

In this pamphlet Toby Boraman discusses working class movements against neoliberalism in Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the 1990s. The movements discussed are the near general strike against changes to employment law and the movement against welfare cuts, both in 1991 and the Maori movement of the mid-1990s against the government attempt to settle all Maori land claims by buying off rich Maori.

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the myth of passivity



class struggles against neoliberalism in Aotearoa in the 1990s

Toby Boraman

- Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002, pp. 151-168.
24. Dannin, *Working Free*, p. 141.
 25. Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment*, p. 318.
 26. See Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith, "He Pokeke Uenuku i Tu Ai: The Evolution of Contemporary Maori Protest" In Paul Spoonley, David Pearson and Cluny Macpherson eds., *Nga Patai: Racism and Ethnic Relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1996, pp. 97-116.
 27. Teanau Tuiono, "Tino Rangatiratanga and Capitalism," *Thrall* 24 (Spring 2002), p. 7.
 28. Quoted in Poata-Smith, "He Pokeke Uenuku i Tu Ai", p. 109.
 29. Te Kawariki, *The Maori Nation: Where to From Here* (1995) quoted in Evan Poata-Smith, "The Political Economy of Maori Protest Politics 1968-1995: A Marxist Analysis," PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2001, p. 304.
 30. Poata-Smith, "The Political Economy of Maori Protest," p. 308.
 31. Poata-Smith, "The Political Economy of Maori Protest," p. 309.
 32. Paul Moon, *The Occupation of the Moutoa Gardens*, Auckland: Trumps Copy Centre, 1996, p. 48.
 33. Poata-Smith, "The Political Economy of Maori Protest," p. 309.
 34. Poata-Smith, "The Political Economy of Maori Protest," p. 309.
 35. Poata-Smith, "The Political Economy of Maori Protest," p. 349.
 36. Elizabeth Rata, *A Political Economy of Neotribal Capitalism*, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2000, p. 225.
 37. Rata, *A Political Economy of Neotribal Capitalism*, pp. 208-209.
 38. Rata, *A Political Economy of Neotribal Capitalism*, p. 231.
 39. Although of course even if the left did see domestic class struggle as important, it aimed to act in a mediating role in that struggle, attempting to recuperate it into the confines of its state capitalist ideology.

Footnotes

1. *The Economist*, quoted in Jane Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment*, Revised edition, Auckland: Auckland University Press and Bridget Williams Books, 1997, p. 8. Kelsey's book was published overseas as *Economic Fundamentalism* (Pluto, 1995).
2. Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment*, p. 347. Kelsey has written a number of other books about neoliberalism in Aotearoa, including *Rolling Back the State* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993). For other leftist accounts of neoliberalism in Aotearoa, see Mike O'Brien and Chris Wilkes, *The Tragedy of the Market: A Social Experiment in New Zealand*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1993 and the various books by Bruce Jesson (*Fragments of Labour* (1987), *Behind the Mirror Glass*, and *Only Their Purpose is Mad* (1999)).
3. Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment*, p. 297.
4. Huw Jarvis, "A Disengaged Society," *Revolution*, 20 (March/May 2003), pp. 16-19.
5. For autonomist Marxism, see Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber Marx*; Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically*, Leeds, San Francisco and Edinburgh: Anti/Theses and AK Press, 2000; and Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven*. See also www.endpage.org Autonomist Marxism has many limitations, such as a tendency to fetishise working class struggle without examining the content of that struggle, but it is useful as a historical method to turn capital centric views on its head.
6. The only publication that I am aware of which addresses this movement is Ellen Dannin, *Working Free: The Origins and Impact of New Zealand's Employment Contracts Act*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, pp. 136-151. In addition, see the unpublished thesis by Sarah Heal, "The Struggle For and Against the Employment Contracts Act 1987-1991," M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 1994.
7. Tom Bramble with Sarah Heal, "Trade Unions", in Chris Rudd and Brian Roper eds., *The Political Economy of New Zealand*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 137.
8. Sarah Heal, "The Struggle For and Against the Employment Contracts Act 1987-1991," M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 1994, p. 130.
9. Heal, "The Struggle For and Against", p. 121.
10. Dannin, *Working Free*, p. 146.
11. As quoted in Dannin, *Working Free*, p. 146.
12. Dannin, *Working Free*, p. 147.
13. Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment*, p. 186.
14. Quoted in Heal, "The Struggle For and Against", p. 110.
15. See Heal, "The Struggle For and Against."
16. Heal, "The Struggle For and Against", pp. 109-110.
17. Quoted in Heal, "The Struggle For and Against," p. 175.
18. Bradford quoted in Kelsey, *The New Zealand Experiment*, p. 186.
19. "Anti-Capitalism as ideology...and as movement?", *Aufheben*, 10 (2002), p. 7. http://www.geocities.com/aufheben2/auf_10_anticapital.html
20. Curtis Price, "Fragile Prosperity? Fragile Social Peace?", *Collective Action Notes*, 16/17 (2000), p. 16.
21. Sources: John Deeks and Peter Boxall, *Labour Relations in New Zealand*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1989, p. 248; John Deeks and Erling Rasmussen, *Employment Relations in New Zealand*, Auckland: Pearson, 2002, p. 89; and *Key Statistics*, Statistics New Zealand.
22. Sources: Bramble with Heal, "Trade Unions," pp. 127-128; Deeks and Rasmussen, *Employment Relations in New Zealand*, p. 89; and *Key Statistics*, Statistics New Zealand.
23. For accounts of the beneficiaries movement, see Karen Davis, *Born of Hunger, Pain & Strife: 150 Years of Struggle against Unemployment in New Zealand*, Auckland: The Peoples Press, 1991, and Cybele Locke, "Organising the Unemployed: The Politics of Gender, Culture and Class in the 1980s and 1990s," in Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor eds., *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*,

Introduction: Capitalism Triumphant?

Since 1984, we've been subject to an awful lot of economic crap in Aotearoa/New Zealand. "Rogernomics", "Ruthanasia", "The New Right", "restructuring", "privatisation", "labour market flexibility", "teamwork": all this has meant working harder for less pay, longer hours, worse conditions, unemployment, falling living standards, the rich getting richer, increasing poverty...Readers are no doubt familiar with the appalling effects of the "New Right" (also known as neoliberalism), so there is no need to repeat them here. The "New Zealand experiment", as it has been coined, has been noted for its severity. Aotearoa "out thatchered Thatcher" and adopted the "most thoroughgoing economic reform in the OECD", "free-market reforms more radical than any other industrial country's."¹

Most commentators think neoliberalism was a devastatingly successful assault by the capitalist class. Most believe that people were helpless to oppose it, giving neoliberalism a *fatalistic inevitability*: even if people had tried to oppose it, apparently it still would have gone ahead. They contend capital cleverly used blitzkrieg tactics to nullify dissent, and assert the working class was allegedly docile and fragmented in the face "Rogernomics" and then "Ruthanasia" (the name given to "New Right" policies in Aotearoa, named after Labour Finance Minister Roger Douglas and National Finance Minister Ruth Richardson). For example, Jane Kelsey, author of *The New Zealand Experiment*, has claimed there was significant resistance from Maori to neoliberal capitalism, but little from Pakeha (whites) who were "passive" and "acquiescent"²:

