



# Hikoi of Hope



# March against poverty

## Church leaders call for urgent action

By Katherine Snell

Anglican Church leaders, including a former governor-general, led a march against poverty from Northland to Wellington yesterday and called for urgent government action on poor housing, health and education.

It was believed to be the first time the church had entered the arena of such public protest as a 150-strong hikoī left Cape Reinga for Wellington to raise awareness about poverty in New Zealand.

The marchers and prominent church leaders, including the Bishop of Aotearoa, the Rt Rev Te Whakahuī Vercoe and the Rt Rev Sir Paul Reeves, a former Governor-General, left the cape after an 8am prayer service by Maori, Pakeha and Pacific Island church leaders. The marchers are due in Whangarei on September 5 and are expected to reach Parliament on October 1.

The "Hikoī of Hope" is calling for change in five main areas — the need for real jobs, the need for a public health system New Zealanders could trust, affordable housing, income and benefit levels that moved people out of poverty, and affordable and acceptable education.

Said Sir Paul: "Jesus did most of his work by walking and talking as he went. We'll do a bit of that." Mr Vercoe said church leaders had embarked on a journey which he believe was called by God for "us to take part in".

"We are here to show how fragmented we have become and how we have supported people from those who have, to those who have not," he

in and that something needed to be done about it.

The Archdeacon of Waimate, the Ven Tony Ross, said God had called the group together "to say enough is enough".

He said the hikoī was particularly relevant for those in the North as it was aimed at looking at real jobs, affordable housing, a health and education system which people could have confidence in and assistance with poverty.

One marcher, David Williams, said this was the second hikoī he had marched in. His first was in 1984 from Ngaruawahia to Waitangi in honour of the Treaty of Waitangi.

A Treaty of Waitangi researcher at Auckland University who has also been involved in the anti-racism movement, Mr Williams said he had decided to join the Hikoī of Hope after seeing a lot of economic changes since 1984 which he claimed had left many people marginalised.

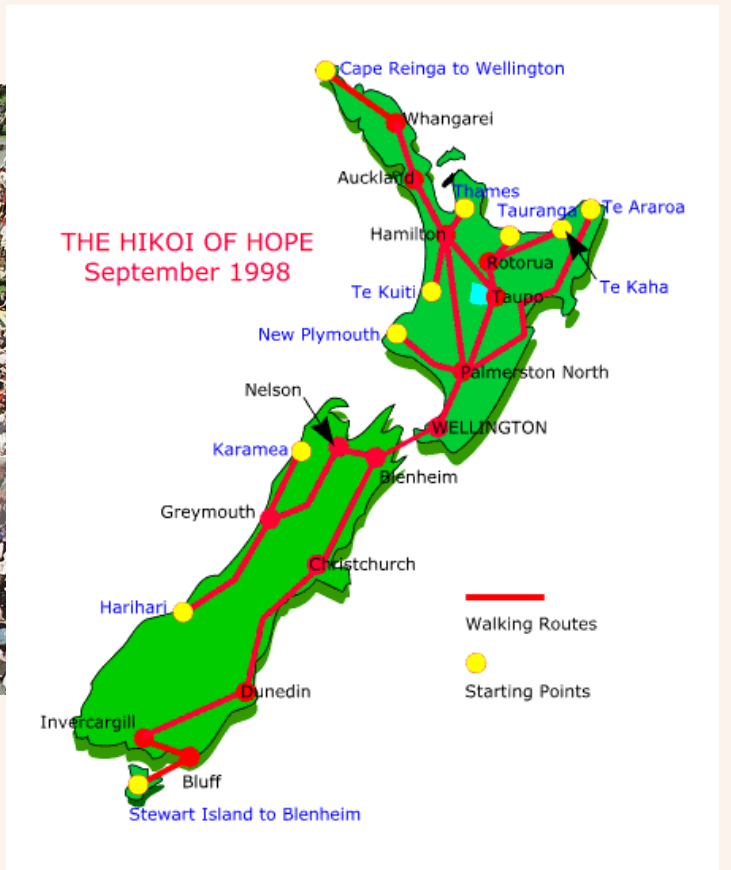
"This is a wake-up call for our nation," he said.

Meanwhile, politicians have been quick to condemn the hikoī, describing it as "misguided".

Whangarei MP John Banks said that while he supported the principle of what the organisers of the march were doing, he did not think the church, of which he was a member, should be involved in "political activism".

He said the organisers of the march should be putting their energies into getting people back into the church and encouraging young people to attend Sunday school.

ACT list MP Muriel Newman said she would not apologise for calling the Hikoī a demand for higher taxation.





*vivian Hutchinson with Sir Paul Reeves outside St Mary's Cathedral in New Plymouth, at the start of the Taranaki leg of the Hikoi of Hope, September 1998.*

1998 was a time when many elements of New Zealand's social and community services were starting to find themselves at breaking point. The neo-liberal revolution after 1984 had taken over the policies of both our main political parties. The consequence was that the incomes for the richest New Zealanders doubled, while the incomes of the poorest barely rose at all.

Policy changes meant that welfare benefits to the poorest New Zealanders were cut in 1991, Housing New Zealand tenants were forced onto market-based rentals, and a new Employment Contracts Act led to an increasing casualisation of the national workforce. In this precarious climate, more and more New Zealanders found themselves struggling to make ends meet.

The Anglican Church decided to focus their concerns about this by staging the *Hikoi of Hope* in the Spring of 1998. It was a call for a national conversation on the basic issues now polarising our communities: how to address poverty, create real jobs, build affordable housing, organise a health system we can trust, and guarantee access to education.

The month-long *Hikoi* had teams marching on Parliament from Cape Reinga at the top of the country and from Stewart Island in the South. It is estimated that over 80,000 people joined the protest at sometime during the month. Each evening when the *Hikoi* stopped, public meetings were held so that local people could share their stories on the social and economic concerns of their own communities.

At Parliament Grounds, over 10,000 people gathered for the final day of the *Hikoi*, making it one of the largest gatherings ever held at Parliament. The marchers were greeted with a karanga from Aunty Marj who welcomed the protestors onto what she considered to be the marae of Parliament Grounds.

It was both surprising and troubling to see Sir Paul Reeves, our former Governor-General, standing on the back of a truck as he invited the crowd to join him in chanting, "Enough is Enough!"

— *vivian Hutchinson*



*Matarena Raumati Rau Kupa with Bishop George Connor at the welcome to the 1998 Hikoī of Hope to Parliament Grounds , 1st October 1998. (photo vivian Hutchinson)*

*(below left) Hikoī marchers being greeted by Sir Paul Reeves outside the Beehive building.*

*(right) Aunty Marj welcoming marchers onto Parliament Grounds. (photos TVNZ)*

