

# Whakatauirā 1981

## — Maori leaders proposals

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**The Prime Minister, Mr Muldoon, believes Maoridom has shifted into a new gear.**

**And in October, Maori leaders proved him right.**

Photographs Ken George

Representing Maori council committees, Maori Women's Welfare League branches, church workers and other Maori volunteer groups, 80 leaders and observers came to Wellington for the second national planning conference, Tu Tangata Wananga Whakatauirā, run by the Maori Affairs Department.

In two days, they turned the \$10,000 conference cost into about \$3 million worth of action programmes, designed to improve Maori employment and incomes, health and education ... and save their language.

Missing were the long-winded philosophical debates and the talk of raising Maori aspirations. It was clear that the 1981 planning round was concerned only with specifics.

The Secretary of Maori Affairs, Kara Puketapu, called the results outstanding. The Minister, Ben Couch, has promised a third wananga this year.

Keeping Maori offenders out of prison and the language alive, emerged as the two most urgent targets. Both involve other Government departments — Justice and Education — and although representing extra funds for Maori Affairs, could save the taxpayer money.

### Rehabilitation

The leaders believe, for instance, that Maoris can rehabilitate 20 Maori offenders for \$66,000 (excluding the setting-up cost for the first year) saving the taxpayer around \$177,000 a year, based on the outlay for keeping the same offenders in a minimum security prison.

Saving the public kitty is of course of rather less consequence to those who came up with the idea, than the future of their youngsters, but the cost calculations, are convincing enough to sell the proposal in court circles.

Most importantly, it represents a concerted bid by the Maori people to shortcut the present prison system, which as they have seen, seems to attract the same young offenders back again. They think they can do better.

The plan involves the Secretary of Maori Affairs — or "a suitably constituted authority" to act as legal guardian of selected first offenders and place them under the watchful eye of Maori farming families on agricultural programmes.



### Shouldering responsibility

That is only part of it. Shouldering equal responsibility, will be marae associations and the joint kokiri/department community partnership teams which will provide basic work skills and vocational training courses, funded by Maori Affairs.

The three-pronged "Awhinatia te Rangatahi" approach emphasises whanau help for families under stress so they can be shown how to direct their children away from crime.

The focus is on young people from 11 to 18 years. The Education Department will be asked to assist with tutors in reading and basic subjects for marae courses.

Likely problems, which some leaders think they might encounter with the United Nations for setting up a dual legal system, are a hurdle they will cross if and when necessary. The wananga's failure to accept an amendment prompted by these fears demonstrated Maori faith in the Maori

ability to right the Maori crime problem.

Ben Couch supports the proposal. Besides, it works he says. In his shearing contracting days, the Minister had kids on probation in his gang, which earned him the nickname of "Ali Baba". Apparently, the "40 thieves" shaped up and proved worthy of his trust.

### Working parents

Another way to help save taxpayers' money is a modest plea for \$85,000 a year to appoint 20 Maori-speaking supervisors to run day-care centres on maraes. Besides, supplying a facility for working Maori parents, the objective is to instil the Maori language in pre school-age children and arrest the decline of Maori speakers.

Presumably if this were successful, the Education Department would not need to spend as much on Maori language courses for school children, understanding that many pakeha children also take the language option.