

1968 was a year of momentous global revolt against elites in both East and West. This article argues that 1968 is noteworthy not so much for the events of 1968 in themselves, but for helping spawn or revive a broad variety of movements which continue to have wide-ranging repercussions today. This was particularly the case in Aotearoa where, by global standards, events in 1968 were tranquil, yet a prolonged spike in dissent developed afterwards during the long 1970s. Some contend that 1968 was an individualist and cultural revolt that sowed the seeds for neoliberalism. This article argues that such an interpretation neglects the strong collective, socialist, working class, and anti-colonial dimensions of 1968 and beyond. Neoliberalism was more of a reaction to 1968 than its product.

Revisiting the Global and Local Upheavals of 1968

TOBY BORAMAN

It is the 50th anniversary of the electrifying global revolt of 1968:¹ the ‘year of the barricades’, a ‘world revolution’ when ‘imagination took power’ and ‘poetry ruled the streets’.² 1968 was perhaps epitomised by the ‘events’ of May–June in France, when a student revolt sparked a nearly month-long general strike of nine to ten million workers. It seemed to bring France to the brink of revolution, yet the movement was soon quashed by the Gaullist government, ably assisted, as some would have it, by the USSR-aligned French Communist Party and the trade union confederation it largely controlled.³

1 My thanks to the two anonymous reviewers and the journal’s editor for their comments on this article.

2 Respectively, David Caute, *Sixty-Eight: The Year of the Barricades* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988); Giovanni Arrighi, Terence Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Antisystemic Movements* (London: Verso, 1989), 97 (for ‘world revolution’ quote); Andrew Feenberg and Jim Freedman, *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

3 Many have claimed that the French Communist Party helped to repress the 68 uprising. See, for example, Maurice Brinton, *Paris, May 1968* (London: Solidarity, 1968); Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1968); Richard Johnson, *The French Communist Party Versus the Students* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Fredy Perlman and Roger Gregoire, *Worker-*

Yet focussing solely on France or the rest of Europe overlooks how the wave of dissent fanned (unevenly) across the globe. Similar cycles of rebellion and repression occurred in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. For example, in 1968 the (South) Vietnamese National Liberation Front and the (North) Vietnamese Army launched the Tet offensive against the US occupation of (South) Vietnam. While this offensive was quickly contained, it demonstrated that the US was vulnerable even within its perceived strongholds. In the US itself, African-Americans rioted in at least 110 cities in a ‘ghetto uprising’ after Martin Luther King was assassinated, but were then repressed by the police, army, and National Guard. China was riven by the tumult of the cultural revolution, a flourishing of dissent manufactured from above to shore up the Chinese (state) capitalist class, but also a ‘revolution’ that frequently (albeit temporarily) escaped the control of Maoist authorities. In Czechoslovakia the Prague Spring attempted to establish ‘socialism with a human face’, yet the Stalinist USSR deployed its tanks to violently suppress it.⁴ In Senegal a student strike evolved into a general strike that almost caused the government to collapse before the Senegalese and French armed forces regained control. Large-scale revolts also occurred in Egypt, Pakistan, Poland, and Mexico, among many

Student Action Committees: France, May '68 (Detroit: Black & Red, 1969); Angelo Quattrocchi and Tom Nairn, *The Beginning of the End: France, May 1968* (London: Verso, 1998); René Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupation Movement, France, May 68* (New York and London: Autonomedia and Rebel Press, 1992).

4 The USSR’s invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 to suppress uprisings, and the role the USSR-aligned French Communist Party played in France during 1968, meant that most activists turned away from the USSR. Indeed, many saw it as continuing to be Stalinist, despite Stalin’s death in 1953. Stalinism is normally associated with a totalitarian one-party state, personality cult, gulags, and the suppression of dissent. But it is important to note that here it also means something more than dictatorship: namely, support for a ruling class—or at least a bureaucratic elite—that effectively ruled and controlled, for their own benefit, ordinary workers and others in the USSR economically, politically, socially, and ideologically. In other words, those who claim the USSR was Stalinist do not think it represented a classless and stateless communist society. However, debate continues about exactly what type of society the USSR represented: was it a ‘degenerated workers’ state’, a ‘state capitalist’ regime, or a ‘bureaucratic collectivist’ regime? For an overview of those debates, see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates Since 1917* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

other countries.⁵

In short, 1968 seemed to be one of those global revolutionary years such as 1848, 1871, and 1917, and perhaps even 1989 and 2011, that occasionally appear in history. Many youth, workers, students, women, migrants, ethnic minorities, and others rose up—and continued to rise up in the succeeding years. However, judged from the radical, anti-systemic aspirations of many of those who rebelled, the events of 1968 were nearly everywhere a failure. They did not overthrow the establishment. Elites in both the capitalist West and ‘communist’ (meaning Stalinist) East, as well as in low-income countries, co-opted and violently repressed protest to preserve the status quo. As the British libertarian socialist group Solidarity proclaimed, ‘the “Communist” world is not communist and the “Free” world is not free’.⁶ This quote neatly sums up much of the dissatisfaction of the New Left, which was often at the forefront of dissent in 1968 in high-income countries, with both Cold War blocs. The New Left also attempted (and sometimes failed) to blaze a path beyond the two dominant currents of the ‘Old Left’—social democracy on the one hand and Stalinism on the other.⁷

5 These are only a brief selection of some of the events of 1968. Many other key events and uprisings have been excluded due to lack of space. A vast global literature on 1968 exists. See, for example, Tariq Ali and Susan Watkins, *1968: Marching in the Streets* (New York: Free Press, 1998); Cauter, *Sixty-Eight*; Jian Chen et al eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (Abingdon on Thames: Routledge, 2018); George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968* (Boston: South End Press, 1987); Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (London: Penguin, 2005); Norbert Frei, *1968: Jugendrevolte und Globaler Protest* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2017). However, most of these books focus mainly on Europe, Japan, and North America.

6 Solidarity, ‘As We See It,’ *Solidarity* IV, no. 6 (1967), available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/brinton/1967/04/as-we-see-it.htm>.

7 For discussions on the New Left and its impact in Aotearoa see Toby Boraman, ‘The New Left in New Zealand,’ in *On the Left: Essays on Socialism in New Zealand*, eds., Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2002), 117–132; ‘A Middle-Class Diversion from Working-Class Struggle? The New Left in New Zealand from the Mid-1950s to the Mid-1970s,’ *Labour History* 103 (2012): 203–226. It is important to note that the division between the Old and New Left was fuzzy, and many groups straddled the two.

Only a tiny minority of the world's population took part in the 1968 rebellion. In Aotearoa, for example, events were extremely placid and subdued in comparison to the global hotspots of 1968. Nonetheless, many people in Aotearoa were elated that a near revolution had occurred in France; after all, France was an affluent country without any direct involvement in the Vietnam War. The poet Alan Brunton has described the effects of the French revolt in university coffee bars in Auckland in 1968 as 'electric':

A group of students had almost brought down a government! Strategy talks, fuelled by amphetamines, lasted for days. Constitutions for new states, all utopian, were written. We were soixante-huitards too! The objective that united the talkers was the overthrow of private property as the state's economic principle. The surplus in the economy would no longer be our labour, but our imaginations. Some people were liberated not just from the State but from reality itself.⁸

1968 is vitally important today for multiple reasons. It is often perceived as the last big moment which seemed to promise genuine anti-capitalist revolutionary transformation in high-income countries. Just as importantly, 1968 appears to have represented a rupture or turning point in history: it threw up a general social, political, cultural, and intellectual ferment for years to come, and many movements and theories were developed or renewed in response that have had a lasting influence to this day.

