

# An Exercise in Maori Autonomy:

## THE RISE AND DEMISE OF THE MAORI WAR EFFORT ORGANIZATION

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IN JUNE 1986, *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (day break)* was released. Known also as the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare*, its findings were the result of 12 months' work involving 60 meetings and 1691 submissions. The report not only suggested changes to the Department of Social Welfare; it recommended that a comprehensive approach be adopted in all government dealings with Maori business and that the initiatives of the Maori people and the community at large be harnessed to help address problems.<sup>1</sup> Those who drafted the report, in the main Maori, looked to the precedent set in the Second World War when Maori had assumed unprecedented responsibility in the administration of their affairs.<sup>2</sup> In the lengthy history of government dealings with Maori, this unusual relaxation of official domination was short-lived — an interregnum prompted by war-time needs. As a case study, however, it retains a high degree of interest because it exemplifies the historical pattern of government control and Maori-government inter-action which Maori have tried for years to alter. Currently they are still endeavouring to break free from a paternalistic relationship which many Maori see as restricting their access to an equitable share of the nation's resources. Some sections of the Maori world see the struggle as another episode in the fight to secure mana Maori motuhake, autonomy or self-government.<sup>3</sup>

That Maori are not prepared to accept the old paternalism — the regime of 'the Pakeha knows best' — was shown by widespread Maori irritation over a loan affair which first became public in December 1986. There was a general reluctance to accept allegations of incompetence in the top Maori administrators. From a hui at Hoani Waititi Marae, Auckland, the call went forth for a 'new-look' Department of Maori Affairs, one geared to better co-ordination of government agencies and a greater participation of the Maori community in the various levels of administration.<sup>4</sup> This is not a

1 *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (day break)*, Wellington, p. 14.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 15-18.

3 e.g. Whatarangi Winiata, 'Good Morning New Zealand', National Radio, 3 February 1987. For a similar evaluation see 'Sympathy in loan row', Alan Ward to Editor, *Dominion*, 9 January 1987.

4 *Dominion*, 8 January 1987.

new idea. In a slightly different form the request was first tabled by Maori in 1936 at a Maori Labour conference. It was put forward again in 1945, as the four Ratana-Labour Maori MPs fought to restructure the Maori War Effort Organization and the Native Department for rapid peace-time development towards the Labour promise of 'equality with racial individuality'.<sup>5</sup>

The history of the Maori War Effort Organization and its demise should be looked at carefully. It is one of the best examples of the repeated pattern of government failure to allow Maori full freedom to develop their resources, and to give them scope to exercise that autonomy which they believe should be theirs under the promises of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The Maori War Effort Organization began to take shape early in the war. Anticipating the outbreak of war, Apirana Ngata, MP for Eastern Maori, had recommended the formation of a Maori military unit, following the precedent of the Maori Pioneer Battalion of the First World War. The Ratana-Labour MPs, Eruera Tirikatene and Paraire Paieka, put forward a similar request. It was not intended that Maori should not serve in other units but that a Maori unit should be reserved for Maori. After an initial hesitation, the government acceded to these requests. In October 1939, it announced that an infantry battalion of Maori recruits would be formed. Within three weeks 900 men had enlisted. Despite Maori objections, the government reserved the right to appoint Pakeha officers and non-commissioned officers to key positions, although prospective Maori officers and NCOs were quickly selected for training. The 28th Maori Battalion, organized on a tribal basis in four companies, departed overseas on 2 May 1940.<sup>6</sup>

Mounting war-time pressures soon forced the government to take special measures. In June 1940 conscription for the forces and for civilian needs was introduced. In July, a War Cabinet of Labour Party and opposition members was formed under the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser. The Maori MPs urged the government not to enforce conscription on the Maori people.<sup>7</sup> It had been a highly contentious issue in the First World War, deeply resented by many Maori, especially by Taranaki and Waikato, who had suffered heavy confiscation in the wars of the 1860s. A group of Waikato had been imprisoned at Auckland for resisting conscription.<sup>8</sup> This insensitivity, coupled with failure to deal adequately with compensation for

5 Claudia Orange, 'A Kind of Equality: Labour and the Maori People 1935-1949', M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1977, pp. 52-56, 62, and Appendix 3. This article has also drawn on R. Ngata Love, 'Policies of Frustration: The Growth of Maori Politics: The Ratana-Labour era', Ph.D. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1977, especially chs. xi, xii.

6 *ibid.*, pp. 325-6; J. F. Cody, *28 (Maori) Battalion*, Wellington, 1956, pp. 1-4; 'War History', Maori Affairs (MA) 19/1/565, National Archives (NA).

7 'Meeting of Maori MPs, 13 March 1941', MA 52/9g; J. V. T. Baker, *The New Zealand People at War: War Economy*, Wellington, 1965, pp. 58-59, 452-4.

8 P. S. O'Connor, 'The Recruitment of Maori Soldiers, 1914-18', *Political Science*, XIX, 2 (1967), pp. 48-83.

the land confiscations, rankled with the affected tribe and left them hesitant at the beginning of the Second World War. Initially, the Waikato leader Te Puea refused to direct her people to go to war, although she endorsed voluntary enlistment and committed Waikato to food- and fund-raising.<sup>9</sup> The Labour Government, anxious not to alienate Maori further, wisely continued the voluntary system for Maori, despite Pakeha criticism.

