

"As I know most of you, had I been sitting here this morning, I would have been in very grave difficulty in making certain decisions, but, had I been one of you making those decisions I would have been all for electing, as President, Sir Turi Carroll.

"May I say Sir Turi how delighted I am that Her Majesty the Queen has recognised our services to the Maori people and the Pakeha.

"Then when you came to the question of the appointment of a Secretary I would have had real worry and I would have weighed one against the other but I would have come down finally after such soul searching, to Henry Ngata; and sure enough you made him the secretary.

"Then I would have wondered — well now you have got to have someone for Associate Secretary from somewhere else to keep the show on the rails a bit and of course my hand would have gone up for Norman Perry as Associate Secretary.

"And then when it came to the Maori Education Foundation it was quite obvious it had to be Sir Turi from your point of view and that saved me the difficulty of considering him as my nominee; and then when I came to the question of appointment to the Maori Health Committee of the Board of Health — I had something to do with the legislation setting up the Board of Health — I would have had grave difficulty about that, and somehow or other I would have come down on the side of Steve Watene.

"In accord with your Maori custom I must say something of my old friend that I come to love very dearly — Major Reiwhati Vercoe. A rangatira of the Maori people in the fullest sense of the term and a very great orator.

"He was the first Maori orator that I really saw in action on the marae at one of our gatherings. Of course, many of you had known him for so much longer than I but in the short space of time that it was vouchsafed me to get to know him I felt that here was a real leader who in other times and in other days might have occupied the most eminent position in Maoridom and in the Pakeha world.

"He was a wonderful man and a wonderful soldier and one of the memories of my experiences with the Maori people will be the last tribute we paid to him on his own marae.

**"Now this legislation which we have passed which makes possible the meeting today stems very largely from the dream of Reiwhati Vercoe. Therefore I think the work of this Council over the years will be his lasting memorial and I know you will endeavour to make it a worthwhile one.**

"It seems to me that apart from the wars in which you were united with the European people in a common objective, or cause — the last two great wars and the Boer War — the only thing that has really united the Maori people as one man, has been our Maori Education Foundation.

"Little did we know when we set off from the suggestions in the Hunn report that we would end up with something that was going to unite the Maori people and perhaps draw the Pakeha closer to the Maori than ever before.

"There were pockets of resistance; a pessimist might say pockets of racialism, but they were few and far between and tremendously outweighed by the vast potential of goodwill that has been exhibited to the Maori people in its campaign to raise funds for the Education Foundation.

"Up and down the length and breadth of the Islands the European people have got behind it in every community, large and small — it has been amazing.

**"Just as the Maori people were united in one objective with the Maori Education Foundation, so this Council is the first time that there has been any assembly to speak for the Maori people as a whole and therefore it is an occasion that will be remembered in the history of the Maori people and in the history of their relations with the Pakeha people. Today is an historic first in the history of the Maori people.**

"The Maori people have a magnificent tradition of leadership. The portraits on these walls, Sir James Carroll, your uncle and the colleague of my uncle when they fought and battled in the years that have gone, Te Rangihiroa and then the great Sir Apirana Ngata and of course Sir Maui Pomare. Great men, great leaders.

"As the voice and the shield of the Maori people, in their time, they were as a vine that bound the tribes together. So now are you, the New Zealand Maori Council.

"The Act of 1945 did, of course, lay down the beginnings of a splendid system of community organisation whereby the Maori people in particular districts could look after those things of particular concern to them; they could deal with their local problems and speak as a group, but beyond a certain limit they had no scope.

"The jurisdiction was confined to the level of the tribal executive stage. The only provision made was for district conferences representing two or more tribal executives to be called together at such times and for such purposes as the Minister might think fit.

"That is not consistent with an autonomous body, that is consistent with, ministerial inspiration or dictation, whichever way you like to put it. At the national level there was no provision at all.

"Because of the incompleteness of the organisation, the district councils — which had no local administrative functions — lost their enthusiasm and became largely ineffective.

"When I became Minister I knew nothing of them at all, they had become so ineffective. Apart from the political channels there was no channel of communication between the Maori people as a whole and Government, and with great respect to all that has been done in the past, I

think that successive Governments were the poorer because the structure was incomplete.

"There is evidence that over the years there was a yearning for something, some national representative organisation.

"It is the Act last year that put the top brick on the structure of Maori organisation and in it I was supported, and I welcomed and appreciated the support, by the four Maori members of Parliament.

"We now have the set-up for a permanent organisation to provide a line of communication from the individual Maori local community through the Tribal Committee to the Tribal Executive and on to the District Council and then to the New Zealand Council and from the New Zealand Council to Government.

"Equally important, the process will operate in reverse from Government down to the grass roots of our democratic structure. It will be basic, of course, to my policy to refer matters that effect the Maori people to the Maori people. I think it would be the wise thing to do and I will get further by so doing. When I can say that I have a unified voice of the Maori people in support of any particular piece of legislation, then its chances of getting through the House will be enormously increased.

"From your point of view, of course, the fact that we have completed the structure to activate and assist the District Councils and Tribal Committees and Executives, will give them some inspiration and may give them some confidence in themselves and faith in their directives.

**"It will provide a vehicle for the Maori people to think and act nationally rather than parochially. I hope that Maori leaders are sufficiently realistic to know that that has been to a very large extent the story of the past. Now you have got machinery that will function nationally.**

"Gentlemen, I hail this meeting as the dawn of a new day in Maori affairs. The progress we make from now on depends on your deliberations and to what extent you can obtain unanimity on some of the problems of our time.

"You know more about the difficulties involved in land titles than I do; you know more about the difficulties of land development and other matters.

"Now if you can resolve some of those difficulties and give me a united voice and a united opinion, then the chances of legislation are increased enormously and you may be able to achieve in a relatively short time a great deal of progress that a few years ago we thought was beyond us.

"May I close with those words that I will always remember long after I have left the portfolio of Maori Affairs: "Let the red tipped dawn come with the sharpened air, a touch of frost and the promise of a glorious day", or to quote one of your proverbs: "Ka pu te Ruha, Ka Hao te Rangatahi" "The old net is cast aside, the new net goes a-fishing".

"Kia ora koutou katoa."