However, this major grassroots challenge from below eventually helped to trigger, to a greater or lesser extent, a major reaction from elites globally in the 1970s and 1980s. This mainly took the form of neoliberalism—'capitalism with its gloves off.' Neoliberalism has profoundly scarred society today: it has contributed to an astonishing concentration of wealth (two Pākehā male capitalists—Graeme Hart and Richard Chandler—own as much wealth as the entire combined wealth of the bottom 30 percent of the population in Aotearoa), crippling inequality, a housing crisis, increasing precarity, high levels of alienation and separation, and accelerated climate

8 Alan Brunton, *Years Ago Today, Language & Performance: 1969* (Wellington: A Bumper Book, 1997), 23.

change.⁹ Further, as some people today search for scapegoats for these effects of neoliberal capitalism, xenophobia, racism, and even fascism are on the rise.

In short, 1968 and its aftermath have deeply shaped the present. Hence I write this article not to belittle or ignore the present, but to explore herstory/history so that people can learn from the multiple lessons of the past, and how the past has moulded the present. And some big lessons can be garnered from 1968. In today's times of relatively narrow horizons, I am inspired by the breadth and confluence of issues and aims that were raised in 1968. Indeed, an important demand raised during 1968 was the call for a truly wide-ranging total revolution, one that combined cultural and artistic revolt with economic, social, and political transmutation. I find far less inspiring the minority of former 68ers whose liberal, non-socialist politics meant that they evolved into supporting neoliberalism in the 1980s, or pessimistically thought the disappointments of 1968 meant that the terrain of social struggle and the possibility of radical transformation should be abandoned for the philosophical study of ideas and the linguistic interpretation of texts.

It is a testament to the importance of the 'long 1968' that its legacies are still contested to this day. Some claim it was largely a cultural and individualistic rebellion that eventually produced neoliberalism. In contrast, others on the Left often seek validation of their own particular brand of leftism by highlighting disproportionately one current of 1968 to the detriment of others. Both these interpretations of 1968 are flawed. They do not examine the broad-ranging, diverse, and frequently contradictory nature of 1968, something I hope to have achieved below despite my account being undoubtedly shaped by my own biases and interest in labour struggle.

Below I examine why 1968 is still important today, despite how the rebellion of 1968 was ostensibly defeated. I will explore some of the strengths and weaknesses of various interpretations of 1968. Along the way, I detail elements of the experience of 1968 in Aotearoa, based on earlier research I undertook into the New Left. I will only skim the surface of some

9 Oxfam, 'Richest 1% of Kiwis Bagged 28% of all Wealth Created Last Year,' Oxfam New Zealand, January 22, 2018, <https://www.oxfam.org.nz/news/richest-1-kiwis-bagged-28-all-wealth-created-last-year>.

interpretations and events in 1968 and beyond. Many other significant understandings will unfortunately be excluded from this overview. These include the interpretations that 1968 was anarchistic, anti-authoritarian, and anti-parliamentary (or, on the contrary, that 1968 led to a revitalisation of party politics, including social democracy and Leninism); that 1968 was all about demanding equality; that 1968 was intersectional; and that it helped spark three ground-breaking and essential movements—women’s liberation, queer liberation, and environmentalism.¹⁰ Many have recently questioned the marginalisation of women in accounts of 1968. Indeed, for many women who participated in the French revolt of 1968 it was the first time that they had publicly spoken out, even if they mostly played a secondary role to men on the barricades. Bibia Pavard argues the French women’s movement was both a part of the 1968 protests *and* a reaction against them. It challenged the marginalisation of women and feminist concerns in the protests, and many became feminists afterwards due to the machismo they experienced in 1968.¹¹ In this country, the first women’s liberation groups were not established until 1970, and further research is

10 For overviews of these movements see, among others, Christine Dann, *Up from Under: Women and Liberation in New Zealand 1970–1985* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1985); Julie Glamuzina, *Out Front: Lesbian Political Activity in Aotearoa, 1962 to 1985* (Hamilton: Lesbian Press, 1993); Laurie Guy, *Worlds in Collision: The Gay Debate in New Zealand, 1960–1986* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2002); Roger Wilson, *From Manapouri to Aramoana: The Battle for New Zealand’s Environment* (Auckland: Earthworks Press, 1982). For anarchistic accounts of 1968 see, among others, Greg Calvert, *Democracy from the Heart: Spiritual Values, Decentralism, and Democratic Idealism in the Movement of the 1960s* (Oregon: Communitas Press, 1991); James Farrell, *The Spirit of the Sixties: Making Postwar Radicalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Nigel Young, *An Infantile Disorder? The Crisis and Decline of the New Left* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977). For accounts that it led to the revitalisation of party politics see Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After* (London: Bookmarks, 1988); Thomas Koelble, *The Left Unravelled: Social Democracy and the New Left Challenge in Britain and West Germany* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Marx, Mao, and Che* (London: Verso, 2018).

11 Cited in Sophie Heywood, ‘Power to Children’s Imaginations: May ’68 and Counter Culture for Children in France,’ *Strenae* 12 (2018): 28. See also, Corinne Maier, ‘The Hidden Women of Paris,’ *New York Times*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/07/opinion/france-protests-68-women.html>.

needed into women's roles in 1968 itself.¹² Sandra Coney has claimed that:

1968 was a quiet year for women's rights, though it was a calm that belied the ferment brewing underneath. My own life was on that cusp between a fairly traditional woman's life and a break for freedom. . . . Underlying the apparent calm of 1968, a veritable storm was brewing that would challenge all aspects of New Zealand life.¹³

This, to some extent, summarises the 1968 experience in Aotearoa—a lull before the stormy dissent of the long 1970s.

1968: The end or a beginning? What happened in Aotearoa?

A previously dominant interpretation, based on the US experience, was that 1968 and its aftermath represented the end of the promise and hope of the 1960s. This is the 'good sixties/bad sixties' thesis: in the early 1960s protesters used peaceful, non-violent means to gradually change society, and by the mid-1960s they had built a mass movement for civil rights, an end to the Vietnam War, and the abolition of poverty, among many other causes. Yet that movement was scuttled in 1968 by external repression and a bitter internal implosion after it became increasingly sectarian, radical, violent, and even terrorist. By about 1970 'the movement' allegedly burnt out.¹⁴

This highly normative take on the US New Left and 1968 is now largely rejected, even within the US.¹⁵ Instead of 1968 representing an end to contestation, it is now seen as signifying a turning point in the development

12 Dann, *Up from Under*, 5.

13 Sandra Coney, 'Unfinished Business: Sandra Coney looks back on the Sixties,' *Stuff*, September 15, 2018, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/life/106848346/unfinished-business-sandra-coney-looks-back-on-the-sixties>.

14 For classic statements of this thesis, see Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987); Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1973).

15 For one of the most stringent critiques of the good sixties/bad sixties thesis see Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air*.

of burgeoning and multifarious social movements both in 1968 and thereafter.¹⁶ As these incredibly broad-based series of movements shook society, they had considerable and lasting cultural, social, political, and even economic impacts. They developed a repertoire of influential tactics and participatory organisational forms (from affinity and consciousness raising groups to teach-ins, sit-ins or occupations, media stunts, and other forms of direct action). They also transformed many people's lives and identities, created and reinforced communities and counter-institutions, won many reforms, and challenged power in both the private and public spheres. In other words, 1968 was significant not only for the explosive events of the calendar year itself, but also for what came after during what is called the 'long 1968',¹⁷ or more accurately, the long 1970s (the period from the late 1960s to the early 1980s). 1968 was a springboard era for local and global dissent.