As the stress of war increased, however, it became apparent that a special Maori effort was called for, not only to increase the number of Maori recruits but to build up the Maori war effort. This was initiated in May 1941 when the War Cabinet gave Paikea responsibility for stimulating Maori involvement. Paikea, taken into the Cabinet in late 1940, was authorized to use the radio for publicity purposes and was free to make any other arrangements. In the following months he embarked on an intensive publicity campaign throughout the country. In some districts the increase in Maori enlistments was most satisfying, but in others it remained disappointing. Apart from Taranaki and Waikato, parts of the Bay of Plenty caused concern. Adverse Maori attitudes there, too, were the result of nineteenth-century confiscations.<sup>10</sup>

Problems of identifying Maori for war service and manpower were also emerging as the government had no complete listing of adult Maori. There were no Maori electoral rolls and though registration had been required for social security purposes since September 1938, forms had been filled in by only a quarter of the estimated Maori work force. When the Cabinet asked the Native Department to supply a list of all single Maori aged 18 to 45, together with the names of Maori males with from one to three dependants, assuming that the department had the closest contact with the Maori people, the departmental head had to admit that he had no listing available. To make one he envisaged engaging 75 staff officers assisted by 200 special temporary assistants. He referred the request to Paikea. Eager to see Maori exercise a greater degree of control over their affairs, Paikea agreed to make a listing from his own office with the assistance of army area officers.<sup>11</sup> This was an important shift of responsibility away from the Native Department and it was to lead to the formation of the largest Maori organization ever established — the Maori War Effort Organization.

The plan for such a body had been germinating for some time. Having consulted widely throughout Maoridom, the Ratana-Labour MPs drafted a scheme for a nation-wide network, operated and controlled by Maori, which would deal not only with recruiting but with all war-related activities. Maori leaders pledged their support. Paikea had already made careful overtures to sensitive districts, stressing the political potential of the organiz-

<sup>9</sup> Te Puea to Savage [?], September and 12 November 1939, G. E. O. (Eric) Ramsden, Papers, 1813-1961, f.342, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL).

<sup>10</sup> Orange, p. 128; Love, pp. 336-8; 'Current Affairs', A. T. Ngata, Papers, 1929-50, ATL.

<sup>11</sup> Cabinet directive, 9 May 1941, MA 19/1/219; Baker, p. 58; Love, p. 338; 'War History', MA 19/1/565; Under Secretary Native Department to Secretary Army Headquarters, 22 May 1941, MA 19/1/219.

ation. Waikato and Taranaki showed a willingness to participate as much for the political possibilities offered by the organization as from patriotic duty. Their commitment, however, ensured that other tribes would not hold back. A certain amount of ministerial and administrative resistance had to be overcome, but the government was finally forced to accept the fact that Maori leadership was indispensable in gaining Maori support.<sup>12</sup>

The scheme that Paikea submitted to the Prime Minister in May 1942 provided for a network of tribal committees which would work in close contact with local Maori communities. The committees' main function was to assist with recruiting, but they would also encourage primary production and co-operate in the direction of Maori manpower. Maori recruiting officers would co-ordinate the committees' activities, there would be a Chief Administrator or Liaison Officer, and the whole scheme was to be under the aegis of a Maori Parliamentary Committee comprising the four Maori MPs and a Legislative Councillor, Rangi Mawhete.<sup>13</sup>

On 3 June 1942 Cabinet approved the Maori War Effort Organization and the following week the Parliamentary Committee, under Paikea's chairmanship, met with an army representative. The Chief Liaison Officer would be attached to the committee and be directly responsible to Paikea, Minister-in-Charge of the Maori War Effort. He would liaise with the army but operate independently of it. The appointee, Colonel H. C. Hemphill,<sup>14</sup> co-ordinated the organization from an office in Parliament Buildings. Although military needs initially dominated government attitudes to the organization, the Maori Parliamentary Committee hoped from the outset to build a united Maori front in all respects.<sup>15</sup>

From the Parliamentary Committee's first meeting it was clear that Maori values would be applied to all the organization's deliberations and decisions. The committee, for example, was fully aware that uniformity in dealing with tribal districts was not practicable; and in the selection of Maori recruiting officers, it insisted on the importance of custom and tradition, even if this recognition cut across military and administrative procedures. Twenty recruiting officers of various ranks were nominated but each was paid on an equal basis regardless of rank.<sup>16</sup> Within six months the organization had been put in place. The country was divided into 21 zones, and 315 tribal committees were formed. For co-ordinating the work of the committees, 41 executive committees, comprising not more than two members from each tribal committee, were set up.<sup>17</sup> The organization, wholly Maori, involved all tribes. It gave Maori a unique opportunity to

12 Love, pp. 333, 339.

13 Paikea to Fraser, 11 May 1942, Walter Nash Papers, (NP) 2067, NA; Love, pp. 340-2.

14 Hemphill was not a Maori. Love, p. 344, notes that Paikea preferred him to Lt. Col. C. O. Pratt, a senior Registrar with the Department of Justice. Little is known about Hemphill's background.

15 Paikea to Fraser, 18 June 1942, NP 2067.

16 Orange, pp. 129-30; Love, p. 345.

17 Paikea to Minister of Defence, 19 January 1943, NP 2067; Love, pp. 357-8, 549.

show their capacity for leadership and planning. They seized it.

