WHINA
A Biography of Whina Cooper

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Maori Land March

If the New Zealand public outside Auckland had forgotten who Whina Cooper was by the mid-1970s, the events of 1975 were to remind them dramatically of her existence and her charisma. Again, she found herself at the right place at the right time. Dissatisfaction over the power of New Zealand governments to seize Maori land under a number of acts had been simmering in Maori circles since the passage of the Maori Affairs Amendment Act of 1967. One product of this discontent had been the formation of city-based Maori protest groups, such as Nga Tamata in Auckland and the Maori Organisation On Human Rights in Wellington, which campaigned for Maori causes far more emphatically than previous organisations. By 1975 the concern of these groups and others had grown to include the preservation of Maori language, culture and identity. There was a widespread feeling that Maori institutions such as the New Zealand Maori Council* and the Maori Women’s Welfare League were not addressing themselves to these problems with sufficient urgency. And so, after a series of meetings that began at Joseph Cooper’s house in Panmure, a new Maori organisation was established and Whina was asked by a younger group of urban radicals to lead it. At her suggestion it was to be called Te Roopu Ote Matakitore ‘those with foresight’.

Auckland’s City News reported the formation of the group in February 1975: [Its] major role... will be the fight for Maori land rights, but it will also encompass work of broad social concern for the Maori people... “This organisation is set up to help the blind,” says Whina Cooper, “to help people who haven’t the perception to see the future... the people came to me and asked if I could form it... I said 'I’m a little old for that. Why don’t you young people take it up.' They don’t think they can call all the Maori people together as they are too young... we must unite, she says, “so that the whole strength of the Maori people can fight for the retention of our lands.”” In another paper at about this time, she was quoted as saying that leading Te Roopu Ote Matakitore would be the last and most important campaign of her life.

At the back of Whina’s mind was the realisation that the total land area of New Zealand was some 66 million acres. After 135 years of British colonisation the Maori share of that total had dropped to about 2.5 million acres. Ten years earlier, the figure had been about 4 million. By this process continued, Whina believed, Maoris would become a landless people. And if they were landless, they would be cultureless, because she believed that Maori history and identity arose from an association with traditionally owned land and a tangatawha wae or marae base. All this, however, had been said before. What Matakitore sought was an arresting gesture that would unite Maoris under their banner and focus Pakeha attention on their concerns. To devise such a gesture, a hui was called at the Te Puea Marae in Mangere early in March 1975. In addition to foundation Matakitore members, participants included representatives of Nga Tamata, the Auckland District Maori Council and the Maori Women’s Welfare League. Whina recalled what happened there:

‘I chaired this meeting. Everybody there talked about problems over their own lands. About trouble with the Public Works Act, the Town and Country Planning Act, the Rating Act — all the laws that had given Pakeha authorities power to seize Maori lands, and each were used for that purpose. Then we stopped for lunch, and I started thinking. What can we do about all this that hasn’t been done before? Eventually I went into the dining room and joined Joseph and a Pakeha journalist, Vivian Hutchinson. We sat at a table away from the crowd. I said, “We have to find some sort of solution to put them after lunch, or we won’t get anywhere.” And Vivian reminded us that earlier, at Joseph’s place, we had discussed the possibility of a march on Parliament. I said, “That’s it.” So after the meal I stood up and said, “As a first step to solving all these things, why don’t we march to Parliament, from Te Hapua in the north all the way to Wellington? But a sacred march — for a sacred purpose, to hold on to our lands, and very carefully controlled.” And they said, “Hooray, that’s it.” Everybody agreed. And then I said, “And what about a man to lead it?” And the meeting said, “No, you lead it. You’re our leader.”’

The decisions to hold the march and to appoint Whina as its leader were confirmed at a meeting at Te Tira Hou Marae in Panmure in April 1975. It was at this hui that the enormity of the undertaking and the amount of work needed to arrange it became apparent. An organising committee was set up under Whina’s chairmanship. It included Graham Latimer, Chairman of the New Zealand Maori Council, Mira

*Set up by National Government legislation in 1962.