The interpretation that 1968 was a beginning seems far more appropriate to Aotearoa than the 'good sixties/bad sixties' narrative. Undoubtedly, before 1968 various small-scale movements had emerged that foreshadowed and laid much of the groundwork for what was to come, such as the anti-nuclear, anti-apartheid, and anti-war movements, and the early phase of the New Left. However, it was not until after 1968 that large-scale social movements were either revived—such as the Māori protest or sovereignty movement (as it was mostly called), anti-racist, women's liberation, and labour movements—or emerged in a major, sustained, and overt form for perhaps the first time, such as the queer liberation, Pasifika, and ecological movements. Thus I believe 'the long 1970s was Aotearoa's 1960s'; it represented 'a decade of dissent'.¹⁸

16 See, for example, Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).

17 See, for example, Daniel Sherman et al., eds., *The Long 1968: Revisions and New Perspectives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

18 Toby Boraman, 'The Independent Left Press and the Rise and Fall of Mass Dissent in Aotearoa Since the 1970s,' *Counterfutures* 1 (2016): 38. However, by this I do not mean that dissent was universal or constant throughout the 1970s; the protest movement declined rapidly in 1972 with the election of a Labour government, for

By international standards only a few small protests occurred in Aotearoa. They were far from confrontational, let alone radical. Nevertheless, they were noteworthy for the diversity of issues raised and for how they foreshadowed what was to come. Probably the largest protests of 1968 were those undertaken by tens of thousands of workers against the Arbitration Court's nil wage order. Given inflation, this order was effectively an attempt by the state to impose a five percent wage-cut on all workers covered by the arbitration system (in other words, the vast majority of workers nationally). This incensed many workers and unions, and a wave of work stoppages and other forms of protest resulted. For example, meatworkers banned the loading out of export meat, and railway workers and watersiders refused to handle that meat. According to Stevan Eldred-Grigg:

Moderate unions grew radical. Conservative unions, such as the Railway Tradesmens [sic] Association, turned to strike action for the first time and in a matter of months were transformed from what one writer called 'ultra-right anti-strike splinter groups' into staunch unions 'threatening to stay out till they starve'.¹⁹

The overturning of this attempted national wage-cut gave many workers and unions the confidence to undertake direct action outside the state's centralised wage-setting system—the Arbitration Court—to gain better wages and conditions. As such, a prolonged upturn in strikes and workplace dissent transpired after 1968. While this confrontation was largely separate from the protest movement, it was often led by younger workers, including

instance. Such dissent in the long 1970s could also be contradictory, limited, and intermixed with conservatism, and only overtly involved a minority of the population. Furthermore, mass protest persisted in the 1980s and 1990s over various issues, including the imposition of neoliberalism and economic restructuring, nuclear warship visits, a rebel rugby tour to apartheid South Africa, and the fiscal envelope. Yet in comparison to other periods in post-World War Two history, the long 1970s did represent a real high point in protest, direct action, subversion, and strikes. It was also a period when protestors seemed to be generally on the offensive, rather than being largely pushed on to the defensive, as they seemed to be during the 1980s and 1990s.

19 Stevan Eldred-Grigg, *New Zealand Working People 1890–1990* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1990), 220. Eldred-Grigg did not reference the writer he quoted, so that author remains anonymous.

many Māori and later many Pasifika and women, who were loosely influenced by the wider mood of dissent in the long 1970s.²⁰

The Vietnam War, probably the major issue of the late 1960s and early 1970s, also attracted much attention in Aotearoa during 1968. Anti-Vietnam War protest groups organised a major international gathering that was dubbed the ‘Peace, Power, and Politics in Asia Conference’. According to Alister Taylor 1,400 delegates attended, and thousands more came to the public sessions.²¹ Hilary Stace remembers the packed town hall as ‘very much a 1968 image: dark jackets and duffle-coats, scarves and duffle bags. I remember looking down on a lot of middle-aged men. I don’t recall many women—certainly not among the speakers’.²² The conference was a counter-conference to the SEATO (South-East Asia Treaty Organisation) conference that was concurrently being held in Wellington. SEATO was a treaty led by the US and its allies (including the New Zealand state) which protesters contended played an important role in sustaining the US war machine in Vietnam. While the anti-Vietnam War movement did not really develop into a popular mass-movement until the national mobilisations, or ‘mobes’, of 1970–1972, the conference helped to popularise the anti-war movement and contributed to the eventual discrediting of the war.²³

Furthermore, in 1968 other significant anti-war, or anti-war related, protests occurred against the proposed siting of the US Omega navigation station in the foothills of the Southern Alps. *Canta*, the University of Canterbury student newspaper, sold 72,000 copies of a special issue detailing allegations that the Omega station would be used by US nuclear

20 A detailed overview of this strike wave has not been published, but readers can get a sense of the diffusion of strikes after 1968, and the breadth and depth of labour unrest, in Brian Roper, ‘The Fire Last Time: The Rise of Class Struggle and Progressive Social Movements in Aotearoa/New Zealand 1968 to 1977,’ *Marxist Interventions*, 3 (2011), 7–30 and Bert Roth and Janny Hammond, *Toil and Trouble: The Struggle for a Better Life in New Zealand* (Auckland: Methuen, 1981), 158–77.

21 Alister Taylor, ‘Introduction,’ in *Peace, Power & Politics in Asia*, ed., Alister Taylor (Wellington: Organising Committee of the Peace, Power, and Politics in Asia Conference, 1969), 9.

22 Quoted in Redmer Yska, ‘Giving Peace a Chance,’ *New Zealand Listener*, April 5, 2008, <https://www.noted.co.nz/archive/listener-nz-2008/giving-peace-a-chance/>.

23 See the conference speakers and participants quoted in Yska, ‘Giving Peace a Chance.’

submarines to launch nuclear attacks, possibly making Aotearoa a first nuclear target in a nuclear war between the US and USSR. Consequently, a few thousand demonstrated in Christchurch and elsewhere.²⁴

Yet the demonstration that probably drew the most controversy in Aotearoa during 1968 itself was the one that greeted the opening of Parliament in June 1968. The local press had somewhat sensationalised the French uprising of May–June 1968 as a series of ‘riots’ (by protestors, and not the police). Perhaps fearing that the French upheaval had reached our shores, they asserted that this multifaceted demonstration of between 3,000 to 7,000 participants outside parliament somehow resulted in a ‘near riot’ after some pushing and shoving of police lines occurred on Parliament steps. The protest was a joint Māori-student-worker demonstration that had come together around a constellation of causes. The largest contingent was that of workers protesting against the nil wage order (indeed, workers on that day were participating in a Wellington-wide one-day ‘general strike’ organised by the Wellington Trades Council of the Federation of Labour). Other causes represented included those opposing the Vietnam War, the proposed Omega station, the rising cost of living (by a female-led group called the Campaign Against Rising Prices), the low level of student bursaries, and what was then dubbed the ‘last land grab’ of Māori land through the Māori Affairs Amendment Act 1967, an act which enabled the state to compulsorily buy some Māori land.²⁵ The latter were a contingent of over 400 Māori from as far as the South Island and East Cape who had been mobilised by one of the first Māori protest groups of the 1960s, the Māori Organisation On Human Rights (MOOHR).²⁶ This protest was

24 See Elsie Locke, *Peace People: A History of Peace Activities in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1992), 262–66; Owen Wilkes, *Protest: Demonstrations Against the American Military Presence in New Zealand: Omega 1968, Woodbourne 1970, Mount John 1972, Harewood/Weedons 1973* (Wellington: Alister Taylor, 1973), 7–16.

25 The fullest account of the protest is found in Toby Boraman, ‘June 26 1968: A Riot Outside Parliament?’ *Labour History Project Newsletter* 45 (2009): 20–23.

