Backing for tribunal critic

I am no ACT supporter but Richard Prebble is right about the Waitangi Tribunal. Years ago I attended several sessions while advising the Ngai Tahu on public relations for their claim.

It would be hard to imagine any public body less well organised to get at the truth.

There was no cross examination. Witnesses were treated with sympathetic deference. The people putting the Crown's side of things seemed equally anxious not to offend.

This might have been ideally suited for coping with a Maori tribe of the 1930s. For dealing with the modern Ngai Tahu, it was ridiculous.

Their case was drawn up, and put, by excellent lawyers backed up by solid research.

The Ngai Tahu went into the hearing with the approach of a team contesting the Ranfurley shield. They dominated from the kick off, and no-one can blame them for that.

Awkward questions absent

The media did not help to redress the balance. Reporters seemed more anxious not to be accused of "Maori bashing" than to discover what was actually going on.

In three months, I don't think I was asked a single intelligent, awkward question. I should have been.

I resigned because I am basically a puzzler after the truth and not a one-eyed supporter of causes.

But Mr Prebble is also right about the growth of a Maori claims industry. If I were a Maori, I'd be very eager to know who was being paid how much and for what. I think many people would be shocked.

by Brian Priestley Christchurch Star 18 May '96