

## CHAPTER 3

# CONCLUSION

The advent of the development schemes in the early 1920s probably had more to do with the declining Government interest in purchasing land for Pakeha settlers and the fear that Maori would become a burden on the state, than a concern to ensure a reasonable future for Maori. The Native Trustee established in 1920 used Maori money, loaned to individuals only in yet another effort to break down any communal elements in Maori land ownership, and did not operate for several years from lack of funds in any event. However, largely through the influence of Sir Apirana Ngata, sufficient money was voted in the 1920s and 1930s to fund a series of major land development schemes, in which the land court and the boards were heavily involved. That involvement had dropped off by the early 1930s, however, as Ngata became concerned to reduce the role of the boards in the management of the schemes. With the fall of Ngata in 1933, the control of the schemes remained in the hands of central Government, along with subsequent changes to them, such as the nominated occupier scheme. By this time a genuine concern was apparent, at least at a central Government level, to make adequate provision for Maori in the future. The court remained, however, an important body in determining the rights of Maori owners under leases, and something of a protector of their land interests where they remained intact. The courts were in fact the subject of complaints that they were becoming too protective of Maori interests and came under pressure from Pakeha politicians to change their stance, a pressure which they successfully resisted. The land boards, however, became increasingly redundant with regard to the larger schemes for land development, although they retained considerable power to intervene in the lives of individual owners with the many lands outside development schemes. Indeed, there was a growing Maori concern that the boards and the court had become an overly powerful patronising influence by the 1930s, stifling individual initiative.

Maori land development after 1932 became even more centralised, with the establishment of the Native Land Settlement Board (later to become by the Board of Native Affairs). All decisions about Maori land development were handled in Wellington, with advice only from the regions. Under policies like the nominated occupier schemes, land development concentrated on the individual owner rather than the group, and development money and assistance went to individual Maori farmers rather than groups of owners working in common. Legal owners were in this way often reduced to being unwilling landlords of their own lands and with no control over the money spent on developments on their lands.

There was little change in policy in the late 1930s, when it became apparent that the future Maori population could not be accommodated on developed rural lands, but would have to make a living elsewhere. It was not until several years after the Second World War that the new situation for Maori landowners was squarely faced.

Although the land boards were not abolished until 1952 they had been largely redundant in fact through the 1940s, meeting only informally to make administrative adjustments to Maori land holdings using the limited powers which the legislation had left for them. Curiously, it was not until the abolition of the boards in 1952 that the Government acknowledged the conflicts set up by the legislation between the role of the land boards and the land court, which had dogged their operation for more than forty years.

Returning to the issues raised at the introduction to this report, it can be seen that Maori land owners were not, in the period from 1909 to 1952, placed in a position of common partnership with the Crown in the development of their lands. They did not enjoy legal rights equal to Pakeha in land transactions and ownership. In fact, the regime for land purchase by the Crown under legislation in 1909 and 1913 amounted almost to compulsion where pre-emptive and individual share buying measures could be employed. Nor did Maori work with the Government on an equal basis in the formation of agricultural policy. Before 1920, there was very little suggestion that Maori would even require such a policy. A crude concern that they not become 'landless' and a burden on the state was the extent of the state's concern. While the development schemes in their early years satisfied immediate Maori demands for land development, the schemes were increasingly centralised and bureaucratised so that the owners were left with few legal rights over their own land while it was under development. Maori did not have equal access to the resources needed for making their land productive. They had sold land cheap in the post World War I period, and much of the finance for development came out of their own pockets. That said, the Government did vote considerable funds for development in the 1930s. However, there is little suggestion that the validity of Maori culture was accepted, or that Pakeha politicians and officials believed that Maori forms of landholding were as good as Pakeha ones. Nor were Pakeha officials and politicians familiar with or much interested in the values underlying Maori landholding. 'Sentimental attachment' was the phrase used to describe Maori values with regard to land. Decisions regarding Maori land were not reached after informed reflection upon the differences between Maori and Pakeha values. The land boards which made many of the decisions for Maori about land development did not have Maori members on them, despite repeated requests from Maori that this be the case.