The organization concentrated at first on recruitment. It was greatly helped by government agreement to Maori ways of operating. In July 1942 Cabinet accepted Hemphill's recommendation that the government 'give immediate recognition to the principle of tribal leadership (consistent with military efficiency) throughout the fighting service'. As Hemphill stated, 'the Maori race has, from ancient times, held the noble art of leadership, especially in warfare, as a tribal status of the utmost racial importance. Accordingly every possible effort should be made by all concerned to restore to the Maori people and safeguard their rightful place and pride of leadership, especially during the present crisis'.<sup>18</sup> He recommended that territorial units, wholly composed of Maori personnel, be commanded by a Maori officer; that where Maori personnel were distributed throughout units they be regrouped into exclusively Maori units to foster tribal unity; and that the same tribal principle be applied to all units of the Home Guard. The Parliamentary Committee also recommended dropping the limitation on enlisting Maori with dependent children above the regulation limit. There was an immediate boost in numbers enlisting for the services.<sup>19</sup> A united Maori effort based on representative tribal leadership was paying off; consequently the threat of conscription receded.

As recruitment proceeded the work of the organization expanded. The committees encouraged food production, vital to wartime needs. They became involved in investigation of housing conditions and alleged misuse of social security benefits. Their broad functions often required them to consider education, vocational training and land use. The committees received no government funding for their work; it was entirely voluntary. Functions such as 'basket socials', where food kits were auctioned, provided them with some funds, but these were ear-marked for patriotic purposes.<sup>20</sup>

The activity that most expanded the organization's responsibility, however, was manpower. The government gave the tribal committees responsibility for the registration and control of Maori manpower. Committees had to list personnel — males between 18 and 59 years and females between 20 and 30. They could enforce registration and recommend the industry and locality for employment. With their intimate knowledge of local Maori they were well able to judge in what capacity people should be directed. Often they were called upon, at short notice, to fill labour quotas for specific jobs.<sup>21</sup> In some districts freezing works and dairy factories could not have operated without their assistance. Although the committees worked closely with the manpower officers of the National Service Department, they followed essentially Maori practices. They dealt with a range of

18 cit. Love, pp. 348-9; Hemphill to Fraser, 11 July 1942, NP 2067.

19 Love, p. 354.

20 *ibid.*, pp. 355-9; Orange, pp. 130-1.

21 See Nancy M. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front*, Wellington, 1986, II, p. 1261.

problems — employer-employee relationships, identification of workers who sometimes used aliases to go from job to job, absenteeism, and other irregularities arising from the strain that industrial and urban life placed on Maori newly involved in the work force. Since manpower officers were required to consult with tribal committees before issuing decisions regarding Maori personnel, the influence and powers resting with the committees were extensive. To the National Service Department the committees' work was invaluable.<sup>22</sup>

By the end of 1942 the position of young Maori women in urban employment was attracting the organization's attention. A voluntary welfare officer, working with the Ngati Poneke tribal committee, reported on the Wellington situation. She had made contact with some 300 young women. Most of them worked in hotels and restaurants, lived in the poorest city areas and had little contact with Wellington's voluntary workers and church groups. According to the welfare officer, there were 'grave social problems' amongst the women. The situation was similar in Auckland.<sup>23</sup>

On the recommendation of the organization, women welfare officers were appointed in the following months to the National Service Department, first in the major cities and later in certain country towns. Under the first appointee, Mrs M. Owens (a Maori), Maori women officers were trained to move out into the community to make contact with young Maori women. If necessary, the officers assisted with job placement and accommodation. The welfare officers were supported by the tribal committees who acted as contact agencies in the rural areas.<sup>24</sup> Thus the organization constituted a vital bridge for many Maori between rural and urban life.

Initially the government anticipated a six-month life span for the organization at an estimated cost of \$14,000.<sup>25</sup> But in January 1943 Paikea requested its extension. As he explained to the Minister of Defence, Maori were asking for patience and consideration from Pakeha because it was a 'revolutionary experience' for Maori to be given such a degree of control over their affairs. Initial hesitancy had been overcome by the government's conciliatory attitude on conscription, by assurances of adequate rehabilitation, and by continuing careful handling of sensitive tribal regions, particularly Fraser's efforts to win Te Puea's support and his promises that compensation for confiscation would be settled at the war's end.<sup>26</sup> Paikea stressed the fact that it was the 'assurance of a position of leadership' that had stimulated enthusiasm; it had overcome long-standing suspicion of government including, at first, the organization itself. Over 27,000 Maori

22 Notes of conference, 16 December 1943, MA 36/23; Love, pp. 329, 355.

23 Chairman, Ngati Poneke Tribal Committee to Paikea, 16 November 1942, NP 2067; Mason to Under Secretary for Justice, 15 July 1943, MA 36/1.

24 Memo to all Recruiting and Liaison Officers and Executive Committees, 8 November 1943, MA 19/1/219; *NZ Herald*, 23 August 1943.

25 Love, p. 352.

26 Report of a conference, 3 July 1942, MA 31/53; Ngata to Fraser, 5 July 1942, NP 2067.

were in the services or had been placed in essential industries.<sup>27</sup> For the first time, one organization had successfully co-ordinated Maori efforts and had brought within its ranks all the accepted Maori leaders. Maori were moving into participation in the mainstream of New Zealand life but on their own terms.

