

Our independence revolution of the 1970s and 1980s took us out into the world. Now we are independent *in* the world, economically, politically and, in part through immigration, societally. We are on our own but *in* the world. Can we maintain that, as I think we will, or might some terrible shock drive us to huddle with Australia? I cannot be sure.

In the 100 years since 1907 many of the coordinates have been reset. New Zealand's settler society of the original Dominion Day has come a long way down the path towards a settled Aotearoa, through statehood to nationhood. But to secure legitimacy and enduring attachment may need most of another 100 years.

"Are we there yet?" a child asks repeatedly of its parents on a long car trip. The answer, for what seems an interminable time, is: "Just a little further."