



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Maori resistance to British land seizure at Parihaka, New Zealand, 1879-81

February

1879

to: 5 November

1881

Country: New Zealand

Location City/State/Province: *Taranaki region, New Zealand; mostly Parihaka; also Oakura, Pukearehu, and Hawera*

Goals:

To defend the Parihaka community and prevent further British colonial encroachment on Maori land

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 048. Protest meetings
- 170. Nonviolent invasion
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 048. Protest meetings
- 126. Boycott of government departments, agencies, and other bodies
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 033. Fraternalization
- 048. Protest meetings
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 4th segment:

- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 048. Protest meetings
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 5th segment:

- 048. Protest meetings
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Methods in 6th segment:

- 033. Fraternalization
- 037. Singing
- 048. Protest meetings
- 129. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
- 138. Sitdown
- 141. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws
- 171. Nonviolent interjection
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 179. Alternative social institutions

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Economic Justice

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Maori of the Taranaki region in New Zealand

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi

Partners:

Not Known

External allies:

Some European allies (in New Zealand) (little information found); some conservative Maori chiefs; some European news outlets and political officials (in Europe).

Involvement of social elites:

Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi themselves were both highly revered in the Maori community and can be considered to have 'elite status'.

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Maori followers in Parihaka

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- European news outlets and political officials (in Europe)

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 5.5 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

British colonial government; Native Affairs Minister John Bryce; colonial armed forces and volunteer militia

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not Known

Campaigner violence:

Not Known

Repressive Violence:

The destruction of the subsistence infrastructure can be considered repressive violence, including garden fences and crops. During the protest ploughs, white farmers threatened the Maori with violence. Those that were arrested were often treated harshly, rarely receiving a trial. Many were sentenced to hard labor. In prisons, there were cases of solitary confinement and overcrowding. Many died while in custody in the cold South Island prisons. During the invasion of Parihaka, there were reports of brutality and rape. Houses and crops were destroyed and animals slaughtered; 45 acres of potatoes, taro, and tobacco were destroyed.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The original community of Parihaka was virtually destroyed. The physical and cultural infrastructure, which made the community a beacon in Maori anti-colonial resistance, dissolved with the invasion in 1881. Parihaka would never experience the same cultural and economic autonomy it had during the campaign. The strength of the campaigners did turn the story of Parihaka and Maori resistance into legend. And some form of the community was rebuilt

The Maori campaign experienced impressive growth given the historical context. Most Maori land had been confiscated and violent resistance had been crushed soon before the Parihaka campaign, however, resisters gained new members during the resistance even in the face of mass arrests and deportations.

The Taranaki region of present day New Zealand spreads from the central plateau of the North Island to the western coast. The

Maori people, indigenous to the region, once inhabited it and the surrounding areas. By 1860, New Zealand had been a colony of Britain for nearly 20 years and land conflicts were common as growing European settlements encroached onto Maori land; British representatives were determined to assert their authority over the whole country.

In May 1863, the 'New Zealand Settlements Act' proclaimed that tribes that continued to assert their independence were considered 'rebels,' and their land could be confiscated. If indigenous communities wanted to keep their land, they would have to agree that the land be surveyed and officially entitled to them under British law. Millions of acres were stolen from Maori communities.

In Taranaki, two esteemed chiefs, Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi, had their land confiscated. In response, they withdrew to Parihaka, a remote site on the western side of Mount Taranaki, and established an open farming community in 1867. The founding of Parihaka occurred one year after end of the Second Taranaki War, a violent struggle between Maori and European invaders, and two years after almost all Maori land in Taranaki had been stolen. Both Tohu and Te Whiti were veterans of the Taranaki Wars. Tohu was a member of the Hau Hau Movement, a more fundamentalist and violent faction of Taranaki Maori. He took part in an attack on a British stockade in which most of the Hau Hau were killed. Te Whiti, also a veteran of the land wars, was a teacher and prophet who had training in Christian doctrine as well.

Te Whiti and Tohu renounced violence at Parihaka and declared they would use spiritual powers to defend their right to the land. They prohibited carrying weapons in public, and distanced themselves from the Kingitanga, or 'King Movement,' which was employing violent tactics to resist colonization and assimilation. The settlement at Parihaka prospered and attracted like-minded Maori to settle there.

By 1878, Parihaka was nearly the only area not to be surveyed by British authorities. However, that year, due to financial pressures on the British government, they began looking into available land 'opportunities'; surveyors were sent into Parihaka. Te Whiti had also continually rejected bribes and offers for the land, creating animosity toward him and the settlement.

In February 1879, surveyors began cutting paths through cultivated fields and fences, trampling crops, and building roads. In response, community members in Parihaka established monthly meetings where Maori and non-Maori allies were invited to discuss the injustices of land grabbing, bribery, and coercion and strategies for resistance. These monthly meetings became a regular institution throughout the campaign to defend Parihaka. Throughout, well-meaning European visitors were welcomed with hospitality.