In April 1943 Paikea again appealed to Fraser for an extension of the organization's life:

In the minds of the Maori people, the establishment of the Maori War Organization is the greatest thing that has happened in the history of the Maori people, since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. They feel that in the organization lies the future prosperity, development and happiness of their people. It is submitted that the Organization should be carefully nursed, encouraged and developed to the full, not only on account of the people's war effort, but also that it may play a worthwhile and practical part in the after-war reconstruction and . . . rehabilitation.<sup>28</sup>

Paikea wanted the services of the Maori recruiting officers retained to nurture the committees until they were securely established. Together with the other Ratana-Labour MPs, he saw the organization as essential not merely for immediate needs but to the future development of Maoridom. 'Should the present attempt to reorganise the Maori people around their tribal system and spirit, and to put them with their rapidly increasing population, to compete on equal terms with their Pakeha brothers and sisters in the present and future economic, commercial, industrial and social life of New Zealand fail, then the outlook can only be viewed in a dim light, with inferiority complex as a dominant factor.'<sup>29</sup>

Paikea's appeal was influential in Cabinet. The Maori War Effort Organization's existence was extended to the end of April 1944.<sup>30</sup> It was an important concession but it was evident to the Ratana-Labour MPs that, though they had won government acceptance of the principle of Maori leadership in a war crisis, they would be involved in a fight to retain it. Moreover, their position was weakened by Paikea's unexpected death in April 1943. At Maori request, Fraser accepted Paikea's mantle as Minister-in-Charge of the Maori War Effort but Tirikatene took over effective leadership of the organization.<sup>31</sup> The Southern Maori MP was keen to see it survive, but lacked Paikea's capacity to bring various groups together and did not command the same respect in political circles.<sup>32</sup> The 1943 election was, nevertheless, a success for Ratana-Labour. Tiaki Omana captured the Eastern Maori seat from Ngata, and Paikea's son, T. P. Paikea, held

27 Paikea to Minister of Defence, 19 January 1943, NP 2067; Love, p. 359. According to Love, p. 361, the total Maori population had been officially estimated at 95,225 in September 1942.

28 cit. Love, p. 363; Paikea to War Cabinet, 3 April 1943, NP 2067.

29 cit. Love, p. 362.

30 Secretary of Treasury to Minister of Finance, 23 August 1943, NP 2067.

31 Tribal Executive to Fraser, 18 October 1943, NP 2067; Love, p. 367.

32 Interview with Wiremu Parker, 2 September 1986.

Northern Maori. The four Maori seats were therefore held by Labour.

The fight for the organization's survival was on. Sections of government had not favoured the decision to retain it. By mid-1943 the army had sufficient Maori recruits and could see no justification for retaining the Maori recruiting officers. Treasury recommended that the organization be discontinued from 31 January 1944. The Native Department, though claiming ignorance of organization work, supported this. By late 1943, the conflict had developed into one between the Maori MPs allied with the organization, against the Native Department, the Minister of Native Affairs, H. G. R. Mason, and a number of other officials, including Mason's secretary, M. R. Jones, and, rather surprisingly, Hemphill.<sup>33</sup>

The Native Department had at first conceded that the organization was better placed to handle the extensive contact with Maori called for by the army and the National Service Department. But as the organization expanded its activities beyond recruiting, its operations encroached upon those of the Native Department, drawing departmental and ministerial ire. In many instances it was difficult to see where the jurisdiction of each authority lay; there was bound to be some overlap and friction. Particularly irritating to some departmental officers was the fact that Maoris were bypassing them, preferring to deal with the organization.<sup>34</sup>

For years Maori had had an ambivalent relationship with the Native Department, needing what services it offered but viewing it, accurately, as a body primarily serving government rather than Maori interests. Before the war the department was essentially a legal and accounting agency, which had moved into land development from the late 1920s under Ngata's direction. By 1943-4, the department's work had spread, rather untidily, into new areas. In the first years of the Labour Government a housing section had been grafted on, with the Ministry of Works attending to construction and the handling of a Maori work force. The Labour Government had also extended the land development schemes but without any careful evaluation. In 1940 the department's land and housing work touched only a fraction of the Maori population, roughly 20%.<sup>35</sup> Some staff had long recognized that the department should commit itself to a more varied programme; welfare problems alone suggested a need for some reorientation of work.<sup>36</sup> For years various aspects of Maori welfare had been shuffled from one government department to another.<sup>37</sup> No one had been willing to

33 Love, pp. 364-5.

34 Under Secretary Native Department to Director National Service Department, 26 August 1942, Under Secretary to Registrars, 14 August 1942, Harvey to Under Secretary, 26 April 1944, MA 19/1/219; Mason to Fraser, 4 May 1943, NP 2067.

35 See Orange, ch. iii.

36 Mitchell to Registrar, Rotorua, 30 October 1937, MA 52/9d; Harvey to Under Secretary, 23 June 1938, MA 36/1; *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), 1938, G-9, p. 8; Grace to Registrar, Wellington, 17 May 1939, MA 52/9a.

37 e.g. Director-General of Health to Under Secretary, 19 August 1937, and reply of 20 August 1937, and other letters on file, MA 36/1.

take the initiative until the war-time flow of Maori workers to urban areas brought the issue to a head. It was at the organization's insistence that welfare officers had been appointed. Mason's suggestion that a Probation Officer might fit the need was rejected by the organization because the officer's duties would be limited to court functions. The thinking of the department's head was similarly unimaginative. He felt that the 'essential ingredients' for the development of the Maori had already been provided. At most, he envisaged adding vocational guidance, the 'only really important service . . . lacking in the providing of a wide and open road for the people from childhood to age'. The placement of Maori in urban employment in his view was not a departmental duty at all.<sup>38</sup> It seemed that the department, by failing to make available a wider range of services, was willing to lose its position as the major trustee of Maori interests.