In a country where welfare ideology was so deeply ingrained, radical and unpopular change by undemocratic governments might have been expected to provoke disobedience and disorder. This did not occur. Most Pakeha were paralysed by the pace and content of change, confused by the role of the Labour Government, and trapped in nostalgia for a centralised welfare state that was disappearing before their eyes. While they felt uneasy about what was taking place, people generally remained isolated, insecure, defensive, unorganised and politically inert.³

Similarly, Huw Jarvis in the Trotskyoid magazine *Revolution* has claimed that New Zealanders are now passive, disengaged, and highly individualistic.⁴ This pessimism is in many respects realistic, and no doubt contains much truth. I believe that the period from 1984 – when the fourth Labour Government first introduced neoliberalism in Aotearoa – to today is one of a *historic working class defeat* and retreat in the face of a brutal offensive by the capitalist class. Many people struggled against the imposition of neoliberalism but were defeated for a complex and intricate variety of reasons.

Orthodox leftist accounts of the New Zealand experiment, such as Kelsey's, view it through the lens of capital. They look at the actions of capital, such as "restructuring" the economy, "rolling back the state" (particularly the welfare state), cutting wages, smashing trade unions, increasing unemployment and poverty, and so forth. I attempt to turn this capital-centric view *upside down*, and instead view the imposition of neoliberalism from a working class perspective. I draw upon the autonomist Marxist tradition, an unorthodox type of Marxism, which stresses the autonomous self-activity of the working class rather than the power of capital.⁵

To bleakly characterise our recent history as an uncontested one is misguided. For instance, in terms of numbers, the biggest protest movement in Aotearoa's history was not the anti-Vietnam War movement. Nor was it the anti-Springbok Tour protests of 1981. Nor was it the anti-nuclear protests of the 1980s. Nor the various protests and hikoi held by the Tino Rangatiratanga movement. By far the largest movement was the wave of protests, strikes and related actions against the Employment Contracts Act (ECA) in 1991. Around half a million people participated in this movement. Yet this movement, which struggled for a general strike, has been written out of history. There has been virtually nothing published about the subject,⁶ while there are numerous publications about the peace, anti-nuclear and

anti-apartheid movements. Perhaps this is because of the bias of many people who write off class struggle as outdated and irrelevant

The 1990s, far from being a period of working class passivity, witnessed a multiplicity of largely working class struggles against the imposition of neoliberalism. These include the above mentioned near general strike in 1991 against the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act and a wave of land occupations by largely working class Maori in the mid 1990s. Additionally, from the late 1980s, dozens of unemployed and poverty action groups mushroomed across the country. Small rural communities in the 1980s and 1990s mobilised in their thousands against the closures of hospitals, post offices, schools and other services. Indeed, often *entire* rural communities turned out to protest against such closures. The 1990s saw tens of thousands of students protest against the introduction of student fees at universities, with many occupations from 1993 onwards. The late 1990s saw significant working class community based struggles emerge that opposed water privatisation in Auckland. The Water Pressure Group received much popular support through its reconnection squads that reconnected water supply to those homes who refused to pay for the commodification of water.

Rather than being a comprehensive overview of the resistance to neoliberalism in Aotearoa in the 1990s, I shall focus upon two of what I consider the most important periods of working class resistance. Firstly, I look at the revolt against the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act and benefit cuts in 1991. Secondly, I examine Maori struggle against the fiscal envelope – which was an attempt by the state to settle financially all Maori grievances going back to 1840 – in the mid 1990s. Both these periods were possibly the key events during the 1990s that could have developed into a broader and deeper resistance to capitalism. Certainly, the other movements against neoliberalism were in their own ways significant movements in themselves, but unfortunately there is little information written about them. For example, there is virtually nothing published about the popular movement against hospital closures in rural areas, possibly because it occurred autonomously from the left. I hope that further research will be carried out into the various unrecorded forms of resistance against neoliberalism.

legislation. For example, the coalition’s Employment Relations Act of 2000 was in fact more draconian than the ECA of 1991.

Class struggle in Aotearoa during the 1990s did not contain much that pointed beyond capitalist social relations. The resistance was defensive, reactive and lacked positive anti-capitalist content. The extra parliamentary opposition to neoliberalism was not based upon autonomous working class direct action – apart from a few exemplary examples, such as occupations and reconnecting water supplies – but largely symbolic street protest pleading to politicians that they not introduce certain draconian laws (such as the ECA and benefit cuts). Only on a few occasions, such as occupations, did people develop a nascent self-organisational form that could have provided a constructive alternative to capitalism. The spontaneous mutual aid and free provision of food during these occupations foreshadows a possible future society where people co-operatively come together to meet their needs themselves without the mediation of the market and money.

Often people saw the enemy in personal terms. Many viewed neoliberalism as a conspiracy foisted upon the country by a few nasty individuals in the Labour Party, National Party, the Business Roundtable, Treasury, Trade Union bureaucracies and so on, rather than a global shift in the class struggle away from the class compromise of Keynesianism to more open class conflict. Sometimes people saw the enemy in idealistic terms. “New Right” ideology was the problem, rather than capitalist social relations. Some left nationalists claimed neoliberalism was the result of American imperialism, but clearly local capitalists were the driving force behind the reforms. As well, many people nostalgically looked back to the welfare state, and claimed it was some sort of utopian society where class exploitation, poverty, alienation and so forth did not exist; this was clearly false, as the welfare state was a bureaucratic form of capitalism that just mitigated some of its worst features.

The chances for further resistance to capitalism today are mixed. I believe we live in a fairly contradictory and complex time. On the one hand, there is much anger, a general resentment about shit wages, overwork, low benefits and so on. There is a general scepticism about all political parties and a general resentment towards wealth being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. The decline of Leninism and social democracy has meant an unprecedented opportunity for a praxis that cannot be recuperated and straightjacketed into some form of bureaucratic state capitalism. There has been a rise in extra-parliamentary protest with the emergence of anti-globalisation, anti-war, anti-genetic engineering movements in the last few years. Yet on the other hand, many people are demoralised, more alienated, beaten down, and struggling to survive with huge debt and inadequate income. The anger against modern capitalism is mostly translated into largely individualistic rather than co-operative forms of resistance. We are living through a period of one of the lowest amounts of formal strike activity in Aotearoa’s history. Most people are too scared to lose their jobs to risk “illegal” strike activity, although there has been an encouraging sign of a number of wildcat strikes in the last few years. Yet this does not mean we should be too pessimistic, and place our main hopes in movements overseas, as the New Left and anti-apartheid movements mistakenly did. Capitalism is fundamentally contradictory and unstable. Overall, I believe we are living through a transitional period, one that could swing towards a retrenchment of neoliberal capitalism or develop into a more radical opposition to it. It could swing either way.

in Aotearoa never reached similar levels as in Britain, despite the more brutal nature of neoliberalism in Aotearoa (for instance, Britain never introduced a similar employment act to the ECA).