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Szasy, President of the Maori Women's Welfare League, Ranginui Walker of the Auckland District Maori Council, and Syd Jackson and Titewhai Harawira of Nga Tamatoa. The next four months were a frenzy of fund raising, route planning and recruiting supporters from all over the North Island, especially in centres through which the proposed march would pass. Letters and deputations were sent to other Maori groups, such as the Maori King Movement, and to organisations regarded as potential allies.

A communication from Whina to the trade union movement, for example, was characteristic of lobbying at this time: 'Brothers, as you are probably aware, we of Te Roopu Ote Matakitae intend within the next four months to get mobilised and march on Parliament for the retention of Maori Land. We are of the opinion that alienation of our land has gone far enough, and in spite of the promises made by politicians for approximately 165 years, land confiscation has in fact intensified to such an extent that it is now intolerable. We are aware that Government has introduced great reforms to return Maori land to its original owners, in some areas, but due to the very existence of the Public Works Act, Town and Country Planning etc, and the sly move by foreign multi-national combines with plans afoot to convert existing coastal areas into holiday resorts and other high profit return by foreign multi-nationals combines with plans afoot to convert existing coastal areas into holiday resorts and other high profit return ventures. Therefore, we call on all members of the working class and of the various organisations to support us by marching with us through your areas. Furthermore, as there is a need for buses for our elders and children, food and accommodation, first aid etc, along the road, we would be very grateful for your financial support also.'

This was a period of heated and often contradictory rhetoric from those involved in the planning of the march. But looking back on events that led up to it, Whina justified her own participation in these terms: 'For me it was several things going on. I wanted to draw attention to the plight of Maoris who were landless. I wanted to point out that people who were landless would eventually be without culture. I wanted to stop any further land passing out of Maori ownership, and I wanted the Crown to give back to Maoris land it owned that was of traditional significance to Maoris. The march itself was to dramatise these things, to mobilise Maori opinion, to awaken the Pakeha conscience. And I agreed to lead it because the great leaders of the past were dead — Carroll, Ngata Buck, Te Paea, Tau Henare, Panare Paika. I was the last one that had known all those people. I had gone around with them, watched them, listened to them, and filled up my baskets of knowledge from them. I wanted to put that knowledge to good use.'

Any doubts she might have had about the appropriateness of her own role were silenced by a dream she had. 'I dreamt... I was on a boat. There were two of us. Suddenly I saw the tide getting to the shore. We landed our boat before it got too deep to get ashore. I got off and discovered I had a line in my hand. I was fishing from the shore. Then there was a strong pull on the line. I knew I had caught a big fish, it was that heavy as I was pulling it in. Now there was a man by my side and I asked him to pull it up so he could feel how heavy it was. Then he was some distance from me with people surrounding him. He came over to me and said he had pulled it up so I walked over to see it. They were washing the dirt off it. I saw to my surprise it was not a fish, it was a beautiful baby.'

Whina had always taken her dreams seriously. She regarded them as part of her faculty of matakitae or second sight; she looked to them for guidance as well as for predictions about the future. In this case she interpreted the boat as her journey through life; the man in the vessel and later alongside her was a manifestation of her male or strong attributes; the tide reaching the shore indicated a sense of urgency in her quest to do something about Maori land; the fishing and the strong pull on the line related to the Maui myth — taking hold of the land issue; and the baby indicated an unexpected offspring from the whole venture, namely an organisation that would grow out of the land campaign, but which would perform other functions and sur-
have Crown Land returned to Maori ownership in cases where it had not been used for the purposes for which it had been taken, and to have land administered by the Department of Maori Affairs returned to the control of Maori owners. He regarded Matakite’s existence as a vote of no-confidence in his efforts. He felt undermined and discredited by the suggestion of the march.

In July 1975, Rata issued a press statement saying there was no need for the march to take place. He said he hoped to defuse the issue by launching a massive publicity campaign to inform would-be marchers of the progress made by his Government in settling Maori land grievances. He noted that since taking office in November 1972 he had transferred thousands of acres back to Maori control, and that in February 1976 he intended to give back a further 75,000 acres. He closed his statement by saying he was more interested in the plight of Maori youngsters than in the reasons for the march.