If the department was sluggish the Native Minister, H. G. R. Mason, was not. By mid-1943 it is clear that he saw the organization as undermining the department's interest. A man with few Maori contacts and no real grasp of the organization's significance, Mason wanted to curb any trend towards its expansion or entrenchment.<sup>39</sup> Seeking alternatives, he proposed a revival of the Maori Councils set up under legislation in 1900. Most were defunct, while the survivors had been largely incorporated into the organization.<sup>40</sup> A draft Council Bill was presented to a meeting of Maori MPs, departmental officers, a number of recruiting officers and tribal representatives. The Bill drew strong opposition from the Maori MPs and organization representatives because it took away the autonomy they had secured in various aspects of Maori affairs. In face of this opposition Fraser agreed that Maori opinion should be sought through consultation with the organization's executive committees. The response was clear. They rejected the Bill. They found particularly offensive a provision whereby the councils could be dominated by Pakeha; the organization was proving that Maori were capable of managing their own affairs. Despite Maori opposition, Mason persisted in airing the proposal. The department belatedly saw the point in bringing the organization's work under its control and therefore supported Mason.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, Mason planned to introduce a system of welfare officers into the Native Department. First mooted in August 1943, the proposal was outlined in its annual report. The welfare officers would provide better liaison with state departments which handled Maori welfare and they would act as 'Placement Officers', assisting Maori in their absorption into industry. They would be a 'connecting link' between the department and

38 Under Secretary to Native Minister, 13 May 1943, MA 36/1.

39 Love, p. 388.

40 Orange, p. 148. Earlier moves to revive the Councils had been suspended at the outbreak of the war.

41 Love, pp. 369-71; Harvey to Under Secretary, 26 April 1944, Shepherd to Secretary of the Treasury, 17 May 1944, MA 19/1/219.

various voluntary organizations that were already involved in Maori welfare.<sup>42</sup>

Through 1944 the Maori MPs and those involved in the organization, anxious to secure a place for it in the future scheme of Maori affairs, tried various tacks. They succeeded in securing an extension of its life for the duration of the war, but it was gradually scaled down. In June 1944 Hemphill's job ended and Cabinet decided to reduce the number of recruiting officers from 21 to 15. With the future uncertain, Maori efforts to restructure the organization faltered. Fraser might have given a considerate hearing to the Maori MPs but his time was fully taken up with national and international affairs. In July the Maori MPs decided to approach the Acting Prime Minister, D. G. Sullivan. They pleaded for a thorough investigation of the administration of Maori affairs. They pointed out that Maori generally were dissatisfied with the department, which was not equipped to deal satisfactorily with their difficulties. Responsibility for Maori, moreover, was shared by many departments where officers were concerned mainly with the populace at large and only incidentally with Maori.<sup>43</sup> The Maori MPs recommended the establishment of a new Department of Maori Welfare essentially with a co-ordinating role.

Liaising with other government agencies, this department would develop a coherent policy for dealing with the Maori situation. The proposal, developed by a small committee called by Tirikatene, aimed also to give statutory recognition to the organization's committees, enabling them to retain their degree of autonomy but bringing them within public service requirements. Faced with lack of response from the government, Tirikatene nevertheless continued to put the case to the Prime Minister, that the Maori people had earned a right to a review of Maori affairs administration.

Tirikatene tried to show the government the extent of Maori support for a change in policy. In late 1944 he called four conferences — at Wellington, Rotorua, Ratana and Opoutama. He was keen to have a good attendance of Maori leaders especially from the organization, but others were invited, including church leaders. At the main conference, held in Wellington, the Prime Minister's opening address revealed that he supported the view that the Native Department should be the main government body dealing with Maori affairs. This was completely contrary to the views expressed at the conference. Maori not only wanted tribal unity further consolidated; they were seeking ways by which it could become a permanent part of the national scene.<sup>44</sup>

The extent of Maori dissatisfaction with the department was shown by criticism expressed during the conference and by press reports appearing

42 Mason to Allum, 2 August 1943, MA 36/1, AJHR, 1945, G-9, pp. 3-4. There had been 'welfare officers' before but their duties were confined to land development work.

43 Love, pp. 375-81.

44 Conference Report, Wellington, 18-20 October 1944, NP 2067; Conference notes, 18-20 October 1944, MA 19/1/535; Love, p. 381-5.

about the same time. The department deserved this criticism. Staff was barely coping with the expansion of work. The land development schemes needed a major overhaul and housing programmes were woefully inadequate. Shortcomings might have gone unnoticed longer but for the Rehabilitation Department which urged that, if the Native Department handled Maori rehabilitation, standards had to match those applying to Pakeha returned servicemen; the department was forced to comply, but it was renowned for its slowness.<sup>45</sup>

More generally, Maori found the department unhelpful on a range of issues. Its Pakeha staff was not uniformly sympathetic to the Maori situation. Yet despite these weaknesses the government was about to add a further dimension to the department's work by extending welfare work. A Chief Welfare Officer, Rangi Royal, was appointed in early 1945 and by March welfare officers were operating in Ruatoria, Gisborne, and the head office in Wellington. By July, the department was waiting for government approval to extend the service to all districts.<sup>46</sup> It was evident that the Maori War Effort Organization was being squeezed out of government plans.