Nonetheless, it is essential to study the recent defeat of resistance to capital so it can be challenged more effectively in the present. What can be learnt from these defeats? How can we avoid our struggles being co-opted and fragmented?

The reforms were imposed in spite of much opposition for many reasons, including – but not limited to – a lack, in general, of a radical tradition of working class autonomy, self-activity and self-organisation; the role of the Labour Party, union bureaucrats and neotribal elites in recuperating revolt; A Labour Party which weakened resistance by granting some reforms, such as recognition of Treaty of Waitangi claims dating to 1840, anti-nuclear legislation, homosexual law reform, and so forth; delusions about the Labour Party and most unions as being representative of workers' interests and being on the side of working class people; the speed of reforms, which gave opponents little time to organise resistance; and clever divide and rule tactics by capital and the state which picked off each opponent to neoliberalism one at a time. Once a movement was isolated it was often crushed by police – for instance, the raid by police against the Auckland unemployed group in 1992, and the use of police to break up Maori land and student occupations. Crucially, there was a lack of linkages made between the various sections of the working class, and thus each movement became isolated and more easily defeated. For example, the racism of some working class Pakeha meant that they opposed the land occupations of working class Maori; and the cultural nationalism of some working class Maori meant that they saw Pakeha culture and society as a whole as the enemy. Another example was that most working class people did not see beneficiaries as part of the working class, but instead viewed them as “bludgers”.

Compared to overseas, two unique examples of recuperation occurred. Firstly, the neoliberal reforms were introduced by the Labour Party. The Labour Party before 1984 was a social democratic party. This shift to the right is unsurprising, as almost all social democratic parties have become neoliberal parties the world over. Yet the Labour Party recuperated revolt largely through a relatively unique strategy of combining liberal social policy (such as banning American nuclear warships from Aotearoa) with neoliberal economics. This confused many people, particularly leftists, who initially supported Labour. Secondly, a large, radical, and autonomous indigenous movement was somewhat subverted by a state sponsored policy of attempting to transform Maori iwi into corporations under the pretence of settling treaty grievances. This neotribal capitalism was an important factor in dividing Maori amongst themselves and further dispossessing working class Maori.

The left was unable to provide much opposition to neoliberalism. In my view, this was because of its state capitalist ideology of left-nationalism and liberalism. By the 1980s the moderate Pakeha left was a predominantly a *liberal* movement that focussed upon opposing apartheid in South Africa (primarily based on support for the nationalist group the African National Congress) and nuclear ship visits (primarily based upon a simplistic anti-American nationalism). This meant that the left was busy supporting *nationalist* struggles overseas, or trying to stop American warships from visiting Aotearoa. The radical left was ironically focussed upon supporting state capitalist regimes (such as the USSR, China and Albania) or nationalist movements overseas, hence it did not see *domestic class struggle* as of central importance.³⁹ Indeed, many leftists initially supported neoliberalism. Once the Labour Party had banned American warships from visiting Aotearoa, many leftists actually voted for a Labour government that was simultaneously kicking workers in the stomach. When the National Party, the traditional enemy of leftists, assumed power in 1990, the left was demoralised, disorganised and weakened by years of abuse and “betrayal” from Labour, and hence it provided little effective opposition to National's strengthening of the neoliberal agenda. In response, some social democrats split from the Labour Party in the late 1980s, eventually forming the Alliance. Great hopes were placed in the Alliance to revive social democracy, but when the Alliance joined Labour in a coalition government in the late 1990s, they unsurprisingly succumbed to neoliberalism and supported much anti-working class

1991: The General Strike That Wasn't

In 1991, the National government prepared to introduce the draconian Employment Contracts Act and severe benefit cuts at the same time. These were both designed to drive wages down and reduce living standards. It was expected that unions and beneficiaries would put up a tough fight. Capitalists and state bureaucrats expected a struggle comparable to the Miners' Strike in Britain – except in Aotearoa, capitalists attacked the entire union movement in one foul swoop, rather than targeting and isolating militant unions as was the tactic used against the Miners' in Britain. In the end, capitalists were pleasantly surprised. A mass movement to stop the ECA was co-opted by union bureaucrats. Learning about our history is crucial. Without it, we are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past. There are many valuable lessons to be learned in the defeat of the anti-ECA movement.

Background

The mid to late 1970s saw the biggest strike wave in New Zealand history. Workers went on the offensive and gained a number of victories. An example of this was the massive strike in 1980 at the Kinleith Pulp and Paper Mill in Tokoroa. Such activity was a significant factor in causing falling profits. The response of capital to this strike wave was ultimately neoliberalism with the election of a right wing Labour Government in 1984. Capital restructured to get out of this crisis and increase profits. By the mid to late 1980s, the pendulum had swung the other way, with workers forced onto the defensive in the face of growing militancy from the capitalist class.

In the mid to late 1980s, many firms were closed and many workers were made redundant. The main objective of unions became stopping job losses rather than bettering wages and working conditions. There were many industrial disputes, but most were defensive struggles over redundancy deals. Some of the larger and more militant unions attempted to fight back, but were eventually defeated. Labour introduced a number of changes (“deregulation”) to employment laws that weakened trade unions, but Labour was reluctant to openly destroy unions because of their historic alliance with conservative unions. Nevertheless, Labour was unsupportive of unions, and excluded, for the most part, union bureaucrats from the negotiation table.

From 1984 to 1991, there was a considerable degree of strike activity, much of it in opposition to the labour market “deregulation” brought in by the Labour Government. In 1985, 182 200 workers were involved in strike activity, the second highest number since records have been kept (the highest was in 1976, with just over 200 000 involved). As measured by numbers of workers involved, the years 1984 to 1991 represented one of the highest amounts of strike activity in Aotearoa's history, second only to the period 1976 to 1984, and generally higher than the late 1960s and early 1970s (see Figure 1, page 9).

Capitalists often employed more militant tactics to overcome these strikes. Lockouts became more common, such as the lockouts at the Tasman Pulp and Paper Mill in Kawerau and the Glenbrook Steel Works in Waiuku in the mid 1980s. Capitalists employed strikebreakers flown in from overseas and other parts of the country, as well as company or yellow unions, hiring security firms to monitor worker protests and protect them from sabotage, and paying people to campaign against the union that was supposed to represent them. By the late 1980s, the number of workers participating in strikes had declined to around 100 000 in 1988 and then 50 000 in 1990. Likewise, the number of working days reclaimed by strike activity fell significantly by the late 1980s (see figures 1 and 2, page 9). The scene was set for one of the biggest changes in class relations in Aotearoa's history.

