

# TE REO MAORI: He turangawaewae nana?

**Maori organisations are plugging for official recognition of Maori before the language dies out altogether, says Paul Bensemann in this article. A pakeha with a B.A. in Maori from Victoria University, he was Secretary of the Maori Purposes Fund Board before undertaking a course in journalism at Wellington Polytechnic.**

E nga iwi kua riro ki te po, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou. Takahia atu ra te ara whanui a Tane, ki te po uriuri, ki te po kerekere.

Tena koutou nga kanohi ora o te hunga kua wheturangitia i te ra nei. Ko te korero e whai ake nei i tuhituhi i runga i te aroha ki nga taonga o nga tupuna kua riro atu ra.

Te Huinga Rangatahi, a confederation of Maori youth groups, is circulating a pamphlet calling for Maori language programmes on television — including five minutes news in Maori. The pamphlet, *Just Five Minutes*, says, "If our efforts do not succeed . . . will we see acts of violence against television masts and stations as occurred in Wales in 1968?"

New Zealanders who scoff at the possibility of such acts of sabotage here may be kidding themselves. Te Huinga Rangatahi's pamphlet brings to mind the parallel between New Zealand's history, and events leading to violence on behalf of the language and culture of the Welsh people ten years ago.

1870 saw an English government imposing a compulsory elementary education on Wales, using the English language in schools. This started a gradual decline in the use of Welsh. Whereas 54.4% of the population spoke Welsh in 1891, this percentage had dropped to 26% in 1961. Te Huinga Rangatahi's counterpart in Wales, Urdd Gobaith Cymru (The Welsh League of Youth), became alarmed at the decline of Welsh language and cultural life. The group increased its numbers drastically after the Second World War and members wrote submissions, published pamphlets, organised sit-ins, and protested in the streets. Their objection was that Welsh schools and the media were "monocultural" — they were totally English.

In the 60s factions of the group went underground. They took to using plastic explosives against television stations and television masts in protest against the lack of Welsh content on television.

The late 1960s and the 70s brought better things to Wales. In 1967 the Welsh Language Act was constituted and it affirmed "the equal validity of Welsh with English in the administration of justice and conduct of government business throughout Wales". Bilingual teaching, using Welsh as the main or secondary medium of teaching was established in many schools. In 1973 the Welsh Language Council was set up as guardian and official promoter of the language.

Today Welsh is used with pride — and without any apparent economic drawbacks. The weekly press includes articles in Welsh, there are bilingual papers, and also papers solely in Welsh. A new T.V. channel is starting in Wales and has a Welsh language service as a programming priority.

Back here in New Zealand Maori has a long way to go before arriving at the happy state of affairs now existing for the Welsh language. Today only about 70,000 speak Maori,

whereas in Wales 540,000 speak Welsh — and they have a million less people in their country. And the future of Maori doesn't look bright — only a tiny fraction of New Zealand children speak the language.

Decline in the use of Maori has the same nineteenth-century root cause as the decline in Welsh. In 1858 the New Zealand Government declared "Native Schools" ineligible for financial grants if English were not made the language of instruction.

But the campaign against Maori has been more ruthless than the Wales experience. Until recently the language was regarded as an impediment, and it was literally beaten out of Maori school children.

"Round table" groups at the 1959 Young Maori Leaders conference discussed the declining use of the language and made a number of recommendations, for example "that some Maori language be made compulsory for all Maori pupils and optional for Pakeha pupils". A member of the 1959 conference, Kara Puketapu, reintroduced that recommendation in the "Questions Please" T.V. programme during Maori Language Week this year. After 1959 protests against the lack of Maori in schools became commonplace. The concern culminated in the presentation of a petition in 1972 which urged the government to introduce optional courses in Maori language and culture for all New Zealand schools. The petition was signed by the then Minister of Maori and Island Affairs, Mr MacIntyre, and about 30,000 others.

The petition was partially successful. Today Maori is taught in about 160 secondary schools and 240 primary schools. Approximately 130,000 children are taught the language at school.

The necessary question is, will school Maori language programmes revive the Maori language? Sam Karetu for one doesn't think so. Last year he said, "The Maori language is enjoying the greatest boost it has ever had and yet I am still pessimistic. I am not convinced . . . that, because more people are learning it and more schools teaching it, the language will be spoken more . . . If it is to survive (it) must be spoken all the time."

Strong views about Maori in schools were expressed in March this year by Carl Dodson, an educationist who pioneered bilingual schools in Wales. While visiting New Zealand, Mr Dodson called the school Maori language programmes "counter-productive". "Weekly lessons do little other than make some children hate the second language", he said. "Bilingual children are produced only when half the school curriculum is in one language, the other half in another."

Bilingual education is an important step towards the retention of the Maori language, according to Dr Richard Benton, director of the Maori Unit, N.Z. Council for Educational Research. Dr Benton and his staff are making surveys of the number of families who speak Maori. They have also been pushing bilingual education for areas where Maori is still widely spoken.

Ruatoki Primary School pioneered bilingual education in 1977, but there are a number of other primary schools just