26 See Boraman, ‘June 26 1968.’ MOOHR was largely formed by Māori members of the Wellington Drivers’ Union in 1967. For overviews of MOOHR see, among others, Aroha Harris, *Hīkoi: Forty Years of Māori Protest* (Wellington: Huia, 2004); Tama Te Kapua Poata, *Poata: Seeing Beyond the Horizon*, ed., Prue Poata (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2012).

part of a wider popular Māori campaign against that legislation, a campaign which was a major catalyst for the Māori land rights movement that arose in the 1970s. As Aroha Harris writes:

Quickly dubbed the ‘land last grab’, Māori viewed the act as the Crown’s final attack on the remnants of their tribal property, and responded with a major and cohesive Māori land rights movement that led directly to the 1975 Māori land march.²⁷

At the opening of parliament, protestors—dubbed ‘the rabble in our midst’ by *The Evening Post*—occupied Parliament grounds singing ‘we shall not be moved’ after the police attempted, and failed, to disperse them.²⁸ This occupation cancelled the outdoors ceremony to mark Parliament’s opening, and some even suggested it could have resulted in the ‘storming of parliament’.²⁹ Dan Riddiford, a National MP, claimed ‘this gang [of students] . . . defied the police and attempted to let loose a tirade of disorder and perhaps death on the people of New Zealand’.³⁰ Yet only two arrests occurred, a placid tally in comparison to the more turbulent demonstrations that followed 1968 such as the anti-Vietnam War protest in 1970 when US Vice President Spiro Agnew visited Auckland, and the demonstration against the American military installation at Mount John near Lake Tekapo in 1972 which was called the ‘Battle of Mount John’.³¹

Overall, the protests of 1968 in Aotearoa were not hugely significant

27 Harris, *Hikoi*, 24. See also Richard Hill, *Māori and the State: Crown-Māori Relations in New Zealand/Aotearoa, 1950–2000* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009), 159.

28 ‘Violence Erupts in Protest at Parl.’, *Dominion*, June 27, 1968, 1; ‘The Rabble in Our Midst,’ *Evening Post*, June 27, 1968, 12; ‘Violent Demonstrators,’ *Evening Post*, June 27, 1968, 21.

29 Boraman, ‘June 26 1968,’ 20; Owen Hughes, ‘June 26 – the Beginning of . . . the End,’ *Salient*, June 25, 1969, 14.

30 Riddiford later claimed his speech was misreported: he said ‘train’ of disorder, not ‘tirade’. ‘Riddiford says speech misreported,’ *Salient*, July 23, 1968, 1.

31 For accounts of these more turbulent protests see Locke, *Peace People*, 227–29 and 271–78; Tim Shadbolt, *Bullshit & Jellybeans* (Wellington: Alister Taylor, 1971), 119–23; Wilkes, *Protest*, 31–40.

in themselves; however, they were important in signifying the thawing of the long period of relative quietude in mass and sustained protest that had occurred since the 1951 waterfront lockout, and for prefiguring what was to develop more fully later.

Did 1968 produce neoliberalism?

One of the most important interpretations of 1968 was that it was mainly a *cultural* and *individualistic* rebellion by students and youth against the establishment's and older generation's stifling and boring authoritarianism. It was a moment in which the allegedly youthful, white middle-class blew off some steam before they grew up to become pillars of the establishment. Under this view, the rebellion ushered in the alleged 'me decade' of the 1970s and then neoliberalism in the 1980s with its selfish, individualistic, and allegedly anti-bureaucratic credo, a view voiced by Slavoj Žižek and Bruce Jesson among others.³² According to Bryce Edwards, Denis Welch claimed in his biography of Helen Clark that:

'1968 lay the seed of 1984' (Welch, 2009: p.19), by which he means that many of those in the new social movements of the 60s and beyond very easily morphed into economic rightwingers at a later stage. Here he's talking about people like Helen Clark, and says that 'Some of the driest disciples of Rogernomics were radical student lefties in their youth'.³³

This trend did occur. For example, two former protestors of the 1960s and 1970s later became editors of the *National Business Review*. Other former

32 Bruce Jesson, *Fragments of Labour: The Story behind the Labour Government* (Auckland: Penguin, 1989); Slavoj Žižek, 'The Ambiguous Legacy of '68,' *In These Times*, June 20, 2008, http://inthesetimes.com/article/3751/the_ambiguous_legacy_of_68.

33 Bryce Edwards, 'Identity Politics vs Class Politics – 6: The Transformation of Social Liberalism into Neo-liberalism,' *Liberation*, December 23, 2009, <http://liberation.typepad.com/liberation/2009/12/identity-politics-vs-class-politics-6-the-transformation-of-social-liberalism-into-neoliberalism.html>. The text he cites is that of Denis Welch, *Helen Clark: A Political Life* (Auckland: Penguin, 2009).

protestors joined the establishment, such as Tim Shadbolt, a prominent demonstrator in the late 1960s and 1970s whose book, *Bullshit & Jellybeans*, was a landmark account of the Auckland protest movement.³⁴

Overall this interpretation contains a good thwack of truth: a major weakness of the 1968 revolt from an anti-capitalist perspective was that much of that movement was not really anti-capitalist, but more concerned with liberal civil rights and individual freedoms within capitalism. It was especially focussed on rejecting the oppressive and stultifying mono-cultural social conservatism that predominated in many Europeanised societies in the 1950s and 1960s. When the influence of the protests of 1968 and its aftermath percolated through society in the 1970s, it arguably gradually produced a more liberal, tolerant, less conservative, and less repressed society, which was then utilised by capital to profit from a more diverse marketplace. The 1968 revolt was undoubtedly harnessed by capital to enable ‘innovations’ in production and consumption, and to further capital accumulation. In other words, it was recuperated, to a large degree, by capital.³⁵

It is plausible that many left-liberals of the 1960s and the 1970s progressed, or regressed, to supporting neoliberalism in the 1980s. This is especially the case in Aotearoa: when the Labour Party first introduced and imposed neoliberal policies between 1984 and 1990 they deftly combined important and ground-breaking socially liberal legislation, such as legalising homosexuality and making Aotearoa nuclear free, with harsh neoliberal economic policies that enriched the capitalist class at the

34 See Shadbolt, *Bullshit & Jellybeans*; Tim Shadbolt: *A Mayor of Two Cities* (Auckland: Hodder Moe, 2008).

35 See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005); Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Undoubtedly, more could be written here about the origins of neoliberalism. For example, the socialist tendencies and broad labour unrest of 1968 were also co-opted and harnessed by capital to drive capital accumulation and the development of new technologies and new forms of work organisation, while Boltanski and Chiapello contend that capital co-opted the ‘artistic critique’ voiced in 1968 at the expense of the ‘social critique’, thus granting (supposedly) more variety and autonomy at work at the expense of social security.

expense of the working class (with those at the bottom of the working class, including the vast majority of Māori and Pasifika, disproportionately affected by economic restructuring). This dual agenda may have helped diffuse opposition to neoliberalism, and conversely, some liberals may have seen the ‘liberalisation’ of the economy and the de-regulation of business as a complementary parallel aim to rolling back social conservatism. Certainly, neoliberals attempted to co-opt the language of liberation in the interests of the wealthy few.

Yet, overall, I find this interpretation to be simplistic. To blame 1968 for the rise of neoliberalism is to draw a long bow. Neoliberalism was not even on the radar during this time. Such readings of the period tend to essentialise 1968 and beyond as an individualistic, cultural revolt of white middle-class youth and students, and thus almost systematically overlook how 1968 and its aftermath was a far broader and more diverse movement.³⁶ 1968 involved various ethnicities (not just whites), women, workers, and even people over 30. The aforementioned rowdy Māori-student-worker demonstration at the opening of Parliament provides an excellent example of the diversity of participants in 1968. While students played a vital role, the class position of students is debatable as, among other reasons, only a minority of students were probably destined to become part of the capitalist class or their middle-class managers.³⁷ Nor can 1968 and its aftermath be simply dismissed as a retreat from class by privileged middle-class youth. It is more plausible that it represented a rediscovery of class conflict and the importance of class after a period when, due to the long boom of the 1950s and 1960s, the working class in high-income countries was supposedly too well-off (or, in the language of the time, ‘embourgeoisified’) to struggle against capital. Indeed, during 1968 a major revival of socialism occurred, and based on the events in France and elsewhere, 1968 popularised the strategy of a worker-student alliance.