Matakite responded with an assurance that the march was still on. The organisation said in a press release that most of the land the minister claimed to be ‘giving back’ was already Maori-owned. Although Mr Rata might feel content with his performance as minister, Matakite continued, most Maoris continued to feel a sense of bitterness over the fact that the Government had not done more. The march is an illustration of this growing impatience and is designed to make Parliament act with greater haste to satisfy Maori demands. It is also designed to provide the Minister with the support to implement more meaningful policies. Despite Government action, we continue to lose Maori land. Acquisition of Maori land must stop before the Maori people will be satisfied . . . we too are concerned about the plight of our young people. Holding onto our land is one positive means of ensuring that these young people retain their heritage and will be able to utilise their lands to provide a distinct alternative to city life."

In a further effort to forestall the march, Rata invited Whina to a meeting in Wellington with himself and the Prime Minister, Bill Rowling. 'I said I couldn't do that,' Whina recalled. 'I had been appointed by all those Maoris to lead a march, and I was going to do that. If we were going to change the arrangement, we'd have to call another one. Once you promise something, you've got to carry it out. Rata's secretary at the time said, 'Very well. We'll close down all the maraes on your way.' I said, 'That's all right, as long as the road isn't shut we'll sleep there.'"

At the same time rumours began to spread from the minister's office (not from Rata himself) that Whina was a hypocrite, because she herself had sold family land to Pakehas and made a great deal of money from such transactions. It was not difficult to find people in
Panguru to add smoke to this fire by talking about Whina's wheeling and dealing which they had not understood, and which some members of the community there had resented. When these stories came to Whina's ears she was deeply hurt. They emanated from people who did not know about her earlier business activities and land transactions. In an effort to stop the rumours, she arranged a meeting with one of the culprits, Brown Pururi of the Department of Maori Affairs in Auckland, who subsequently apologised to her and admitted that the allegations were groundless.

By August 1975, arrangements were gathering momentum. Most maraes down the proposed route were prepared to accommodate the protestors, and many indicated that they also supported the cause. There was no doubt that the march would take place, beginning from Te Hapua on 14 September, the first day of that year's Maori Language Week. In addition to planning the logistics, especially eating and sleeping arrangements, Whina gave considerable attention to the symbolic features of the march. She had her son-in-law Morgan Puru carve a pouwhenua, an upright stake that in pre-European times would have declared tribal ownership of land. It was to be carried at the head of the march, but was never to touch the ground. This would signify the amount of land which had passed out of Maori ownership and which therefore could not be marked in the traditional way. She composed a special Mataite song, to give the marchers a sense of unity and to boost morale, and she had Joseph Cooper draw up a 'Memorial of Rights' (which she actually called a 'Memorial of Right'). This was to link the march symbolically with the earlier petitions of Maoris to the British Crown, especially those of King Tawhiao in 1886 and King Te Rata in 1914. Both these expeditions to London had involved the preparation of a memorial or statement of Maori rights. By devising both the pouwhenua and the memorial, Whina was cloaking her apparently innovative protest in 1975 with the validity of tradition and continuity.

The memorial was couched in archaic and legal terms. This was part of a deliberate effort to relate it to the past, and to give it an aura of

*Whina's pouwhenua was carved with lizard figures, because lizards were intensely territorial animals.

**See Appendix G. The last verse of this song Na Te Kore I Mohio would have reassured anybody who feared trouble from the march. It said (in translation): 'Let us unite people of the four winds/consolidate all our aspirations/bind them with love/with the power of God's blessing/to benefit all mankind/to benefit all mankind.'
something sacred and esoteric. It was addressed to all members of the
House of Representatives — not merely those in Government — and
read: ‘Greetings to you in whose assembly is vested all the powers to
amend and adjust all laws which inflict injustice and hardship upon
the Maori people, and in whom is vested the power to confirm all
promises which were made to give relief to the indigenous people of
New Zealand under Her Majesty’s Magna Carta: “Long Live the
Queen”.

‘Your Maori people pray: firstly, that an enactment of Parliament
which enshrines the spirit and intention of this memorial shall
incorporate in it the protective principle of entrenchment whereby it
shall not suffer repeal or amendment without the assent of the Maori
people, such assent to be forthcoming by the expression of a majority
of all those persons eligible to vote as Maoris in a national referendum.

