

New Law Reduces Adoptions

(N.Z. Press Association)

WELLINGTON,
July 28.

A children's hymn was sung softly in Maori at the Maori Women's Welfare League conference today to express concern at a decline in Maori adoptions since the Adoption Act of 1962.

In 1962, the procedure of Maori adoption was transferred from the Maori Land Court to the Magistrate's Court and with this came a change in formalities, it was reported.

Whereas through the Maori Land Court there were no costs, under the rules of the Magistrate's Court the applicants must pay solicitors' fees.

"The Maori can only see the Magistrate's Court as an institution for punishment," said a North Auckland delegate.

At the change-over it was understood that application fees only would be paid. It was found in practice that a solicitor was necessary to prosecute the case.

"The intention was honourable, the result is catastrophic," said the delegate.

The Kaikohe district Council which put forward a remit expressing concern said that along with the fees, the

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Maoris objected to the legal procedure involved and the detailed questioning which was sometimes "most intimate."

The delegate said that in 1962-63 there were 475 Maori adoptions, but in 1963 after the Magistrate's Court took over, there were only 154 and in 1964, 128.

The Secretary for Maori Affairs, (Mr J. M. McEwan) said there was a definite trend which showed that the people were getting used to the Magistrate's Court. In 1965 the number of adoptions increased to 283.

Referring to informal adoption Mr McEwan said that this belonged to the past. The Polynesian custom of informal adoption was no longer satisfactory in a country where half the Maori population lived in the cities.

"It's not a community, it is a cold, hard, savage world," he said. The Maoris must accept this change and adapt themselves to this society.

The child without status and there were from 10,000 to 12,000 in a recent survey by the Maori Affairs Department—"has no security, no right, and there is no responsibility on the part of the natural father," he said.

"This is one of the really serious social problems that you have got to look at," he insisted. The adults must consider what is going to be best for the child.