

Why Brian Tamaki-led protest didn't turn into Parliament Occupation 2.0

The capital was on tenterhooks as protesters again strode the streets from Civic Square to Parliament, prepared for a repeat of the February-March occupation.

Instead, [just before 2pm on Tuesday, the Brian Tamaki-led protest dispersed](#) without major incident. But experts warn that even though it is over, it is not over.

Disinformation Project researcher Sanjana Hattotuwa said it would be a mistake to think of the event as a failed Parliament Occupation 2.0, when in reality it was "Tamaki 1.0".

Far from fizzling out, the Freedom & Rights Coalition protest ended with a "pregnant pause".

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The obvious place to channel the leftover energy would be [Tamaki's new three-party political alliance, Freedoms NZ,](#)

Hattotuwa said.

Leaving the protest open-ended was “far more useful for a budding politician” than inciting violence or bedding in for the long haul.

The city was determined not to be caught off-guard by the convoy.

Police put in [bollards and road blocks](#), security in Parliament's grounds was reinforced, buses were diverted and staff around the former occupation area were advised to work from home. [Additional police staff](#) were called in to assist.

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At the Freedom and Rights protest in Wellington on Tuesday, a crowd of more than 1000 makes its way down Lambton Quay.

Initially police estimated fewer than 1000 people but, on Tuesday evening, Wellington district commander Superintendent Corrie Parnell estimated about 1500 people congregated around Parliament grounds.

All signs pointed to a demonstration with a very different vibe.

The so-called convoy was [more of a rag-tag handful of cars](#) making their way from the regional centres.

Tamaki, who is also Destiny Church leader, arrived in the

capital a couple of days ahead of his flock, kicking back at central city eateries.

Police estimate about 1500 people congregated on the Parliament grounds.

Juan Zarama Perini/Stuff

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On Tuesday morning, anti-government protesters slowly made their way to Te Ngākau Civic Square.

By the time the event kicked off at 10am, the crowd was about 500. By the time the group left the square to march on Parliament, estimates suggest that number had trebled.

They arrived at Parliament about noon, dodging a few eggs thrown from above by residents along Lambton Quay.

Tamaki's group was met by counter-protesters, blasting gay anthems like YMCA. But the clashes remained verbal. In the end, there were no incidents, arrests or trespass orders.

Hattotuwa had [not been worried Tamaki would incite violence](#) but he had been concerned they would not "have a handle on containing or controlling or holding at bay physical offline stochastic violence that may well occur on that day".

But in its makeup and mandate, this protest was "fundamentally different" to the earlier occupation.

Additional police staff were brought in from elsewhere in the country to assist.

KEVIN STENT/Stuff

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“Last time there was a cornucopia of organisers,” he said. This time, Tamaki stood apart from other prominent anti-mandate groups, such as Voices For Freedom (VFF).

“The broader context is – [Tamaki] is an expedient politician,” Hattotuwa said. “Expedient politics doesn't thrive on instability and violence.”

In a press release issued on August 19, VFF said it did not consider the convoy and protest “an effective strategy to reach the people we have identified need to be reached”.

Kevin Stent/Stuff

Destiny Church head Brian Tamaki, right, announces a new political party to protesters in Wellington on Tuesday.

“When these public gatherings consistently pull smaller crowds, we are concerned the freedom movement appears much smaller than it actually is,” it said.

Sir Peter Gluckman, president of the Paris-based International Science Council and director of Koi Tū: The Centre for Informed Futures at Auckland University, said both events reflected the fact that misinformation and belief in conspiracy theories emerged as a form of anger and a non-consensual approach to resolving differences.

“It is a response to rapid change, crisis, uncertainty, a shift to short term-ism in politics, a failure to engage, and I think

the loss of the ability to have civil discourse amongst people who disagree.”

The news of Tamaki’s new party was perhaps a step in the right direction.

“I think it is healthy that they are forming themselves – not that I agree with anything that they are saying – but that they are engaging in the democratic process.”

The 28-day Parliament occupation had been a different beast, “wound up” by certain people, sprinklers and music.

“What surprised people was that this was not that kind of protest.”

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