

# The cutting edge of social change

John Panga

Poverty among Auckland's Maori and Pacific Island community should be a top priority of the new Kokiri administration, says Auckland District Maori Council chairman Dr Rangi Walker.

Children are going to school hungry and people are forced to sleep in caravans, cars and in overcrowded conditions because they are poor.

"It's a scandal in an affluent society such as New Zealand," says Dr Walker, "Nobody should want for the basic requirements of food and shelter."

Dr Walker welcomed the new Kokiri move. He said: "Clearly there are many problems and all existing and past strategies have failed to make an impact on them. If anything the situation has deteriorated."

"I think the Kokiri administration is doing the right thing and leaving it up to the people to decide which priority the people want to deal with."

A tribal group may want to hold a school of learning to establish their origins and genealogies; or press for Maori language classes at the pre-school level to save the Maori language, or develop prison rehabilitation schemes.

## People decide

The advantage of the Kokiri concept said Dr Walker is that instead of the department deciding what are the areas to allocate resources for, the people decide.

The critical housing shortage is an element of the poverty of the urban poor. Maoris have trouble meeting criteria and the required income limit. The demand for houses remains unsatisfied for Maoris and Pacific Islanders.

This affects family life. When family life is threatened, said Dr Walker, "the signs are, kids getting into trouble, truancy and delinquency."



## Kokiri

Kokiri it seems, must be given a lot of thought.

It's not some thing to be haggled with, it cannot be bought. You must think out, decide upon, work it around.

Get everyone's comments, make sure that it's sound. Use wisdom not anger, sift and be sure.

If we work as a community, we must find a cure. Conceive an idea and work on that base.

If it is to do with children, make sure that it's positive see that there's no waste.

We are parents, and examples, so get right in there. Help the youth and our children and make them aware that we love them, and want them, to grow straight and tall. That we are right there behind them if ever they fall.

Meri Ariki Totana  
Waahi Pa Marae  
Huntly.



Associated with that is the cultural loss, as youngsters lose their identity and the loss of the Maori language.

Unemployment and poverty are two major areas of concern.

## Real poverty

Dr Walker: "Teachers are reporting real poverty in the schools. There are kids who can't afford the basic necessities like lunches, shoes and glasses."

Regulations and conditions were being imposed on children when their parents had no possibility of meeting them because of the cost.

"It's embarrassing having to go on school trips and having no money, or promising to pay and the cheque bounces," said Dr Walker.

The plight of the urban poor needs to be rectified and adequate mechanisms set up to meet the needs of children who are missing out.

"Nobody should want for the basic requirements of life, and yet large numbers of people are being deprived," said Dr Walker.

Inflation and high interest rates are making it even harder for Maoris and Pacific Islanders to build homes.

"The Kokiri administration should investigate alternative types of housing. Instead of individual houses on their separate section," said Dr Walker, "a number of houses could be joined up to a central pool of household appliances such as washing machines and lawn mowers."

## Communal people

Polynesians are communal people and this should be planned for."

Another priority area should be more power sharing with the Pakeha. Some gains have been made such as the inclusion of a Maori representative on the regional planning committee of the Auckland Regional Authority.

This needs to be carried forward and Maoris need to have greater participation in decision-making to achieve their goals and aspirations."

"If Pakehas are not willing to share power with all people then we are bound to repeat the black urban experience of urban America."

A ward system of electing councillors on the Auckland City Council would give Polynesians living in Ponsonby a better chance of getting elected.

"If you shut people out of power then they have no faith in the system and end up fighting against the system."

Recent trouble between Maori gangs and police said Dr Walker, showed "we are only a few steps away from our cities being fire-bombed by those kids."

## Civil disobedience

The potential for civil disobedience was shown during the Springbok rugby tour when some kids took the opportunity to hit back at the system said Dr Walker.

Instead of denigrating the emerging Maori activist groups, people should be trying to find out "what they are on about" because, said Dr Walker, these groups are "on the cutting edge of social change."

Dr Walker: "It's easy to denigrate them but much harder to establish what they are on about."

He said the activist groups were not talking of violence but of revolutionary change and they "are getting impatient."

The Kokiri administration is an exercise in community responsibility which would have a greater impact on the problems facing Maoris and Pacific Islanders.

## Tu Tangata

## To advance on all fronts

## The power-house for action

## The talent and physical resources to give life to community action.