

# Change at the top now making waves.

Rangi Walker

Late last year one hundred Maori leaders met in the Legislative Council Chamber of Parliament for the 1981 Tu Tangata Wananga Whakaitira conference under the auspices of the Department of Maori Affairs. The inaugural conference in 1980 marked a turning point in the relationship between a government bureaucracy and its client community.

It was in essence a voyage of discovery between a revamped Department of Maori Affairs and the people it had purported to serve in the past. At that conference Kara Puketapu signalled his intention of inverting the bureaucratic pyramid and effectively making the people the directors of community development programmes.

## Legacy of mistrust

Such a fundamental transformation of a social institution is fraught with difficulties not the least of which is a legacy of mistrust among many Maoris towards the Department. Then there are the vested interests of organisations such as the Maori Council with its own bureaucratic type perception of its role in serving the people.

It has taken time for the Council to perceive that it too was being inverted along with the Department. Consequently council members were offended when they were by-passed by the Department as field officers went directly to the people to establish community programmes such as whanau wananga, kokiri skills centres, and tu tangata home-work groups.

Other unanticipated difficulties soon became manifest. For instance community officers long wedded to their desks were gun-shy of fronting up to the community. They needed retraining.

## Key issues

The experience gained in the twelve months since the inaugural conference from a series of district planning conferences identified the key issues of community development. These were brought forward in a series of papers and recommendations to be considered by the delegates to the 1981 conference.

## Identify priorities

There is insufficient time to deal with the themes of the seven workshops so I will confine myself to the basic one of kokiri administration. Essentially a kokiri is an overall community administration group charged with the responsibility of bringing Maori voluntary associations together to identify priorities, in community development.

Having identified those priorities, resources at the disposal of the Department for community development are then allocated. This devolution of power and resources has been long dreamed of by the Maori people. Now with a sympathetic head at the top it is being brought to fruition.

## Field Administrators needed

The pilot schemes launched in Wellington on Kokiri administration, according to the community officer responsible for them, indicates that the theory on which it is founded is not only feasible but also successful. But experience has shown that there is a need for training of participants in voluntary associations, and community officers

themselves.

At the grass-roots level, training is needed in committee procedure, accounting, communication skills, dealing with bureaucracy, and the marshalling of social and financial resources. Community officers need training in management and community development.

They also need a working knowledge of legal systems, local bodies and their by-laws and planning procedures. So important is training for kokiri administration that the conference voted for \$100,000 to be ear-marked for the purpose.

## Marshall and unite

The aim of kokiri administration is to marshal community groups and to unite with them the resources of the Department of Maori Affairs. That way a concentrated impact will be made on many of the social issues that each has grappled with separately for so many years. Should Maoris succeed in this creative alternative strategy then the model provided may well be emulated by the rest of society.

