new forms of political organisation

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New Forms of Political Organisation

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WHAT IS POLITICAL ORGANISATION?
Campbell Jones and Shannon Walsh

Each of the contributions to this volume offers contemporary analysis of new political organisations, new sites of political organisation, new ways of doing political organisation and new ways of thinking political organisation.

Our purpose here is to clarify what we mean when we speak of new forms of political organisation. We therefore provide a provisional explanation of what we mean by ‘politics’, ‘organisation’, ‘political organisation’ and ‘the new’. This is not just a matter of looking up these words in the dictionary, but is rather a political act regarding each of these terms. What counts as ‘politics’, for example, is a matter of struggle and is here itself made into a site for intervention. In what follows we provide an argument for a particular understanding of what political organisation is, what the new forms of political organisation are and why they matter.

What is politics?
Most of what is called politics today does not involve politics at all but instead refers to efforts to eliminate or contain politics. In fact, much of what happens in parliament is better described as management. Politics is reduced to management when decisions are made in such a way that there seems to be no room for disagreement, for instance when things must be done to satisfy the demands of the economy or the market. The goal of planning and policy then becomes to adapt to a set of conditions entirely outside human control. In the extreme, political parties then compete on the basis of their ability to outperform each other in their capitulation to the dictates of capital, a tendency that can be seen across the entirety of the political spectrum in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere.

This disappearance of politics from parliament has led many to characterise the current situation of parliamentary politics as ‘post-political’. Whatever truth there might be in this, it is important to
remember that politics is not just what happens in parliament. Indeed, this question of what is inside and what is outside, what counts and what does not, is fundamental to politics itself. Politics always involves the designation of certain areas as being within politics, and therefore open to contestation, and others being outside, and therefore out of human control. When something is defined as being outside of politics and therefore outside of our control, it is made to appear as if it belongs to a domain of nature. This desire to designate parts of life as being outside human control also signals a fear of those things becoming political. The distribution of what is politics, and what is not, therefore involves the creation of a domain in which certain things must be passed over in silence. This also means that a great number of people are treated as if they were unable to speak on matters that affect them.

This is why politics always involves turning things that were previously thought not to be political into objects open for contestation. This was one of the key stakes of Marx’s critique of economics. Against the claimed neutrality of business owners, landlords, economists and professional politicians, Marx exposed the one-sided way that the world appears to these groups. Moreover, he emphasised that how the world appears to these people is not simply an illusion, but rather a representation that results from only taking the world as it appears, and not treating seriously the fact that the same world is experienced differently by others. Politics arises when those others who are excluded but affected demand inclusion in the construction of a world.

This irruption of politics when there was previously thought to be none is also one of the key stakes of feminism. This can be seen in the way that feminist struggle is not restricted to one particular issue but involves a struggle over the nature of the political as such. Feminism is a claim against the containment of particular bodies to particular places and against the restriction of politics to a place imagined to belong to the ‘public sphere’. The demand that the personal is political is not a sectional demand but a refusal to separate the personal from the political. As such, feminism opened a vital new terrain of political struggle and has bequeathed us today a powerful expanded understanding of politics.

Marxism, feminism, and other great political sequences opened new sites of contestation. Such openings do not come from nowhere or drop from the heavens. Rather, the opening that is called politics requires a prying open, a forcing into the open of something that was always there. It requires actively making political that which was previously not thought as such. This is why politics is so hard. Politics always threatens to break open the situation as it is. To put it another way, there is politics to the extent that every situation is always open to the possibility of something new, even if that novelty is considered impossible within the terms of the situation. This is why politics, far from being the art of the possible, is precisely the art of the impossible.

It might sound, then, as if politics is a very grand thing. In the sense that politics signals a radical overcoming or rupture, politics would therefore be very rare. Politics is indeed exceptional. Still, in recognising that the new always irrupts from within the old, we recognise that politics is very much a possibility every day. Every situation is riddled with contradictions and inconsistencies that threaten its stability. It is always possible to identify groups who are disqualified and not included, or groups who are included only on the condition that they harmlessly assimilate themselves to the situation. What history shows is precisely the possibility of things appearing within situations in which they were considered to not exist or to not fully exist. This can be seen again and again. The abolition of slavery, universal suffrage, legal limitation of the working week, income tax, freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, sex or sexual orientation, all of these have at one moment been represented as unthinkable and impossible. We do not mention these merely to praise them as the end of the game, as if we could then do no more than congratulate ourselves that democracy has been achieved. We take these as examples of the fact that these, and numerous other demands that we are making today, were and always are possible.

What is political organisation?
The term political organisation indexes the effort to bridge the rupture of politics with the endless hard work of instituting and institutionalising this change. Radical change is indeed what we are working towards, but for us this comes with the premise that change needs not simply to be imagined or hoped for but collectively constructed step by step.
Political organisation involves giving form to politics. It signals a refusal to sit idly by waiting for change to happen spontaneously but rather to become informed and draw political demands out of analysis of the present. Giving form to politics involves coordinating these demands and strategising to produce real change. None of this happens without action and organisation.

Because it is a process of giving form, political organisation can become incredibly formal. In short, effective political organisation involves lots of meetings and seemingly endless bureaucracy. It involves inspiring and mobilising people, as well as caring for one another and eating together. It requires compiling lists, taking minutes, doing the photocopying. None of this is achieved through the internet alone. Political organisation is hard work, not just for those physically present at meetings and direct actions but equally for those others whose work makes it possible for them to be there. Political organisation involves good facilitation, understanding group dynamics and patterns of exclusion. Without this, old forms of privilege necessarily return, no matter how horizontal the political organisation claims itself to be. The formalism of a meeting can, if it is done well, actively break with traditional relations of privilege.

This great promise of formalism is part of the reason why political organisations have a tendency to drift towards the purely formal. The excessive pull toward formality is the scourge that threatens any political organisation. The problem of pure formalism, when the formalities are the only important thing, is that politics gets lost. In this very real manner, political organisations are always drawn towards the privilege of organisation at the expense of politics.

Organisation alone suggests the containment of politics in institutions, procedures, and therefore, in this sense, is antagonistic to politics as such. The fixation on the party form, for example, can easily lead to the disconnection of the party from those other forms of politics that are supposed to support, motivate and keep the party in check. This domination of organisation over political organisation happens again, for instance, in the privileging of the most organised forms of politics over less outwardly organised forms of action, movement and intervention.

What is important then, and what political organisation offers the promise but not the guarantee of, is the avoidance of the drift towards either of the two terms of which it is composed. Conjoining politics and organisation is the suture of a wound that will never heal. Political organisation is therefore in a certain sense impossible, reflecting what, in philosophical terms, could be called a dialectic, or a ‘unity of opposites’. It reflects the striving to combine the rupture of politics with the formalism of organisation. This is the constant and never ending struggle of political organisation: to avoid on the one hand the infatuation with rupture and politics as such, and on the other hand the fetishisation of organisation and procedure.

Of course, the expression ‘political organisation’ does not do the magic of producing a dialectical synthesis of politics and organisation. Neither does the practical work of political organisation mark this resolution. Any practical politics involves exactly this oscillation between politics and organisation. Political organisation strives to hold politics and organisation together, while recognising their tension. And to complicate things, in different places, different moments in time, and in the face of different situations, political organisation can take a number of forms. Political organisation is already and always happening and will take various forms specific to the situation being organised within and beyond. There are, in short, old and new forms of political organisation.

