

# Whakatohea outlines reason for new claim on lands

by Dawn Kincaid

**"We are not trying to dislocate anybody from their land, our case is against the Crown, and private individuals with European titles have nothing to fear."**

Whakatohea Maori Trust Board chairman, Claude Edwards, was addressing in detail to Race Relations Conciliator, Chris Laidlaw, the tribe's reasons for lodging a new compensation claim with the Waitangi Tribunal for lands which were confiscated in the 1800s.

"We must regain, and I'm not sure how, the mana Maoridom once had when they had full control of their resources," Mr Edwards told the meeting at Te Rere Marae on Friday.

"Unless, collectively, or individually, we strengthen and develop our economic base, I see a very, very sad future for us.

"I go back to the years between 1840 to 1860 when Maori people were contributing to the economy in a very businesslike way. For some of those people, the economic base was removed. Taranaki were the first people to come under pressure. Waikato got a hell of a thrashing and then the Bay of Plenty. Those events followed an

obvious pattern.

"The country was being pressured into a situation of unrest, and the people were settled on very fertile land, as near as one could imagine to the best fertile land in England. Government motives were very clear.

"Now we come right back to here. Whakatohea had all their lands confiscated, stripped away. If we could restore our economic base, we would be far better off without any Government funds at all, if we want to develop as a people.

"We know Maoridom has done without before, but somewhere in the processes, Maori have been compromised and seduced by policies that have built dependency attitudes.

"We are lodging a claim following the one lodged back in 1950, when, four years later, our old people settled for a lump sum of twenty thousand pounds for the confiscation of, as near as we can estimate, 130,000 acres of prime land. Whakatohea was resettled back in virgin bush, all the economic base taken.

"From that small beginning, up until the present day, they have proved they still have the ability to do a good job. Now, here's the rub.

"We're subject to departmental audit and ministerial approvals. They make the

rules, they're captain of the team, and also the referee.

"We are progressing this new claim on the basis that we now have conditions more conducive to a fair settlement, and there could be some hard negotiating.

"We want to do it now, because if the dominant culture cannot accept the reality of our history which may well stem from fear through ignorance, then one day they may get pushed out of the way. That could mean violence and all those negative things we never want to see happen. Whakatohea is determined to make a reconciliation that is fair and equitable.

"In pressing for the claim, it must be accepted that for Government, it's hands off...We agree that this is what Whakatohea receives for these damages: suffering, loss of life, loss of land.

"We are not trying to dislocate anybody from their land, the Crown is our adversary and any properties held by them may become part of the settlement.

"There are some people, locally, who don't understand yet, and I feel sorry for them. The game could get messy."

Mr Edwards claimed that if the compensation gave Whakatohea the opportunity to regain their economic base in one solid entity, then he saw a real future in that context. "It becomes a positive achievement for the whole community, and the community benefits. We are not selfish," he said.

In response to a question from Mr Edwards, Mr Laidlaw said the claim must be a valid one and placed before Government for settlement.

"Their record so far is unimpressive. Bastion Point is about to be settled, and that's taken the

Government four years. Maybe they'll get some glory from that, and maybe they'll say, that's enough.

"They already have a treaty negotiation unit in place, and it will be a commercial negotiation. You will have to give something, as they don't want to be bound by tribunal findings.

"Maybe the time will come when you will have to sit down, eyeball to eyeball with people from the justice department who have never set foot on the land, and don't even know where it is. I'm not wildly optimistic on your chances of a proper and reasonable settlement."

Mr Laidlaw said the Government was clearly working towards a deal with Tainui in which they obviously had a high level interest. "It would be very good from their point of view," he said.

Mr Edwards suggested that if Whakatohea's claim was not satisfactory to Government, "then there must be another legal forum one could go to.

"What the Government wants most, is to sit comfortably at the United Nations forum when the rights of indigenous peoples are discussed, and to be seen to be addressing these matters.

"That's how cynical I am, because I believe it to be absolutely true."

Speaking in support of Mr Edwards, the Mayor, Don Riesterer, said the iniquitous taking of Whakatohea land was "the worst example of confiscation, and for no reason," he said.

"I acknowledge with respect all that the Whakatohea Trust Board has done in this area.

"Their ability to handle capital input for the benefit of the people has been proved," he said.

# 'Place for Maori' not through to Govt yet says conciliator

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"There are clear signs of a resurgence in Maori identity, and we Pakeha have reached the point of having to say, maybe we got it wrong," says the Race Relations Conciliator.

Chris Laidlaw was speaking to a gathering at Te Rere marae on Friday, during his fact finding tour of rural areas throughout the country.

"A place for Maori in the new society is beginning to emerge, but that hasn't got through to Government yet," he said.

"In New Zealand today, the big hand of Government is slowly being taken away. We can see it all the time, with the number of Government created jobs diminishing. They are saying, get out there and do it for yourselves. People are beginning to realise they are on their own, and there are optimistic signs of this happening, along the Coast here, and in other places.

"But there are also big risks in what the Government is doing," Mr Laidlaw warned.

"At the recent opening of the health clinic at Cape Runaway, area health board representatives said they were very worried over the special health areas being taken away.

"It is a grave mistake to do this. The Government is responsible for people losing access to health care. There will be people dying, and I wouldn't like to live with that on my conscience."

Mr Laidlaw claimed there was a second revolution

happening in New Zealand, and over the next 10 to 20 years, everything would be re-negotiated. "But the bewildering legislation is the opportunity to rewrite the system," he said.

"The big challenge for we Pakeha is to realise that for so many years we have imposed our will on Maoridom. We've been coach, captain, player and referee. Now we're going to have to step aside and allow that space to be

created. If we don't, we'll be pushed aside.

"Pakeha are asking, how do we know what's right and what's wrong? They don't know who to turn to. But Maori are going to help Pakeha to get across that psychological barrier, for that's what it is. Recognising the other person's culture and allowing that person to be different, that's the problem.

"We are fundamentally different cultures, and we

have got to get to the situation where that's normal, not push everyone into the same box.

"I hear the word separatism ringing around. Separatism means to be different, it means to be wrong. If we want to live with Maori, we've got to get beyond that notion. Winston Peters helped bring the Government to that reality. He brought them right up against it.

Cont p2

Cont from p1

"When you are looking for a delivery system for Maori, do you stick with the Government of the past, or create something new? The Government is not yet ready to take that on, I'm sure of that.

"It's going to take a big effort from a unified Maori voice to achieve that, and after hearing about the Maori Congress, I can't imagine anything more powerful that can speak direct to Government, rather than have Maoridom report to a select committee or an assistant minister. It's insulting."

On the subject of electoral reform, Mr Laidlaw was eloquent. "The present system is worn out, not only for Maori, but all the rest of us.

"The old system doesn't provide for the Maori voice. There are four seats artificially divided up, no doubt done by some thick-headed clerk at the beginning of the last century."

Turning to the role of the Race Relations Office, Mr Laidlaw said it was helping to protect the rights of people being discriminated against, all people, not just Maori.

"We are having to deal with the worst aspect of human nature, but we have to persevere, helping people to celebrate their differences.

"This is a bi-cultural society, with so much to be gained by being fair and honest about the past, why the Treaty of Waitangi was never honoured, and what must be done to restore the mana of the Maori."