The Employment Contracts Act And The Struggle Against It

In 1990, the National Party was elected. Unsurprisingly, it took the neoliberal programme to greater depths and prepared to introduce the infamous Employment Contracts Act (ECA). The ECA aimed to force wages down, to deteriorate conditions of employment, and to smash unions. It was thus both an

anti-worker and an anti-union piece of legislation. The ECA abolished national award coverage and instead replaced them with individual employment contracts, contracts that were to be made on a supposedly “level playing field” between individual capitalists and workers. Under the ECA, unions did not have any special privileges in representing workers. The ECA made most forms of strike activity illegal, including strikes over job losses, solidarity strikes, political strikes, strikes over sexual harassment and damage to the environment, thus bringing in some of the harshest anti-strike laws in the “advanced” capitalist world and comparable to countries such as China. Unionists were denied access to workplaces to talk to their members.

At first, the scene looked set for Aotearoa’s biggest industrial confrontation since the 1913 general strike or the 1951 waterfront lockout. In the first four months of 1991, public servants, engineers, teachers, nurses, seafarers, wharfies, steelworkers, railway workers, shop assistants, cleaners, caretakers, and security guards all took action against the ECA, mostly in the form of stopworks and strikes. Huge demonstrations against the ECA were held in many towns. About 300 000 to 500 000 people were involved in these actions against the ECA, representing perhaps over a quarter of the entire workforce.⁷

The rank and file was in a militant mood: every single union voted for strike action against the ECA. The bill was opposed by the overwhelming majority of workers. Attendances soared at mass stopwork meetings at which there was growing support for a general strike against the bill. Indeed, many unions almost unanimously voted for a general strike. For example, the Timberworkers’ Union and Building Trades Union were unanimous in support of such a strike, and 87% of workers in the Nurses Association voted for the action.⁸ Hence for unionised workers the question was not whether a general strike should be held. Debate centred upon *when* it should be held, and *how long* it should last. Some preferred a 24 hour general strike, some a 48 hour, some a week long. Conservative unions, such as the Public Services Association (PSA), faced internal dissent with some individual branches calling for a general strike against the wishes of the conservative national union leadership. The PSA national leadership asked them to abandon their call, and a result some PSA branches passed resolutions of no-confidence in their leadership. (This later led to a split within the PSA with the establishment of NUPE). This widespread call for a general strike was a highly unusual step to take as Aotearoa has only experienced two general strikes in its history, namely in 1913 and 1979.

During the week of action against the ECA of 3-10 April 1991, 250 000 workers participated in some form of action against the bill.⁹ The week of action was declared by the major trade union federation, the Council of Trade Unions (CTU). There were strikes by storeworkers, drivers, seafarers, and steelworkers. Fifty thousand education workers held a 24-hour strike on April 4.¹⁰ Even Inland Revenue staff in Nelson struck. Wildcat strikes became common. Wildcats were held by drivers, freezing workers at three different plants in Northland, railway workers in the Hutt Valley, pulp and paper workers at Tokoroa’s Kinleith plant, and journalists associated with the New Zealand Press Association. A headline in the *National Business Review* exclaimed, “Protest week could trigger wildcat strikes”.¹¹ This exemplified the fear of capitalists that the anti-ECA strikes were getting out of control: they worried that anger against the bill might lead to more widespread and generalised wildcats.

There were also rallies and marches across the country during the week of action. April 4 saw 100 000 people protesting up and down the country against the ECA, including large attendances in small towns, which often saw the largest protests they had ever seen. For example, 1 500 people protested in Whakatane, which represented 10% of the town’s population. A nationwide total of 100 000 people protesting on the streets may sound like a small number to readers overseas, but in the context of a small population lacking a popular radical working class tradition, it is a massive number. For example, it far outstripped the “protest generation” of the anti-Vietnam War period in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as the protests against the Iraq War in 2003. The protests against the ECA represented the biggest mobilisation of demonstrators since the 1981 Springbok Tour. Nationwide anti-Vietnam War mobilisations attracted a peak of 35 000 people in April 1971, despite the fact the New Zealand government was one of the few states in the world to send troops to fight for the Americans in Vietnam.

Capitalist Maori use it to mask their own privileged position within tribes, and working class Maori use it to criticise capitalist Maori.

Corporate iwi claim to be the legitimate inheritors of the traditional iwi that were dispossessed by the English state since 1840. This is highly questionable, as traditional iwi were not corporate in structure. In fact, they practised some aspects of anti-state communism. For example, traditional iwi had a moneyless gift economy and communal ownership of property; however, early Maori society was still some form of class society, complete with chiefs, commoners, and slaves. Perhaps this hierarchy within Maori society meant it was easier for the Pakeha elite to co-opt Maori leaders in the 1980s and 1990s.

By the late 1990s, the occupation movement had largely died down, although disgruntlement and a number of occupations directed against the state and sometimes the new Maori capitalists continues to this day. Militant Maori had become isolated and temporarily defeated. Protest against neoliberal capitalism became increasingly difficult as it was so personalised, as often working class Maori opposed Maori capitalists within their own extended family. Yet the massive Hiko of May 2004 against the privatisation and commodification of the seabed and foreshore, attended by 20 000 to 30 000 people, even more than the land march of 1975, shows that working class Maori resistance is alive and kicking.

Conclusions

The main aim of this article was to prove that the imposition of neoliberalism in Aotearoa *was* resisted. Far from being passive in the face of devastating neoliberal reforms, many working class Pakeha and Maori struggled against their imposition. Even if it is true that the majority of Pakeha did not overtly attempt to resist neoliberalism, a significant minority did. The features of this resistance was that it was mainly working class and grassroots based; it was generally autonomous from political parties and the left; it was extra-parliamentary; it was often community based rather than workplace based, especially after 1991; and it was often co-opted, whether by the left – as with the union bureaucrats who suppressed the movement for a general strike in 1991 – or by neoliberal capitalists.

Nonetheless, this resistance failed. The movements that attempted and still attempt to resist neoliberalism in Aotearoa have been isolated and defeated, and have not led to a more widespread opposition to capitalism. For example, these movements never developed into riots, insurrections, workplace occupations, general strikes and near revolutions (such as in Bolivia and Argentina) that have characterised opposition to neoliberalism overseas. Indeed, resistance in Aotearoa never reached the level of even the miner’s strike and the Poll Tax riots of the Thatcher years in Britain.

Subsequently, I believe it is more accurate to call the period a *defeat* rather than one of passivity in the face of an onslaught from the capitalist class. Furthermore, the temporary “success” of neoliberal technocrats and ideologues in imposing their will upon a working class that in general did not support neoliberalism was *not* inevitable. I believe if resistance to neoliberalism had been better linked (*horizontally*, and not vertically), and was able to outmanoeuvre the attempts of leftist recuperators to sanitise revolt, many of the worst aspects of neoliberalism could have been averted, if not rolled back. Such resistance could have developed into a more generalised opposition to capital and the commodity system.