‘Secondly: that all pernicious clauses in every statute of the present
day or in new statutes in the future, which have the power to take
Maori land, alienate Maori land, designate Maori land, or confiscate
Maori land be repealed and never to be administered on the remaining
Maori land at the present day, and whereas management, retention
and control remain with our Maori people and their descendants in
perpetuity. Ake ake.’

The problem about such wording, however, and about the scroll-
type characters in which it was written, was that the document was not
easily understood. Much of the reticence to sign it that Whina first
encountered on the march was simply due to the fact that people did
not know what it meant. On the other hand, Whina was able to
exploit its very ambiguity to make it appear to embrace all the preoccupa-
tions and grievances that Maoris held in relation to land. For the
meantime, however, its contents were not revealed. Its handing over to
the Prime Minister was to constitute the climax of the march when the
protesters reached Parliament. With a fine instinct for the dramatic,
Whina did not want its contents bandied about in the press before her
arrival in Wellington. The secrecy surrounding it would heighten the
impact of the final presentation.

The memorial was to be signed only by recognised rangatira at each
marae. It was to be a sacred document made more sacred by the mana
and tapu of the Maori establishment. To attract the support of the
general public — Maori and Pakeha — Whina had drawn up a more
conventional ‘Petition of Support.’ It read: ‘The Maori land rights
group, Te Roopu Ote Matakitae, will be marching from Te Hapua to
Wellington beginning on September 14. The march promises to be
one of the most significant events of the decade and to the Maori
people, it will be a climax to over 150 years of frustration and anger

Whina and her granddaughter, Irene, lead off the march from Te Hapua.
(New Zealand Herald)
over the continuing alienation of their lands. Land means much more to the Maori people than it does to any other New Zealander. To them it has a deep spiritual value. You can realise then the frustration the Maori people have had over the last 150 years as they have seen their lands gradually fall out of their hands. Before the arrival of European settlers, the Maori had 66 million acres of land, today they have less than 3 million. Matakitae is deeply concerned as it sees more acts brought in by Parliament which continue this process of alienation. These acts include the Town and Country Planning Act, the Public Works Act, the Rating Act, and the Counties Amendment Act. Matakitae wants to press for the abolition of monocultural laws pertaining to Maori land, and establish new laws for Maori land based on their own cultural values. Matakitae wants to establish communal ownership of land within the tribe as a legitimate title equal in status to the individual title.'

As a result of intensive labour by dozens of dedicated Matakitae supporters, the march was able to begin on schedule from Te Hapua on 14 September. It was to cover 700 miles in only 30 days and to visit 20 maraes (a circular announcing final arrangements noted that the New Zealand Army defined a ‘prolonged march’ as one of 100 miles at the rate of fifteen miles a day — about two-thirds the rate at which the Matakitae marchers would have to walk). Only a 'hard-core' of about 50 members were expected to cover the whole distance on foot. Others, such as Whina, would travel much of the way by car, and the vast majority of supporters would join the ranks as it passed through their home districts.

Whina led the first marchers out of the Te Hapua Marae at 9.30 on the Sunday morning, holding the hand of her three-year-old granddaughter Irene. When she dropped out to be driven, on account of her arthritis, her place was taken by Cyril Chapman holding aloft the pouwhenua, topped with a Matakitae flag. Shortly afterwards others set off from Spirits Bay and Cape Reinga, and the whole party came together for the first night at the Te Kao Marae. Morale was high. The weather was brilliantly fine — which Whina announced was a good omen — and a telegram was received from Mat Rata, giving Matakitae his blessing after all. This did much to disperse tension in the minister's home settlement.

The pattern for the whole march was set during the first days and nights. The party would arrive at a pre-arranged marae venue at the close of each day's march, to be formally welcomed by that evening's hosts. After mihis, the marchers would be able to wash, eat, drink, massage sore limbs and apply medication to blisters. Evenings were usually taken up in a debate with local people about the objectives of Matakitae and the march. In an extraordinary display of stamina for a person of her age, Whina took the leading role in such discussions night after night. 'I used to warn them what would happen if they lost their land. If Maoris lost their turangawaewae or footing in this country, the Pakeha would use them, I said. They'd be like performers in a zoo, doing their haka for tourists, with Pakehas collecting the money. Far better to do your haka on your own land, where it means something. I used to tell them too that it was no use preserving the Maori language if they'd lost the footing that gave them security.' At a suitably solemn moment, the Memorial of Rights would be taken out of its leather-bound box and unwrapped from a protective cloak. Whina would read it, explain its meaning, debate it with the locals, and then invite rangatira present to sign it. At a much later stage in the evening the speech-making would finish and the marchers would sleep.