Even while 1968 contained a significant anti-disciplinarian thread and exhibited a healthy dose of scepticism towards all forms of authority and

36 For example, Caute, *Sixty-Eight*.

37 For an account of the New Left’s complex relationship with class see Boraman, ‘A Middle-Class Diversion.’

bureaucracy, this does not necessarily imply a liberal individualism and an affinity with neoliberalism; instead, it could simply mean many 68ers preferred anti-authoritarian variants of leftism (such as anarchist socialism). Moving forward to the 1980s, only a minority of former protestors explicitly supported neoliberalism or joined the top levels of the establishment. Many remain leftist activists to this day, such as those involved in the Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa and the Mangere East Community Centre.

Undoubtedly, 1968 possessed strong individualist and liberal streaks. Indeed, a fairly unique feature of 1968 (in high-income countries at least) was its desire for cultural freedom and experimentation, which produced an energetic and effervescent politics that combined surreal fun with protest. For example, Shadbolt described Auckland anti-Vietnam War, anti-apartheid, and civil rights protests in 1969 as the product of a ‘Wonderful, amazing, almost incredible outburst of frustrated energy and creativity. . . . It was more than just talking about freedom, it was really experiencing it. For those who were really involved it was our own little ‘68 French Revolution’.³⁸

Yet this individual creativity and freedom was *intertwined* with a communal spirit of collective liberation, and, to labour the point, a humanist, anti-bureaucratic socialism. Far from being individualistic, 1968 (and beyond) fashioned a strong belief that social change (including transforming everyday life) could be attained by ‘marching in the streets’ and other forms of collective extra-parliamentary action. In Auckland, for example, the Myers Park free speech movement led to the ‘liberation of Albert Park’ or ‘jumping Sundays’ during 1969, a ‘liberation’ involving thousands of Aucklanders who ignored and effectively overturned Auckland City Council by-laws that banned free speech and assembly in Albert Park. This collective and illegal festival of political speeches, music, and dancing might seem a perfect example of individualistic frivolity and hippy-dom. Yet it also involved the collective taking of space for communal ends (or in

38 Tim Shadbolt, ‘New Zealand Protest Movement,’ *Guerrilla* 1 (June 1970): 5. He also noted that ‘ideas had come floating across from the protests in Paris’. Shadbolt, *Bullshit & Jellybeans*, 105.

socialist jargon, ‘socialising’ or ‘communising’ enclosed property). Indeed, Henri Lefebvre—an influential French radical of the period with his critique of capitalism’s attempted colonisation of everyday life and his arguments for the ‘right to the city’—argued that the French movement in 1968 aimed for ‘the reconquest of urban space’.³⁹ Certainly, some statements of the Friends of Brutus, a carnivalesque group involving Shadbolt that helped to spark the ‘jumping Sundays’ movement, seem to confirm Lefebvre’s interpretation: ‘Our institutions have moulded us, so we must mould our institutions. . . . We need a place, we need an arena, we need a platform and we need a Park’, so ‘we must take Albert Park’,⁴⁰ ‘it is YOUR park, OUR park down to every blade of trampled glass. Everyone is the public’.⁴¹

While cultural and sexual liberation were important aspects of 1968 in high-income countries, this does not mean that 1968 was solely concerned with ‘post-materialist’ cultural matters such as the lack of quality of life, boredom, and the general hollowness and alienation of production, consumption, and suburban living under capitalism. If one zooms out and takes a global view of 1968, it appears that in low- to middle-income countries, demands tended to focus more on economic and political issues, like opposing dictatorships, self-determination, decolonisation and democratisation, corruption, and the lack of land, money, and food (similar in several respects to Māori and Pasifika movements in the long 1970s in Aotearoa).

Further, a major global strike wave followed 1968 that was not divorced from material factors. This wave was related to the end of the post-World War Two ‘long boom’, sometimes called the ‘golden age of capitalism’, when sustained economic growth saw most enjoy rising living standards and full employment. However, the gains made over that period were

39 Henri Lefebvre, *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).

40 ‘The Chance for Jumping Sundays,’ *Brutus Says*, 1969, Eph-B-ROTH-Politics-Brutus Says, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. *Brutus Says* was the newsheet of the Friends of Brutus group, named after Shadbolt’s dog.

41 ‘Have You, Sir, Madam, Ever Seen the Phoenix Resurrect Itself???? Come to Albert Park!!!’ *Brutus Says*, 1969, Eph-B-ROTH-Politics-Brutus Says, Alexander Turnbull Library, original emphasis.

unevenly shared between capital and labour, and also within the working class.⁴² A recession during 1967–1968 later developed into a general economic crisis in the 1970s due to, among other factors, the oil shocks of the 1970s. People, and not just workers, often rebel during these swings from economic boom to recession.⁴³

Collective direct action, mobilisation, and strikes during and following 1968 in Aotearoa, while never really seeking revolutionary change, achieved many gains and reforms. Indeed, in the long 1970s social movements were generally on the offensive. In 1968 itself, anti-war protestors arguably stopped the proposed American Omega station from being built in Aotearoa, with the US deciding to construct it in Australia instead,⁴⁴ and striking workers helped to defeat the Arbitration Court's infamous nil wage order. As noted above, the latter victory ushered in a sustained period of strike activity and direct action in the workplace during the long 1970s. Such activity won real wage increases for workers until a major recession in 1974.⁴⁵ Arguably, protests were also a major factor in causing the withdrawal of New Zealand troops from Vietnam in 1972, in establishing the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, and in the eventual return of Takaparawhā, or Bastion Point, and other parcels of alienated Māori land. This is not to suggest that all activism brought about major gains, however. Numerous defeats occurred in the period of dissent after 1968 due to the conservative backlash of the Muldoon years, the beginnings of industry restructuring

42 In Aotearoa, for instance, many Māori and Pasifika were concentrated in low-paid manufacturing jobs, and many women were also concentrated in low-paid jobs or excluded from jobs altogether.

43 For the theory that strike waves are related to long waves of boom and bust in the economy see, for example, John Kelly, *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilisation, Collectivism, and Long Waves* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

44 Given the secrecy around the US Navy's decision, this is not certain. However, most Australian political commentators as well as Wilkes interpreted it as a victory for protest, given that the location in Aotearoa was deemed by the US navy to be the most suitable site technically. Wilkes, *Protest*, 10, 16.

45 Many accounts of the nil wage order marginalise the role of strikes, using a top-down methodology that focuses on the role of the 'unholy alliance' of employers and trade union officials in overturning the nil wage order. See, for example, Pat Walsh, 'An "Unholy Alliance:" The 1968 Nil Wage Order,' *New Zealand Journal of History* 28, no. 2 (1994): 178–93.

(and de-industrialisation) from about the late-1970s onwards, the failure of the massive ‘stop the tour’ anti-apartheid movement to halt the Springbok tour of 1981, and the imposition of neoliberalism in 1984.

Despite the liberal and individualist tendencies of 1968, it is difficult, then, to see neoliberalism as a direct product of 1968. A more plausible explanation is that neoliberalism was more a reaction to the movements of 1968 and their aftermath. Neoliberals themselves have argued this. Some neoliberals contended that the collective dissent of the long 1970s led to spiralling and unsustainable demands being made on the state. They controversially argued that this caused declining economic growth, with the implication that such ‘rigidities’ needed to be broken through neoliberal restructuring and austerity.⁴⁶

Setting aside such views, however, there does seem to be some plausibility that labour unrest hampered profitability, and that restructuring and class decomposition resulted as a consequence. Multifarious forms of workers’ dissent emerged in Aotearoa during the long 1970s. For example, dissent in the meat industry included strikes, wildcat strikes, rolling strikes, pickets, early finishes, occupations of company offices, as well as informal everyday resistance, such as work avoidance, tardiness, theft, absenteeism, playing around on the job, work-to-rules, and informal workers’ control of work. This unrest following 1968 seems to have restricted production levels and perhaps squeezed profits. Somewhat in reaction to this labour unrest of the long 1970s, but more importantly in reaction to the oil shocks of the 1970s, Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community free trade zone, and increased global competition, capital then restructured industry on a more profitable and ‘efficient’ basis from about the late 1970s onwards. In so doing, it was later ably assisted by neoliberal government policies that ‘de-regulated’ capital. This restructuring led to mass unemployment and a re-organisation of work to re-assert management’s ‘right to manage’ the shopfloor and to attempt to nullify strikes and informal resistance. Such an interpretation of economic restructuring thus views neoliberalism as an attempt to restore capitalist class power and especially profitability, a thesis

