

Bi-cultural journalists must change the media

by Philip Whanga

Maori and polynesian journalists are a unique commodity and a rare breed often misunderstood by their own people and more often misused by their employers.

This year on the hiko to Waitangi and at the ceremony itself they were badly needed although they would have had to endure the same scrutiny as their pakeha colleagues. It was only the presence of Te Karere news team that gave this year's Waitangi Day a chance to be seen in a wider view.

And if it was nice to feel that pakeha journalists felt the other side of racism however briefly, it would be wrong to think that the media now accepts the kaupapa of the Maori or polynesian journalist. Many journalists still believe they can cover any event, Maori or pakeha adequately and in a professional manner. Obviously the marchers on the hiko disagreed and look what a hornets nest that stirred up.

It's this belief that Maori and polynesian journalists are needed to rectify the inbuilt bias in what is seen as 'news', that is changing people's expectations of the media.

Maori and pacific island people are increasingly wanting to control what is said about them in the media, and news editors are becoming aware of this. Some editors see the hiring of Maoris or polynesians as a marketing move that'll demonstrate their solidarity with the cause, while others recognise the use of polynesians opens up lots of doors to an otherwise closed news field.

And then there are those who've always been aware that New Zealand journalists, with the rare exception of Harry Dansey, never seemed to be quite sure of what country they were writing in, or for. It all adds up to change both in attitude and expectation, in pakeha and polynesian alike.

The strong presence of the television news team of Te Karere has probably been the biggest factor in waking pakeha and Maori viewers to the bi-cultural potential of New Zealand. And with media attention on what are termed 'Maori issues', such as unemployment, crime, health etc etc, the Maori perspective is now needed more than ever, to redress the balance. The pakeha system of values on which news is assessed is rather negative of what it

can't understand, and so many important stories now surface in the Maori media, such as Te Karere, Te Reo o Aotearoa or Tu Tangata.

For those who worry that a separate news system based on race is already operating in New Zealand, the message is clear. Existing media structures have shown an inability to cope with Maori aspirations and have more than once turned the question back to the Maori people, "What are you doing about your aspirations?" Well that time has come.

A threefold plan of advancement is underway. One is the need to raise the level of expectation of Maori and Pacific people to what the use of the media can do for them in promoting cultural values. Out of this expectation will come the encouragement for young Maori and polynesian journalists.

Second is a system of journalism training that recognises the cultural strengths of these Maori and polynesian trainees, and the bias already operating against them in the media.

Third is education of the pakeha media in the strengths of bi-cultural journalists and the potential that could exist for a bi-cultural New Zealand.

All three parts of the plan are already in operation but it's important that all New Zealanders, pakeha and polynesian, know what's happening.

The scarcity of New Zealand journalists with a Maori or Pacific Island back-

ground is being combated by the New Zealand Journalists Training Board which is itself, the training arm of the media.

Since 1980, the training board in conjunction with the Department of Maori Affairs has run many introductory journalism courses for Maori and Pacific Island students. That's led to jobs in the media for twenty or so of those students.

The introductory courses have helped students decide about a career in journalism and enabled them to make strong applications to journalism courses at Auckland Technical Institute, Wellington Polytechnic or Canterbury University. And for keener students, Tu Tangata magazine now runs a three week intensive follow-up course at Waiariki Community College.

This year for the first time, Pacific Island students will have their own journalism course running in Auckland for two weeks.

The scheme is now paying off with 15 Maori and Pacific Island students this year training full-time for journalism.

The education of the media in the strengths of bi-cultural journalists is ongoing, and dependant on good-will and trust. Hui are organised each year within the newspaper industry, and also Television New Zealand and Radio New Zealand. These are chances for the media to experience another environment and a different set of cul-



May Parokoti-Lewis, Tu Tangata magazine course graduate 1983.