Whina imposed her will strongly over the group. She addressed them each morning before they set out, always reminding them of the tapu nature of their task and cautioning them to behave themselves, even if provoked by hostile bystanders. She forebade the use of alcohol
— either on the march itself, or on side-trips for refreshment. 'I used to pray, too, I'd tell them that a little prayer wouldn't hurt them, it might even help them. Then I'd say something like, "Oh Lord it's a lovely day. Thank you for giving it to us. Bless us all on this march. And give us the understanding to build a new Aotearoa with love for one another." Sometimes, when I saw them starting out, limping from blisters and sore legs I used to cry — you know, to see so much dedication.' Discipline on the road itself was in the hands of a committee of marshals. This group kept a continuous eye on behaviour, controlled the pace at which people walked, kept the ranks compact and watched for traffic hazards.

One of the permanent marchers, Ngapuhi poet Hone Tuwhare, wrote verses en route and captured the feelings that most of the participants shared:

_Papa-Tu-A-Nuku_
(The Earth Mother)

_We are stroking, caressing the spine of the land._
_We are massaging the ricked wracked back of the land with our sore but ever-loving feet._
_Hell, she loves it. The land turns over with great delight._
_We love her._

The experience was not entirely pleasurable. Some marchers, unaccustomed to sustained exercise, almost crippled themselves in their effort to keep going. Some Pakeha bystanders were rude and others overtly hostile. In Wellington, an unidentified group scattered broken shells on the road in the knowledge that many of the marchers had bare feet. The marchers also received anonymous threats and abusive letters, including this one postmarked Rangiora: ‘We find it very strange about your land, as you mistakenly call it. All the land, farms, and 8-acre sections, or . . . housing, occupied by Maoris is always filthy, strewn with garbage, and out of production. So what would you do with more land? You would make it a garbage dump. In any case the land was fairly bought and sold, and everything you enjoy was made and developed by the white race. It it wasn’t for us you would still be in grass skirts, and eating each other. So why not return to that state, and we will give you a bit of separate land to live your way. We are white and western and want to live our way. Also, if you call us Pakehas, we must call you horis. You are coloured and we are white. We want to live white and speak white. Let Maoris be horis if they wish. Or, better still, let us declare war on each other and decide all this nonsense once and for all.’

Whina and her organisers were also immensely disappointed at what they viewed as the non-cooperation of the Maori Queen, Dame Te Atairangikaahu. At the request of representatives of the Waikato people, she brought the marchers to Turangawaewae Marae, their ceremonial centre, to stay a night. But the Queen herself did not receive them, nor did she put in an appearance while they were there, nor did she sign the Memorial of Rights. Whina was especially displeased about this in the light of her lengthy association with the Queen’s great-aunt, Princess Te Puea. After the march, she resisted strong pressure to donate the pouwhenua to Turangawaewae.

For the most part, however, the marchers encountered co-operation and support. Cars tooted and waved. People along the route brought out drinks and food. Maori hospitality was warm and extravagant. Over 200 elders representing among them every tribe in the country signed the Memorial of Rights and another 60,000 people the petition. Police and traffic officials co-operated fully, especially as the march passed through the larger centres. The Auckland Harbour Bridge Authority at first refused permission for them to use the bridge. But after Whina sent a carefully worded and flattering communication from Ruakaka, the chairman relented and even signed his telegram ‘Arohanui’. The eventual sight of thousands of supporters crossing the harbour and entering Auckland city on 23 September was one of the most inspiring spectacles — for participants and spectators — of the entire march.