What are the new forms of political organisation?
Politics is the principled irruption of the new out of the old. Political organisation gives form to politics. The form that political organisation takes, or what might be called the mode of political organisation, is always subject to reinvention anew. From what we can see, there are at least four interconnected things that are new about political organisation today.

First, there are new political organisations, new bodies and institutions that task themselves with political organisation. Some of these are underground, covert and hardly known, working in the shadows or the undercommons. Others are out in the open, in the public sphere and therefore open to the ridicule and hatred of the
powers that be. Any list would be incomplete and its beginning would seem arbitrary. Novelty and time are complex matters. For some, the political organisation of the Confederation of the United Chiefs or of Parihaka are new. In the narrower sense of time, and referring to the sequence following Occupy (2011-2012), it is possible to name Auckland Action Against Poverty, Auckland Peace Action, Black Lives Matter, the Campaign Against Zero-Hours Contracts, the Doing Our Bit campaign to double the refugee quota, Fightback, the Matike Mai Working Group for Constitutional Transformation, Momentum, No Pride in Prisons, Plan C, Podemos, Real Choice, the Student Housing Action Group, Tāmaki Housing Group, We Are The University, the national and international Women's Strike, and many others. Even, why not, Economic and Social Research Aotearoa.

These political organisations are diverse in their character. Some are loosely structured, others tightly organised. Some are open, some closed. Some operate directly in relation to parliamentary politics while others are to varying degrees extra-parliamentary. Some are international and some come from here. Many are hated, feared and misunderstood by those in positions of arbitrary privilege. This, we argue, should be taken as one of the signs of their importance.

Second, there are new sites of political organisation. Political organisation arises in new places and mobilises around new objects, or around objects that appear in a new light in the present. The meaning of struggles around, for example, work, housing and incarceration are incredibly old, but take on a very new significance in the present conjuncture. New forms of political organisation arise from specific sites. These can be the classic sites of struggle or sites that take on new political significance in the present.

Third, alongside new political organisations and new sites of political organisation, there are new ways of doing political organisation. Political organisation today follows on from the experiments that arose in the sequence of the Indignados and Occupy. To move beyond these forms of political organisation is not to dismiss them as failures, but rather to develop forms of politics that exceed horizontalism, connectivity and direct participation. There is today no question of a retreat back to the glory days of either Occupy or the forms of political organisation that came before it.

New forms of political organisation today proceed from this point. We have learned a lot and are learning as we go forward, building new political organisations while we experiment with new ways of doing political organisation. There are challenges along the way, and our enemies will call us every name they can invent. There is in this something unpredictable and hardly understandable for the defenders of the politics of the past. Because the new forms of political organisation do not fit within the narrow parameters of what they recognise as politics, these new forms will be judged within the old frames of what is taken to be ‘politics’, or simply not be recognised as politics at all.

Fourth, these new forms of political organisation are animated by new ways of thinking about political organisation. This can be seen in a range of theoretical writings in recent years that have challenged the very nature of politics and the political, and have sought to identify an opening out of and beyond the present ‘post-political’ moment. Sometimes, at their worst, these arise from the safety of a position outside the new forms of political organisation that they presume to talk about. But at their best, new forms of thinking about political organisation coincide with the work of political organisation. Indeed, some of the best thinking about political organisation today happens outside the narrow confines of the university and, rather, presupposes that everyone has the capacity for thought, speech and politics.

Thinking the new forms of political organisation is what we are doing here and what future publications in this series will do. This involves work at the intersection of the four characteristics that we have identified here: (1) new political organisations; (2) new sites of political organisation; (3) new ways of doing political organisation; and (4) new ways of thinking political organisation. There will be different emphases, but in their focus on thinking beyond the current political situation these four characteristics are all fundamentally connected to one another.

There are two points that we must never forget about the new forms of political organisation. First, not all new forms of political organisation
are good. Some are horrifying. The point of critical reflection is to carefully scrutinise these new forms of organisation.

Second, the new is always connected with the past. If we forget this or get into laying out plans for inventing the new out of nothing then we fall prey to 'utopian socialism' or 'speculative leftism'. Our action is always connected with the past, as it is with others now and in the future. Indeed, sometimes the most radical and newest intervention is to repeat claims that have been made in the past. In Aotearoa New Zealand this might involve claiming that there will never be 'full and final settlement' and that our history renders justice impossible. Our action is always connected with the past, as it is with others now and in the future. Indeed, sometimes the most radical and newest intervention is to repeat claims that have been made in the past. In Aotearoa New Zealand this might involve claiming that there will never be 'full and final settlement' and that our history renders justice impossible. Connecting our struggles with the past and projecting these into the future is the same as saying that our politics always arises from where we stand. We can never forget our whakapapa, which in Aotearoa New Zealand is both the history of capitalism and colonisation, and at the same time the proud traditions of resisting and refusing these. Creating the new out of the old requires knowing the situation as it is and knowing how it has come about. This is not the knowledge or wisdom of individuals but rather the knowledge and wisdom that we create in dialogue with our ancestors, both those who came immediately before us and those long passed. New forms of political organisation today march with these generations behind them.

The authors who have contributed to this volume have thought through these questions as they work to build new political organisations. While we acknowledge the need for analysis and intellectual rigour, this volume seeks to go beyond academic formalism and deliver on the promise of the new forms of political organisation that give hope in the otherwise miserable situation we live in today.

NATION DESTROYING: SOVEREIGNTY AND DISPOSSESSION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Ben Rosamond

Speaking specifically about the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand, Ranginui Walker noted that 'modern nation building driven by capitalism in the era of European expansionism is a historical process driven by nation destroying'. What he meant by this was that for a capitalist economy to be established on this land, a political order first had to be destroyed so that another could be erected in its place. This destruction was at the heart of the foundation of the state of New Zealand as we know it, and its legacy continues to structure the way in which politics is organised here today.

A useful heuristic for analysing this situation is Marx's theory of 'so-called primitive accumulation', the term he uses to describe the imposition of the necessary pre-conditions for the establishment of the capitalist mode of production. This accumulation is 'primitive' because it is at the origin of capitalist production, 'so-called' because, as David Harvey points out, the process of dispossession it refers to is continuous and ongoing. The key characteristics of this process are the concentration of land and resources in the hands of a small elite, and the corresponding establishment of a class of people who become dependent on selling their wage labour to survive. The continuation of so-called primitive accumulation, which Harvey refers to as accumulation by dispossession, is necessary for the continued functioning of capitalism, which requires the emergence of new markets in order to continue the valorisation process. Capital must always grow, and so must always be in motion. Such growth cannot occur within the bounds of an already saturated market, and so more markets must be opened up through the dispossession of what was held in common and its accumulation in private hands.

This fairly orthodox account of primitive accumulation sees it as primarily an economic process. While it is, of course, a process driven by the logic of capital accumulation, its continued confinement to the
economic sphere ensures that most accounts of this dispossession fail to capture its corresponding political aspects. Simply put, primitive accumulation is not only the accumulation of land, resources and labour, but also the accumulation of the power required to enforce this dispossession.

Political philosopher Glen Coulthard connects the theory of primitive accumulation with an analysis of colonisation in his recent book *Red Skin, White Masks*. Though his work is written from a Canadian perspective, its conclusions apply equally to the colonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand. After an initial period of largely peaceful coexistence, European settlers driven by the demands of international capital appropriated Māori lands, began large-scale industrial exploitation of natural resources, and ensured through brutal force that Māori could no longer survive in the manner they had for centuries prior, forcing them instead into wage labour and capitalist production. As we previously noted, however, before these violent economic processes could be put into practice, settlers acting in the interests of capital accumulation had to dispossess Māori of their political power over the land of Aotearoa.

