

tle confidence that they are.

O'REGAN: Another dimension of the report was that which dealt with the climate in the school which might be more responsive to cultural difference and preferences. The implication is that all kids would probably do better in such a climate. However all the nice thoughts about socialisation are underpinned by the judgement that one of the first functions of the school is to teach children to numerate, read and write with confidence and competence. Beyond that....

TAPSELL: May I interrupt you there! I differ with the Report to this extent... I think the most important thing a school ought to teach a child is to communicate verbally. I don't think reading and writing are nearly so important now as they once were. The media has changed all that. I have noticed that there is a striking difference between New Zealand and American children in their capacity to communicate verbally. The American is immeasurably better than the New Zealand child and so too is the English child.

O'REGAN: You think that this is to do with the patterns of learning we have developed?

TAPSELL: I think we have emphasised too much the skills of formal reading and writing and paid nowhere enough attention to encouraging children to communicate with each other and their elders by means of speaking. This is very important.

O'REGAN: Nearly everyone who has ever said anything about Social Education aims at the development of a more harmonious society. They then generally go on to discuss the growth of perceptions of political and social process and so on....

Now the Maori community and the Maori child seem to be fairly distant from much of the formal social and political process that we have. Maoris seem to switch out from involvement in the larger political scene. If they do get into politics its usually into the Maori political frame and into Maori issues.... Doesn't this suggest a sense of alienation, and instinct for separation from the larger society and its operation?

TAPSELL: Not really. I think its due as much as anything to the fact that the system has not really made provision for Maoris to play a part as Maoris. Another reason is that in the larger system the Maori viewpoint is always subordinate to the thinking of the Pakeha majority, decisions are made on the basis of their rules. At least in the Maori world you can control the process in a Maori way and let Maori values operate. You can focus on your own Maori issues there or on the Maori viewpoint of general issues. Its much more satisfying than always being in a minority playing by someone else's rules. I don't think its separatist; its sensible, as long as we don't lock our-

selves up in our own world.

There is another aspect to this question. I have had a lot of political experience at different levels and I find that Maori people have much broader political views than the Pakeha I have dealt with. They get excited about larger issues. In a general seat I would be rung up about the holes in the footpath or the state of the telephones. In a Maori seat I get rung about the catchment of the Motu River — the whole 5000 acres of it — the lakes, the forests, Tarawera Mountain, about the education of Maori children, not about a particular child. Maoris don't grizzle politically! The Motunui coast issue is a classic example.

O'REGAN: Coming back to the harmonious society question; most people see that as being an issue between Maori and Pakeha. However in my own Ngai Tahu area it is as much an issue between Maori and Maori. We have been heavily inundated by migration from other tribal areas. How do you see the harmony or the lack of it?

TAPSELL: I'll take up just one aspect of that. One of the things that worries me greatly is the concept of the Multi-tribal Marae. I think that is going to end up a mish-mash fruit salad of good-for-nothing. I believe that every tribe should have its kawa (it's rules and protocol) and stick to it in its own area — rigidly.

O'REGAN: But what about those areas where the tribes have mixed or are having to mix? What of your own Arawa who are living and working in my tribal area? Are you suggesting that they should establish Arawa marae in another tribe's area? How can we avoid the cross-tribal marae? Isn't it something that just has to be made to work?

TAPSELL: I don't see how it can. The problems you refer to will just have to be worked out some other way.

O'REGAN: A well known feature of your Arawa kawa is the emphasis on sex role definition, on the fixed roles of men and women in a marae context. Whilst this is widespread through most Maori kawa, Arawa are particularly noted for it. Is this at the heart of your resistance to the cross-tribal marae?

TAPSELL: To some extent. I resist very much the rage in education to make girls into boys and boys into girls. That rage will not last. It will fizzle out. I think our Maori sense of sex role definition is not something we should lightly give up.

I am not saying for one moment that a girl should not train, should she wish, in electricity, plumbing, etc, in fact I have been advocating it.

O'REGAN: So you are talking about relationships, about the restoration of the traditional age and sex roles. At the same time, in terms of occupational category and income earning you would be all for opening it up?

TAPSELL: Yes — for opening it right up, across the widest range of occupa-

tions appropriate for our women. However I want to qualify that a little. I fear the great Pakeha rage for abolition of sex roles might lead us to sending out our women to work with chainsaws in the forest on some bizarre attitude that this is going to bring sex equality. What that will bring is the situation that Maori women will be run into the worst, the dirtiest and the heaviest jobs and the most miserably paid. That is not what we want! I am all for equality that gets women to be lawyers, teachers, doctors and nurses — all the nice jobs. I am not nearly so keen on equality for women if they are going to be in the bush and in the dirtiest parts of the freezing works. That is what will happen!

O'REGAN: While all the Pakeha women have the teachers jobs?

TAPSELL: All the women who talk about equality you will find doing so from behind lawyers' desks. Not many of them are in the forests. The main point I am making is that we are going through an era round the world in which age and sex roles are being challenged — in many cases justifiably. In Maoridom, though, I don't believe that our customary sex and age role definition does disadvantage people. It has many positive effects for our culture.

One of the unfortunate things about minority groups is that they always follow fashions in ideas belatedly. When the pendulum of opinion swings they invariably get caught up in the backwash.

I don't think the current trend to abolish sex and age roles will last. I think we should be careful and retain our traditional cultural concern with the generations and with the respective roles of men and women. These things give us a structured base for the maintenance of the whanau — the extended family — and the whole supportive structure of Maori society. Ultimately that is what we must rebuild ourselves around. All the identity and self-esteem we were talking of earlier will be impossible unless we can rebuild a strong supportive home base. That requires the strengthening of the family. That is the context in which I see our restoration as a culture and as people.

O'REGAN: That's all very desirable. But isn't it all pretty abstract in the face of the enormous number of our children who are growing without any experience of whanau? The children of solo parents who lack opposite sex models; distant from their old people and with no age ranges to relate to. How realistic is the rebirth of the whanau?

TAPSELL: Very realistic. The problems you describe have been largely met by whanau. In that respect Maoris are surviving the present breakdowns somewhat better than Pakeha. We have more built-in capacity for surviving the trauma of our times than the Pakeha has. I want to see us realise that capacity — release that potential!