



PARIHAKA, 1881

One of New Zealand's first big protests was at Parihaka, a kāinga in Taranaki. Māori living there wanted the government to stop taking their land for Pākehā settlers. Led by Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi, the people of Parihaka used a form of non-violent protest called passive resistance. They pulled out government survey pegs on **confiscated** Māori land and rebuilt fences taken down to make way for new roads.

When soldiers invaded Parihaka on 5 November 1881, Māori didn't fight back. Instead, they made bread to share with the soldiers and sent their children to greet them. Most of the village was still destroyed, and Parihaka's leaders – along with many others – were arrested and jailed. In June 2017, the government formally apologised to the people of Parihaka for its actions. Today, Parihaka stands as a symbol for peace.

confiscate: to take something away as punishment

STAND UP

A HISTORY OF PROTEST IN

NEW ZEALAND

BY DYLAN OWEN

Everyone in New Zealand has the right to protest. There's even a law that safeguards this right (the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990). With permission, we can protest on the grounds of parliament!

Protesters like to be seen and heard, and there are lots of ways to make this happen. Petitions, strikes, rallies, meetings, and marches all draw attention to an issue. Over the years, a lot of protests in Aotearoa have been successful. Some have helped stop the destruction of our native forests. Others have helped make New Zealand nuclear free.

What else have New Zealanders protested about over the last 150 years? And what forms did their protests take?



Parihaka in the 1880s

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE PETITION, 1893

"I felt it was something to be proud of." Kate Sheppard wrote this after the women's **suffrage** petition had been delivered to parliament in July 1893. She was right to be proud. The petition was more than five hundred pages long and signed by over 25,000 women. This was around a quarter of the adult female population. The petition asked that New Zealand women be allowed to vote. At the time, only men could help choose the country's government, and some people didn't want this to change. They said that a woman's "proper place" was at home – politics was for men.

But in the end, the suffrage petition helped to bring about a huge victory. A few months after the petition was presented, a law was made that gave all women in New Zealand the right to vote – a world first!

suffrage: the right to vote



Women voters in Tahakopa, 1893

Protesters in Auckland, 1913

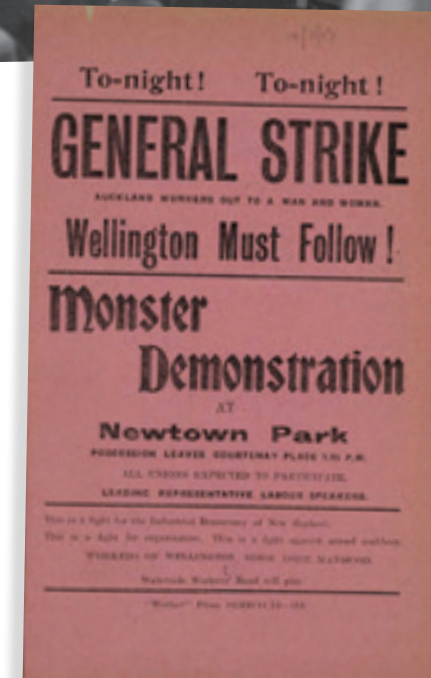


GREAT STRIKE, 1913

Strikes were a common form of protest last century. In 1913, a strike by **watersiders** in Wellington and miners in Huntly quickly spread around the country. The workers went on strike to defend their working conditions and support sacked workmates, but the real issue was who would have the most power in the workplace: the **unions** or the employers? Thousands joined in, including over seven thousand workers in Auckland. Prime Minister William Massey wanted to end the strike. There were violent confrontations, and special police on horseback charged at strikers and beat them with batons. The strike lasted eight weeks but failed. Several of the leaders were arrested, but a few of these men went on to become politicians. They helped to make new laws to improve the lives of workers.

union: an organised group of workers that negotiates with employers for better pay and working conditions

watersider: a person who works on a wharf



DEPRESSION RIOTS, 1932

Sometimes a protest can turn ugly, especially when times are tough. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a lot of people were unemployed and frustrated. Many believed that the government wasn't doing enough to help them, so they began to protest. Marches became riots, the first one in Dunedin in January 1932. A few months later, unemployed men in Auckland fought with police and stormed down Queen Street, smashing shop windows and looting. The same thing happened on Lambton Quay in Wellington. During the depression, some people ate at soup kitchens, and many more went hungry. Women sewed clothing for their children from flour bags. It was a time of great hardship for many New Zealanders.