This Maori were not prepared to accept. A small working group under Tirikatene's chairmanship drafted the Maori Social and Economic Reconstruction Bill, which they presented to the Prime Minister. Under its provisions a new Department of Maori Administration would be established. It would co-ordinate the activities of the various government departments dealing with Maori, and at the same time incorporate a 'flax-roots' committee structure akin to the organization. Thus a degree of autonomy would be retained, while government resources would be utilized effectively for rapid Maori development. The Board of Native Affairs, with its predominantly land orientation and all-Pakeha members, would be supplanted by a new Board comprising the Minister and Director of the new department, together with the permanent heads of the Departments of Health, Education, Social Security, Housing, Treasury, and the Native Department. Most important from a Maori point of view was the provision for eight Maori members. They would be elected from four District Councils—bodies corresponding to the Maori electoral districts and additional to tribal and executive committees established along the lines of the organization. Like the Board, their function would be basically a co-ordinating one, their members comprising the district's Maori MP and a liaison officer, delegates from tribal executives, and representatives from government departments.<sup>47</sup> Expenses would be met from an appropriation from Parliament. Maori participation was built into this scheme from the most senior administrative level down to the tribal committees. Authority, at last, would be held by Maori.

In most respects the plan resembled the one put forward at the 1936

45 Orange, pp. 134-43.

46 AJHR, 1945, G-9, p. 2; Under Secretary to all Judges, 16 July 1945, MA 35/1.

47 Tirikatene to the Prime Minister, 20 September 1945, NP 2067; Love, pp. 389-94.

Maori Labour conference.<sup>48</sup> The Labour Government had then ignored it. Policies begun under the previous government had instead been expanded and better funded. They had brought improvements to Maori society, but not the promised 'equality', which proved a more complex goal than expected. Tirikatene no doubt hoped that the climate of opinion had been improved by Maori performance in the war effort; that there was a chance for the government to convert war-time policy into fulfilment of its earlier promise of *mana Maori motuhake*, first made in a policy statement on Maori affairs in 1925. Labour had then offered to provide a degree of self-government through the establishment of a Maori council with advisory and administrative powers.<sup>49</sup>

The Labour Government now had to reconcile two schools of thought on Maori affairs. The representations of their Maori MPs and the Maori community could not be ignored. But the Native Department was hostile to the proposed reorganization, and Mason thought it unnecessary. He was influenced to some degree by Ngata who remained influential despite losing his seat in 1943. Throughout the war Ngata worked directly with the Prime Minister, by-passing the organization, which he distrusted. He feared its political potential amongst Maori at large and particularly in his own electorate. Fraser, however, was sympathetic to Maori aims for autonomy, but as he was engrossed in other business, Mason was left to finalize the legislation.<sup>50</sup>

The Bill was drafted in great haste for the closing stages of the 1945 parliamentary session. The main directive, given to the Native Department's law clerk, R. Blane, was to include the organization in the Bill in some way. He had a draft of Mason's Maori Council Bill, which had been suspended since 1943, and a draft of Tirikatene's Bill. In a first attempt, Blane tried to make provision for the incorporation of Maori in positions of administrative responsibility. Mason rejected this draft and ordered Blane to submit a second draft based simply on the Maori Councils Bill. This draft was accepted as the basis for the Maori Social and Economic Advancement Act 1945.<sup>51</sup>

The Act was a compromise. It left the structure of the Board and Department of Native Affairs intact and made no provision for the District Councils proposed in Tirikatene's Bill. It incorporated only the tribal and executive committees, which immediately became a part of the department's structure. The Act made provision for an allocation of

48 Orange, p. 55. For a similar plan, see R. Love, 'The Maori, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow', *Journal of Public Administration*, VI, 1 (1943), p. 71.

49 Report on Maori affairs, NZ Labour Party Conference Report 1945; Native Policy 1925, NZ Labour Party, in the possession of A. Moffat, Auckland; Orange, pp. 30-31 and Appendix I.

50 Notes of a deputation to Fraser, 29 October 1945, MA 19/1/219. Interview with M. R. Jones, 25 September 1976; Love, p. 349.

51 Interview with R. Blane, 15 December 1975; Maori Councils Bill (draft); Maori Social and Economic Reconstruction Bill (draft); Plan of Department of Maori Administration, MA 19/1/219; Love, pp. 392-4.

government funds to the committees through subsidies equal to any money raised by the committees. The funds could be used for almost any purpose, because the Act left the widest scope for interpretation. The law clerk's brief had been extremely vague. He had made provision, therefore, for the most comprehensive range of activities that the department and committees might wish. The Act's full title indicated this: An Act to make Provision for the Social and Economic Advancement and the Promotion and Maintenance of the Health and Social Well-Being of the Maori Community.

At best, however, it represented a partial victory. The department had been drawn into a wider range of work and was committed by legislation to a degree of co-operation with the Maori people which would have been unthinkable in the pre-war years. Constant Maori pressure had secured this shift in policy. But the committees would have to deal with Native Department officers at district office level in all aspects of tribal business. They had lost the 'flax-roots' autonomy as well as Maori leadership at the top level of government.

Fraser expected much from the legislation. He was confident that Maori energies released during the war could be harnessed for Maori development in peace-time. His conception of the future was one in which Maori handled their own affairs as much as possible. Anxious that the spirit of the organization should not be lost, he hoped that the work of the tribal committees and the department could be dove-tailed; 'this would bring new life into the Department and bring it closer to the people'.<sup>52</sup> But this view overlooked or ignored the strongly expressed Maori antipathy to the department.

