

A challenge to European authority? - Maori independence

Potatau set a boundary separating his authority from that of the governor. 'Let Maungatautari be our boundary. Do not encroach on this side. Likewise I am not to set a foot on that side.' His aim was not to oppose the Crown but instead provide authority in the lands placed under his mana (authority). Supporters believed it was possible for the mana of both monarchs to be complementary. To Maori, the Kingitanga was a development for Maori, not against Europeans.

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Given the tribal nature of Maori society there was some surprise that a pan-tribal movement had been established. Most Maori were loyal to their own hapu first and foremost. The historian Michael King believed that as the European population grew it created a sense of Maoriness that made it possible for Maori to distinguish between a Maori and non-Maori world and think beyond their tribal affiliations. A perceived strength of the British lay in their unity under the Crown, and supporters of the Kingitanga believed that if Maori could replicate this sense of unity then they stood a better chance of withstanding the full impact of colonisation.

Despite this, important iwi like Nga Puhī, Te Arawa and Ngati Porou did not join. Some opponents dismissed the Kingitanga as a Waikato movement that had little support in other parts of the country. Historian James Belich maintained that the Kingitanga did not represent a radical change in the North Island. 'It was not a declaration of Maori independence – this already existed – and it added no new territory to the Maori sphere. It sought merely to unite pre-existing polities. But in other ways the Movement was an important change. Together with the rise in anti-land-selling generally, it raised the profile of Maori independence from a level which the British disliked but tolerated, to a level which many found entirely unacceptable.'

When fighting broke out between government forces and supporters of Wiremu Kingi in Taranaki in April 1860, the Kingitanga was portrayed as being behind the war. Most Kingitanga supporters in lower Waikato, including Potatau himself, actually opposed involvement in the Taranaki War, but when Ngati Maniapoto warriors arrived to help Kingi's men, the finger of blame was pointed in the direction of Waikato.

Some settlers and politicians saw this as an opportunity to assemble all the so-called troublemakers together and crush them in one hit. This never happened, and events in Taranaki quickly reached a stalemate.

The Kingitanga resisted further European encroachment and opposed new roads, and it sought self-government in Maori areas. The movement took on the appearance of an alternative government with its own flag, newspaper (*Te Hokioi*), councillors, magistrates and law enforcement. The Kingitanga government even had a minister for Pakeha affairs.

See also:

- **Te Kingitanga – troubled times, 1860–95**

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