Eventually, on Monday 13 October, Whina led 5000 marchers
through the streets of Wellington to Parliament Buildings. This time it rained as they walked, a manaakitanga or blessing in traditional Maori terms. The New Zealand Herald described the scene: "It was an impressive sight as the four-lane wide column threaded its way up to the main gates singing the Matakite song. The crowd also sang, led by a local Maori party dressed in colourful Maori costume, and some bare-chested Maori youths braving the elements. Security was tight with scores of police廉价 posted throughout the grounds of Parliament, but there was no trouble. The marchers then entered and were welcomed by the local Maori group.

The first official speaker was Mr Muldoon [Leader of the Opposition]. He told the marchers the National Party would do all it could to ensure the ownership and retention of Maori land... "National would amend the Town and Country Planning Appeal Act and take away from local bodies the power to manage Maori land," he said. "There will be no Coastal Moratorium and Management Bill," he told the gathering, "and no proposals for the management of Maori land by somebody else here in Wellington." Mr Rata told the marchers they had the perpetuity and retention of Maori land in common. "Your terms are indeed our terms," he added.'
captured the imagination of all who have a deep interest in the relationship of the Maori people and their land interests. In speaking for my Parliamentary colleagues can I say how deeply impressed I was . . . Despite the high feeling and emotion which such an occasion could arouse I was particularly taken by the dignity of the presentation ceremony, which was tempered by the Maori people’s traditional approach to matters of considerable importance to them.

In an equally complimentary letter, the Leader of the Opposition added: ‘Regardless of the number of National Party Maori members, a National Government which we are believe will govern next year will give due consideration to your Memorial of Rights. We will consider it in the light of the size and the nature of the march which you led . . . I can assure you that the sense of occasion which you and your people created . . . is not lost.’

Although the organisation of the march had required exhaustive and exhausting attention to detail, and although the physical effort of walking the distance had been considerable, the whole experience had been an euphoric one for the organisers and participants. It had been especially so for Whina. Once again, she felt that she had been called by destiny; she had been the right person thrown up to lead a mass movement at the right time. She not only felt part of national Maori history again, she felt she was at the helm, charting its course, steering it, as she had been when she was president of the Maori Women’s Welfare League. There were two dangers inherent in all this. One was that she would identify her own preoccupations and objectives with those of Te Roopu Ote Matakiti; the other, that in the excitement of immediate events she would fail to recognise the force of some of the expectations that she had set in motion.

The vision she had articulated as leader of Matakiti — of an almost landless people demanding justice from the country’s system of government — had been a rallying call for Maoris of all shades of political opinion. It had also attracted malcontents of various kinds — people whose dissatisfaction with the Maori lot arose from ideologies more radical than those Whina shared, or from psychological disorders. Some of these latter groups had wanted to go much further than the Matakiti leadership throughout the course of the march, to make more flamboyant gestures of protest and dissatisfaction than those implied by the march itself. Up until the time the marchers reached Wellington, these people had been restrained by considerations of the common good, by Whina’s insistence that the march was a sacred one and not to be desecrated by violence or bitterness, and by the system of discipline imposed by the marchers as a whole. One of the malcontents had even been paid off at Palmerston North to leave the group.

Once the marchers reached the steps of Parliament, however, those who had chafed under the restrictions of moderation were freed from the need to accept Whina’s authority and the discipline of the marshals. And they had a plan. As Ti Harawira noted subsequently, ‘We had already made the decision. If we didn’t get our demands for Maori lands we’d camp at Parliament. They weren’t met so some of us stayed.’ This group of about fifty, which contained only one Matakiti executive member (Harawira), then claimed to represent the organisation as a whole and displayed its banner. When they refused to disperse with the rest of the marchers Whina approached them angrily.

‘I said, “Why do you want to sit down here, on the steps of Parliament?” They said, “We want an answer to our demands, immediately.” I said, “Look you people, that’s been part of the trouble with the Treaty of Waitangi. It was something done on the spur of the moment and didn’t have any deliberation or go through a Parliament. That’s why it’s dismissed as a gentleman’s agreement. That’s why it had so many shortcomings. I’m not going to have our take treated that way. Our causes are going to be fought out in Parliament and going to be put right in legislation. That’s the only way. If you sit up here and wait for an answer you won’t get any results. You’ll just look foolish.”’