46 See, for example, Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

voiced by David Harvey and the autonomist Marxists among others.⁴⁷

Self-management and participatory democracy

In contrast to the view that 1968 was a cultural and individualistic movement, another prominent interpretation of 1968 stresses its more socialist aspects. In that respect, some authors, such as George Katsiaficas, Gerd-Rainer Horn, and James Miller, claim that self-management and participatory democracy were some of the most significant hallmarks of 1968.⁴⁸ Indeed, as noted earlier, a ‘socialism from below’ became popular during and after 1968 as an antidote to the then dominant state capitalist versions of socialism: reformist social democracy and Stalinism. Both these forms of socialism were critiqued as being too capitalist, top-down, and alienating, and in the case of Stalinism, dictatorial. More importantly, self-management and participatory democracy were also popularised due to how, as Solidarity claimed, ‘throughout the world the vast majority of people have no control whatsoever over the decisions that most deeply and directly affect their lives’.⁴⁹

By championing self-management and participatory democracy, many radicals aimed for a broad-based democratisation of the whole of society down to its very roots. They contended that just as students themselves ought to run universities and schools through direct democracy (or through joint student-teacher control), so should workers run their factories and offices themselves, and community members run their communities themselves,

47 David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Assembly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 114 (although Hardt and Negri today are considered more post-autonomists than autonomists).

48 Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1957–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*; James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). However, like much of the early US New Left, Miller tends to emphasise participatory democracy without self-management and socialism.

49 Solidarity, ‘As We See It.’

and so on throughout society. In France in 1968, for example, many students occupied their high schools and universities, and workers their factories and offices. Footballers famously occupied the French Football Federation headquarters demanding ‘football to the footballers’ rather than capitalist profiteers.⁵⁰ Occupied public buildings and universities were used as ‘popular assemblies’ where anybody could discuss politics, which some interpreted as prefiguring a society run through the council or assembly form of direct democracy under self-management. In this country, groups like the Friends of Brutus aimed for ‘a decentralised, participatory, community-based form of self-government’ as well as an end to the money economy.⁵¹

Yet, in practice, self-management and participatory democracy could mean almost anything, depending on one’s politics. Some thought it meant promoting various worker co-operatives or worker participation schemes and attempts to spruce up representative democracy with greater direct participation (in other words, greater participation in the management of capitalism), while others contended that it meant the self-management of a new society. Direct democracy and self-management were no doubt broad aims that were widely shared amongst radicals. This perhaps reached its apogee in the views of the Situationist International, a French-based revolutionary artistic current prominent in 1968, who argued for a total revolution of ‘generalised self-management’ run through workers’ councils that would abolish the ultra-commodified capitalist ‘society of the spectacle’.⁵² The Situationists claimed the French revolt of 1968 was a ‘rejection of all alienated labor; it was a festival . . . a rejection of all authority, all specialization, all hierarchical dispossession; a rejection of the state . . . and repressive morality’.⁵³

However, many liberals, moderates, and workers did not share these aims of participatory democracy and self-management. Instead, they

50 See their leaflet reproduced in Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists*, 149–50.

51 ‘New Zealand in the 1970’s,’ *Brutus Says*, 1969, Eph-B-ROTH-Politics-Brutus Says, Alexander Turnbull Library.

52 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983 [1967]).

53 ‘The Beginning of an Era,’ *Internationale Situationiste*, 12 (Sep. 1969) in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed., Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 226. See also Viénet, *Enragés and Situationists*.

mostly sought to win a few reforms, such as pay-rises, better working conditions, or the cessation of the Vietnam War and nuclear ship visits, rather than seeking systematic change or, more importantly, aiming to link these reforms with long-term anti-systemic goals. Further, many protesters who played essential roles in building movements in 1968 and beyond were, in my opinion, for various versions of socialism from above, such as those within the Labour Party as well as Maoists and Trotskyists (even if Maoists and Trotskyists claimed to be anti-bureaucratic).

One of the most important criticisms of this anarchistic ‘socialism from below’ current of 1968 was that its exponents asserted that the main problem with society, in East and West, *was the lack of control people had over their everyday lives*.⁵⁴ The French communisation current, which developed in the 1970s as a response to the self-management agenda of groups like the Situationists, argued that even if people ran their own factories and communities themselves through workers’ councils and community assemblies, it would lead to a self-managed capitalism and self-managed exploitation, as the market, wage-system, and private property would all be retained.⁵⁵ Some strands of capital, with their adoption of ‘self-managed teams’ in workplaces, and *supposedly* non-hierarchical, network-based workplaces, have attempted to co-opt the self-management current of 1968 to some extent since the 1980s.⁵⁶

54 For a discussion see Toby Boraman, ‘Carnival and Class: Anarchism and Councilism in Australasia during the 1970s,’ in *Libertarian Socialism: Politics in Red and Black*, eds., Alex Prichard et al (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 251–74.

55 See Benjamin Noys, ed., *Communization and its Discontents* (New York: Autonomedia 2011). The communisation tendency argues, somewhat programmatically, for the immediate establishment of a classless, stateless, and moneyless society, without any need for transitory periods or stages.

56 See Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. However, these authors tend to neglect how the supposed autonomy and self-management of workers today tends to be minimal or at least highly proscribed in most workplaces and is shaped by the broader logic of capital accumulation and class exploitation.

Internationalism and anti-colonialism

Some, taking a broader global overview of 1968, stress it was a genuine internationalist moment, rather than just a European or North American one.⁵⁷ This interpretation stresses the rapid transnational transmission of ideas and practices between movements in the long 1968. In so doing, they emphasise the need to go beyond Eurocentric accounts of 1968. As noted above, it is important to include countries mostly overlooked in 1968, such as Pakistan, which provides perhaps the only successful instance of the 1968 global wave actually toppling a regime. And it is also vital to place Aotearoa in a global context, noting the transnational linkages and cross-fertilisations between movements, rather than to work within a methodological nationalist framework which claims Aotearoa is, and ought to be, an isolated exception to the rest of the globe. This does not, however, mean movements here were simply copies of overseas causes. They were adapted to local conditions and many indigenous responses to such conditions also sprouted.

Besides the obvious influence of Europe, North America, and Australia on post-1968 movements here, 1968 provides inspiring examples of many activists offering lasting solidarity to countries in the ‘third world’, as it was then called. The best two examples were probably opposition to the Vietnam War and apartheid in South Africa. While many white activists in high-income countries saw their acts as one of charity towards oppressed peoples elsewhere, some began to see them as genuine mutual partners in struggle.

1968 was part of a broad anti-racist and anti-colonial solidarity. It was associated with a wave of struggles against colonisation and imperialism in Indo-China, Africa, and across the Pacific, including Aotearoa, during the long 1970s. In the South Pacific, transnational solidarity developed between many Indigenous independence movements and also against French nuclear testing in Mururoa. Māori protest itself seems to have been in part spurred by rising opposition to apartheid and the Vietnam War. For

57 See, for example, Ali and Watkins, *1968*; Chen et al., eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*.

example, in 1968 the Federation of Māori students initiated protest against the All Blacks tour of apartheid South Africa in 1970, and Tama Poata of MOOHR drew parallels between the Vietnamese struggle against the US and that of Māori in Aotearoa. He said at the Peace, Power, and Politics in Asia Conference in 1968 that:

the considered opinion of the Māori Organisation On Human Rights is that the struggle of the Vietnam people to obtain self-determination is similar to our struggle in New Zealand, the fundamental difference being that REAL bullets are being used in Vietnam.⁵⁸

Later, Ngā Tamatoa, another trailblazing Māori activist group ‘unwaveringly committed to the pursuit of tino rangatiratanga’ and influenced by Black Power movements overseas, was formed in 1970. Among many other activities, Ngā Tamatoa members established a ‘Māori embassy’ located in a tent on parliament grounds in 1972 to demand ‘Māori control of Māori things’.⁵⁹ This movement gathered strength with the momentous 1975 land march, various land occupations from the late 1970s onwards, and Waitangi Day protests, a story much better told elsewhere.⁶⁰ It was probably not until 1981 during the huge stop the tour anti-apartheid protests—which perhaps could be seen as the culmination of the dissent which began in the late 1960s, and were in themselves remarkable grass-and flax-roots displays of international anti-racist solidarity—that Māori were able to confront Pākehā *en masse* about why they were opposing racism in South Africa but not in Aotearoa. However, several largely Pākehā anti-racist organisations in the 1960s and 1970s did attempt to address racism against Māori and Pasifika, such as CARE (Citizens’ Association for Racial Equality) and ACORD (Auckland Committee on Racism and Discrimination), even if much of their activist focus centred on opposing sporting contact with apartheid in South Africa.