If the myth of passivity is false, so too is the myth of a naturally insurgent working class outside the control of unions and parties. Undoubtedly, the working class in Aotearoa is quite conservative and hence probably the majority did not actively oppose neoliberalism. This is partially because the tradition of working class direct action had largely disappeared by the 1980s and 1990s. This was due to a variety of factors, including the influence of reformism and the suppression of the radical wing of the union movement (for instance, the 1951 waterfront lockout). There has been little mass support for radical movements, apart from perhaps the radical wing of the Tino Rangatiratanga movement. Hence the resistance against neoliberalism has in general been quite mild. Perhaps this explains why resistance

by the corporate bodies, but being “sold out” by them. Maori were placed under intense pressure by capital and the state to choose commodified forms of iwi. Hence while corporate warriors were (and are) in control of corporate iwi, these new governance structures are also largely shaped by the Office of Treaty Settlements. As such, corporate iwi ought to be seen as the creation of capital and the state.

Working class Maori often occupied land in direct protest against proposed settlements between their local corporate iwi and the state. Their protest was directed at their own capitalists as well as the state. For them, the hapu (which can be loosely translated as sub-tribe) and not the neo-tribal capitalist elite was the legitimate kaitiaki (guardians) of the land.³⁵

Rata has called this new Maori capitalism created by treaty settlements a “neotribal capitalist regime of accumulation.”³⁶ This regime centres on the transformation of tribes into capitalist enterprises, and the creation of a new tribal based capitalist elite. This elite emerged in the treaty negotiation process of the 1980s and 1990s: namely, those Maori lawyers, leaders, and bureaucrats who used their privileged positions to become the chief executive officers of neotribal capitalism. Yet Maori iwi as a whole were guaranteed access to their traditional resources, fisheries, land and so on under the Treaty of Waitangi. Under neotribal capitalism, this access to what paltry resources have been returned to Maori is effectively exclusively *controlled* by the new tribal capitalist elite. Even if ownership of resources is nominally owned by the whole tribe (the corporate tribe, and not an individual, is the legal owner), and even if iwi members have a shareholding in the business, the undemocratic nature of neotribal capitalist business ensures that working class iwi do not have any real say in the corporate iwi head office.

The link between economic development and wealth accumulation meant that economic development could not occur without commodity production, and commodity circulation must occur within the capitalist sphere of accumulative exchange. Commodification, with its intrinsic split between buyers and sellers of labour-power in the creation of surplus value (i.e., of wealth that can be used as capitalist investment), means class exploitative relations and not communal relations [prevail], despite the existence of communal ownership of the means of production.³⁷

Such a claim is somewhat debatable as the means of production is effectively owned and controlled by tribal capitalists.

Initially, many working class Maori supported neotribal capitalism because they saw it as a means to economic independence, a route out of poverty, and the basis for a revival in Maori society in general. Yet overall neotribal capitalism has amounted to a new dispossession of working class Maori. “The neotribalist ideology of communal kinship relations, originating in the pan-Maori ethnification and indigenisation movements of the 1970s and 1980s, has become the means of access and privileged relationship to traditional lands, waters and knowledge by particular groups of retribalised Maori...Communal relations of families and kin-based communities revived within the prefigurative movements are conceptualised as ‘softening’ and humanising counters to the dehumanising class relations.”³⁸ As well, detribalised Maori, who make up the majority of the Maori population and are primarily concentrated in working class urban areas, have been excluded from corporate iwi.

Class relations within tribes are concealed by an ideology of a revived Maori culture and community. Working class Maori are encouraged to identify with their tribe as a whole, overlooking exploitative class relations within their own tribe. Thus working class Maori are encouraged to identify culturally with Maori capitalists. Maori capitalists can falsely claim that working class Maori resisting their business are resisting traditional Maori society and culture. However, many working class Maori, especially in rural areas, use Maori culture as a card to undermine capitalist Maori who they see as having ‘colonised thinking’. Corporatism is often associated with ‘Pakeha colonised’ thinking and therefore as ‘bad’. In that respect, Maori culture is used by *both* capitalist and working class Maori.

What is more, a fledging alliance was developing between the unwaged and waged wings of the working class. Many thousands of people were out on the streets protesting severe benefit cuts at the same time, with marches organised by unemployed groups often meeting anti-ECA rallies on the street on the same day. A militant and visible unemployed movement was highly active, and caused a stir with a number of occupations, protests, effigy burnings and the like (see below for a brief overview of this movement).

The week of action against the ECA put increasing pressure on the CTU to call for a general strike. Yet on April 18, the bureaucracy of the CTU voted 250 122 to 190 910 against holding a general strike against the ECA.¹² This move went against the wishes of the majority of its members. For example, as noted above, 87% of nurses voted for a general strike, yet the Nurses Association representative at the CTU meeting voted against a general strike. CTU bureaucrats wrongly assumed there was insufficient support to sustain confrontational and effective nationwide action.¹³ Most CTU bureaucrats wished to avoid any large-scale confrontation with capital partially because of their experience in 1951, when the militant wing of the union movement was obliterated during the Waterfront lockout. They believed confrontation would lead to an inevitable defeat and decimation of the union movement. Yet surely the ECA aimed to do that anyway! Ken Douglas, the CTU President, ironically said at a time when hundreds of thousands of people were marching in the streets against benefit cuts and the ECA that the era of confrontational class struggle had passed! Minister of Labour Bill Birch praised the CTU for the “realism” of “positioning themselves to work with the new legislation”.¹⁴

Not only did union bureaucrats reject the call for a general strike, they also sabotaged the efforts of those who did.¹⁵ For example, Bill Andersen, a CTU bureaucrat and member of the Stalinist Socialist Unity Party (SUP), prevented or ignored people from the floor putting forward resolutions to defeat the bill at union meetings.¹⁶ John Ryall of the Service Workers’ Federation said, “The CTU leadership were opposed to doing anything”¹⁷ yet to be fair the CTU did oppose the ECA, and organised a campaign against it, including protests, strike activity and stopwork meetings. However, this campaign was mild, largely symbolic, and aimed to cause little disruption. The most effective way of opposing the bill was a nationally co-ordinated general strike. Perhaps the ECA could not have been defeated by even a general strike. But such a move may have forced the state to retract some of the more draconian proposals contained in the ECA, and perhaps if the strike was lengthy, widespread and well organised, it may have actually defeated the bill.

Some of the more militant unions outside the CTU, such as the Seafarers and the Building Trades Union, called for a general strike. Their influence was marginal and isolated, however. As a result, no general strike occurred, and even though pulp and paper workers, bus drivers, nurses, teachers, some factory workers and some service workers went on strike, their actions were uncoordinated, isolated and defeated. These workers were too small in number, lacked industrial strength, and were often consciously subverted by the CTU leadership. Furthermore, in 1991 it appears that workers did not develop their own autonomous organisations in the heat of the struggle, in contrast to the mid to late 1970s, when strike committees and rank and file groups sometimes managed to outmanoeuvre both capitalists and union bureaucrats. Hence it seems that many workers did not self-organise themselves inside and outside bureaucratic unions, apart from the ones who took up unofficial action such as wildcat strikes against the ECA.