In a 1946 election pamphlet, directed at Maori, Labour claimed that it had finally fulfilled its 1925 promise of *mana Maori motuhake*. In a section dealing with Maori social and economic development, the pamphlet traced the history of Pakeha rejection of Maori requests for self-administration. In chronological sequence, beginning with the 'broken promises' of the Treaty of Waitangi, it listed the failures of successive Maori leaders to satisfy the demand for autonomy which Maori were said to hold.<sup>53</sup> But Labour's claim was proved false by subsequent Maori experience.

In early 1946 a Native Department officer observed that Maori were doubtful about the successful implementation of any policy 'expressed or implied' in the Act. The Native Department, too, was not happy. Staff thought it merely a means of absorbing War Effort personnel into the department.<sup>54</sup> Through 1946 there were, in fact, no moves to implement the Act. When Fraser took over as Minister of Maori Affairs for the Labour Government's last three years, he pushed for its rapid implementation.<sup>55</sup> It was not easily carried through. Though the organizational structure was set

52 Deputation to Fraser, 29 October 1945, MA 19/1/219.

53 *The Maori Way of Life*, Wellington, 1946.

54 Royal Report, 8 May 1946, MA 35/1; Orange, pp. 187-9.

55 Notes of conference, 29 January 1947, Jones to Under Secretary, 6 March 1947, MA 35/1.

up, using the seven Maori Land Court districts, the Act was not a compulsory measure; welfare officers had to seek Maori co-operation in forming tribal committees. Progress was slow, but by March 1948 the department reported that 85% of the Maori population was organized in areas gazetted under the Act.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Fraser expressed his concern about the Act's workings. The welfare officers were supposed to play an important part in the overall scheme but they had quickly become the department's 'pack horses', loaded with work of other sections.<sup>57</sup> Fraser rarely put pen to paper on Maori affairs, but in a lengthy letter he outlined his conception of the Act. 'It was early recognised by myself that if the Organisation was absorbed into the ordinary activities and routine of the Department it would to a very great extent, be stultified and could not possibly exercise that positive beneficial influence, and carry out the work specified by Parliament for it to do as efficiently as if it was practically an autonomous organisation. It has been my aim to make the Organisation as self-controlling and autonomous as possible, that is to the full limits of its potential development — always stipulating for efficiency.'

Conceding that, of necessity, it had to be associated with the department, he noted with regret that the custom had grown up of referring all communications through the district registrars:

This was entirely opposed to my conception of the working of the Organisation and would slow up the development, the effectiveness, and the benefits of the Organisation to such an extent as would handicap all concerned and dishearten the Welfare Officers, the Tribal Executives and the Tribal Committees. To put it plainly, such a procedure would to a large extent nullify the purpose of the legislation and of the Government.

The Maori Social and Economic Welfare Organisation must not be looked upon as merely another branch of the Maori Department. It is an organisation that must be to a very large extent independent and self reliant. The Tribal Committees, the Tribal Executives and the Welfare Officers must think out proposals and plans for the advancement of the Maori people in all directions. They must feel that they are at full liberty to approach relevant Government Departments or their officers, such as the Education Department on education matters, the Health Department on matters of health, the Social Security Department on matters dealing with Social Security Benefits or any other Government Department, or those responsible for Governmental activities. It will always be necessary, of course, that such activities should be reported to the Controller by the local Welfare Officer, and, where necessary, the assistance of the Organisation and of the Maori Department should be asked for.<sup>58</sup>

Fraser's letter shows that he had unreasonable expectations. He expected the tribal committee structure to be more or less autonomous and hoped that Maori would consider it their own — 'a form of local expres-

56 AJHR, 1947, G-9, pp. 2-3; *ibid.*, 1948, G-9, pp. 5-6.

57 'Maori Welfare Division', 1947, Memo, Under Secretary, 10 December 1948, MA 35/1.

58 Fraser to Under Secretary, 21 September 1948, MA 35/1.

sion, direction and control, and, up to a point . . . even a measure of local government'.<sup>59</sup> But these objectives have been largely precluded by the terms of the Act. The committees were firmly within the department framework, committed to working at a local level only. There was no role of a national kind. Their only links with the government, in fact, were through the local welfare officers and district registrars, and the chief Welfare Officer at the head office — all departmental people.

The 1945 Act, not surprisingly, had limited success. The committees were in an ambiguous position — neither completely independent, nor wholly a part of government. Some welfare officers shared this ambiguity, seeing in their role a conflict of allegiances akin to that of the 1840s Protectors of Aborigines. Moreover, Maori were often confused by the range of responsibilities imposed on them. Once concrete objectives had been obtained — installation of water supplies, marae improvements, arts and crafts projects — committees felt a lack of direction. Ngata considered the Act a 'botch'. By 1955 some tribal committees played only a 'negligible part' in the organization of community affairs.<sup>60</sup> While a thorough analysis of the workings of the Act has not been made, the 1986 *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (day break) Report* points to the committees' lack of real authority. 'The [Act's] emphasis on economic development was helpful, but . . . tribal powers were carefully divorced from any responsibility for what was then the only — if illusory — economic base for Maoridom — the land. Without the land, or adequate funding to permit the development of other economic enterprises, the emphasis of the tribal councils shifted to political and social concerns. There never was the facility for the councils to be involved in any comprehensive tribal development programme.' When the 1945 Act was replaced by the 1962 Maori Welfare Act, the present New Zealand Maori Council was set up. The tribal principle, however, was not the 'basic rationale' for the Council's structure; it was based on regions.<sup>61</sup> The Council, therefore, has also had limited success.

