

# Wananga mo nga Kaiwhakawa o Tamaki

## Report and pictures by Tainui Stephens

Hiwi Tauroa, the Race Relations Conciliator, has steered the Race Relations Office on to a new tack. The aim is to create an understanding and appreciation of the deeper Maori and Pacific Island values in the minds of a certain group of very important people. He calls them collectively "The Decision Makers". Far from being a stereotyped unit of highly salaried civil servants they are the men and women who, by the nature of their jobs, create decisions which often have profound repercussions on society. They include business people and professional people who consciously take risks every day that might lead to success or failure in whatever field they are involved in. One of the most important groups of "decision makers" is judges. The bench is an institution which inevitably demands awe and respect. An air of neutrality at times engenders almost deliberate detachment from the people who feel the brunt of judicial words and deeds most.

Hiwi Tauroa and his staff, with tremendous help from prominent personalities such as Ken Mason S.M., Garfield Johnson (Chairman of the controversial Johnson Report) and John Rangihau, ensured the outstanding success of a "hui whakaoho" at Te Whaiora marae in Otara.

In all, twenty-two district court judges, their wives and families attended: some seventy people. The numbers impressed us deeply. Particularly as we well knew that for many of them, a marae experience was totally new and something that would be approached probably with trepidation and certainly with some shyness.

We all assembled outside the entrance of Te Whaiora marae on time and instantly it was possible to detect a "reluctance but a willingness to try" attitude amongst our guests. However, as a skilled challenge and powhiri were performed by the children and teenagers of Otara, these barriers quickly lowered, and were replaced by respect for the rituals which were being performed by the youth of a suburb which has gained a certain amount of notoriety in recent years.

That evening, after a general introduction to the concept of the marae, began the mihimihi. Wives were particularly delighted to hear that their voices could be heard at this point. Words of introduction and greeting were elicited from all present. One judge pondered on the traditional image of a stipendary being somewhat absurd when "standing here pontificating in my shorty pyjamas", while another, lamenting the fact that he was one of the last to speak, and having endured hours of talk and singing before arising,

declared his surprise at "having to stand here at three in the morning singing 'Three Blind Mice'!" Although an amount of hesitation was encountered by the majority who were worried more about singing than talking, the night was thoroughly enjoyed by those who managed to endure the marathon effort. A relaxed air of informality was set, and a profound interest was created to learn as much as possible.

Saturday started with the carver of the meeting house Te Wai Ariki, Paki Harrison, explaining the symbolism of the meeting house in Maori culture, and in particular the role of the urban marae as a communal centre and vehicle of education. John Rangihau gave an enthusiastically received address on the many spiritual and profound beliefs of the Maori. Louisa Crawley and a group from the Pacific Islands Resource Centre led by Edgar Tuinukuafe used video equipment and many personal experiences to describe the plight and situation of Pacific Island peoples settling in New Zealand, and the problems that can occur.

Saturday night was the time for "nga mea whakangahau" where judges, wives and families really made the most of the opportunity to show off their entertaining talents. Any previous inhibitions were completely forgotten as they indulged in a host of action songs, skits and solo sports. One of the Waitangi Action Committee members who had come to lay down their take was visibly impressed by the various acts of inspired lunacy, and expressed surprise at the joviality of the gathering. The comment was made, "They seem so human!"

Interestingly enough the young protesters seemed to get on well with the judges. The point was made very clear by them that in a courtroom there was no equality but on the marae they were all on even terms and could speak so. Unfortunately there was little time for active debate to continue between the two factions.

Sunday morning saw a turn to more serious thought, with a discussion led by Mick Brown on the future of the children's courts, and justice for Maori and Polynesian youth. Hiwi Tauroa concluded the whole session with a hard-hitting series of suggestions of what judges could do to effect equitable democracy and justice in their decisions. Some of the main points were:

1. The Maori language is a long way from extinction but will survive only with positive decisions made by persons in authority, like judges. He quoted where Dun Mihaka's bid to defend himself in Maori was stymied by a judge's decision based on two rulings: one from fourteenth-century and the other from eighteenth-century England. There was scope for the setting of a precedent, but it did not eventuate.
2. Democracy did not exist when decisions concerning a minority culture were made by the majority culture who knew little or nothing of the thoughts and attitudes of that