On 30 April 1991, 60 000 people across the country – again more protesters than the biggest days of mobilisations against wars in New Zealand history – protested against the imminent enactment of the ECA. On May Day, massive rallies were held. On May 3, the government passed the ECA whole and unchanged. The Prime-Minister, Jim Bolger, went on an overseas trip and apparently skited to foreign politicians about how they had successfully imposed the act, a reform that in other countries would have been virtually impossible to enact.

Sue Bradford claimed, “I think the CTU bears huge guilt for having not allowed the people to do what they wanted to do [i.e. hold a general strike]...Groups like ours were having massive

demonstrations at the time, there was tremendous public opposition. So it wasn't that the people didn't want to fight."¹⁸ Bradford, then a Maoist involved in the Unemployed Workers Rights' Centre in Auckland, said she could not understand why the CTU subverted the struggle of "the people." As with most leftists and Leninists, she assumed that the problem during 1991 was a crisis of *leadership*. The CTU bureaucrats were "bad" leaders, and needed to be replaced by "good" leaders. Yet trade union bureaucrats, just like Labour and Alliance politicians, have helped institute neoliberalism and subvert resistance to it not because of the commonly held view that they are corrupt, undemocratic, or just plain bad people. Instead, a more feasible explanation for their behaviour is simply because they are dependent upon, and attempt to facilitate and mediate, capital accumulation.¹⁹ Union bureaucrats act as mediators of wage labour, recuperating workers' struggles outside of their control – and the control of capital – in return for gaining limited benefits for workers and a say in the state management of industrial relations.

For union bureaucrats of the period, the key was to have some say in the state management of industrial relations. Indeed, Douglas – also a member of the Stalinist SUP – said in 1991 that unions had to face the realities of "global competition," which basically meant that he wanted union members to accept the reality of "restructuring" in the faint hope that union bureaucrats could gain an ear at the negotiation table to soften the effect of mass layoffs a wee bit. This offers an explanation why CTU bureaucrats opposed the general strike. Because they wanted to be a partner in government, they did not wish to appear to be too radical and support confrontational mass direct action such as a general strike. However, this hope was forlorn since by 1991 most capitalists and politicians simply did not want to negotiate with union bureaucrats anymore but instead explicitly desired to smash the power of unions altogether. This was essential in capital's drive to force wages down and increase profits.

After the ECA was enacted, wages fell immediately for most workers. Union membership declined dramatically. The union movement split. Strike activity became almost non-existent. The 1990s saw the lowest amounts of strike activity since the quietude of the mid 1950s to mid 1960s, the alleged "golden era" of welfare state capitalism. Numbers of workers involved in strike action fell from 26 800 in 1992, to 7 600 in 1997, to 2 600 in 2000, before jumping somewhat to 23 000 in 2002. In comparison, an average of around 15 000 workers went on strike per year between 1954 and 1961 (see Figure 1, page 9), a decade characterised as one of bleak conformity in most histories. Hence it seems that the ECA was devastatingly successful in outlawing strikes, reducing wages and increasing profits for capitalists. However, to rely solely upon statistics that examine strike activity ignores informal, everyday forms of class struggle in the workplace, as well as forms of class struggle that occur outside of the workplace. It is noticeable that much of the resistance to neoliberalism after 1991 shifted to the community rather than the workplace. As Curtis Price notes, many workers under neoliberalism no longer use strikes as weapons of resistance because capitalists use "replacement workers" to take the jobs of strikers. Instead, it is likely that workers make *more use* of informal, everyday resistance on the job through using such tactics as go-slows and the work-to-rule.²⁰ Indeed, in the United States work-to-rule tactics increased in the 1990s while strike activity decreased. No doubt informal workplace resistance plays an important and fertile role in class struggle. Unfortunately, in the absence of statistics and studies about informal resistance, it is very difficult to quantify how much resistance of this type occurred in Aotearoa.

traitors and sellouts. They sold the Sealords Deal to our people, and picked up a cool million bucks for their treachery...As we prepare to fight against the Crown Proposals, we must also expose the treachery within our own ranks.²⁹

Wanganui Maori occupied Moutoa Gardens in Wanganui for 79 days in early 1995. They renamed it Pakatoire, after the site of a Maori pa that was located in the gardens. Pakatoire had been a disputed site between local Maori and the state since 1887, especially over control of fishing rights in the Wanganui River. This occupation "was to emerge as the Bastion Point of the 1990s and represented the single largest collective act of 'civil disobedience' since the anti-Springbok Tour protests of 1981."³⁰

The occupation involved thousands of Maori from all walks of life – church groups, gang members, trade unionists, as well as Pakeha sympathisers. Evan Poata-Smith paints a picture of the hive of self-activity during the occupation:

The gardens resembled a motor camp with tents and caravans set in place, with work crews responsible for different tasks throughout the day. Cooks prepared meals for a steady stream of visitors who arrived to give their support to the tangata whenua. A makeshift kitchen was constructed and the dining room was able to hold up to 150 people a sitting. Rented ablution facilities were placed at one end of the gardens and electricity was supplied with a generator. Security surrounding the gardens was tight [there was the constant threat of forcible removal by the police, as well as constant police harassment] with people rostered on shifts throughout the day and night. There were people stationed at every entrance and corner of the gardens.³¹

Hundreds of people visited the occupation. Far from being "separatist", the occupation was open to the public.³² When the Wanganui District Council, who formally "owned" the gardens, gave the occupiers a deadline to leave, numbers swelled from 150 to 2000. A festive atmosphere ensued on the day of the deadline. Occupiers organised an impromptu concert and sung waiata until the deadline past.³³ The result was that the Council decided not to force the eviction, and entered a process of negotiation. Numbers of occupiers declined. The Council then acquired a court order requiring the occupiers to remove all the buildings they had erected and leave the site. On 18 May 1995, almost three weeks after the failed attempt at eviction, protesters voluntarily left the site "saying they did so reluctantly but in preference to being moved on by the police."³⁴

The occupation of Pakatoire triggered a series of occupations by Maori in the North Island. By April 1995, there were six major occupations in progress. Many Maori saw that the legalistic framework set up in the 1980s for treaty grievances was not delivering any real benefits to working class Maori and hence took direct action. There were occupations of schools, Marae, courthouses, farmland, railway yards, airports, and even the site of the Taumararua police station. The police evicted protesters from some of these occupations, resulting in dozens of arrests. The 25-week occupation of the former Takahue School near Kaitaia in 1995 resulted in the occupiers burning the school down after police moved in to evict them. Children set alight tyres that had been stockpiled outside the school. Sixteen arrests resulted. As well, some more novel forms of autonomy were established, with the Tuhoe tribe setting up their own embassy at Tanetua in the East Cape of the North Island, and issuing property owners with eviction notices.

