

Speaking out in defence of history

PROFESSOR Tom Brook-
ing of Otago University,
says: "The past was always
important to the Maori but
they never lost their percep-
tion of the future and al-
ways realised that change
was part of the human con-
dition."

It is hard to deny the
truth of his observation.

When compared to the
fate of other indigenous
peoples — most notably the
Australian Aborigines —
Maori history is distin-
guished by a remarkable
ability to meet the challenge
of European contact head
on, to adapt, and to survive.

After Tariana Turia's
speech to the Psychological
Society's conference in
Hamilton, in which she
coined the phrase "post-co-
lonial traumatic stress dis-
order", it has become a
matter of some urgency for
New Zealanders of all races
to speak out in defence of
their history.

Mrs Turia, a convinced
Maori nationalist, must not
be allowed to get away with

*From
the Left*

*Chris
Trotter*



her reactionary revisionist
account of the "fatal im-
pact" of European culture
on Maori society. It is time
for some plain speaking.

The first thing to note is
that the Maori response to
the arrival of Europeans
was overwhelmingly posi-
tive.

The pragmatic leaders of
the numerous hapu in con-
tact with the sealers and
whalers of pre-colonial
times were quick to take ad-
vantage of the Europeans'
superior technology, and
rapidly adapted their eco-
nomic behaviour to secure
a permanent supply of
European goods.

Nor were they slow to
adapt their agriculture to
the beneficial arrival of pig
and potato.

Far from seeing them-
selves as the victims of the
Europeans, Maoris confi-
dently anticipated a future
in which the newcomers
and their advanced techno-
logy could be peacefully ex-
ploited by a materially
strengthened and politically
dominant indigenous order.

TO FACILITATE this
change, the leaders of
the various hapu estab-
lished a thriving trade not
only in flax, timber, and
ship provisions, but also in
sexual services and the
shrunk heads of prison-
ers of war.

Indigenous warfare was
itself transformed by the ir-
reversible connections for-
ged between Maoris and
their European trading part-
ners.

The Ngapuhi chieftain,
Hongi Hika, in particular,
launched a series of devas-
tating assaults on neigh-
bouring tribes — the pos-
session of British and
American muskets giving
his war parties an over-

whelming military advan-
tage. Mrs Turia may speak
about the "holocaust" that
followed European colon-
isation, but history records
that it was Hika who prac-
tised what amounted to
genocidal warfare against
Ngati Paoa, Ngati Maru and
Ngati Whatua.

(Nowhere in the history
of Maori-European military
conflict are more than 1000
casualties recorded from a
single engagement.)

In fact, the only indisput-
able "holocaust" to blight
New Zealand history was
the mass enslavement and
murder of the Moriori peo-
ple of the Chatham Islands
by Te Atiawa during the
1830s and 40s.

The signing of the Treaty
of Waitangi and the system-
atic colonisation of New
Zealand which followed,
post-dated by many dec-
ades the Maori people's ini-
tial encounters with, and
rapid adaptation to, the in-
dustrial civilisation of the
European states.

By the 1860s and 70s, the

concept of a pristine indi-
genous culture suddenly
confronted by an aggres-
sive colonial power was al-
ready a historical nonsense.

"Aotearoa" had ceased
to exist the moment the first
Maori chieftain recognised
the utility of the first iron
axe, and the military poten-
tial of the first musket.

When Governor Grey's
troops invaded the Waikato
in 1863, New Zealand was
already one nation, which is
why Professor James Bel-
lich sometimes describes
the military confrontations
between a number of Maori
tribes and the British Army
(almost always fighting
alongside Maori allies) as
the New Zealand Civil War
— fought (like the contem-
poraneous war between the
American states) to estab-
lish the indivisibility of na-
tional sovereignty — a sov-
ereignty which, in New Zea-
land's case, had been
peacefully transferred to the
British Crown, by Maoris,
nearly a quarter of a century
before.