58 Poata, *Poata: Seeing Beyond the Horizon*, 104, original emphasis. Poata’s statement from the conference was reproduced in his autobiography from the *People’s Voice*, 1968.

59 Harris, *Hikoī*, 26, 43.

60 See, for example, Harris, *Hikoī*; Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (Auckland: Penguin, 2004).

However, while anti-racism and anti-colonialism were essential strands of 1968 and its aftermath, not all of those involved in social struggles during the long 1970s proffered such global or anti-racist praxis. Many protesters were simply focused on single-issues or localised struggles. Not all, furthermore, shared a perspective which uncritically supported anti-colonial struggles overseas. Indeed, considerable debate developed about the worth of left nationalism, an ideology which was often intertwined with anti-imperialism. Owen Gager argued, for example, that the Wellington anti-Vietnam War ‘umbrella group’ the Wellington Committee on Vietnam, believed internationalism was:

Simply the co-ordination between different ‘nationalist’ movements—because the N.L.F. [Vietnamese National Liberation Front] is primarily ‘nationalist’ (rather than being primarily, say, socialist.) All ‘genuine’ nationalists must support it, out of ‘internationalism’. ‘Internationalism’ is defined simply as nationalism everywhere in the world—an easy, but obviously false, definition.⁶¹

Some also expressed discomfort with how many anti-imperialists seemingly turned a blind eye to various totalitarian regimes in the ‘third world’, such as China.⁶² Despite these criticisms though, the period after 1968 stands out as a high point in transnational solidarity and interconnection.

Pessimistic and sober interpretations

While 1968 is often taken as proof that collective mobilisation from below generated social transformation, others stress that the 1968 revolt was easily swept aside. As noted above, many see 1968 as a failure: governments were not overthrown, and structures of class exploitation, patriarchy, and racism remained in place. After the defeats of 1968, many leftists (some of whom later became former leftists) attempted to re-evaluate the Left thoroughly.

61 Owen Gager, ‘Vietnam with Tears: The Record of the New Zealand Protest,’ *Dispute* (May 1968), 8.

62 Indeed, an extraordinary romanticisation of Maoism occurred during that decade.

Consequently, some developed post-structuralist and other theories. In some ways, this questioning paralleled earlier attempts by the Frankfurt school of ‘critical Marxism’ in Germany to reconsider the Left after the failures of the global revolutionary wave from 1917 to about 1923, and the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s. In countries like Aotearoa, the limited and somewhat anaemic events of 1968 paled in comparison with corresponding events in France, the US, and Senegal. To pessimists like Bruce Jesson (who attempted to combine critical Marxism with Left nationalism) it was a stark illustration that most working class people in Aotearoa were fundamentally conservative, and that adopting ‘foreign theories’ unsuited for local conditions was foolhardy.⁶³

Certainly, this perspective gels with the cold reality that Aotearoa lacks an ongoing popular radical tradition, apart from perhaps the radical wing of Māori resistance to colonisation. Yet that does not mean radical change is *forever* impossible, and hence all that is possible and ‘realistic’ are proposals for more humane versions of capitalism. Or, to put it into today’s context, all that is possible is the current Labour-led Government’s minor softening of neoliberalism. In contrast, a slogan used in France during 1968 emphasised the importance of utopian impossibilism: ‘be realistic, demand the impossible!’ Indeed, a common criticism of such pessimistic theories—including some strains of post-structuralism which assert that ‘grand revolutionary projects’, especially of a Marxist kind, are impossible if not dangerous—is that they represent an idealistic retreat by middle-class intellectuals away from social struggle and towards the philosophical study of ideas and texts after the failure of attempts at social transformation. In that regard, Georg Lukács criticised his former Frankfurt Marxist colleagues for preferring to remain in a ‘grand hotel abyss’, a beautiful hotel where one could contemplate the void in first-class comfort.⁶⁴ And Julie Stephens has argued that some strands of postmodernism are commonly seen as a

63 For a discussion of Jesson’s views, see Boraman, ‘A Middle-Class Diversion,’ 204; ‘The Independent Left Press,’ 51–52.

64 Cited in Russell Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 115. Many Marxists criticised the Frankfurt school because they believed that school had abandoned class struggle for a focus on culture, psychoanalysis, and subjectivity.

‘break’ with ‘emancipatory possibilities’ and so function as a ‘justification for political disengagement’.⁶⁵

These pessimistic interpretations are nonetheless useful for soberly questioning and probing common leftist orthodoxies. They are especially useful for rejecting leftist views that revolution is a messianic, apocalyptic act rather than an ongoing process, and that in times of an upsurge in dissent that revolution is ‘just around the corner’ due to bloated assessments of the level of struggle. Indeed, it needs to be emphasised that 1968 and its aftermath was very much a contradictory period of protest *and* conservatism, of action *and* reaction.

In recognising these contradictions, we can avoid ‘flat’, one-dimensional understandings of 1968. For instance, the Trotskyist Socialist Action League (SAL) claimed in 1973 that ‘the radicalisation that this country is experiencing is more and more taking on the character of the biggest and broadest challenge to the capitalist status-quo in New Zealand’s history’.⁶⁶ While the SAL was correct in highlighting the breadth of the revolt, it was misguided in claiming that it represented the largest challenge to capitalism in Aotearoa’s history. The years of the revolutionary syndicalist trade union-based revolt between 1908 and 1913 and especially the massive Māori resistance to the British invasion and colonisation of Aotearoa in the 19th century and beyond posed far deeper challenges to capitalism. Owen Gager, from a different Trotskyist angle to the SAL, offered a soberer, if not cynical, view on post-1968 radicalism in 1972:

Proclamations of a ‘New Left’ simply prove that student radicalism is based on the illusions of youth that history is irrelevant. Those who

65 Julie Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9. However, given the nebulous, diverse, and fuzzy nature of post-structuralism, not all post-structuralists would agree. For example, Stephens herself, in her post-structuralist interpretation of 1960s radicalism, argues that the 1960s offered not the end of emancipatory possibilities, but instead a transformative ‘anti-disciplinary politics’ that sought to transcend the boundaries between politics and art, politics and culture, and politics and everyday life. Stephens, *Anti-Disciplinary Protest*, vii.

