

State-owned enterprises born

The State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986 – the key provisions of which took effect on 1 April 1987 – heralded a major overhaul of New Zealand's state sector. A number of government departments became commercially oriented organisations with a stronger emphasis on efficiency and profitability. A prime target of these reforms was the Post Office Department, which was replaced by three SOEs - New Zealand Post, Telecom and Postbank. Telecom and Postbank were eventually sold into private hands. Many communities, especially small rural settlements, bore the brunt of rationalisation in areas such as the postal service. Hundreds of post offices were closed in a drive for efficiency.

Māori becomes official language

Concern for the future of the Māori language led to a Te Reo Māori claim to the Waitangi Tribunal in 1985. This asserted that te reo was a taonga (treasure) that the Crown (government) was obliged to protect under the Treaty of Waitangi. The Waitangi Tribunal found in favour of the claimants and recommended a number of legislative and policy remedies. The Maori Language Act which came into force on 1 August 1987 made te reo Māori an official language of New Zealand. Te Komihana Mo Te Reo Māori – the Māori Language Commission – was established to promote the use of Māori as a living language and an everyday means of communication.

Black Tuesday

The 1987 Hollywood blockbuster *Wall Street* is the archetypal portrayal of the financial wheeling and dealing – not to mention excess – of the 1980s. New Zealand may not have had anyone quite as ruthless as 'corporate raider' Gordon Gekko, but many New Zealanders thrived in these deregulated times. In 1987 the *National Business Review* published its first New Zealand 'rich list'. Everything changed in October when New York's Wall Street stockmarket dropped sharply. The effects were immediately felt around the world. Billions were wiped off the value of New Zealand shares within weeks. Many investors lost everything as companies that had over-extended themselves were dragged under and went bust. Small 'mum and dad' investors were also burned by the experience.

'An unfortunate experiment'

Updated 3rd edition reference

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In June *Metro* magazine published an article by Sandra Coney and Phillida Bunkle entitled 'An unfortunate experiment'. This raised serious questions about the treatment of cervical cancer patients at Auckland's National Women's Hospital. Dr Herbert Green had been convinced that abnormal cells in the cervix often did not develop into invasive cancer. For the best part of 20 years he had monitored women without treating them – or informing them of this experimental approach. A number developed cervical cancer, and some died. Two of his colleagues worried about Green's approach had failed to convince the medical establishment of its dangers. The outrage which followed the *Metro* article led to the establishment of a Committee of Inquiry headed by District Court Judge Silvia Cartwright. Her final report in 1988 condemned the experiment and proposed radical new measures to ensure patients' rights.

Other 1987 events

- On 19 January Dennis Conner's *Stars and Stripes* ended New Zealand's dream debut at the America's Cup regatta with a decisive 4-1 victory over New Zealand's 'plastic-fantastic' *KZ-7* in the challenger final.
- The 6.3-magnitude Edgecumbe earthquake caused damage in Edgecumbe, Whakatāne and Kawerau. There were no fatalities but the damage was the most significant since the 1931 Napier earthquake.
- Lotto tickets went on sale for first time with a first division prize of \$360,000.
- On 8 June, The New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament, and Arms Control Act passed into law, establishing this country as a nuclear and biological weapon-free zone.
- New Zealander Lorraine Cohen was sentenced to death in Malaysia for heroin trafficking. On appeal her sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. The trial of Cohen and her son Aaron, who had been arrested at the same time, gained worldwide attention. Both were pardoned and released in 1996.
- The attempted hijacking of an Air New Zealand Boeing 747 at Nadi airport, Fiji, in the aftermath of a military coup was thwarted when a member of the cabin crew struck the hijacker on the head with a whisky bottle.
- The All Blacks won the inaugural rugby World Cup, defeating France 29-9 in the final at Eden Park, Auckland.
- 'Friend of China' Rewi Alley died in Beijing. Alley had left New Zealand in December 1926 'to go and have a look at the Chinese revolution'. He stayed for 60 years, becoming one of China's best-known and best-loved foreigners, and an advocate for the People's Republic.
- 27 May saw the death of artist Colin McCahon.
- Eight days after her disappearance on 19 June, the body of six-year-old Teresa Cormack was found on Whirinaki Beach, north of Napier. Advances in genetic fingerprinting led to the conviction of Jules Mikus for her murder in 2002.

The government sold SOE New Zealand Steel to Equiticorp for \$327 million on 19 October – the day Wall Street crashed.

- In August, the New Zealand netball team won their third world title in Glasgow.
- In September the Waitangi Tribunal ruled in favour of Muriwhenua in a fisheries claim that marine areas could be owned in a similar way to land. This ruling opened the way for successful Māori challenges to the allocation of fishing quota.
- Labour defeated National by 17 seats and 4% of the popular vote in the August general election.
- The 1987 'science fiction splatter comedy horror' *Bad taste* was Peter Jackson's first foray into feature film-making. With a limited budget, Jackson produced, photographed, wrote, directed and co-starred. The film's special effects were a taste of things to come.
- Dave Dobbyn continued his domination of the local music scene, winning Best Male Vocalist and Single of the Year for 'You oughta be in love' from the *Footrot Flats* soundtrack at the annual Music Awards. His collaborators, Herbs won Best Album with *Sensitive to a smile*. Shona Laing's hit, 'Glad I'm not a Kennedy' helped her become Best Female Vocalist, and their mastery of the 'Dunedin sound' earned The Chills the title of Group of the Year.

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