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The rubber match in any All Blacks Test series is invariably a tense affair for those involved. In a country that draws such a large degree of their self-worth from rugby the collective experience of the players, the coaches, and the fans becomes immensely anxiety-ridden. On the 12th of September, 1981, the All Blacks were victorious over the South African Springboks 25-22 in what would be described by All Blacks manager Peter Burke as 'a magnificent game' thanks to a last-minute penalty by Alan Hewson. Under different circumstances, it would go down as one of the All Blacks great victories, a triumph over one of its most fierce rivals. But ask any fan, any New Zealander, about that fateful day at Eden Park, and their most abiding memory won't be of Alan Hewson's penalty kick. They'll speak of a low-flying Cessna airplane dropping flares and flour bombs on the pitch, of widespread riots and protests just outside the gates of the stadium.

The Springbok Tour of 1981 was a harrowing time in New Zealand history. It divided the country and brought to the surface underlying tensions that had remained dormant in both New Zealand culture and politics. The manner in which the country perceived issues of racial injustice was forever changed by the 1981 Springbok Tour and the ways that the National and Labour Party's responded would draw the battle lines of New Zealand politics for decades to come. The tour and the counter-movement that it inspired engendered a far more divisive and combative era in New Zealand politics, highlighting the disparity between two parties that had previously been unwilling to define their stance on social issues.

It's important to first note that the activists were not uniform in their grievances and intentions in coming out to protest. The protestors can be split into three distinctive groups. There were the city dwelling, educated middle class baby boomers that were severing themselves ideologically from previous generations. Women also came out in numbers seeking to use the protests as an opportunity highlight existing gender disparities in New Zealand that had been accentuated by rugby. Finally, Maori activists challenged other protestors to acknowledge the hypocrisy of their being opposed to the tour on grounds of racism while simultaneously disregarding the racist treatment that their own native people were being subjugated to.

Unfortunately, protest and activism mean little if the political actors are incapable of seizing the moment and initiating real change in response. This was the story of the 1981 election that followed soon after the Springbok tour. The incumbent center-right National Party stood firmly in favor of the tour, with its leader Robert Muldoon keenly aware of the importance of retaining support in the more conservative, rural areas of the country. The onus was on leader of the opposition Labour Party, Bill Rowling, to manifest the energy of the protests into votes in the November election. Rowling was ill equipped to do so, as a self-effacing man with an admittedly low-key political style, Rowling lacked the charisma to turn the activism into an electoral victory.

Between 1981 and the next New Zealand election in 1984, the Labour Party recognized that changes were necessary. In the wake of the 1981 protests, social issues had risen to a level of prominence that they could no longer be ignored. The Labour Party needed a leader who had the requisite wit and charisma to capture the

hearts of New Zealand's people; elections would no longer simply be a referendum on the economy. David Lange, a skilled orator and lawyer by profession was the man for the job. Lange would propose a bevy of policies that appeased those who voiced frustration in 1981 and successfully rode his charisma to a landslide victory in the 1984 election, one widely thought of as the most significant in New Zealand history.

The Labour Party would embark on a two-term, six-year stint in power following their victory. It was a time period that was marked by progressive social reforms and a strong anti-nuclear policy that remains integral to New Zealand's national and cultural identity. David Lange, who never claimed to be an expert on or even care much for economic policy, allowed his ministers to introduce one of the most radical neo-liberal, free-market experiments in the developed world. It was arguably the most transformative period in New Zealand's short history.