A unique Māori political order, with its own concepts and mechanisms of power, law and justice, had existed on this land for centuries before the arrival of European settlers. One of the first acts undertaken by these settlers, before the establishment of the capitalist mode of production, was the destruction of this Māori political system, and the laying of the foundations of another regime based on the principles of European political philosophy as found in the work of Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, and Immanuel Kant. In their quest to establish a state based on these principles, early emissaries of the British government dismissed the Māori political order, rangatiratanga, as a backwards and savage system of political relations, unsuitable for ruling over the civilised settlers. At the same time, Māori were shocked at the treatment of British settlers and soldiers by their political and military superiors, who operated on a strictly hierarchical model.

This hierarchical model of governance, based on a set of cultural and political ideas common to late medieval and early modern European states, remains dominant today in Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world. Sovereignty is taken as a given by those on all sides of the parliamentary political spectrum, yet political instability rages across a world dominated by sovereign states that continue to relate to their citizens through a politics based on violence. As such, it only makes sense to think again about the foundational principles of the global political order, examine its operating logics, and look seriously at alternatives. In order to do this, we need to be able to define what sovereignty is.

The broad definition of a ‘supreme authority within a territory’ encapsulates the key conceptual and material attributes of the sovereign order. This definition works through a double exclusion of forms of governance other than the modern nation-state. By insisting on the presence of a supreme authority that cannot be divided, early modern states, including monarchies, are included in the definition, but states in which powers are split among nobles, princes, the Church and the monarchy are not. Indigenous political orders are excluded for this same reason. The territorial nature of sovereignty excludes claims that are not geographically delimited, such as the endless spiritual powers of the Pope, or other political units whose authority is not strictly associated with a particular piece of land. Sovereignty is based on the absolute power of a single sovereign, which generally takes the form of the state, within certain borders. The merits of this concept were established in the late medieval period, in a feudal Europe swept with political instability. Before this time, such a means of conceiving of political organisation held no sway. Its ascent in a specific historical period implies that it could also recede, leaving the way for another model more in tune with the conditions of the world outside of late-medieval Europe to take its place.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the only other political arrangements that have existed up until this point are those of rangatiratanga. The power of rangatira is that which was dispossessed by British settlers in order to establish a sovereign state and the capitalist mode of production. To deal with this dispossession we can look again to the Marxist tradition, which encourages us to work towards the dispossession of the disposposers, and to return that which is now held in private to the realm of the commons, for use and access by all. This
accommodate a form of constitutional transformation based on the precedents and values identified in the report. The first four of these models are based around the existence of separate ‘spheres’ for Māori and tauiwi governance, termed respectively the ‘tino rangatiratanga’ and ‘kāwanatanga’ spheres, and a ‘relational’ sphere in which tauiwi and Māori deliberate together. The fifth model is composed entirely of the relational sphere, and the sixth of only the tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga spheres. A defining characteristic of these models is the particular composition of the relational sphere, which along with the overarching constitution itself, is based on tikanga. The presence of the relational sphere in almost every model almost ensures the position of tikanga as the tūrangawaewae for constitutional arrangements should this process succeed. This radically calls into question the existence of the sovereign state.

Indeed, the exceptional nature of the report lies in the fact that it is calling for total transformation, not just limited iwi self-government or minimal acknowledgement of Te Tiriti in an otherwise European-style constitution. Sovereignty is based, from the beginning, on the absolute decision making power of the sovereign within a defined territory. In a political order based on tikanga, without clear borders between different powers, and with dispersed and autonomous political units, the sovereign order would be incapable of functioning as we know it. In fact, such a situation is more closely analogous to that in which the theory of sovereignty was developed, wherein power was allotted unevenly between church, nobility, and crown.

But the end of sovereign power could be the beginning of an emancipatory future. The history of sovereignty in Aotearoa is perhaps easier to imagine in the economic than the political sphere. What would a political dispossession imply in a colonial context, and to whom would this power return? This is the question Coulthard grapples with in Canada, where he introduces the concept of countersovereignty in order to frame a politics around re-possessing and decolonising political power. Though posed in a different way, I wager that this is also the question being asked by the Matike Mai Independent Iwi Working Group on Constitutional Transformation, which is overviewed by Moana Jackson in the final chapter of this book.

This group was commissioned by the Iwi Chairs Forum (an organisation composed of chairpersons of iwi confederations representing their tribal interests on a national scale) in 2010 to develop and implement a model for an inclusive constitution for Aotearoa New Zealand based on tikanga and kawa, He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Niu Tireni of 1835, Te Tiriti o Waitangi of 1840, and other indigenous and human rights instruments which enjoy a wide degree of international recognition. Since then, they have conducted hundreds of hui with Māori from all walks of life, culminating in the release in early 2016 of an in-depth report on their findings, which recommended a wholesale change to New Zealand’s constitutional structure. Such a change would require a real re-configuration of the operations of political power in this country, and the re-emergence of an old form for wielding such power that has been largely submerged for over 150 years.

The report seeks to establish the grounds for a Tiriti-based process of constitutional transformation. In order to do so, Matike Mai propose seven values on which any new constitutional arrangement would have to rest, as identified by participants in their series of hui. These are: tikanga, community, belonging, place, balance, conciliation and structure. This system of values is interdependent, each strengthening the others with their individual expressions. Community requires the fostering of a sense of belonging, which can only be pursued through a process of conciliation recognising our mutual connectedness to a place. A constitutional structure is required that is open and fair, which can only be just if it is based on tikanga, rooted in the concept of balance.

Matike Mai provide six indicative constitutional models that might accommodate a form of constitutional transformation based on the precedents and values identified in the report. The first four of these models are based around the existence of separate ‘spheres’ for Māori and tauiwi governance, termed respectively the ‘tino rangatiratanga’ and ‘kāwanatanga’ spheres, and a ‘relational’ sphere in which tauiwi and Māori deliberate together. The fifth model is composed entirely of the relational sphere, and the sixth of only the tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga spheres. A defining characteristic of these models is the particular composition of the relational sphere, which along with the overarching constitution itself, is based on tikanga. The presence of the relational sphere in almost every model almost ensures the position of tikanga as the tūrangawaewae for constitutional arrangements should this process succeed. This radically calls into question the existence of the sovereign state.

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This does not mean to imply that the implementation of such a situation in Aotearoa New Zealand would result in a world reminiscent of feudal Europe. Rather, it means that rangatiratanga, as a system for asserting ‘an absolute authority... to define, protect and decide what was in the best interests of our people’ can be established, with the essential precondition that ‘independence is only real when it depends upon the interdependence one has in relationships with others.’ This qualification makes such a project incompatible with the nature of political organisation necessitated by the sovereign concept of power.

