

Tu Tangata finding its feet says race conciliator



by Debra Reweti

It's 4.45 p.m. and Hiwi Tauroa has had a hard day. He slumps back in his chair, sighs a weary sigh and stares vacantly at his well-worn shoes.

"It's been one of those days," he mutters.

Above his desk is a framed passage: "He hath said 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee'... it's a comforting thought on a day like today.

Edward Te Rangihwinui Tauroa was born 55 years ago in the Taranaki township of Okaia. His father, a Methodist minister, was Ngapuhi. In his early years he achieved sporting and academic success — member of the NZ rugby teams which toured Fiji between 1951 and 1954, member of the NZ Universities swimming team on tour in Australia in 1951, bachelor of agricultural science and recipient of a diploma of education from Massey University.

He began his teaching career in 1952. It eventually took him to South Auckland's Tuakau College where he was principal and in his spare time celebrated coach of the Counties rugby team, holders of the 1979 national title. He is also a Methodist lay preacher.

On December 19, 1979 he was appointed race relations conciliator. The job came a week after he was to take another as head of Whangaroa College, near Kaeo, a week after he decided to

return to his ancestral home.

In his Auckland office, Hiwi shades his tired eyes from the glare of the staring sun. He talks deliberately, in a soft monotone.

"Race relations have changed since I first came into the office but I think it had some major contributions.

"I think the (Springbok) Tour was one, it shook everybody up, people thought everything was fun and no families ever argued with other families but the next thing they knew brothers and sisters were fighting.

"What it did was create an awareness."

And what difference did it make to the blacks in South Africa?

"I don't believe it did anything at all for them because I don't think they would have heard about it.

"But in New Zealand anyway it made a lot of difference, people became a little fearful of this type of conflict."

Racial conflict. Fiery, bitter battles of strength, words and will.

Hiwi went to South Africa to check out the apartheid system for himself, two weeks later he returned and delivered a disarmingly frank television speech in which he said the tour should be postponed.

It went ahead but Hiwi sees something positive in the results.

"Now there are people who want to make sure that it won't happen again. They know what they should be doing but they don't know EXACTLY how to go about it.

"I honestly believe a lot of people are really trying. And it was a bit of shaking up that did it."

The actions of a group of Maori activists, fed up with the annual capping antics of university engineering students who performed a mock haka, prompted Hiwi's most controversial statement — Race Against Time.

"I did it after the Humans Rights Commission requested a report on that haka party thing and really the commission didn't get as much credit as they should have.

"But that report created a tremendous effect... I suppose I was quite surprised.

"Now, it's being used overseas; the Dutch are using it in Indonesia, its be-