

# Deja Vu For Maori business

**In 1857 the 8000 people of the Bay of Plenty, Rotorua and Taupo tribes had 45 coastal vessels engaged in trade. They also had 900 canoes, 96 ploughs, 1000 horses, four flour mills driven by water power, 5000 pigs, and 200 cattle engaged in a vast commercial enterprise supplying other areas of Aotearoa.**

Contrast this enterprising example with the present situation in which a national Maori business development conference has just been held to encourage a return of these entrepreneurial skills.

In his address to the conference, John Rangihau quoted a paper the late Dr Sutch presented to Maori students back in 1964.

"Dr Sutch identified five critical processes that followed colonial settlement as:

- The embracing by the Maori of new technical means of production — horses, metal goods, flour mills, trading ships; new products such as wheat and flour and new animals such as pigs and cattle.
- The adoption by the Maori of production for the market.
- The introduction of the wages system and the partial divorce from the Maori community.
- The adoption of price, money and credit system.
- The alienation of tribal land to individual ownership.

The impact of these processes were beyond belief. Their potential for social and economic devastation — horrendous. But what I want to emphasise is the Maori response because it is from

**John Rangihau**



that response that we can draw significant lessons for the present.

## **Take note**

The Maori of the 1840's, 50's and 60's responded positively to these challenges. In many parts of the country, the Maori provided the settlements daily needs. In the North Island the Maori grew thousands of acres of wheat. By 1855 the Maori dominated coastal trading. The Maori not only grew the wheat and shipped it they also exported it to Australia.

Such records startling facts about the Maori people's entrepreneurial skills.

Modern Government and Business Trade missions please take note.

## **No self-help**

Maori people please take note that there were no petty jealousies, no ethic of pulling one another down and no concept of relations helping one another to the crops. These were indoctrinational processes which were developed later against traditional ohu patterns.

Contrast this example with the crisis in confidence that confronts us today. A lack of confidence that developed in the wake of the devastation of the land wars.

A lack of confidence we carried with

us into the cities during the period of urbanisation. A lack of confidence that is reflected in poor scholastic results, the disproportionate number of our people unemployed or in low status jobs and in the popular image of the Maori painted by sections of the media and popular Pakeha mythology.

That lack of confidence is totally unjustified. Let me pause momentarily as we remember shining examples of our people's efforts to rise above their condition as exemplified by their working with the Health Department for a few years with the Maori Councils Act; the Maori War Efforts Organisation and its aftermath the Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act, the exploits of Maori Servicemen especially the Maori Battalion.

## **Living examples**

You, who are here is further unjustification. You are living examples of this. You demonstrate to the World the Maori people's capacity to succeed in the world of commerce. And, most importantly it is not a new skill.

Let me deal briefly with how our forefathers managed to organise themselves to cope with the challenges of Pakeha settlement.

## **Organising**

The key to that success was their ability to organise economic activity collectively. They successfully acquired the skills of the Pakeha, they adopted new technology, products and animals and they integrated these with existing land ownerships patterns and tribal organisation. Sutch says:

"Maori tribes had both the economic organisation and the ability to produce and harvest crops and build, own and operate coastal vessels to take the crops to the main settlements. The Maori tribes operated a large sector of economic life and they did it with the tribe owning the land, the tools and the vessels and dividing the proceeds of sales in accordance with custom."

In the intervening years much has changed, yet much has been retained. We still have the essentials of tribal organisation, despite all that has happened we retain physical resources such as land. Most importantly, we have at our disposal that tremendous human resource — **our people.**

The challenge confronting this hui collectively and you individually and specifically is that of mobilising these resources. **Mobilising them in a distinctively Maori way.**