

Laws 'not solution' for racial problems

Auckland (PA). — Donald Woods, perhaps the most visible white face in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, has a warning for those pursuing a separatist solution to New Zealand's racial problems.

"Laws based on racially-specific grounds merely emphasise the problem for future generations," Mr Woods said yesterday.

"As a general principle, from the experience of my own country, racially-based solutions are particularly unsatisfactory for everyone."

Mr Woods was commenting on claims from some Maoris for separate sovereignty, judiciary and health systems governed by Maori for Maori.

Learning more about the situation for Maori was one area he was keen to examine on his third trip to New Zealand.

Mr Woods, friend and biographer of Steve Biko — his relationship with Mr Biko and his subsequent exile from South Africa was the subject of the movie, *Cry Freedom* — is in New Zealand for Newspaper Week next week. He is sponsored by the Newspaper Publishers Association.

His visits here have tended to coincide with significant events in New Zealand and South African race relations.

His first visit was during the lead-up to the 1981 Springbok tour of New Zealand, the second for the re-emergence of South Africa into world cricket in 1992 and his third follows the aftermath of the Maori protest on Waitangi Day and the occupation of Wanganui's Moutua Gardens.

Although unaware of the details of the present problems in New Zealand, he was adamant that the solutions were not on the path of racial-based laws, whoever proposed them.

"Opening the way for Maoris to achieve influential positions may be a way of solving some of their grievances but I would like to see such a step limited to perhaps two, three or five years.

"Otherwise, if you don't limit it you run the risk of creating a crutch and human nature being what it is, when a crutch is available, people generally lean on it."

While in New Zealand Mr Woods will talk about the value of press freedom and the subject on which he is an acknowledged worldwide expert, South Africa.

The lack of press freedom, which prevented Mr Woods from writing about the death of his friend Mr Biko, eventually drove him into self-imposed exile in London in 1978.

While conceding that press freedom was hardly an issue in New Zealand when compared with the 22 statutes that used to control the South African press, he believed the press here had a greater role to play.

"Maybe it is possible press freedom is not

always fully exploited here. The press may not always explore issues to all of its potential.

"It has an important role to play in developing cross-cultural understanding and there is a place to be extra-sensitive to the needs of minority groups. It is the task of the press to explore the human condition."

On the future of his own former home — Mr Woods now lived in England — he was optimistic about the stability and the progress in South Africa.

"What the Mandela government has done brilliantly so far, it is in the area of race relations where, for 350 years, one group was inferior to the other. Now I would say about 90% of blacks and whites are working hard to get together.

"Many blacks do have high expectations but they are not that unsophisticated to instantly expect a house, a car and a job. They are more realistic than that.

"The areas where the most progress is being made are the ones targeted by the government — infant health, education and housing. About five billion rand has been put aside for low cost housing and 40% of the land was already owned by the government and is ready for redistribution.

"Previously, under-used white schools now have mixed classes and [South African president Nelson] Mandela is working to rid South Africa of the culture of confrontation that helped to end apartheid and replace it with a roll-up-the-sleeves and work together mentality."

However, Mr Woods also saw problems with the economy.

Overseas investors had been quick to return to South Africa but investment from businessmen within the country had been slow, perhaps as the business community waited to see how far down the Socialist path the government will go.

Mr Woods was worried about capital flight if a proposed 45% tax rate went ahead.

Another problem was the embarrassment caused by Winnie Mandela, the estranged wife of the president, and the reluctance of the government to deal with her.

Mr Woods believed that her years of solitude while Mr Mandela was in prison and the years of abuse from authorities may have "slightly deranged" her, although he said her influence over the radical element in South Africa might be overestimated.

Also overestimated was the influence of Zulu president Mangosuthu Buthelezi and the effect of his rift with Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini.

"Most Zulus would vote politically and back the Zulu members of the ANC," Mr Woods said.

"Perhaps the main international concern over South Africa's future is what will happen when ageing president Nelson Mandela steps down and

what affect the loss of a man of his stature would have on the different factions within the republic.

"There is a fall-back in the second and third rank of leaders. Nelson is a giant and people like Desmond Tutu and F. W. de Clerk aren't far behind him.

"But in the second rank are people like deputy president Thabo Mbeki, Cyril Ramaphosa and Rolph Meyer."

Mr Woods, a keen sports fan, had one other prediction for South Africa this year.

"New Zealand might be lucky to score 12 points against them when they win the world rugby cup later this year. After all, you are the second best rugby-playing country in the world."