

Correspondence

Dear Editors

REVIEWS are helpful except where they mistake the facts. In reviewing my *Te Wai Pounamu the Greenstone Island* John Owens (*The New Zealand Journal of History*, April 1994) says that the book consists of material I submitted to the Waitangi Tribunal on the Ngai Tahu Claim. He calls this 'grievance history', and warns that 'one should not assume that major transitions occur solely because of the machinations of a few officials', and that 'we should not neglect aspects of our past which are not relevant for Waitangi Tribunal purposes'.

John Owens has put up a straw man. Little of the book's contents went before the Waitangi Tribunal, or derives from Tribunal sources. Of more than two thousand source references in my chapter notes, fewer than 150 refer to Tribunal submissions or reports. My bibliography includes about 300 publications and manuscripts that never went near the Tribunal. The officials he mentions — Grey, Eyre, Kemp and Mantell — emerge only halfway through the book, and dominate only five of my 20 chapters. I am careful to explain the wider context of colonial and imperial politics and economic and social pressures within which these men worked. My book disputes many of the Waitangi Tribunal's findings, and ends by deriding the Tribunal's preference for official evidence over contemporary Maori evidence. The only important Tribunal finding that it agrees with is that Ngai Tahu suffered 'grievous economic loss' — a conclusion previously announced by Mackay's Royal Commission Report in 1887, as I point out.

Contrary to what John Owens suggests, the book is not just about the Ngai Tahu claim. As the subtitle indicates, it is about European colonialism and its impact on the southern Maori. The earlier chapters portray Maori tribal society, colonialist movements, traders, musket wars, epidemics, British and Australian politics, missionaries, and their accompanying ideologies. Later chapters include the pastoral economy, Victorian imperialism, Darwinism and racism, New Zealand historiography, and the 'culture clash' theory. None of these phenomena concerned the Waitangi Tribunal, nor does the book suggest that any of them were the work of 'a few officials'.

John Owens suggests that I should make my book into a picture-book because it is 'too solid for most general readers'. However, I find that general readers are quite able to read books without pictures. Academic historians should not underestimate them in this.

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