Maori Land Hikoi 1975

Causes

Maori Land Loss

In 1840 Maori owned almost 66,400,000 acres of land in New Zealand. By 1975 only 3 million acres of land remained in Maori hands and many of those who owned shares in the land found that it wasn't big enough to provide a living.

Maori sold land to the settlers in the 60 years after the Treaty of Waitangi. However more Maori land was taken through a series of laws passed by the Pakeha government.

In 1841 the government set up the Land Claims Commission - they decided that all land sales before the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi were unfair. The Commission took a portion of land from large sales regardless of whether they were fair or not and sold them to Pakeha. In 1844 the South Island tribe, Ngai Tahu, sold 34.5 million acres of their land to the government.

Economic Issues

Most Maori lived in very rural areas and on what little land they did own Maori often worked temporarily or as casual labour on Pakeha land. Most of the land Maori had was shared amongst members of a tribe so individual's shares were too small to provide a living and often ended up being leased to Pakeha. Due to their land being unsubstantial enough to provide a living, Maori were forced to find work elsewhere; these jobs usually consisted of unskilled labour. As a result of this Maori were often limited to shack-like houses without proper sanitation and large families being crowded together. Maori were isolated from Pakeha and often still lived tribally. Some Maori such as Maui Pomare, Peter Buck, Apirana Ngata, Whina Cooper and Princess Te Puea led campaigns to encourage Maori to develop their land in hope of improving their economic situation. However by 1975 conditions for Maori had only slightly improved. New industries emerged but required a highly skilled workforce and as most Maori were only qualified for unskilled or at the most semi-skilled work, Maori unemployment rates started to soar.

Political Issues

In the 1830s and 1840s Maori held four seats in parliament and worked in alliance with labour to pass legislation that improved the social and economic conditions for Maori, this included laws to decrease poverty, equalizing Maori unemployment benefits and opportunities for housing finance. However the National Party was in power for most of the years from 1939-1984 and they didn't make the improvements the Labour party believed necessary to make Maori a priority.

The formation of Te Roopu O te Matakite

Whina Cooper established an organisation named ‘Te Roopu O te Matakite’ that commonly became known as ‘Matakite’. The aim of the group was to stop the sale of any more Maori land. Whina Cooper, along with many others, feared that if land sales continued Maori would lose their cultural identity.

Matakite took six months to plan a march that would capture the attention of the whole country. The march was set to begin in Te Hapua in the far north and end at parliament. The marchers carried a Memorial of Rights that was signed by recognised tribal rangatira.
(hereditary Maori leaders) as well as a petition that could be signed by both Maori and pakeha. The march covered over 1000 kilometres in 30 days. Only a small group of about 50 covered the entire distance by foot whilst others including Whina Cooper travelled by vehicle and the vast majority joining the march as it passed through their districts. The marchers stopped overnight at 25 different marae with a strict no alcohol consumption rule. Every morning Whina Cooper addressed the group emphasizing the tapu (sacred) nature of the march. With the catch cry of 'not one more acre of Maori land', the hikoi quickly grew in strength. Every tribe in New Zealand was represented as over 200 kaumatua (elders) or rangatira signed the Memorial of Rights and over 60,000 Maori and pakeha signed the petitions.

One of the most memorable moments during the march was on 23rd September; media interest had gained momentum as thousands of marchers crossed the Auckland Harbour Bridge on their way to Wellington.

On Monday 13th October Whina Cooper again led the group of 5000 with the Memorial of Rights and the petition in hand through the streets of Wellington to parliament where they were addressed by the Labour Prime Minister Bill Rowling and National leader Robert Muldoon who agreed their petition would be taken into account.

This march was very significant for Maori. It joined Maori from many different tribes to march together for an issue that they all had in common: land. It encouraged them to keep fighting for their own tribe problems as well.