But the end of sovereign power could be the beginning of an emancipatory future. The history of sovereignty in Aotearoa New
serves as a regulating principle between the new and the old, people and environment, man and woman. Equally, though, the evolving and ever-changing nature of whakapapa allows for change and rupture, to be balanced in turn. Utu, or reciprocity, ensures that actions are met with reactions of equal or greater intensity to keep the system in equilibrium.21

Leaders serve the role of bringing together the thoughts and opinions of the people in order to reach a mutually agreed upon settlement. This stands in stark opposition to the sovereign, who is characterised even as early as Bodin precisely by an ability to make decisions without the consent of the governed. While there certainly exist individuals with more or less power in Māori society, the actions of a good rangatira enhance not only their own mana, but the mana of the entire hapū or whānau whose interests they directly serve.22 Despite the common caricature of rangatira acting as tyrants, violence within whānau and hapū organisations was avoided whenever possible, as Anne Salmond recently demonstrated.23 When utu was required to restore balance after an offence it generally, though not always, took the form of commandeering or destroying possessions rather than lives.24

The contemporary world varies greatly from the world of the eighteenth century, and so rangatiratanga may look very different today. Jackson argues the consensual nature of Māori decision-making, enhanced by the cultural values shared by all of the decision-makers and tikanga’s openness to interpretation is relevant in the contemporary environment.25 By holding true to the core axioms underpinning tikanga; whakapapa, manaakitanga and balance, amongst others, rangatiratanga (a system based on the putting into practice of these axioms) is able to develop to meet the changing needs of people in different contexts and situations. As Nuki Aldridge describes in the context of Ngāpuhi, ‘in the face of a new situation, the old people would meet and work out from the principles that guided their social and environmental relationships what the rule or code of behaviour was meant to be’.26 Such situations show the adaptability of tikanga as a system of law that doesn't offer binding precepts but guidelines and axioms to be interpreted.

Just as the law of sovereign states can change over time and adapt
is unfeasible. If and when Matike Mai’s counter-sovereign project succeeds, Pākehā and tauwi will be left with a state bereft of sovereignty, wanting for a new concept of power. Such a state would likely already be premised on tikanga through the operation of their relational sphere, and so would require a system amenable to the basic principles of rangatiratanga. Why not look, for a foundation, to a political philosophy native to this land to accomplish this task?

Returning political power to Māori does not mean disempowering everyone else. Rather, constitutional transformation of the sort advocated by Matike Mai challenges the people of this country to think about how to change our political system for the better, for all New Zealanders. Rather than reproduce the day-to-day of sovereign power and colonial subjugation, they have opened the possibility of innovation and radical change while recognising the ancient laws of this land. Whether Pākehā, tauwi or tangata whenua, we don’t need to look only to Europe for our models of politics and society. Instead, there exists an opportunity to think from where we are, to create something new out of the old, and to use the power of the past to inform the politics of the future.

To reverse the process of primitive accumulation, and bring about a world in which the possibility of justice can be achieved for all, constitutional transformation as advocated by Matike Mai must be pursued to its fullest extent. Political power was taken in Aotearoa New Zealand to ensure the possibilities of establishing the capitalist mode of production. The effects of seizing and reapportioning this power would surely not be limited to the political sphere, and might similarly mark the way for the establishing of an altogether different economic system.

NOTES
4 Ibid.
LAND, HOUSING AND CAPITALISM: THE SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF FREE MARKETS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Shane Malva

On 14 June 2017, people around the world watched in horror as entire families burned to death inside Grenfell Tower in London, England. Unable to escape, tenants remained helplessly trapped as a raging inferno devoured their homes, possessions, and lives. Residents of Grenfell Tower had repeatedly warned of potentially lethal living conditions, including a lack of sprinklers and fire alarms. Their voices were ignored.1 To date, authorities have confirmed at least 80 dead, in a disaster that British Labour Party shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has deemed ‘social murder’.2

The concept of social murder has its roots in European workers’ movements of the nineteenth century. It refers to situations where those in power knowingly maintain conditions that inevitably lead to the early deaths of the poor.3 Here in Aotearoa New Zealand it might be tempting to comfort ourselves with the apparent absence of such appalling events. While it is true that there has not been such a dramatic loss of life by fire in recent history, another less obvious but equally noxious form of neglect is killing people in their homes. Housing in Aotearoa New Zealand is also a site of social murder.

Between 2000 and 2015, 275,818 children across Aotearoa New Zealand experienced 413,316 ‘potentially avoidable hospitalisations attributable to the home environment’.4 Over the same period, more than 1,180 children were killed by housing related illnesses.5 Medical researchers argue these deaths could have been avoided by ‘central and local government policies which ensured that families with children had access to high quality housing and a safe physical environment’.6 Specifically, access to healthy public/state housing and other non-market housing options.7

In Aotearoa New Zealand, a country that The Economist claims has the most unaffordable housing in the world, poverty, ill health,
homelessness, and death, are produced as a matter of course by the normal functioning of capitalist housing markets. A lack of accessible alternatives – caused in part by an under-resourced and misdirected public/state housing provider – enables monopoly prices to form in rental markets.

The profit motive that drives market activity, including the leasing of housing to tenants, results in a significant amount of housing being poorly maintained. This causes negative health outcomes. The high cost of housing, along with often substandard quality, means that people living on low incomes suffer considerably as a direct result of their position in housing markets. At the same time, property investors secure rental returns and capture capital gains through owning land and housing.

This chapter introduces two political campaigns that have resisted social harm caused by market-driven housing developments. It seeks to expose the exploitative social relationships lurking beneath quantitative measures of economic growth and explains the high cost of housing in terms of the monopoly power of property owners to supply housing to those without access to capital. It is the ability of housing to function as capital, producing a profitable return on investment, that maintains the market price of housing. This analysis shows that market solutions actually reproduce the problem of unaffordable housing rather than solving it. Finally, two radical proposals for housing are set forth: a massive expansion and democratisation of public/state housing; and substantial increases in resource allocation for non-profit community housing projects.

Organising around housing
There have been attempts across Aotearoa New Zealand to prevent some of the damage caused by market-driven housing developments. Since 2011, the Tāmaki Housing Group have contested a process of state-led gentrification in Glen Innes, Auckland, known as ‘Tāmaki Regeneration’. The project has involved the eviction of public/state housing tenants to make way for a private development, forcing many existing residents to leave the community. The increase of market housing in Glen Innes has caused land values to soar, revealing that, despite claims to the contrary, capitalist development increases the price of housing. Most recently, Tāmaki Housing Group led the ‘Stop Niki’s Eviction’ campaign that opposed the eviction of an elder Māori woman, Niki Rauti, from a state house once contracted as a ‘home for life’.

A second campaign opposing a market-driven housing development has formed under the banner ‘Save Our Unique Landscape’ (SOUL). SOUL is a mana whenua led group that has, to date, successfully resisted a private housing project on stolen Māori land at Ihumātao in Mangere, Auckland. The SOUL group have been reclaiming land that was confiscated by the State in 1863 as punishment for local iwi refusing to swear allegiance to the Crown. The land was passed on to a Scottish settler through a Crown Land Grant in 1867. His descendants farmed the land until 2016 when they sold it to property developer Fletcher Residential Ltd, after securing planning permission for residential housing from Auckland Council in 2011.

In August 2017, SOUL members Pania Newton and Delwyn Roberts brought the situation to the attention of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD). The committee were ‘concerned by conflicting information regarding consultation with local Māori in connection with the designation of Special Housing Area (SHA) 62 at Ihumātao on land traditionally and currently occupied by Māori’. UNCERD recommend that, the State review, in consultation with all affected Māori, the designation of Special Housing Area 62 to evaluate its conformity with the Treaty of Waitangi, the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other relevant international standards, and that the State obtain the free and informed consent of Māori before approving any project affecting the use and development of their traditional land and resources.

At the time of writing, there has been no sign that the New Zealand Government will act on the United Nations recommendations, and Fletcher Residential Ltd. intends to continue with the development. Fletcher’s project at Ihumātao not only seems to be in violation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, it also threatens the existence of the longest occupied papakāinga in Aotearoa New Zealand that borders the site. Meanwhile, the SOUL campaign continues to receive broad media
nature of economic relationships that are important, and not merely the growth of GDP.