A review of the Department of Maori Affairs is long overdue. When it occurs, either as a result of the loan 'scandal' or for other reasons, the government might well look at the patterns of history and learn there Maori perceptions of their past, their present, and their future. The history of the first Labour Government reveals a recurring tendency, seen in Ngata's 'scandal' of 1934 and in the 1986–7 Maori loan affair: whereas Maori are concerned for their right to act autonomously, the Pakeha community is concerned about 'mismanagement' of Maori affairs. The capacity to make political gain out of Maori policy and practice, often to the detriment of Maori welfare, is also evident.

59 *ibid.*

60 J. Metge, *A New Maori Migration*, London, 1964, pp. 86–88, 215–20; Reviews of welfare policy in MA 35/1; AJHR, 1949, G-9, p. 10; *ibid.*, 1950, G-9, p. 10; *ibid.*, 1957, G-9, p. 19; Ngata to Ramsden, 17 December 1946, Ramsden, Papers, f. 376. Interview with Mira Szaszzy, 19 March 1976.

61 *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (day break)*, pp. 18, 20–22.

The first Labour Government was particularly vulnerable because it held office after the 1946 election only by a majority of four. Since Labour had won the four Maori seats on the day before the general election, when Maori voting was customarily held, the government was open to the charge of holding office by virtue of the 'Maori mandate'. The opposition was quick to make political capital, as were various pressure groups. Over the next three years, the Returned Servicemen's Association and the farming sector regularly ranted over so-called 'idle' Maori land and regretted that Maori land was exempted from compulsory acquisition for rehabilitation. Other critics carped over alleged misuse of social security benefits, and there were tensions over housing conditions and crime rates as Maori urbanization continued. The reverse flow to rural districts expected after the war did not eventuate. The Native Department, too, was an easy target. It was not managing land or housing programmes adequately, a matter for both Maori as well as public criticism. With rehabilitation pressure and at Fraser's insistence the land schemes were reviewed and housing standards were finally raised. The Health and Education Departments also came in for their share of criticism. Improvements had been made during the Labour period but the condition of Maori health remained poor. The Education Department would admit no recognizable Maori shift to urban areas, in spite of evidence to the contrary. Expectations of Maori achievement remained lower than those for Pakeha, and numbers of Maori were being educated solely for a farming future when it was obvious that the land could support only a fraction of the population.<sup>62</sup>

Labour nevertheless made some significant moves to eradicate blatant paternalism and inequalities. The term 'Native' was replaced by 'Maori' in official usage; inequalities in drinking laws and in the allocation of social security benefits were eliminated; moves were made to make state rental housing more readily available. The justice of such measures was self-evident. As the 1949 election approached, however, it was evident that the Labour Government was fighting to sustain electorate support. Caught up in post-war difficulties, it walked a tight-rope, trying unsuccessfully to strike a balance on Maori affairs. National won the 1949 election and political observers noted that antipathy to Labour's apparent concessions to Maori had, in part, lost it the election.

Maori continued to support Labour in the elections during the 1950s, despite disappointment over its failure to grasp the degree to which Maori values differed from Pakeha ways. The 1957-60 Labour Government so dismayed the Ratana-Labour MPs that there was talk of withdrawing their support, a threat made previously to Fraser.<sup>63</sup> Walter Nash, the major culprit, kept a tight control over Maori Affairs by holding the portfolio. This was a paradoxical position for the man who had drafted the 1925 Labour Maori policy statement. It had promised not only a substantial

62 Orange, ch. v.

63 Love, p. 422, and ch. xiii.

degree of autonomy, but a kind of 'ratification' of the Treaty of Waitangi. Claims arising out of the Treaty would be investigated by a Commission.<sup>64</sup> The latter has been partially satisfied by the work of the Waitangi Tribunal, set up under Labour by the 1975 Treaty of Waitangi Act. But Maori autonomy has not been secured. As *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (day break)* notes:

The years since the 1950s have seen a continuation of institutionalised decisions for the Maori people. The Department of Maori Affairs has been the central point of policy development, not the iwi. Decisions are still centralised although some effort has been made to develop consultation. Consultation, though, is not a substitute for autonomy and tribal responsibility. . . . The Maori Council lacks authority and has little popular support and its Maori Committee's [sic] function is effective in only a few areas. It is really just another inappropriate structure persisting in the face of Maori experience. Those structures are confronted with a Maori world which is the major casualty of the New Zealand economic decline — and they are powerless. They are powerless because they ignore the one real fact in the few historical examples of Maori success — that the base of the Maori world is tribal. The point of reference into the world is tribal, and the only leaps we have made have been those centred on our iwi, our hapu and our whanau.<sup>65</sup>

In an election year — 1987 — the Labour Government is caught, as the first Labour Government was, walking a tight-rope between Maori expectations and electoral pressures. Old patterns could be repeated.

CLAUDIA ORANGE

*Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Wellington*

<sup>64</sup> Orange, Appendix I.

<sup>65</sup> *Puao-Te-Ata-Tu (day break)*, p. 18.