Many of these occupations and protests led to direct and open conflict between Maori capitalists and working class Maori. For example, the occupations of Coalcorp land at Huntly and the Waikato University Marae were in direct opposition to the \$170 million Raupatu settlement between the state and the Tainui Trust Board. Iwi were transformed into corporate bodies (such as the Tainui Trust Board for the Tainui tribes) to manage settlement assets and negotiate with the government, but everyday Maori were excluded from having a say in these boards. They claimed they were not being "represented"

In response, capital and the state aimed to co-opt and divert this movement. It attempted to achieve this through the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal (in 1975) and Maori Language Commission. From 1985, Labour allowed Maori grievances lodged with the Waitangi Tribunal to date back to the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Thus from 1985 Treaty claims became a route for Maori to place pressure on the state to demand monetary compensation for the colonial theft of resources. The Labour Government of 1984 to 1990 also sought a policy of co-opting of Maori elites into the state, a policy that it called “biculturalism.” The result of this policy was the enrichment of a few Maori who controlled the neotribal capitalist businesses created by treaty settlements. Correspondingly, working class Maori were made much worse off.

In the 1980s most of the Tino Rangatiratanga movement was focussed upon reviving Maori culture and language. Hundreds of autonomous Maori schools were established, cultural groups were formed, and people fought to have Maori studies introduced into the state education system. However, this cultural nationalism often led to an exclusive focus on cultural change rather than a more holistic approach. As Teanau Tuiono states,

By focusing on cultural issues this allowed the co-optation of a Maori elite within the structures of the state and forced many Maori leaders to straddle the uneasy gulf between pushing the Maori struggle forward and maintaining the existing state of affairs. The prestige and wealth that went with such privileged positions in the settlement process meant that Maori leaders became increasingly removed from the concerns and vitality of the flaxroots Maori struggle. Tino Rangatiratanga could be then seen as economic independence because we were free to enter the ‘free market.’ Capitalism with a smiley (Maori) face. Bullshit.²⁷

The National Government of the early 1990s saw the Maori movement for self-determination as a threat to its neoliberal policies. The National Government was concerned that the backlog of Treaty claims created a climate of uncertainty for capitalists because it left the ownership of a number of key resources in doubt. Treasury officials called major Treaty claims an “unquantifiable fiscal risk.”²⁸ National thus attempted to put a lid on these claims by negotiating a final settlement of all claims – at minimal cost to themselves.

As a result, National offered a \$1 billion deal in secret negotiations with a number of “corporate warriors” and “tribal executives” called the fiscal envelope. It also brokered a deal with middle class Maori to end fisheries claims through the Sealords Deal. The 1992 Fisheries Settlement Act included a settlement between the state and some Maori to purchase a \$150 million share in a major New Zealand commercial fisheries business, Sealord Products Limited.

As the state publicly admitted the existence of the fiscal envelope in 1994, Maori protest swung into action. On Waitangi Day in 1995, a militant protest of 500 Maori turned into a full-scale battle with police. The protest group Te Kawariki explained their grievances:

The recent deals struck by Maori leaders have done nothing to reverse that trend, and in fact those deals have been disastrous for all future generations of Maori people. These so-called leaders must be sidelined, and ALL Maori given a chance to have a say in determining what our destiny will be... We were conned by false Maori leaders into thinking we were on the road to success. We were told that Maori were ‘coming out of grievance mode and into development mode.’ We were touted as the ‘New Corporate Warriors’. Maori graced the covers of all the ‘right’ [wing] magazines... It seemed that after 150 years of oppression, we’d finally made it. Unfortunately, for Maori people, all the promises, all the hype, turned out to be a load of BULLSHIT!!!... There are Maori for whom cutting a deal with the Crown has been a sweet little number. These people are

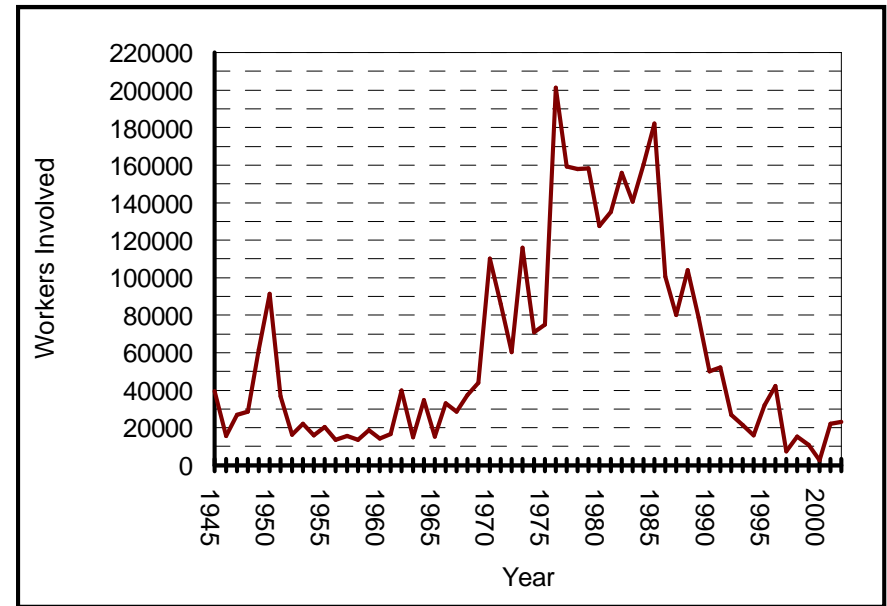


Figure 1. Numbers of Workers Involved in Strike Activity in Aotearoa 1945-2002²¹

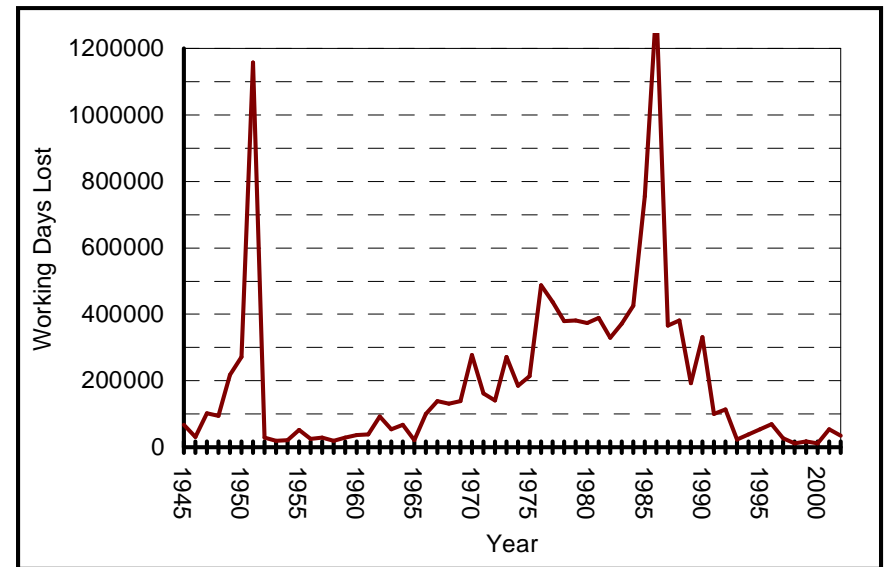


Figure 2. Working Days Reclaimed by Strike Activity in Aotearoa 1945-2002²²

The Movement Against The Benefit Cuts

Unemployment soared in the mid 1980s to well over a quarter of a million people. In response dozens of unemployed, beneficiaries and poverty action groups sprung up across the country, not only in the large urban areas but also in provincial and rural towns.²³ These groups organised many small actions to highlight the fate of beneficiaries. A nationwide march was held by unemployed groups in 1988. Unemployed groups became increasingly “militant”, and in 1990 occupied the Wellington headquarters of the capitalist lobby group the New Zealand Business Roundtable (the NZBR suggested many of neoliberal reforms before they were implemented) as well as the Auckland offices of the Treasury Department (the government department responsible for implementing neoliberalism). This was in protest against punitive cuts to benefits for young people, the sick and the unemployed, as well as work tests for solo parents.