Monopoly power
In the four years leading up to September 2017 the price of housing in Aotearoa New Zealand increased by 42.8%. In Auckland prices rose by 56.7% during this period. Economists, social commentators, and political parties have repeatedly claimed that dramatic rises in house prices are determined simply by a relation between supply and demand. This analysis fails to capture the complex social relationships from which contemporary markets are composed. In housing markets the basis for capital gains is the ability of property owners to charge rent. It is a property owner’s monopoly over a piece of land and the housing occupying it that enables them to reap an immediate major return and potential increases in value.

In Aotearoa New Zealand the cost of housing is due to the price of land. Or more specifically, the price of a legal title granting monopoly power over a piece of land. When land rights are converted into private property rights – a process that occurred in Aotearoa New Zealand through colonisation – one of the places where profit can accumulate is in land. The monopoly power granted by private land titles allows property owners to extract rents. This dynamic produces a situation where land and housing seemingly have the strange ability to add value to themselves.

Once capitalist modes of economic activity are established, and credit systems are developed, financial speculation becomes possible on anything with a value. These processes amplify the price of material assets, capturing profits through speculative trading. In addition to capitalised rental returns, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates the price of housing in Aotearoa New Zealand has been inflated up to 40% higher due to financial speculation.

The reason housing in Aotearoa New Zealand is prohibitively expensive is due to the predominance of capitalist markets. Housing unaffordability continues to be a social issue because land and housing effectively function as capital. Housing deprivation – as well as the poverty, ill health, homelessness, and death sometimes associated with
housing markets – is a direct outcome of a system in which it is legal to buy the right to exclude other people from living on a section of the earth, and to then charge monopoly rents to access shelter.

Current government policies actively uphold this capitalist logic over the use of land, while many politicians and economists present it as the only possible way of organising the construction and distribution of housing. An example of this can be seen in the Auckland Unitary Plan, which continues to privilege landlords and investors at the expense of low income communities.21

Liberal market solutions
There has been much debate on the issue of housing amongst economists, pundits, and parliamentary political parties. Where many seem to agree is on the idea that an increase in market housing will solve the crisis of affordability. This position overlooks the fact that it is the dynamics of the market itself – driven by the profit motive and underpinned by a system of private land rights – that has caused housing to become unaffordable in the first place.

Markets do not provide for people’s needs if they are not in a position to pay market prices. Capitalist markets in Aotearoa New Zealand are producing housing for people with access to significant amounts of wealth, rather than people on low incomes. In practice, effective demand for housing comes from those with access to large sums of capital and, in the absence of viable alternatives, leaves everyone else in subordinate economic positions paying monopoly prices for rental housing. The solutions to the housing crisis for people living on low incomes lie outside of capitalist markets.

Historically, quality housing has been provided for people on low incomes in Aotearoa New Zealand through mass builds of public/state housing.22 In recent times, however, the public/state housing option has been side-lined in favour of market solutions, to such an extent that the New Zealand Government is now pursuing a mass build of state funded market housing.23 The undermining of public state housing systems through turning public resources over to the market is known as the ‘privatisation trap’.24 This trend shows that ‘when social/public rental housing is built, sooner or later there is a demand for its privatization, or it is transformed into de facto homeownership support’.25 The process is self-defeating, reproducing the same situation that had required public/state intervention to begin with.

While increasing the market supply of housing can have some short-term effects on dampening house price speculation, it fails to solve the housing crisis for people on low incomes. Once housing enters the private market it is subjected to the same profit motives, monopoly rents, and speculative pricing mechanisms that cause housing crises in the first instance. Failing to expand and democratise non-market housing solutions means homeowners are still able to appropriate unearned wealth from the economy, while those most in need are left to reckon with monopoly prices for substandard housing.

Radical reforms
Parliamentary political parties campaigned to solve the housing crisis in the run up the New Zealand General Election on 23 September 2017. The housing policies under development fail to properly address the underlying causes of the human suffering produced by our contemporary situation. Specifically, public/state housing, and other non-market community housing options such as papakāinga, remain marginal rather than prioritised as the primary solutions to the inequality produced by capitalist markets. The argument that needs to gain traction in the public sphere is that capitalist markets are structurally unable to provide universal access to healthy, secure, and affordable housing. There is a need for collectively planned and democratic alternatives.

Radical reforms get to the root of a problem, oppose vested interests, and call the logic of the market system into question.26 The root of the housing crisis is a process of capital accumulation in land. The solution to this problem is straightforward: the market price of land needs to be eliminated from the housing equation. This can be achieved by transferring private land into public ownership through the state, and/or facilitating common ownership of land using various legal structures. In other words, we need to reconfigure our relations to the Earth and to each other, in both a legal and cultural sense, so as to recognise use rights to land as collective, inalienable, and unable to be traded in a market for
Driven housing developments by using papakāinga models. This could be achieved through prioritising collective use rights to land that recognise He Whakaputanga, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the principle of tino rangatiratanga as foundational to all land rights in Aotearoa New Zealand. Additionally, government could make significantly more resources available to non-profit community housing projects by taxing accumulated wealth, while also maintaining a functional system of universally accessible quality public/state housing with maintenance rents.

An easily accessible public/state housing system is an effective means of deflating the price of land and housing as long as it significantly undercuts monopoly prices in markets. This would make papakāinga projects more affordable for any groups needing to purchase land in a market. As has already been argued, it would be preferable to do away with capitalist markets in private land titles completely, as trading legal rights to private land not only allows surplus value to accumulate in the soil, but also goes against the tikanga principles that underpin the whole papakāinga development model.

Centring papakāinga models in urban and rural planning could additionally serve to remind people living in Aotearoa New Zealand that the whole country was once Māori land, and in many ways still is. The processes through which settlers attempted to deny Māori traditional land rights and the ability to practice kaitiakitanga are part of a history of injustice. Radical political movements concerned with housing provide welcome opportunities to support Māori land claims. For the obvious reason that housing is built on the land, but also because drawing on traditional Māori practices of holding land in common under local authority can be a central part of the solution to our contemporary housing crisis.

Conclusion

We are in a unique political, economic, and cultural situation here in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the same time, nearly every major city in the world is currently experiencing some form of crisis in residential housing. Driving housing efforts connect the local with the global, exposing common tendencies in capitalist economies. Paying close attention to
the contemporary housing situation in Aotearoa New Zealand reveals that society is comprised of groups with antagonistic economic interests.

Capitalist markets in land and housing drive social inequality, leading to impoverishment, poor health, homelessness, and sometimes death for people living on low incomes. While investors are able to make windfall profits, actors in these markets routinely contravene the public interest, as they are primarily driven by the profit motive. From the perspective of capitalist corporations such as Fletcher Residential Ltd and Tāmaki Regeneration Co., indigenous land rights and public/state housing tenants refusing eviction are merely problems to be overcome or circumvented.

Housing in Aotearoa New Zealand demonstrates a general truth about the economy: capitalist markets are functionally incapable of providing everyone with the basic necessities of life. The profits flowing out of the housing market are not only a testament to the sustained neglect of the most vulnerable members of society, but rely on the ongoing history of colonisation. Against these trends, quality public/state housing with maintenance rents and non-profit community housing models – both of which have the capacity to eliminate the price of land from housing costs – offer viable alternatives to perpetuating housing models – both of which have the capacity to eliminate the price of land from housing costs – offer viable alternatives to perpetuating a market-driven crisis in housing. In our contemporary historical moment, housing issues demand the attention of any social movements aiming to connect local issues with visions for a better world. Not as a strategic choice, but as a political necessity.

