

Maori education makes a break for it

By Charlton Clark

Probably the most contentious hui held in recent years was at Turangawaewae marae in March and it was all about education.

Discussion hasn't stopped since then as maori parents have a long look at what the education system has done for their children.

By the time this issue is out, it'll be known how effective the boycott of school classes on June 1 was. But there are calls for further boycotts so it seems action has to follow on some of the issues raised at that hui and the subsequent hui called by the Post Primary Teachers' Association. The following feature by Charlton Clark sums up discussion at those hui and gives us thoughts for our children's future.

The Maori education hui at Huntly's Waahi marae in April was "the first time anyone has actually taken the trouble to ask the maori people what they want," according to Post-Primary Teachers' Association president Tony Steele.

"The PPTA is immensely proud to be associated with this initiative," Mr Steele said in an interview after the welcoming ceremony.

"If the minister (Education Minister Merv Wellington) thinks the community is not interested in what is taught in schools, he only has to take a look at what we have got here to see that the community interest is colossal." Mr Steele was referring to the fact that about 1000 people had turned up for the hui.

He said that to better cater for maori children's needs, "we don't need to change the law or change the budget. We have just got to change people's minds. It looks as if this is going to be the start."

Later he told participants that "if all we get out of this hui is just another report, we will all have wasted our time".

He promised that the association, which called the hui, would draw up a policy on maori education which it would use to influence Education Department policy to change. The association's policy would be based on the recommendations of this weekend's hui, Mr Steele said.

"It's my belief that taha maori is more than seeding your lessons with a maori word here and there.

"There has to be fundamental

change — not just in bricks and mortar or dollars and cents, but a fundamental change in the minds of people in schools," Mr Steele said.

Speaking in maori during the powhiri, Waikato-Maniapoto District Maori Council chairman Tom Winitana echoed some of Mr Steele's statements.

"After 150 years the education system is now coming to us, looking for answers to problems which have been created for no other reason than that they did not see fit to consult with us," Mr Winitana said later.

"We are now being asked to prop up a sick system."

He urged maori people to only give a

little bit at a time and see how well the system did with that before deciding whether to give any more.

He also called for a greater sharing of resources with the maori people.

"A lot of people are afraid of accepting that the maori people have a sense of responsibility, that they have been at the bottom of the educational pile," he said.

But he questioned whether pulling maori children out of the education system was the correct answer to a national problem.

A New Zealand Maori Council-sponsored hui in Ngaruawahia in March had urged this step.

But Mr Winitana admitted such an exercise would be very interesting.

"How many teachers would be out of jobs?" he asked.

Transforming the bureaucracy

The task of the maori people in the 1980s is to transform bureaucracies like the Justice and Social Welfare Department's in the same way they have transformed the Education Department, according to a maori leader.

Auckland District Maori Council chairman Ranginui Walker said this to delegates at a maori education development conference at Ngaruawahia's Turangawaewae Marae in March.

In a keynote address to the conference, Dr Walker said maori people had to transform more bureaucracies so they reflected the bicultural and multicultural nature of New Zealand society.

"The transformation of the education system provides the model," Dr Walker said. "It is an encouraging start, and indicates that minorities are capable of ordering their own destiny and maximising their own choices and life chances."

Earlier Dr Walker had described as "remarkable" the impact on the country's education system of the appointment of maori language teachers, itinerant teachers of maori, and specialist advisers in maori education.

He said "the value now placed on maori identity and culture in schools is

reflected in the growing pride of maori children and the widening respect for biculturalism in the general community."

Much of his address was taken up with tracing the history of maori education since the missionaries used it to convert the maori from "barbarism" to "civilisation".

He cited examples which he indicated showed that the pakeha used education to subvert maori culture and impose pakeha monoculturalism on the country. Among them were: ‡ Governor George Grey's 1847 Education Ordinance which provided government money for church schools to take children away from "the demoralising influences of their villages".

But Dr Walker said that by the late 1950s it was realised that town and city schools were not equipped with teachers who could cope with the influx of maori children moving in from their traditional rural homelands.

And with the declining numbers in the tribal homelands, their capacity to absorb the many maori school failures was reducing. Only one in 200 maori children were getting to the seventh form in 1960, compared with nearly 8 out of 200 pakeha.

Maori representation at university was only one-eighth of what it should have been.