In 1990, the National Government announced it was intending to make sweeping benefit cuts in 1991, an announcement made at the same time as that of the ECA. In 1991, National cut social spending by one third. It savagely cut the rates of all benefits, including the invalids and sickness benefits. The harshest cuts were for the unemployed. The unemployed benefit was cut by 25% for young people, 20% for young sickness beneficiaries, and 17% for solo parents. They abolished the family benefit and made workers ineligible for the unemployment benefit for a stand down period of six months. These represented the harshest attacks upon beneficiaries since the depression of the 1930s.

This produced an upsurge in working class self-activity. For many beneficiaries, it was simply a matter of survival. People could not get by on the meagre benefits they received. Beneficiaries had to cut back on essentials like food, clothing, electricity and so forth. In response, unemployed and beneficiaries groups provided green dollar barter systems, free services and health clinics, worker education, food co-ops and other services in an attempt to build some form of self-help or mutual aid. Unemployed groups across the country organised huge marches against the cuts. For example, at the same time large marches were being held against the ECA, the Auckland Unemployed Group organised a huge “march of Anger” in Auckland. Effigies of various ministers were burnt, and the demonstration encouragingly developed into a near riot as thousands of protesters rampaged through Queen St., temporarily occupying many businesses including McDonald’s and banks (without doing any property damage).

Because the benefit cuts occurred at the same time as the ECA, much co-operation developed between unions and the unemployed groups. Initially, there was tension between unions and unemployed groups. The CTU established its own unemployed groups under its control, as it distrusted the national unemployed network, Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa, for being too militant. Nevertheless, in 1990 the CTU formally recognised Te Roopu Rawakore. Unions gave resources, funding and other help to the unemployed groups, while the unemployed groups reciprocally supported the various actions of the unions against the ECA. However, there was still some suspicion of groups opposing the benefit cuts. For example, some called for the CTU to support broad based community coalitions against the ECA and benefit cuts, but the CTU refused to endorse such a coalition.²⁴ When the movement for a general strike was quashed, the informal co-operation between individual unions and unemployed groups instantaneously disappeared.

As a result, unemployed groups became increasingly isolated. Some groups became more militant in response, and attempted to keep organising large marches and occupations against the benefit cuts. However, these actions became increasingly unpopular, and eventually petered out. In Auckland unemployed people occupied the front lawn of Michael Fay’s opulent residence and even took a dip in his swimming pool – Fay was an influential financial capitalist within the NZBR and a prominent public figure because of his backing of the America’s Cup yachting. The state decided to attempt to repress the unemployed movement through arresting people they viewed as key activists, culminating in a brutal police raid on the Auckland People’s Centre, which housed the Auckland Unemployed

Workers Centre, in 1992. The raid was based upon trumped up charges that bombs were being manufactured at the centre.

In addition to external suppression, the unemployed movement split in 1991 in a bitter internal feud. The strength of the unemployed movement was its autonomy from any one political party or bureaucratic union; Maoist parties such as the Communist Party of New Zealand and the Workers’ Communist League (WCL) attempted to control the movement, but in the end failed. In 1991, the Maoists from the WCL including Bradford and her allies left Te Roopu Rawakore, leaving it to anarchists and their allies.

The Tino Rangatiratanga Movement Of The 1990s

The British invaded Aotearoa in the 1800s. In comparison to many indigenous societies overseas, Maori were offered a Treaty – the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 – that guaranteed Maori access to, and control of, traditional resources such as land, fishing areas, and so on. The Treaty was then systematically ignored by the English state. Maori were forcibly dispossessed of almost all their former resources. Because of this dispossession and near genocide, Maori have a long tradition of rebellion against the “colonial state.”

After 1945, many Maori migrated to urban areas, and consequently became more integrated into the working class. Maori became disproportionately employed in low-paid blue-collar manual labour and service industries, occupations such as freezing workers and timberworkers. Maori became a significant sector of the working class. Most blue-collar industries were “restructured” in the 1980s, and thus working class Maori bore much of the brunt of neoliberal reforms; indeed, Maori suffered significantly higher levels of unemployment and poverty than Pakeha from the 1980s.

Some commentators claimed Maori represented the biggest threat to the imposition of neoliberal regime of accumulation on the working class. Maori had a long tradition of autonomous resistance, were opposed to the colonial state, had only relatively recently been incorporated into capitalism, and had a distinct culture which valued communalism rather than individualism. For many Maori, neoliberalism was the continuation of long-standing theme of theft and colonialism. For Jane Kelsey, “It was not surprising, then, that the most (some would say the only) sustained political resistance to the structural adjustment programme had come from” Maori.²⁵ Kelsey’s view is romantic because, as seen above, many working class Pakeha – together with working class Maori and Pacific Islanders – opposed the benefit cuts, ECA, and closures of hospitals and other rural services. The biggest threat to the imposition of neoliberalism, in my view, came from the self-activity of the working class as a whole, not just working class Maori. Yet Kelsey is correct in stating that a major form of resistance to neoliberalism came from Maori, although she overlooks the fact that the wave of Maori protest in the 1990s mostly came from disenfranchised working class Maori. While Maori protest is undoubtedly a reaction to colonialism and Pakeha racism, and cannot be reduced to class struggle, I argue that a clear division emerged between working class Maori and “corporate warriors” or capitalist Maori in the protests of the 1990s. Hence a class based analysis of this rebellion is relevant and useful.

From the late 1960s, Maori protest activity renewed. It was given impetus by the New Left, anti-Vietnam War movement, anti-apartheid movement, new social movements and the strike wave of the late 1960s and 1970s. The Tino Rangatiratanga (or Maori self-determination) movement had two major wings, both with substantial support. One wing was “middle-class” dominated and aimed to gain concessions from the state through legalistic activity; the other was firmly opposed to the state, and more focussed upon direct action to achieve its aims. This flaxroots based self-activity culminated in direct action in the form of land occupations in the late 1970s at Raglan and Takaparawha/Bastion Point in Auckland. Bastion Point was a particular highlight as it saw a fledging class based alliance between local iwi (tribes), trade unions, and Pakeha sympathisers. Unions placed a “green ban” upon construction at the site to support local iwi.²⁶