Whina was embarrassed and angered by the posture of the breakaway group. For the march to have any effect, she believed, it had to be seen to have the support of the Maori people as a whole. Only then would Parliament take its submissions seriously. Her post-march strategy involved going back to the institution for sittings of relevant select committees and having changes made to the various laws that affected Maori land. If Matakiti fragmented into a group of warring
factions, she believed, then their submissions would carry little weight and the consensus and goodwill generated by the march would be dissipated and wasted.

When the dissidents at Parliament showed no willingness to move their tent embassy, Whina attempted to isolate them from the rest of Matakitake. She sent telegrams to the Prime Minister and to Matiu Ratana saying that the new protest had been orchestrated by members of Nga Tamatoa, and that they had taken the Matakitake march banner and displayed it on the steps of Parliament without authority. Nga Tamatoa, she said, had acted subversively throughout the march, holding secret meetings all the way down from Te Hapua. She said that instead of sitting there issuing ultimatums, the protesters should wait patiently and courteously for a reply to Matakitake's petition. 'I am prepared to wait until the Government gives its verdict. And if I am not satisfied with it, I am prepared to go to the Queen and the Governor-General.'

The tent embassy remained, however. It was still there two months later when the Labour Government went out of office and National's Robert Muldoon had become Prime Minister. He wrote to Whina just before Christmas 1975 saying that he would welcome discussion with Te Matakitake O Aotearoa* in the New Year, and asked what should be done about the protesters. In a reply dictated over the telephone by Maori Council chairman Graham Latimer, Whina indicated that the protesters had no mandate from Matakitake to be in Parliament grounds. Robert Muldoon was a shrewd politician. This was precisely what he wanted. Whina's telegram gave him authority to act without the blame falling on himself or his Government. Consequently the Speaker of the House called in the police and thirty-five protesters were arrested in Parliament grounds on Christmas Eve — another shrewd move, since the attention of the country was very much on other events at that time of the year.

In justification of the telegram, Whina said subsequently that it would have been impossible to negotiate with the Government while the protesters were sitting on the steps of Parliament. 'I wanted all the leaders of the Maori people to go to Parliament to make submissions. If those protesters were still there, they might have joined in and spoiled proceedings. I also wanted the select committees to be able to make their decisions without feeling threatened. I wasn't doing it just to exercise power, as some of them said. Goodness me, I've got enough decorations. I was just after our land rights. And I didn't want them

*The organisation had changed its name in November to give it a more national character.
Wellington-based organisation which retained the earlier name of Te Roopu Ote Matakite and which supported the people who had been protesting at Parliament; and a fourth group called 'The People's Land March', which eventually walked around parts of the country that had not been on the route of the first march.

While these groups were considering their next move, Whina led a deputation of 30 elders to the Minister of Maori Affairs, Duncan MacIntyre, on 12 February 1976. The purpose of this meeting was to follow up the marchers' general message with specific submissions. The New Zealand Herald reported: 'The ... group asked the Government to set up a Maori Land Commission to hear submissions and bring down legislation to protect Maori land ... one of the major grievances [voiced] concerned the Town and Country Planning Act. "The National Government will review this Act and when it does these people will be able to make submissions," Mr MacIntyre said.' Whina refused to comment on the nature of the talks and as she left Parliament she was jeered at by Maori demonstrators who claimed that she was 'selling out' the Maori people.

Later in the same month, two rival Matakite O Aotearoa hui were held on separate marae. At Ruatoki, a group of 300 people endorsed Whina's leadership, elected new vice-presidents and terminated the position of organisation co-ordinator. At the same time a meeting at Mangere, called by former vice-president Dr Douglas Sinclair, announced that Whina had been expelled from Te Matakite O Aotearoa on the grounds that she had supported the arrest of the tent embassy protesters. Dr Sinclair said he blamed the news media for Whina's autocratic style of leadership. 'She had been built up in reports to the situation where she believed that she alone is the movement. This has supressed many others coming forward and young people are leaving in their hundreds.' He noted that his Matakite executive intended to replace Whina with a council of four chief who would act as advisers to the organisation. Whina dismissed both the Mangere hui and this report of it. She said that Sinclair had had the support of only one other member of the executive, Tom Poata of Wellington, and that the Mangere hui had not been a meeting of Te Matakite O Aotearoa.

