
Maoris in New Zealand regain Bastion Point by occupying their land, 1977-1978

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) indigenous participants](#) [1]
- [an example of paradox of repression](#) [2]

Timing

5 January

1977

to:

25 May

1978

Location and Goals

Country:

New Zealand

Location City/State/Province:

Orakei, Auckland, New Zealand

Location Description:

Bastion Point--land that was originally held by the M?ori

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To claim back the entirety of the land taken by the Government in Bastion Point

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 4th segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 5th segment:

- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Methods in 6th segment:

- 137. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Segment Length:

3 months

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Democracy

Environment

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Indigenous Maori people of New Zealand

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Joe Hawke, Piriniha Reweti, Orakei M?ori Action Committee (OMAC)

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

Not known

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Orakei M?ori Action Committee

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

3 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

The New Zealand Government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

New Zealand Army and police forcibly removed the protesters, arresting over 200.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Total points:

9 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

This occupation was a major landmark in the history of M?ori protests. It gained a lot of media attention and people in New Zealand and all over the world wanted to know what would become of this campaign. This enabled the Ng?ti Wh?tua to continue discussions with the government until an agreement was made. This ultimately contributed to the Treaty of Waitangi of 1975 that returned Bastion Point to the Ng?ti Wh?tua in the 1980s. The New Zealand government formally apologized in the 1980s and returned the land to the all the tribes that were directly affected by the loss of land. Te Roroa, Te Uri-o-Hau, and Ng?ti Wh?tua-o-?r?kei eventually received compensation for injustices that culminated with the refusal to give the land back to the M?ori people. Today, Ng?ti Wh?tua play a prominent role in Auckland life.

In Orakei, Auckland, New Zealand, there is a coastal piece of land that overlooks Waitemata Harbour called Takaparawhau in M?ori and Bastion Point in English. Before the colonization of the land by the British Crown, it provided shelter, rich fishing and farming areas for the Ng?ti Wh?tua people, a M?ori iwi (tribe).

From the 1840s all the way into the 1950s, the land surrounding this area was bought or confiscated in various forms by the New Zealand government for public works and development. In particular, the government said it found this land valuable due to its strategic position over Waitemata Harbour in case of an invasion from potential opponents. (New Zealand did not have conflicts with other countries and it was unlikely that another country would have cause for invading New Zealand).

In the 1880s, the government made up various legislation that allowed the government to take ownership of Bastion Point for the purpose of defense against the Russian Army. Long afterward, although the government clearly no longer needed this land for a defense base, the land was not returned to its traditional M?ori owners. In 1941, it was given to the Auckland City Council. This reserve was comprised of the last 60 acres of uncommitted land in Orakei that some of the Ng?ti Wh?tua people still hoped to get back.

The tipping point came in 1967 when the national government announced that Bastion Point would be sold to the highest-corporate bidder for the purpose of developing the land for high-income housing.

The Māori asked for the land to be returned to them, since it had been originally been taken for public, not corporate, use. The Māori Affairs Act 1953 had provided a mechanism through which they could get the land back which was taken from them. The act was strengthened in 1975 with a clause that specified that the land “no longer required for public work or other public purpose for which it was acquired or is held” should be given back to the Māori.

Māoris hoped to reclaim the land in the name of the whole iwi—collective people of the Ngāti Whātua. Activists Joe Hawke and Piriniha Reweti along with others formed the Orakei Māori Action Committee (OMAC) to demand this.

The government offered to give back a portion of the land in question. That infuriated some Māoris while others were open to the idea of accepting the offer. They differed on strategy —nonviolent action or compromise.

Hawke and his followers chose direct action. Also, that group did not want to compromise over the amount of land in question; their demand included the houses on the land, which the government considered their property. On 5 January 1977, the OMAC organized an occupation of Bastion Point to stop the land from being forever lost.

A meeting held on 15 January 1977 to settle the dispute between the government and the OMAC only led to a division between the elders and the young of the Ngāti Whātua. The elders were willing to accept a government proposal that did not completely cover the concerns of the Ngāti Whātua.

Reweti and Hawke took separate paths at this point: Reweti led the moderates and Hawke led those dissatisfied with the moderate approach. Reweti’s group asked for their 10 acres while the Action Group led by Hawke pushed for undeveloped government lands and control of the marae, a sacred place that serves religious and social purposes. The Action Group presented three petitions: 59 signatures supporting OMAC’s actions, 243 signatures supporting the return of all “Crown” lands and control of the marae, and 4800 signatures supporting either the return of this land or its retention of Auckland.

For the next 500 days or so, the government promised to give back varying amounts of the land through poorly made bills. None of these bills came into fruition, creating disagreement between the two groups of the Ngāti Whātua iwi on how best to proceed.

During this time, Reweti and the moderates expressly disowned the OMAC and insisted that the government negotiate only with the elders. The OMAC group had grown despondent. On 30 September 1977, 9-year-old Joanna Hawke died in an accidental fire at the occupation site. The OMAC hit its bottom at about 20 members and the campaign almost ended.

However, the occupation came back, involving hundreds of Māori people. The occupation of Bastion Point lasted 507 days and finally ended on 25 May 1978 when 800 New Zealand police officers and soldiers forcibly removed the occupiers. The removers destroyed the temporary buildings, vegetable gardens, and a meeting house, all of which were constructed to accommodate the participants during the protest. In addition, they arrested 222 protesters, ending the nonviolent occupation with the use of force.

The occupation and government response gained widespread media attention, both inside and outside New Zealand. The government agreed to continue discussions with the Ngāti Whātua. One outcome of the

discussions was to return Bastion Point to the Ngāti Whātua. The New Zealand government formally apologized in the 1980s and returned the land to the all the tribes that were directly affected by the loss of land.

Te Roroa, Te Uri-o-Hau, and Ngāti Whātua-o-Ōrākei eventually received compensation for injustices that culminated with the refusal to give the land back to the Māori people. Today, the Ngāti Whātua play a prominent role in Auckland life. And Bastion Point is back in their hands.

Research Notes

Influences:

Influenced by Maori New Zealanders occupy Raglan Golf Course for land rights, 1975-1983 (1)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

Suggested reading:

Harris, A. (2004). Hikoi: Forty years of Maori protest.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Alexis Dziedziech, 16/02/2013

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