NOTES

5 Ibid, 2.
7 Ibid.
10 Vanessa Cole. We Shall Not Be Moved: Community Displacement and Dissensus in the Gentrification of Glen Innes, Tāmaki Makaurau. Masters Thesis, University of Auckland, 2015, p. 79.
13 Ibid.
25 Ibid. 115.
28 Ibid., pp. 11-15.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
It is incredibly hard to write about political organisation and the environment without beginning with ‘shock and crisis’ framings. We know that these are increasingly urgent times as access to freshwater constricts, mass extinction marches forward, we dive headlong into the Anthropocene.1 And on the list goes. To move beyond shock and crisis framings, however, allows us to highlight the already existing efforts for change.

This chapter focuses on a diverse set of themes that have characterised political organising and the environment. These initiatives begin from multiple places: decolonisation, anti-capitalism, feminism, a need to confront the nature-society separation that characterises much Eurocentric thought, and an opportunity to shrink networks of exchange. There are a bounty of critiques to be made of how many of these initiatives have taken shape, but this chapter focuses instead on the possibilities that are shaking people free from the sense of a lack of any agency.

Indigenous led environmental movements
There is a history of successful direct action in environmental struggles in Aotearoa New Zealand. Recent years have seen effective blockades of oil and gas industry conferences, of banks who maintain investments in the fossil fuel industry, and ongoing actions by the Save Our Unique Landscape (SOUL) campaign to protect wāhi tapu and the whenua of Ihumātao, South Auckland.2 These examples have often mixed confronting businesses that profit from environmental degradation, especially the oil and gas, and construction industries, with calling out government inaction and subsidies of these industries.

Perhaps the most important environment activism has come from Indigenous led movements. It is important not to fix and romanticise Indigenous people as environmental saviours. Doing so leaves people in an impossible position within capitalist societies, as it does not enable
understanding of the multiple tensions Indigenous groups navigate. Yet
the proliferation of Indigenous movements has provided direction for
environmental activists more generally.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui triggered a
movement opposing offshore oil exploration and the Government’s
active courting of the oil industry. In 2011 the iwi took a range of
actions to contest Petrobras’ presence in the Raukumara Basin, and
the fact that they were left out of the permit process. On 23 April, Elvis
Teddy, skippering San Pietro, an iwi fishing boat, sailed into the path
of Petrobras’ exploration vessel. Rikirangi Gage, CEO of Te Rūnanga
ō Te Whānau (Te Whānau-ā-Apanui), was on board and radioed the
exploration vessel, stating:

You are not welcome in our waters. Accordingly, and as
an expression of our mana in these waters and our deep
concern for the adverse effects of deep sea drilling, we will be
positioning the Te Whānau-ā-Apanui vessel directly in your
path, approximately one and a half nautical miles in front of you. We will not be moving, we will be doing some fishing.
We wish to reiterate that this is not a protest. We are defending
tribal waters and our rights from reckless Government policies and
the threat of deep sea drilling, which our hapū have not
consented to and continue to oppose. We have a duty to uphold
the mana of our hapū here in our territorial waters.

Teddy was arrested by the police, who were supported by the Navy
and the Airforce. This use of the military speaks to wider concerns
about state and industry attempts to stifle dissent. But there were many
hopeful aspects of this action, which helped lead to the creation of
several grassroots ‘oil free’ and ‘no drill’ groups.

Importantly, Greenpeace supported the action, and has acted in a
supporting role for a number of other Māori led direct actions around
oil exploration since. This support is significant because Te Whānau-
ā-Apanui resistance was as much rooted in an assertion of sovereignty
over their waters as it was in contesting the act of deep sea oil drilling.

At many points in the history of environmental activism in
Aotearoa New Zealand, campaigns have been rooted in Western,
colonial desires to preserve people-less wilderness. This position has
often required the active denial of Māori sovereignty, and continues to
underpin both national conservation policy and Pākehā nationalism.
There appears to be an increasing desire by (often largely Pākehā)
environmental groups to navigate how to support Māori demands for
sovereignty and recognise that struggles for Māori self-determination
over land and resources are fundamental to creating environmental
justice. This is not to say that these groups are always successful in
their navigations. It is possible that the desire to support Māori is
bound up with confronting the truth that a Western privileging of ‘wild’
and people-less nature leads to the position that the only answer to
environmental problems is the eradication of humans. So instead, the

Pro-environment alliances
Regardless of whether Pākehā and tauiwi groups can ‘keep up’ with the
pursuit of decolonisation by Māori, Indigenous groups across the Pacific
are forging awe-inspiring alliances. For instance, the Pacific Climate
Warriors, active in 15 nations, assert that the people of the Pacific are ‘not
drowning, we are fighting’. Sick of asking for climate action, the Pacific
Climate Warriors, part of 350 Pacific, are demanding action and in doing
so changing discourses about what it means to be from the Pacific at a
time when the climate is rapidly changing.

The group has repeatedly resisted framings of Pacific peoples as
‘victims’, ‘tiny, needy bits’ ripe for more colonial paternalism. Instead,
effort has been invested in forming a decentralised Pacific response that
demands accountability for climate change and conducts direct action.
In October 2014, the group blockaded the world’s largest coal port in
Newcastle, Australia.

The Pacific Climate Warriors have also been part of global alliance
building. They have travelled to Alberta’s tar sands to build solidarity
with First Nations people, and young people connected with Standing
that begins with supporting the assertion of Indigenous worldviews, and learning from them without slipping into appropriation and cherry picking of ideas.

Gerda Roelvink and J.-K. Gibson-Graham suggest how these kinds of relationships might be fostered. They write about farmers that have learned to ‘listen to’ the land and create an ‘economy of working with the land’ whereby the needs of nonhumans are accounted for. This type of economy is yet to congeal into a new political organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, but the notion of accounting for the needs of nonhumans and redistributing surplus to them is a radical proposition that deserves to be explored.

**Legislative change**

Emblematic of the links between decolonisation and pro-environmental change are the Indigenous movements that have led to legislative change in places like Bolivia. There, the protection of the rights of *pachamama* (the earth mother) is given equal status with those of humans, and is enshrined in the Bolivian constitution. The law draws on Indigenous Andean spirituality and anti-capitalist sentiment.

Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, the possibilities for legal frameworks that support the rights of the environment have been hugely extended by the *Te Awa Tupua* (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017. Whanganui iwi have fought for over 150 years to have their relationship with and understanding of the river adequately recognised. The Act codifies that the river sustains life, flows from mountains to sea, has an inalienable relationship with iwi and hapū, and is made up of streams large and small that flow into it. The rights of the Whanganui River are recognised, and are advocated for by the office of *Te Pou Tupua* the human face of the river system. What this means for the river in practice and for how people interact with it remains to be seen.

**New environmental economic ethics**

For non-Indigenous people it is often a struggle to articulate and organise around complex ethical relationships with the nonhuman world. There are many reasons for this, one being a lack of language for kinship relationships. This is a key area for further political work, work
Aotearoa attempt to develop community autonomy that also builds alternatives to capitalist relations.