66 Socialist Action League, *The New Wave of Protest* (Wellington: Socialist Action League, 1973), 9.

ignore history are doomed to repeat it. . . . The nineteen-thirties Auckland unemployed confrontations with the police remain unrivalled by recent PYM [Progressive Youth Movement] confrontations. New Zealand's most radical sit-in happened at Parihaka in the nineteenth century, not in the American consulate at Auckland in 1969. More people were arrested in the 1914–18 anti-war movement than in the last four years anti-war activity.⁶⁷

Similarly, the 1968 strikes against the nil wage order were far smaller than the much larger strike years of 1974, 1976, 1979, and 1986. In 1968 and its aftermath, conservative and other right-wing ideas and practices held sway over large swathes of the population. Shadbolt, for example, recalls that in 1968 he was assaulted three times for distributing leaflets, and that members of the public harassed protest marchers down Queen Street in Auckland on several occasions (marches which drew a maximum of just 35 people, a far cry from the liberation of Albert Park in 1969).⁶⁸

In reaction to protest after 1968, conservatism increased in popularity in certain quarters of society, as exemplified in the grass-roots support for National Party Prime Minister Robert Muldoon and his authoritarian right-wing populism between 1975 and 1984. In the Muldoon years, increasingly sharp polarisation occurred between the Left and Right, and authoritarian conservatives and left-liberals. For example, conservatives began to organise large counter-demonstrations of their own by the early 1980s, as illustrated by the 'Kiwis care' anti-strike march in Auckland of about 20,000 to 30,000 people in 1981.⁶⁹ Beyond that response, many

67 Owen Gager, 'Radical Synthesis,' *Salient*, May 4, 1972, 7.

68 Shadbolt, *Bullshit & Jellybeans*, 102. However, Roberto Rabel has noted one anti-Vietnam War march in Auckland in 1968 drew 1,000 people. See Roberto Rabel, *New Zealand and the Vietnam War: Politics and Diplomacy* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005), 256.

69 The Kiwis care march was a reaction to a city-based 'general strike' in Auckland in 1981 following the arrest of picketers at Mangere airport. Numbers attending the Kiwis care march are disputed. Estimates in the press ranged between 10,000 and 50,000 attendees, but numbers between 20,000 and 30,000 were the most commonly estimated. *Auckland Star*, March 3, 1981; *New Zealand Herald*, March 4, 1981; *Dominion*, March 4, 1981; and *Evening Post*, March 3, 1981. On the other hand, it has been claimed that at least two other Auckland demonstrations of the early 1980s were larger than the Kiwis care march: the Auckland mobilisation against the

people remained apparently politically uninterested or apathetic. Even in France during 1968, Mouvement Communiste argued that the general strike ‘without an end’ was an inactive rather than an ‘active strike’:

the workers did not work but stayed at home. The factories were occupied, but by a handful of workers, most of the time trade union militants. . . . It was the biggest general strike (at its height, 9 million strikers for ten days) in history and also that in which the workers participated the least. This is the paradox of May–June 1968.⁷⁰

In this respect, one author has dismissed 1968 in France as an ‘imaginary revolution’.⁷¹ While this questioning does capture the paradoxical nature of 1968, it can emphasise the lack of autonomy and participation at the expense of the autonomy and participation—and anti-systemic practice—that actually did occur.⁷²

Conclusions

1968 was a year of social, cultural, and economic upheaval that has shaped the present in many ways. While events in Aotearoa were placid in comparison with Czechoslovakia or Pakistan, France or Senegal, they led to a blossoming of many large and influential movements which have had major impacts on society to this day. 1968 should not be dismissed as the main seed for neoliberalism in the 1980s. While it had a major liberal,

Springbok tour in 1981 and the Federation of Labour and Combined State Unions protest against the wage freeze in 1982. *Socialist Action*, November 5, 1982; and *Auckland Star*, October 28, 1982.

70 Mouvement Communiste, *May–June 1968: A Situation Lacking in Workers’ Autonomy* (Mouvement Communiste, 2006), 38. See also the comments about the confusion and lack of autonomy in the uprising by veteran Marxist and councilist Henri Simon in Mitchell Abidor, *May Made Me: An Oral History of the 1968 Uprising in France* (London: Pluto Press, 2018). The Indian general strike of 2016, which involved between 150 to 180 million people, has since been called the largest general strike in history.

71 Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution*.

72 As Horn argues in his *The Spirit of ’68*.

individualist streak that was co-opted and harnessed by neoliberalism later, 1968 also possessed strong collective, socialist, and working class tendencies. 1968 was ambiguous, variegated, and inchoate—it was both liberal and socialist, playful and serious, anti-authoritarian and authoritarian, individualist and collective, internationalist and localist. Neoliberalism seems more of a reaction to the broad-based revolt from below of 1968 and its aftermath than a direct product of 1968 itself.

The broad-based nature of protest was one of the most important trends of the long 1968. At its best it aimed for a combined cultural, sexual, economic, gender, anti-racist, environmental, de-colonial, and class-based transformation. Protest on one issue led to protest on another. Many radicals, such as Anna Lee of the Auckland Progressive Youth Movement (PYM), became radicalised through questioning the Vietnam War and the New Zealand State's participation in it. But this opposition led her to question the nature of capitalism and imperialism more generally.⁷³ Similarly, many feminists and queer people found the protest movement male and hetero-centric; many women's and gay liberation groups formed in the early 1970s partially in response.⁷⁴ Environmentalists started to raise environmental concerns, especially after the Save Manapouri campaign, the unemployed began to organise, students protested, prisoners rebelled and occasionally rioted, and workers (low and higher paid, white and blue collar) took action. In other words, a dawning awareness emerged of how social change needed to be multi-dimensional and interlocking, a sentiment captured by the Polynesian Panther Party in 1975:

73 Anna Lee quoted in Paul Jackman, 'The Auckland Opposition to New Zealand's Involvement in the Vietnam War 1965–72: An Example of the Achievements and Limitations of Ideology,' (M.A., University of Auckland, 1979), 76. The Auckland PYM (1965–1977) was one of the most important radical protest groups of the New Left in Aotearoa. Many other PYMs formed around the country in the late 1960s and 1970s, yet they did not always share the Auckland PYM's Maoist bent. A history of the PYM as a whole has not been written, but see Toby Boraman, *Rabble Rousers and Merry Pranksters: A History of Anarchism in Aotearoa/New Zealand from the Mid-1950s to the Early 1980s* (Christchurch: Katipo Books, 2008), 36–49. For the Auckland PYM, see Jackman, 'The Auckland Opposition.'

74 Although, of course, it was also a response to the oppression and discrimination that women and queer people faced in society generally.

The revolution we openly rap about is one of total change. The revolution is one to liberate us from racism, oppression and capitalism. We see that many of our problems of oppression and racism are tools of this society's outlook based on capitalism; hence for total change one must change society altogether.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, I am not suggesting there was a monolithic unity between the different strands of post-1968 dissent. No 'movement of movements' then existed. Indeed, massive tensions and bitter conflicts erupted between and within many movements (such as between moderates and radicals, and the virulent debate over which form of oppression or exploitation was the most important, strategic, and fundamental).

One of the biggest lessons that I have taken from 1968 and its aftermath was how many of its protagonists saw the everyday and the larger picture as being interconnected. They did not fetishise the local at the expense of the global (as with some understandings of post-structuralism) nor the global at the expense of the local (as with some structuralist Marxists). In 1968 many thought that broader rebellions could spring from the smallest unbearable aspects of everyday life. As an Italian student, Agnese Gatti, said in a classic oral history of 1968: 'acting on your immediate problems made you understand better the bigger issues. If it hadn't been for that, perhaps the latter would have remained alien, you'd have said "OK, but what can I do?"'⁷⁶ Hence, slogans like 'Vietnam is in our factories' during the Italian *contestazione*—the period of intense left-wing anti-establishment rebellion in Italy from the late-1960s to about the late-1970s—epitomised this attitude of bringing global issues like war home. For all its ambiguity, then, 1968 gave hope that 'a different world is possible' by people collectively acting to liberate themselves in mutual solidarity with others, rather than relying on others (such as politicians) to liberate them on their behalf. While 1968 was very much a product of its time, something that cannot be repeated and should not be romanticised, it continues to provide proof that wide-ranging social change is possible through collective self-emancipation and self-organisation.

75 Polynesian Panther Party, 'What we Want,' *New Zealand Politics: A Reader*, ed., Stephen Levine (Melbourne: Chesire, 1975), 226.

76 Quoted in Ronald Fraser et al, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988), 12, original emphasis.