Unemployed workers clashing with police, Wellington, 1932



Unemployed workers marching towards parliament, 1932

WATERFRONT DISPUTE, 1951

Imagine: you are involved in a dispute with your boss, and the government introduces laws to punish you. One of these laws makes it illegal for people to give you food, even though you have no money. This happened in 1951, when the men who worked on the wharves loading and unloading cargo asked for better wages. The watersiders were offered only a very small pay increase. They protested, refusing to do any overtime. The employers locked out the watersiders, saying they couldn't come to work until they agreed to do what they were told. Thousands of workers went on strike to support the watersiders.



Striking watersiders on Cuba Street, Wellington, 1951

Closed wharves would mean disaster for New Zealand's economy, so the government declared a state of emergency. Then it passed new laws that allowed soldiers to work on the wharves. The government also gave police special powers to break up marching protesters. It was a bitter fight. One politician called the protesters "worse than a disease". After 151 days, the watersiders finally gave in and went back to work. Later, many of these men had trouble getting work because they had been involved with the dispute.

MĀORI LAND MARCH, 1975

A march or hīkoi is a long journey made on foot. It's become a very Kiwi way of protesting. New Zealand's most famous hīkoi began in September 1975, when a small group of Māori left Te Hāpua in Northland. Their goal was to walk the length of Te Ika-a-Māui to protest over the loss of Māori land. Their slogan was "Not one acre more". Leading the hīkoi was the 79-year-old kuia, Whina Cooper.

ANTI-VIETNAM WAR PROTESTS, 1960s

"One, two, three, four, we don't want your bloody war!" chanted a new kind of protester in the 1960s. These protesters were anti-war and opposed to New Zealand soldiers fighting in Vietnam. They believed the Vietnam war was a civil war and New Zealanders shouldn't be supporting one side or the other. Hundreds of protests took place around the country between 1965 and 1970. These involved thousands of people. Many of the protesters were university students who used new protest tactics, such as sit-ins, occupations, graffiti, music, and street theatre. At one protest in Auckland, people smeared their bodies with red paint to symbolise the deaths of Vietnamese civilians.



A young anti-Vietnam war protester at parliament, 1967



Protesters leaving Northland on the Māori Land March, 1975

SPRINGBOK TOUR, 1981

“Whose side are you on?” That was the question on everyone’s lips during the Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand in 1981. At the time, the South African government enforced a policy of apartheid (meaning “apartness”). Apartheid laws denied basic human rights to millions of black South Africans.

During the tour, New Zealand became a divided nation. Some people said sport and politics shouldn’t mix. But anti-apartheid demonstrators were determined to stop the games. There were violent clashes, including one at Rugby Park in Hamilton, when protesters stormed the rugby field and stopped the game. The marches and violence lasted the Springboks’ entire tour – fifty-six days. Thousands of protesters were arrested.

One man in a South African prison heard about the protests. Later, he said he’d never forget the day the game in Hamilton was cancelled. “It was,” he said, “like the sun coming out.” That man was Nelson Mandela.



Anti-apartheid protesters in Wellington, 1981



Anti-GE protesters in Auckland

GE-FREE MARCHES, 2003

Since the 1960s, protesters have worked to save our native forests, rivers, lakes, and endangered species. But one of the biggest environmental protests happened in 2003, when thousands of people demonstrated against **genetic engineering** (GE). Many New Zealanders felt uneasy about GE. They didn’t like the idea that plants and animals could be changed in unnatural ways. They also felt there were unknown risks. Did we really know if it was safe to eat genetically engineered food?

The result was large anti-GE protests in our major cities, including two GE-free hīkoi that travelled from Auckland to Wellington. The largest protest saw 35,000 people marching down Auckland’s Queen Street. Their efforts had some success. New Zealand now has some of the strictest laws about genetic engineering in the world.

genetic engineering: deliberately changing a living thing’s genetic material



ANTI-TPPA PROTESTS, 2012–2016

We were once part of negotiations for the biggest trade deal ever: the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA). The agreement was big enough, officials said, to eventually add \$2.7 billion each year to our economy. So why were thousands of people against it?

Many were upset that the trade talks were held in secret. They also believed that the New Zealand government might lose the ability to uphold some of its laws and regulations because of the trade agreement. Others were worried that essential items like medicines might become more expensive. Over four years, protesters held rallies, meetings, and demonstrations. Three families even led a hīkoi from Christchurch to parliament.

The New Zealand government signed the TPPA agreement on 4 February 2016. Again, thousands protested on the streets. A year later, the president of the United States, Donald Trump, withdrew the United States from the deal. The world's biggest trade agreement was over.

Stand Up: A History of Protest in New Zealand

by Dylan Owen

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