In spite of attempts to reconcile the two groups over the next two years, the last general public saw and heard of Matakite was a spectacle of rival organisations with identical names engaged in a slanging match, each accusing the other of being a splinter group. It was a sad and undignified end to a great crusade. Even sadder, there was some truth in the allegations made by each group. As Whina had predicted, the fragmentation of the organisation meant that Parlia-
gan, wrote in 1978. 'We are increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of any positive results in the time since the Land March took place ... The organisation we represent is strongly of the opinion that time is not on the side of the Government in this matter. They feel that if the Government finds itself unable to meet the requests of a moderate and reasonable body such as Matakiti O Aoteaaroa, this is direct encouragement to more radical groups who will not be satisfied with any conservative proposals.' Meanwhile the second Matakiti group had not produced leaders of Whina's stature, and its impact on Maoridom and on wider New Zealand society was minimal.

The accusation that Whina had contributed to if not caused the splits by her dictatorial style of leadership — in particular by her telegram to the Prime Minister — was not without foundation. Whina had attempted to dominate Matakiti as she had led the Maori Women's Welfare League and as she had tried to organise community affairs in Panguru. And the diverse and volatile nature of the group was such that it was reluctant to support leadership of this kind. The net result was that for the immediate future, the status quo in Maori land law prevailed. The Maori Land March achieved no immediate legislative result (although the discontent it reflected did contribute to changes in the structure and policies of the Department of Maori Affairs).

This aftermath was a tragedy for the cause of Maori protest; it represented the loss of an unprecedented opportunity for winning Maori concessions from a non-Maori system of government and administration; and in the cause of this loss was factionalism. The march itself had succeeded in unifying Maori opinion on land issues to an extent never seen before, and it created and released a flood of Pakeha goodwill towards Maori causes. Credit for both results had to be given largely to Whina Cooper. Whatever others might have said disparagingly about 'personality politics' and the media's concentration on her, the fact remained that it was her mana, discipline and energy that had brought together and held together an exceptionally diverse group of people. And it was her astuteness, her sense of the dramatic and her voluble articulateness that made the objects of the march comprehensible and even appealing to wider New Zealand society. Even her opponents recognised these facts. Eva Rickard, a member of the opposition Matakiti group, noted: 'The Maori land march would never have come about if it hadn't been for that old lady. She had the mana and the charisma.'

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Further Crusades

One of the factors that contributed to the eventual disintegration of Te Matakiti O Aoteaaroa was that it ceased to be a single-cause movement: its concern for the future of the Maori land in general was succeeded by an interest on the part of both major groups with land issues in particular places. One of these, taken up by the Matakiti faction in opposition to Whina, was the Raglan Golf Course dispute. In this instance, Maori land had been seized in the late 1930s and a community displaced to provide an emergency landing strip for aircraft. Once World War Two was over the land was not returned to Maori ownership, but was eventually leased to the local golf club. The Tainui Awhiro people, led by Eva Rickard, attempted to regain ownership and control of the land, and the second Matakiti organisation backed their cause.

The other major land dispute in 1977 was over the use of Bastion Point in Auckland. The Bastion Point controversy was far more complicated than the Raglan one. Its origin lay primarily in an inexplicable decision of the Native Land Court in 1898 that turned the Ngati Whatua trustees of the 700-acre Oakei Block into owners. A consequence of this decision was that those trustees and their descendants had the right to sell the block, and the Crown set about buying it from them. By 1928 it had acquired all but three acres, including a 59-acre papa taina area in Okahu Bay, which previous decisions of the Native Land Court had declared to be 'inalienable'. The Crown also owned the four-acre site that included the Oakei community's church and cemetery. The Ngati Whatua had given this land to the Church of England in 1858 and the Church had sold it in 1926.

In the early 1950s, the Ngati Whatua community at Oakei was re-located on a 10-acre area overlooking Okahu Bay, and a new marae was built in the late 1970s on an adjacent section made available from Crown land. But this whole sequence of events had left deep resentment among some sections of Ngati Whatua. The tribe did not own the land on which the new community was built. And there was still