

Mereana Pitman

— On the road to find out

Maori people need to be revolutionaries, to do as women have done, take the information and make it work for them. That's how women's lib worked says Mereana Pitman, a Maori woman working for a slightly different cause.

Mereana sees herself as a communicator in a world taken up with things rather than people. She sees the Maori people as not having access to all the information by which the system we live in, functions. "The information stops at a certain level and only those in the know get the message."

She speaks from experience about getting access to information. A group she belongs to. The Womens Web Collective wanted to make an album of acoustic music. Problem was that all the normal channels such as recording companies, music groups and others wouldn't loan any money to the women. It was left to them to raise the sixty

thousand dollars needed. Mereana puts it down to the belief that a group of women musicians weren't seen as a sound investment.

"In the recording industry women are treated like shit, they're seen as slinky bodies or backing vocals. Us women were able to gain strength from each other and from the women's movement around the country. We did the album and arranged our own distribution ourselves, and now a year later we've broken even with a bit to spare.

"The point is that to do all of this we had to do things we'd never done before, and that took finding information and breaking it down into simple language."

Mereana goes for the simple language and doesn't mince words about the ideas close to her heart, maori women and music. "Maori women have it doubly bad, in that they're at the bottom of the picking order, they're put down by both maori and pakeha men.

"I think maori men are under more pressure to perform either in competi-



tion with the pakeha man or else to maori ideals they're not too sure of. Either way they can't let it out and so they suppress their frustration. For some young maori men the right to whai korero is nothing more than an ego thing and it's used to put women down. I'm not talking here about women speaking on the marae because where I come from in Ngati Porou, women have always spoken. I mean about maori women always being consulted in decision-making, they have complimentary roles with men in caring and nurturing. Maori women have great strength and foresight "I remember hearing my kuia, Whai McClutchie doing a whai korero when I was nine years old. I thought she was amazing. I guess I grew up accepting that role.

"But then Tuini Ngawai some years ago had to go knocking door to door to get her songs published, and now thirty or so years later there's hardly a Maori club in the land that doesn't have one of her songs in their repertoire. It's hard to imagine Inia Te Waiata having the same sort of problem. You see it's alright to have women weavers but not carvers or musicians.

"For real change in treatment of maori women there first has to be a realisation by Maori men of the complimentary nature of maori women. "I think its because of this existing blind spot that a maori woman writer like Patricia Grace doesn't get the recognition she deserves as New Zealand's finest short story writer.

"In this talk about the role maori women should be playing I'm not talking about who does the dishes, I'm talking about survival of a race."

Mereana also believes young maori people are verbally oppressed and angry and need to express that feeling, and a marae is the best place for that. However she says a lot of maoris can't get access to their own marae because they can't afford to hire them.

"Back home in Wairoa, we can't use our local marae because it's always booked out to pakeha groups having socials. I think the Hoani Waititi marae in Henderson, Auckland is an example of a marae being run by people not into acquiring power or prestige. It's there for the people.

"I reckon on the road to competing with the pakeha, some of the maori people have forgotten about taking care of the spiritual side. The economic side of things has gained too much importance. We've got to redress the balance."



Maori Womens Welfare League President, Georgina Kirby being presented with her chain of office from Lady Lorna Ngata.

The presentation took place on the Taihoa marae, Wairoa. Mrs Kirby comes from the Wairoa area but lives in Auckland.

She also received a carved wooden vessel for holding the chain of office and feather cloak.