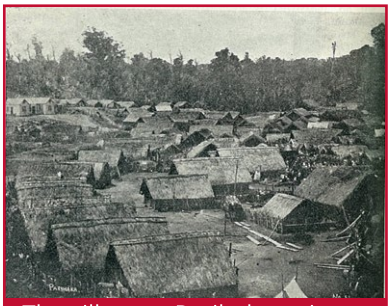
The Invasion of Parihaka

Arguments over Land Ownership

In the mid-1800s, as more and more settlers came to New Zealand from Britain, **tangata whenua** Māori found themselves increasingly forced from lands they had used and lived on all over the country. While some of these lands were sold properly to the colonist **manuhiri**, many were not. Many contracts were broken or followed wrongly. In some cases, English and Māori translations differed significantly, leading to disagreements over who owned which pieces of land. These misunderstandings and disputes almost always favoured the colonisers. In 1863, the colonial government made a law allowing the 'confiscation' of tracts of land from Māori - without giving anything of value in return. An **iwi** could have land taken from them if the British accused them of 'engaging in open rebellion against Her Majesty's Authority'. As a result, many Māori leaders and iwi grew frustrated at being cheated.

Establishing the Village at Parihaka

From the mid-1860s, Parihaka was a small village within view of Mount Taranaki - and it still stands today. The land it was on had been confiscated by the British government but not used for anything.



The village at Parihaka, prior to invasion by the British

Two **rangatira** in the village became important figures in history. Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi were closely guided by their **whakapapa** and Christian spiritualism. Both men believed that there should be good relationships between Māori and **manuhiri**. They also believed strongly that the British settlers should respect Māori ownership of lands and independence from the British government - as was laid out in the Māori translation of the Treaty of Waitangi. The village of Parihaka began to host monthly meetings, inviting Māori from all around New Zealand to discuss how best to stand up against the moves by the British to confiscate and occupy Māori land.

Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi differed from other rangatira because they led the Parihaka people to peacefully protest against British land confiscation. First, Te Whiti and Tohu wrote letters expressing their disagreement with what was happening. Then as the colonist manuhiri moved closer to Parihaka, surveying land to set up pākehā farms and towns, Te Whiti and Tohu organised men from Parihaka to respond by removing surveying pegs and ploughing the ground the British were

trying to occupy. These men of Parihaka were arrested and brutally mistreated by the British, but because they believed in non-violent resistance, they always surrendered peacefully. They were sent to the South Island in a kind of exile, held for long periods with no trial, and many put to work building infrastructure in the new British cities like Dunedin.

Many Māori who had been **dispossessed** in other parts of the country travelled to Parihaka to live and participate in the peaceful resistance movement. The village grew quickly. It became famous around New Zealand for how productive and industrious it was. The people of Parihaka worked together effectively to produce large crops to feed the village. It even had its own police force and bank.

The British Invade

Many in the British government believed that Parihaka and its leaders were working towards a violent insurrection. The colonial government's Native minister, John Bryce, described Parihaka as a threat. He thought the people who lived there were **fanatics**.

Armed British forces arrive at Parihaka village, November 1881

On the 5th of November, 1881, John Bryce led over 1500 British troops to Parihaka. An Armstrong gun was placed on a hill nearby, pointing directly at the village. At the entrance to the village, singing children met the British troops, and they were welcomed in. By having the children welcome the invaders, Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi had intended to show that the village was a place of peace. However, the British did not have peaceful intentions. Over the next two days, John Bryce repeatedly threatened the Parihaka people with arrest, hard labour and the gun on the hill overlooking the village. The villagers sat silently and peacefully and refused to respond. Finally, the British arrested or chased off almost all of the people of the settlement. Many of Parihaka's women were attacked by British men. Because some Parihaka inhabitants remained, the British spent two weeks pulling down all of the houses and burning the crops, intending to force them to leave to find food. The farm animals belonging to the villagers were all slaughtered.

Exile

Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi were among those arrested and imprisoned on the South Island. They were held without trial, meaning they had no idea when they would be freed. They were finally released in 1883, after 16 months of imprisonment. However, many other men and boys who had been imprisoned in 1881 remained

there for much longer. It was not until until 1898, 19 years later, that all men arrested in the invasion were finally freed. Sadly, many had died as a result of ill-treatment in prison.

Return of Te Whiti and Tohu

The British government of the time tried to stop Te Whiti and Tohu from continuing their leadership and encouragement of the Māori people to stand against colonisation. At first, they tried to make laws that prevented the two men from returning to Taranaki, calling them a threat to the peace. John Bryce's staff even offered Te Whiti a deal of land and income for himself if he would stop assembling his people. He refused.

When their leaders returned from prison, the people of Parihaka began to reassemble, rebuild the village and resume their peaceful protests against the powers of colonisation. They continued their efforts to obstruct the surveying of Māori land by removing surveying pegs and building fences across roadways. Te Whiti and Tohu also organised **hīkoi** throughout Taranaki to draw attention to the issue. This was not without consequence; both leaders were arrested and jailed again during the 1890s.

Both died at Parihaka and were buried there, Tohu in February 1907 and Te Whiti in November 1907. After their deaths, the monthly meetings continued, right up to the present day.

The Legacy of Parihaka

Throughout the early 20th century, the New Zealand government divided up and gave away the disputed land to Europeans. By 1950, the village stood essentially on its own, its inhabitants living in poverty.

As well as a reminder of how Māori land was taken by force all over New Zealand, Parihaka remains a symbol of non-violent resistance. Its leaders have been compared to Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr, who similarly faced racial discrimination and responded with peace and pacifism. Since 2006, the village itself has hosted a peace festival that celebrates the non-violent legacy of Parihaka's people and other peace and pacifism movements in New Zealand and overseas.

Between 2001 and 2006, the New Zealand government apologised to four Taranaki tribes for how the invasion affected them. In 2017, the New Zealand government issued a formal and public apology to the whole Parihaka community, referring to the legacy of shame left by the invasion.

Parihaka Peace Festival in 2006

Glossary

dispossessed - People who have been deprived of property or land.

fanatic - A person with an extreme belief in something, to the point of being dangerous.

hīkoi - A protest march or parade, often a long journey.

insurrection - A violent uprising against government or authority.

iwi - A tribe of people, many being related to each other.

manuhiri - Visitors or guests, for example when visiting a marae.

rangatira - The leader(s) of a hapu or iwi.

tangata whenua - This translates literally to 'people of the land'. As its indigenous inhabitants, Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand are tangata whenua, having authority in particular places.

whakapapa - A person's line of descent and ancestry, showing connections to others.