Collaboration for urban environmental change

Another possible example of quiet activism with radical potential is collaborations that bring together diverse groups to imagine how to organise for more improved access to and autonomy over healthy environments. One such collaboration focuses on cities as important places for thinking about and creating environmental justice. The project, called Imagining Decolonised Cities, involved Ngāti Toa Rangatira and Victoria University of Wellington academics, and focused on Porirua city.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, we often overlook cities as sites of environmental struggle; nature is understood to be rural, or in isolated green pockets of urban environments. When we think of nature this way, we ignore that it is everywhere, and the right to access healthy environments is for everyone. For instance, urban communities have rights to clean air or water, and should be empowered to make decisions about building roads or reclaiming land for private use in a previously publicly accessible harbour. Urban populations also have important roles in enhancing biodiversity.

Imagining Decolonised Cities began from the recognition that urban places have always been Indigenous places, but these environments have changed in ways that do not often reflect this reality. For instance, the mana whenua status of Ngāti Toa Rangatira is not apparent throughout much of Porirua. Through colonisation they have lost access to food through the degradation of the harbour, and lost control over their land through Public Works Act confiscations. The project sought to create conversation and ideally action, to address these environmental injustices that are perpetuated through the ongoing process of colonisation. This was done through a series of workshops with young people in Porirua, a public symposium, and an urban design competition that asked participants to engage with utopianism to envision a more ‘just’ Porirua.

The response to the project has demonstrated an appetite for thinking about and organising for urban environments that look...
beyond the grid-form, private property-centric approach that currently dominates. This suggests a desire to recognise mana whenua and imagine the impossible of transformed, decolonised, design and planning for healthy urban environments.

**Political organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand**

This chapter is only a partial account of political organising around the environment. I have attempted to highlight the diversity of ways and scales by which people seek to unleash their agency. Many Indigenous led movements are rooted in the fundamental and overarching injustice of colonisation, of which environmental autonomy and protection are inseparable dimensions. It should not be overlooked, for example, that the internationally celebrated legislation recognising the legal personhood of the Whanganui River was part of the Whanganui iwi Treaty settlement.

For non-Indigenous people, supporting the mahi of decolonisation provides the opportunity not only for justice, but a way out of ‘wilder ness’ conundrums where the only answer to environmental degradation is entirely separate spaces for humans and nature. Localised movements have sought to bridge this gap by commonging land, and building community autonomy and resilience. Activism like community gardening provides the opportunity not only for justice, but a way out of ‘wilderness’ conundrums where the only answer to environmental degradation is entirely separate spaces for humans and nature. Localised movements have sought to bridge this gap by commonging land, and building community autonomy and resilience. Activism like community gardening and comming have not only for justice, but a way out of ‘wilderness’ conundrums where the only answer to environmental degradation is entirely separate places for humans and nature. Localised movements have sought to bridge this gap by commonging land, and building community autonomy and resilience. Activism like community gardening

One of the contemporary challenges of environmental organising is actually understanding environmental issues as political. There is more and more research that points out the way that solutions to environmental issues are often understood as purely technical, to be solved by economic experts and done so within the capitalist system. The possibilities for tackling issues like climate change are narrowed as disagreement and debate is limited to which capitalist tool is best; for instance, green consumption, or carbon taxes.

This chapter has sought to highlight the ways that groups in Aotearoa New Zealand have insisted that the environment is political, and problems cannot be solved by reproducing the structures of capitalism and colonialism, the very systems that produced these problems in the first place.

**NOTES**

1 The Anthropocene is a contested term that refers to the idea that we have entered a new epoch determined by the way humans have altered the planet’s ecosystems and geology. There is plenty of debate about whether this idea furthers a constructed divide between nature and society, or when exactly this date might rest. For example, should it coincide with the advent of colonisation when environments were drastically changed? See: Heather Davis and Zoe Todd. ‘On the importance of a date, or decolonizing the Anthropocene’, *ACME* vol. 16 issue 4 (2017): pp. 761-780.; Jason Moore. ‘The Capitalocene, part 1: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 44 issue 3, (2017): pp. 594-630.


3 The powers of the defence force to intervene in sea based protests such as these were expanded through Supplementary Order Paper 105 of the 2013 amendments to the Crown Minerals Act. This act also created a new offence for entering designated exclusion zones around exploration and extraction vessels, known as the Anadarko Amendment because of lobbying by industry groups like Anadarko.

4 See also reports from *The Intercept* on the use of private security forces at Standing Rock and the way activists were understood as potential terrorists. Last accessed 18 July 2018. https://theintercept.com/search/?s=standing-rock

5 For instance, resistance to Statoil in the Far North. Note that this is not always an easy relationship.


8 As Moana Jackson put it in a talk at the ‘Imagining Decolonised Cities’ symposium, Takapūwāhia Mara, Porirua on 13 May 2017.


16 For example Kelly Dombroski and Gradon Diprose.
There has been a huge resurgence of the radical left in Europe since 2008. It has been enormously inspiring at times, even for those of us as far away as Aotearoa New Zealand. So are there any lessons for the radical left here that can be taken from the movements and parties of the left that have emerged or come to prominence in Europe in that time? I do appreciate context is hugely important. I do not suggest for a moment that in some neo-colonialist fashion we can simply impose a European template here in Aotearoa New Zealand. Indeed, that is why it is important to reflect with care on any possible lessons. In fact, as I will discuss, there are reasons why some of the approaches that have been successful in Europe cannot be applicable here. In this chapter I will discuss four issues: (1) dealing with the centre left, (2) left populism, (3) front politics, and (4) the idea of the connective party.

The radical left and its dealings with the centre left
I begin with Podemos in Spain. In many ways Podemos has been a huge success. Founded in early 2014, by a group of political scientists from Complutense University in Madrid, and drawing on the energy of a series of large scale anti-austerity occupations of public squares known as the 15-M movement, or the Indignados, it now has around 350,000 members. In coalition with Izquierda Unida, the United Left, it now holds 71 seats in the 350 seat Congress of Deputies.

Podemos’s primary goal since its inception has been to replace the PSOE (the Spanish centre left) as the principal left party in Spanish politics. Leading figures in Podemos have been implacable in this goal and, following general elections in December 2015 and June 2016, have refused to do any deal with the PSOE to form a government. At the time it seemed this hard line position was failing, contributing to the nervousness and disunity that started to emerge within Podemos.

Then, in September 2016, in two regional government elections
in Galicia and Euskadi, Podemos-led coalitions polled better than the PSOE. Pedro Sánchez, leader of the PSOE, was forced to resign. Subsequently, most PSOE deputies abstained in a parliamentary vote, permitting the formation of a minority conservative PP government led by Mariano Rajoy, thereby further alienating the PSOE from any remaining left base it held. The divisions these moves have caused could shatter the PSOE, just as Podemos intended. It’s a huge victory. In opposition, Podemos continues to put huge pressure on the PSOE, and its confusion was demonstrated again in May 2017 when Sánchez was re-elected leader of the PSOE.

This unfolding story is reminiscent of the situation in Greece, where Syriza (the Coalition of the Radical Left) was able to replace Pasok (the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement). Nonetheless, despite its magnificent achievement in bringing the radical left to political power, Syriza has proved no more capable of facing down the demands of the bankers who run the European Union than its forerunners in government in Greece (or elsewhere) and austerity remains firmly in place.

The situation in Spain contrasts sharply with events in the UK. There, following an inspirational call from the film director Ken Loach, the Left Unity party was founded in 2013 with similar aspirations to Podemos and Syriza... until Jeremy Corbyn happened to the British Labour Party. Suddenly it seemed a credible left force was taking shape through the centre left rather than against it. Left Unity was in crisis as members flocked to Labour (and some to the Greens), and the affiliated Communists departed in the opposite direction; in late 2015, Left Unity was reduced to debating its own dissolution, although it decided against that step and in October 2016 recommitted itself to radical socialist principles.

