

New Zealand in Samoa

MCH, 2014i

Page 5 – The rise of the Mau movement

'Samoa mo Samoa'

Samoa has a history of opposition to European rule. Formal resistance had occurred on two occasions during the German colonial era, and several petitions had already challenged New Zealand's administration. But the opposition that emerged in the late 1920s was organised and widespread.

This new opposition had its origins in two public meetings held in Apia in October and November 1926. These provided a forum for local Europeans and Samoans to document their collective grievances and prepare formal submissions to the New Zealand government.

Richardson blocked a Citizens' Committee plan to meet New Zealand's Minister of External Affairs. He believed that Samoans were being stirred up by a handful of local European agitators.

I do not approve of a political meeting which mixes Native politics with European politics, as its tendency must be to disturb the peace, order, and good government of the Natives.

Richardson, in a letter read out in English and Samoan at the meeting held at Apia on 12 November 1926
(from *AJHR*, 1928)

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Timeline 1

In March 1927, the Citizens' Committee confirmed the principles of an organisation called the League of Samoa. It became known as *O le Mau a Samoa* - 'the firm opinion of Samoa' - the Mau. Its slogan, *Samoa Mo Samoa* - 'Samoa for Samoans' - envisaged a Samoa without New Zealand.

Support for the Mau grew rapidly. The *Samoa Guardian*, established with assistance from Olaf Nelson in May, promoted the cause in direct opposition to the pro-government newspaper, *The Samoa Times*.

The Mau were soon represented in all but two of Samoa's districts. The central committee established its headquarters at Vaimoso under the leadership of Tupua Tamasese Leolofi III. While the administration estimated that about two-thirds of Samoa's population supported the Mau, the Mau themselves put the figure at closer to 90%.

Such-anticipated visit by New Zealand's Minister of External Affairs in June 1927
led matters. It prompted Richardson to issue a proclamation ordering the Mau to

and promising to deport non-Samoans who continued to interfere in 'native affairs'. With Europeans now less willing to play a public role in the Mau, Samoans assumed greater control of the movement.

The Mau began a systematic campaign of passive resistance to the administration. District councils, village committees and women's welfare committees stopped meeting. Villages ignored visiting officials and children were withdrawn from government schools, some of which were forced to close. Coconuts were left to rot rather than be made into copra, and banana plantations were neglected. Births and deaths went unregistered. Instead of paying taxes, Samoans raised money for the Mau.

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