

50 years ago, New Zealanders were divided over their moral beliefs on a war that only 3000 NZ soldiers fought in. The Vietnam-War protests occurred between 1967 and 1971, dividing the nation and causing civil unrest.

The Vietnam War protests were a direct reaction to the controversy over the Vietnam War. Specifically, whether the actions taken by the Republican side (South Vietnam, The United States, New Zealand etc.) were ethically and morally right. The weapons and military tactics used by Republican battalions commonly affected innocent Vietnamese civilians; over two million lost their lives (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Across the world people were angered by the effects of chemical weapons, for example the infamous 'agent orange,' on innocent Vietnamese. Extensive television coverage led protestors to question and make moral arguments against New Zealand's involvement in the war, specifically that South Vietnam was a corrupt dictatorship and defending it was immoral. Furthermore, New Zealanders believed that New Zealand should follow an independent foreign policy rather than a policy tied to a superpower such as the U.S. Subsequently, the extensive U.S bombing campaigns were a focal point for protestors. Prime Minister Holyoake stated, 'I am pleased that such a strong stand was taken and expressed in the communique on the Vietnam War issue.' (*National Library of NZ*). This approach was not agreed with by most New Zealand citizens. New Zealanders felt that they would rather have their own foreign policies than be tied to a superpower such as the U.S. This shows how New Zealanders at the time were ready to become an autonomous nation, creating an opening for many more NZ protests to follow in the next decade.

New Zealanders took many different actions to protest how they felt about the Vietnam War. These actions took the form of protests, rallies, marches and objects being thrown. Most rallies occurred between 1967 and 1971. Eggs, paint and flower bombs were thrown during demonstrations. During a 1969 election meeting, firecrackers were thrown and thirty people were arrested. Violence was also displayed by anti-war protestors during US Vice President Spiro Agnew's 1970 visit to Auckland (*Vietnam War NZ*). By 1971 there were up to 35,000 protesters throughout the country, whose main way of protesting were rallies through the streets. This shows how although protestors favored peaceful demonstrations like rallies, there were still some violent outbursts exemplified by the objects thrown. A civic parade led by the Band of the Royal New Zealand Artillery was disrupted when demonstrators threw red paint to symbolize the bloodshed in Vietnam. (*New Zealand History*) Other protests include two members of the left-wing progressive youth unit being convicted of laying a protest wreath on ANZAC Day in Christchurch in 1967. There were also 21 arrests during an Auckland protest against the visit of South Vietnam's premier, Air-Vice Marshal King. (*Vietnam War NZ*) When the veterans returned home from the war, they were met with protestors labelling them as 'murderers.' The homecoming parade in Auckland on May 12th saw a violent clash between veterans and protestors. Vietnam War veteran, Bill Godfrey, stated '(Protesters] were smearing themselves in ox blood and had signs saying 'murderers' and 'child killers', and our people had to endure that.' The actions of protestors show how deeply they felt about the Vietnam War, as they went to excessive lengths in front of veterans who had recently returned home. This conveys the mass anger they felt over the war and the impact that a foreign war had on New Zealanders. The intensity of these

protests can also be understood within the wider context of the emerging counter-culture of the late 1960s. Around the world, and although later to the party, also in New Zealand, young people were more frequently willing and ready to challenge traditional authority, social conservatism, and loyalties to nations who wielded power on vulnerable populations. Global movements increasingly focused on peace, civil rights (in particular the Black Civil rights movement in America) and freedom, and this saw many New Zealanders publicly question government decisions and take part in protest action.

As a result of the protests and negative public sentiment around the war, the national government chose not to acknowledge the soldiers when they returned home to New Zealand. As a result of this, many soldiers suffered from depression, embarrassment and anger (*National Library of Medicine*). According to research by Veteran Affairs NZ, 'Overseas and New Zealand studies suggest Vietnam veterans are more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than civilians. Veterans with high exposure to combat are at higher risk of PTSD.' This shows how even after they have returned home, Vietnam War veterans faced many hardships. The protests in New Zealand made it harder for veterans to reach out and ask for help, many soldiers may have felt shame for fighting in the war. This is supported by Veteran Barry Dreyer, as he states that he was 'Often looked down upon by family and friends for fighting in the war.' Agent Orange affected many New Zealand soldiers, and when they had children, many babies were stillborn or with birth defects (*Veteran Affairs*). In 2005 Massey University conducted a study that showed that Agent Orange affected both the children and grandchildren of veterans. The NZ Herald states that 'Successive governments have said there was no proof the veterans had been exposed, let alone hurt.' This shows how the Vietnam War was so controversial that the government had ignored the suffering of veterans and did very little to remedy this until 2006 with the Memorandum of Understanding for NZ Vietnam Veterans. There are no direct consequences of the Vietnam War Protests as their main point was to refrain from sending NZ soldiers to war, and for the war to be stopped. These are all short-term consequences, and these protests actually had no effect on the war, or the soldiers sent. Therefore, the only consequences that are evident are the way that Vietnam War victims were treated.

Although there was little political or social change as a result of the Vietnam War Protests, the events remain significant to New Zealand. The Vietnam War Protests are remarkable as they can be remembered as a time where New Zealand was split in half and saw its largest set of protests yet. Historian Roberto Rabel stated that '-Vietnam has steadily receded from public consciousness' (*Anti-Vietnam War Protests NZ*). This contrasts with what another historian Ian McGibbon stated in 2010, 'Forty years on, the Vietnam War still conjures up negative images, of controversy, debate and regret' (*Anti-Vietnam War Protests NZ*). I think that although the Vietnam War Protests are not remembered or talked about by New Zealanders as much today, the protests are still resonant as they show just how easily it is for our nation to split in half over a war or ideology. It resonates with us today as a warning that New Zealanders are not afraid to take direct action for something they believe in. This is relevant at a time where currently two wars are being fought in Palestine and Ukraine. We have already seen Pro-Palestine protests up in Auckland over the past couple of months, and we can expect to see many more. This is relevant to the Vietnam War Protests, as both wars are being fought overseas with almost no involvement from Kiwi soldiers, yet New

Zealanders still protest against the wars on a moral basis. This shows how passionate New Zealanders are to defend ideologies on a moral or ethical basis. Additionally, the protests remain significant as they have led to a shift in public opinion over whether New Zealand should follow an independent path in foreign policy or remain tied to the views of a superpower such as the USA. New Zealanders' protests meant that they thought of themselves as a peaceful nation, leading to more foreign policies unique to New Zealand, such as the 1982 Nuclear-Protests. The Vietnam War protests were a key pivotal point in New Zealand protest and should be remembered.

A reference list was included but has been removed for brevity.