

Maoris advised to crack small business first

From a speech by Hugh Fletcher to the Maori Business Development Conference.

I am pleased to discuss a matter of great moment — the involvement of Maori people in business. I do this in great humility. I am very conscious that I was born with a golden spoon in my mouth and my own personal experience is of little relevance to other Maoris or Pakehas.

In the case of my years with our organisation I have certainly known the pain of failure, or error, of mistake, or a lack of constancy or commitment — but in knowing that I have also known that the work of those who preceded me was too sound and too large to be endangered by my mistakes — and that underlying strength is now a typical situation. So I make these remarks in all humility.

At the outset let me also make it quite clear that it is not the right, it is not the role, of a commercial organisation such as Fletcher Challenge, to tell anyone what they should do with their life. My colleagues and I will not say Maoris or women should be more involved in managing businesses and/or owning and operating businesses. It is for the Maori to make that decision.

If you as an individual do not want to be a businessman then do not be one. You do not owe it to Society to be one. The choice is yours. However, if you do want to be a businessman then a Society that calls itself equalitarian owes it to you to give you an equal opportunity to be one.

In considering the decision of course, you will be guided by how can business enable you to satisfy your aims and aspirations that give enjoyment. Material wealth is seldom an aim or an aspiration in itself but it is amongst many of us often the most powerful means to achieve a lot of our personal or group aims and aspirations.

And so the attaining of material wealth so that it can be used to provide enjoyment is a dominating factor in society today. How to attain material wealth while not losing one's meaning and enjoyment of life in the process is the critical choice question we all face. And all of us will decide differently. There is no shame in that. And if every Maori elected to leave business aside there can be no objection to that.

It is choice

But no doubt you will ask yourselves individually and collectively as to why in such startling proportions relative to Pakehas you are doing so. Is it from choice or is it because of inequality of opportunity.

My colleagues' and my reason for being here is not to influence your choice but to be a small attempt to ensure that if you make the

choice to get more heavily into business that you do not then suffer from inequality of opportunity.

I was very interested by Mr Rangihau's remarks about the economic activity of Maoris in the 1850's. (Published in this issue, ED). It was the perfect rebuttal to the derisory cliches thrown around about Maori compability with business, and it raised in my mind a couple of points of some importance.

Firstly in choosing whether or not you want an involvement in business one has to concede that to say so is a very extreme (though not necessarily wrong) decision simply because business is all pervasive. The proportion of economic activity that falls under the "business" banner is very large. For 10% of the population to reject such a large area of opportunity would be surprising.

Group approach

Secondly and I may well be wrong — but the much greater group orientation of the Maori against the individual orientation of the Pakeha may well be the most dominant reason for the different employment directions the two groups have taken in the business arena. In looking at the position of the Maori in business in New Zealand today I regard it as comparable to that of women. So if I might use one of the sexist cliches used in business "that behind every good businessman there is a wife." This cliché has often been factually correct and it does state a number of features of New Zealand business today,

(a) that business is individual oriented — the wife and children are not alongside, they are behind — out of sight, out of mind. Their role is to strengthen the individual. Remove from him all of the worries and responsibilities of the home and family, so that he as an individual can excell, succeed.

(b) secondly, the type-casting of male versus female. The cliché is quite clear the man is the businessman, the woman is not. Yet there is not and never was any objective assessment as to who was the better of being a businessperson. Because it became so engrained in our society the damage was done as children — the sons were educated, were trained, were put up for employment to progress through to management or ownership; the daughter was removed from such education to an education to serve, to nurse or to speak nicely. No wonder women are as rare

