

National Conference

Wardens Want Control

From the wardens national conference at Ratana Pa late last year came the message that the wardens want to control their own destiny and not be the whipping boys at the beck and call of politicians.

Still knee-deep in administration re-organisation, the three hundred or more wardens at the conference served notice that they won't be pushed around. A remit that would have allowed non-maoris to serve as wardens was thrown out along with any change in the appointment of wardens by maori committees.

The fighting mood however wasn't just reserved for policy sessions but surfaced a few times in clashes between wardens and the executive. What seemed to be in dispute was who knew best what action is needed on the ground floor.

Back up needed

Wardens traditionally are in the front line of handling the social ills and joys of the maori people. What is new is the need for back up administration so that the job can be done, especially in view of the eleven hundred plus wardens and rising membership.

The national executive has nearly completed the big task of co-ordinating the ten district associations, and its message to the conference was for the districts to now get themselves in order. That 'order' differed considerably from district to district with some like Waikato reporting a lack of cohesion, while the newly formed Tauranga/Moana district association was looking forward to getting in the thick of things.

Agreement on purpose

What came out from the weekend was a reaffirmation of the warden's aroha for their people. Although there was a healthy disagreement on the methods used, there was unanimity on the purpose and need.

In the reports from the districts the usual problems of alcohol abuse and youth roaming the streets were evident with some districts asking for more recognition from government agencies for the work being done.

Workshop sessions looked at some contentious remits that ranged from the need for an age limit on wardens to defining what was an unstable situation for a maori warden.

Already law

The most controversial remit was 'May a non-maori be appointed as a maori warden'.

Unfortunately by the time the conference considered the remit it was already law, unbeknown to delegates.

Anyway it provoked much discussion, especially as one delegate at the conference was a european who

had been appointed as a warden by his local maori committee.

Taking into account the ill-feeling caused by the remit, one workshop recommended that no person be barred from being appointed as a warden on account of race or creed. When it came to the vote on the conference floor the status quo carried the day with several speakers saying only a maori could work successfully as a warden amongst the maori people.

Illegal appointments

Although no change was recommended, it was pointed out that two european wardens had been appointed in the Tai Tokerau district, though the local committee had been told it was illegal and the appointments should terminate at the end of three years.

The new legislation since passed gives wider criteria for the district maori councils to act on, making it possible for any person to be nominated as a warden. All in all a very hot topic that's bound to surface at the next conference.

On the question of national identification there was complete agreement on the issuing of a new warrant which included a photograph.

Junior wardens

Possibly the most stimulating remit of the weekend was passed over in the sea of information before the delegates, 'Should there be an age acceptance as a maori warden'.

Most workshops came up with age limits of 17, 18 or 19 for marae wardens, with the main proviso for ordinary wardens being the 20 year old age limit for entry to licenced premises.

For many at the conference the solution was staring them in the face. Three junior wardens from the Waikato took part in the conference giving lie to the need for any age limit. The girls were appointed to the Maori Queen's marae at Turangawaewae and Wahi and have been successfully carrying out their duties for over a year.

The girls say the biggest problem is getting the acceptance of older maoris in doing their job of ensuring protocol is observed on the Queen's marae.

Winning combination

In another area, the so-called junior wardens are also proving invaluable. That is in patrols of night spots such as amusement parlours and discos.

It's said that the lack of identifying

insignia on the junior wardens and their youthfulness are the winning combination in getting to know some of the maori children 'at risk' in the community.

Maybe those wardens who attended the conference are already finding out in their local fun parlours, the advantages of having and encouraging young wardens into the association.

In the major area of solution finding, there were scattered attempts to come to grips with the reasons for vast numbers of youth roaming the streets day and night. Unfortunately just because maori wardens deal a lot with this phenomena doesn't mean they have the answers. As one warden put it "We deal with the results, not the reasons".

Major challenge

In the other major field of alcohol abuse the conference had the chance to hear some alarming statistics from two men working for the Alcoholic Liquor Advisory Council. Such things as 47% of children by the age of 16 have drunk in hotels and by Form Two are on the way to starting to drink.

And then the staggering total of 500 million dollars that alcohol abuse is estimated to cost this country each year, coupled with the two million dollar budget the council gets to combat the problem.

No finger pointing

While admitting that maoris are part of the problem, ALAC secretary Peter Dunne said it wasn't an exclusive finger-pointing exercise, with pakehas just as much involved. However he said it's easier for the dominant culture to say it's a problem of the ethnic minority, as happens around the world.

His compatriot, Keith Evans outlined the educational expertise available to wardens if they wanted to know how to combat alcohol abuse, but ran into some stiff opposition from a few wardens who had their own ideas.

These ranged from encouraging a Christian approach amongst drinkers, to complete abolition of licenced premises.

This year the Alcoholic Liquor Advisory Council has donated another ten thousand dollars to the wardens association so that seminars can be held.

More abstainers

Some hope was given in the fact that maoris have the highest level of abstainers in the country but the people who do drink, do so excessively.

The main priority to emerge from this part of the conference session was the need for programmes to be put together by district associations in order to qualify for ALAC funds, a priority that's been sadly lacking in recent years.

On the final day of the conference there was the karakia in the Patana Temple and decision to hold the next conference at Omahu marae in November 1982.