

Kua puta te Puao-Te-Ata-Tu says committee on Social Welfare

Daybreak must come for the Maori people in social equity, with the Department of Social Welfare needing to be at the forefront of most radical change. That's the conclusion of the Ministerial Advisory Committee which was charged with giving a maori perspective of the Department of Social Welfare to its minister, Anne Hercus.

Its members, John Rangihau, Lena Manuel, Donna Hall, Hori Brennan, Peter Boag, John Grant and Neville Baker have held 65 meetings on marae, in institutions and offices, listening to people have their say. This is their report.

Among its thirteen recommendations are the complete reappraisal of policy objectives that operate from a 'superior' point of view towards those of other 'inferior' cultures.

Power sharing is advocated, one example of which is the abolishment of the existing Social Security Commission (seen in the report as "four Pakeha male officers of the Department") to be replaced by a Social Welfare Commission (to be composed of four Social Welfare officers, two persons nominated by the Minister of Maori Affairs after consultation with tribal authorities and two persons nominated by the Minister of Women's Affairs. The option of a nomination from the Minister of Pacific Island Affairs is also offered.)

Accountability to the community was seen as vital therefore District Executive Committees were advocated, each having up to nine members.

Changes to dole payments and child benefits were also seen as vitally necessary so that maori efforts to break out of the dependency cycle could be realised. The maori customary practices that strengthened whanau, hapu and iwi ties were seen as being paramount, rather than the primacy of the individual. In that context the recommendations to the review of the Children and Young Persons Act 1974, as requested specially by the Minister, were pertinent. They were to have customary cultural preferences recognised by the courts and social workers.

The Social Welfare institutions around the country needed to be run by management committees drawn from the local communities. This was necessary to utilise the extended family support networks and help the youngsters in the institutions re-establish their tribal identities.

The fairly new programme pioneered by the departments of Maori Affairs and Social Welfare, Maatua Whangai, was given enthusiastic approval, with the caution that it may be too early to

expect it to be able to support those young people already in institutions. The committee instead advocated a return to the original focus of nurturing children within the family group.

The needs of the rangatahi were acknowledged in that, although they are the future, many of them are alienated

from their culture and identity.

It was acknowledged that parental influence had broken down and the maori networks were not yet strong enough to be really effective. The committee saw it as being essential that a co-ordinated strategy by the departments of Social Welfare Maori Affairs and the Police was needed to strengthen maori networks and family ties. The proposed Social Welfare Commission could meet with the tribal authorities to consider best allocation of funding so that young Maori skills could be promoted and employment opportunities result.

PUAO-TE-ATATU (DAY BREAK)



**Ministerial Advisory Committee
on a Maori Perspective
for the Department of Social Welfare**