On May 26, 1879, Maori launched a resistance campaign under the leadership of Te Whiti and Tohu. Throughout Taranaki, organized groups of ploughmen began to plough 'confiscated land' using either hoes or oxen-drawn ploughs through white settlers farms. The plough protests started in Oakura, and then spread to Pukearehu and Hawera. In Oakura, ploughmen worked for three days from dusk 'til dawn and ploughed eight hectares. White farmers threatened the Maori with violence. Te Whiti gave instructions not to fight back against either settlers or British officials if attacked, and not to enter the homes or touch any property of the settlers. Te Whiti claimed that they were not targeting the settlers themselves, but rather the policies of the government. In Hawera, a group of 100 armed vigilantes confronted the ploughmen but were talked out of violence by the Maori.

On June 29, arrests began. As ploughmen were imprisoned, others immediately took their place. Maori with the most prestige volunteered to be the first arrested. By August 1879, around 200 had been taken into custody; many were treated harshly and most never received a trial. Those brought before the court were sentenced to hard labor and charged a fine. Many were sent to prisons on other islands. Native Minister John Sheehan is reported to have told Parliament in July, "I was not aware ...what the exact position of those lands on the west coast was. It has only been made clear to us by the interruption of the surveys. It turns out that from the White Cliffs to Waitotara the whole country is strewn with unfulfilled promises."

On August 10, some conservative Maori chiefs issued a statement to all tribes of New Zealand calling for both the government to stop surveying contested land and for Maori to end their resistance. Te Whiti agreed to a truce and by the end of the month the protest ploughs stopped.

Late 1879, the West Coast Commission was set up to examine grievances over land confiscations and allegations of corruption. Hearings began in early 1880, but were boycotted by Te Whiti and supporters when the Commission refused to meet and hold a discussion at Parihaka.

British authorities increased their push for land. A group of 600 armed forces began building roads through some of the most fertile land in Taranaki, pulling down vital garden fences of the Maori for construction. By June 1880, these roads reached the outskirts of Parihaka. Native Affairs Minister John Bryce, leader of the forces and known for his malice toward Te Whiti and Parihaka, wanted to incite conflict. The Maori continued life as usual and occasionally offered food to soldiers.

On Bryce's instruction, the armed forces broke fences around large Parihaka cultivations to mark road lines. Resisters began rebuilding fences across the road lines as fast as they were pulled down. Colonial survey parties were escorted from the area and survey pegs were trampled into the ground. Soon after, these 'fencers,' as they came to be called, were arrested, often dragged off by force as they continued to work on building the fences. Maori traveled by the hundreds to assist in the rebuilding actions. Again hundreds were taken into custody and imprisoned without a trial. Amidst continued land-grab attempts, the settlement at Parihaka continued to thrive.

The colonial government responded with several official Acts, after which arrests could be made for anyone suspected of 'endangering the peace' by digging, ploughing, or building or dismantling a fence.

In all, several hundred were imprisoned (some estimates cite a total of 636); only several dozen ever appeared in court. Reports indicate cases of solitary confinement and overcrowding in jails, with many terminally ill or in critical health. Increasing numbers of prisoners died while in custody in cold South Island prisons. News of this treatment reached England and European newspapers. Some officials called for the colonial administration to act more justly and in accordance with the law, but these pleas were essentially ignored.

However, remaining prisoners were released in the first part of 1881, but they returned to Parihaka to find the land divided up for sale. On November 1, 1881, Te Whiti addressed the Parihaka community, preparing them for an anticipated attack. He asked that they 'abide calmly upon the land' and urged against the use of violent defense.

On the morning of November 5, 1881, 644 colonial armed forces and 956 volunteer militiamen charged the village. Native Affairs Minister John Bryce himself led the assault. Upon reaching the village, the charge was halted by rows of children dancing and singing in front of the Parihaka entrance. After bypassing the singing children and rows of women, invaders found 2,500 unarmed adults sitting with Te Whiti and Tohu at the center of the village. Some reports claim the Maori greeted the invaders with bread and song.

Te Whiti and Tohu were arrested along with several others. Soldiers then dispersed the people and began destroying the settlement of Parihaka. There are reports of brutality and rape. Te Whiti's meeting house was wrecked. Houses and crops were destroyed and animals slaughtered. 45 acres of potatoes, taro, and tobacco were destroyed. Over the next several weeks, hundreds would be arrested, and up to 1,600 would be displaced from their homes in Taranaki; 600 would be allowed to remain. Further public assembly was banned.

The Maori leaders were imprisoned in the South Island. New legislation, the West Coast Peace Preservation Bill, decreed that Te Whiti and Tohu were not to be tried and were to be imprisoned indefinitely. If released, they could be arrested again at any time without charge. The two leaders were released in March 1883 and returned to Parihaka, which was in the process of rebuilding. Meanwhile, hundreds of Maori remained imprisoned, with their families often living in poverty, in exile, or in search of loved ones. The last of the Parihaka prisoners wouldn't return until summer 1898.

Te Whiti and Tohu continued to organize Maori resistance and advocate nonviolence. In the following years they initiated several smaller campaigns and were arrested several times again. Parihaka began to modernize, and by the early 1900s was considered an advanced municipal development. The story of Parihaka has influenced the art community in New Zealand, inspiring the first published play by a Maori playwright among other notable works.

Research Notes

Influences:

Not Known

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Additional Notes:

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A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

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