Former General Secretary of Left Unity, Kate Hudson, made it clear how the positioning of Left Unity must be read against what Labour is doing in the UK:

In addition to the struggle to restore the Labour Party to its original remit and ethos, it is also crucial for an alternative left politics to be expressed [that is] anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist... The hopes and dreams of so many of those who support Corbyn – and many more across society who don’t articulate their aspirations in party political terms – can only ultimately be fulfilled by a radical transformation of society.

In her speech in late 2016 Hudson also noted that nowhere has a nominally social democratic party that has embraced neoliberalism subsequently repudiated it. But in the run up to the 2017 UK general election, the impossible happened: Corbyn broke with a quarter-century or more of centre left sell-out by issuing a Labour Party election manifesto that does indeed repudiate neoliberalism and the politics of austerity, presenting an agenda I would largely describe as ‘old school’ social democracy – it does not once mention capitalism. These policies, along with Corbyn’s own compassionate integrity, have delivered a success that took Labour to the brink of a return to government in the election of 8 June 2017. At the same time (and one must remember, in the context of a nineteenth century first-past-the-post electoral system), Labour has completely marginalised the voices of the more radical left that a few years ago were threatening it so loudly.

A consideration of all the examples above indicates that, in any context, the radical left requires a coherent strategy to deal with the centre left. Podemos’s patience and implacable position against the PSOE is instructive. So is Jeremy Corbyn’s resurgent Labour Party. And most importantly, in light of the neoliberal agendas still expressed or implied by many on the so-called centre left in Aotearoa New Zealand, it tells us that there is absolutely no room for sentimentality on the radical left here, whatever our own personal historical attachments might be to parties of the past.

Left populism: ‘Constructing the people’

At a meeting in London in June 2016, which I was fortunate to be able to attend, Sirio Canos Donnay from the Podemos international committee stated that in order to understand Podemos it was necessary to understand left populism. Podemos recognises that politics is a ground of struggle and antagonism, a struggle for hegemony not consensus. This antagonism is something that Podemos has attempted to generate consciously and deliberately by connecting individuals, initially in local
'circles', into a popular struggle against the elite – because 'they' (La Casta, the Caste) don't represent 'us' (El Pueblo, the People).

For Podemos this course of action is nothing less than the thoroughly populist process of 'constructing the people.' This desire to construct a new 'us' has led Podemos to avoid all the signs and symbols of the 'traditional left': (1) there are no revolutionary songs – instead, Guardian writer Owen Jones reported at the London meeting, Podemos election rallies opened to the tune of 'Ghostbusters', (2) there are no red flags, stars or hammer-and-sickle – the party's 2016 election manifesto (which sold out) was styled on an Ikea catalogue, (3) the 2016 election slogan for Unidos Podemos (the electoral coalition of Podemos and Izquierda Unida) was 'the smile of a country'.

Donnay argued that the Indignados had no articulation to politics and people from the right related to the movement as well, so what attracted these people to Podemos meetings was a change of vocabulary, avoiding the terms 'Left' and 'Right'. The people are being constructed with entirely new symbols, in a complete break with the political past, in order to shape a new party and a new 'us'. Ultimately, Canos Donnay insisted, centrality means winning the struggle not winning the political centre.

That sounds like mere word play to me.

More fundamentally, I find the whole idea of 'constructing the people' to be rather problematic. In the case of Podemos there seems to be something profoundly elitist about a group of university professors determining the subjectivity of 'the people'. Furthermore, Benjamin McKean, writing in the US context, argues that 'because some subjects are constituted with a racial identity that prevents their unmediated identification with the people as a whole, [populism] locates marginalized identities as outside politics and unrepresentable.'

The outcome of this for a populism that seeks to be inclusive is indeed problematic, to say the least: 'the populist identification of equality with homogeneity is the source of the racial resentment that characterizes many populist movements'. I would go beyond that and suggest that this false identification of equality with homogeneity also taps into existing racism and legitimises it.

For Podemos the course of action is nothing less than the thoroughly populist process of 'constructing the people'. This desire to construct a new ‘us’ has led Podemos to avoid all the signs and symbols of the ‘traditional left’: (1) there are no revolutionary songs – instead, Guardian writer Owen Jones reported at the London meeting, Podemos election rallies opened to the tune of ‘Ghostbusters’, (2) there are no red flags, stars or hammer-and-sickle – the party’s 2016 election manifesto (which sold out) was styled on an Ikea catalogue, (3) the 2016 election slogan for Unidos Podemos (the electoral coalition of Podemos and Izquierda Unida) was ‘the smile of a country’.

Concluding his critical analysis of left populism, McKean usefully directs us towards the work of Stuart Hall, who emphasises the possibilities inherent in a politics ‘which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible.’

The significant practical question which follows from this is one which frequently seems to vex the centre left. It is a question the radical left too must seek to answer: how might we organise ourselves in common struggle and resistance ‘without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities’?

In seeking to avoid the traps of populism by actively encouraging a diversity of interests and identities, two organisational forms have been explored by the radical left in Europe: front politics and the connective party. I want to look at the possibilities suggested by each of these structures.

Front politics: Encouraging diversity, not suppressing it

The academics who initiated Podemos are very familiar with a book by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe titled Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. In this book, Laclau and Mouffe reject the call that some on the left have made to abandon identity-based or ‘cultural’ struggles and ‘return to the class struggle’. One of the central tenets of their book is ‘the need to create a chain of equivalence among the various democratic struggles against different forms of subordination’. By this they mean that indigenous struggles, queer struggles, struggles against sexism and racism, and the defence of the natural environment must be articulated with each other and
with the struggles of workers. A new hegemonic project of the left must 'tackle issues of both "redistribution" and "recognition".' 24

The key question, of course, is how can this 'chain of equivalence' be created, if we are not to go down the Podemos road and attempt to 'construct the people' anew? Rather than obliterating the political past and the political formations built on that history, as Podemos seems to desire, many of the new organisations of the radical left in Europe recognise the need to create a broad front among diverse existing formations to challenge the hegemony of neoliberal capital. A number of ways to construct this broad front, and to handle difference within it, have been devised.

The Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) in Portugal, for example, functions with multiple platforms which openly debate programmes and contest positions within the party. Die Linke in Germany operates similarly. At the June 2016 Bloco de Esquerda party conference, three different programmes were published, debated and voted upon; and although one particular platform is dominant, each platform is represented on important committees. 25

Some left parties in Greece, such as Antarsya (and Syriza in the past), operate as coalitions of smaller parties. Antarsya, the Front of the Anti-Capitalist Revolutionary Communist Left and Radical Ecology, is a formation of seven left parties. It came together in early 2009 in the aftermath of an intense youth rebellion in December 2008. Panagiotis Sotiris describes the 'front politics' of Antarsya as opening up 'actual dialogue…actual ideological battle, but also synthesis and experimentation.' 26

Antarsya has around 3,000 members, and operates through local committees. The national conferences are attended by 1,000 delegates who elect a national coordinating committee of 101 members who meet every 2-3 months and a central committee which meets weekly. 27 Clearly this level of participation speaks of a highly democratized party of committed activists, and the party has been highly successful. The impact it has in social movements far outweighs its small size, and this level of commitment bears fruit in the electoral arena too: Antarsya has nine regional councillors, elected in 2014 across thirteen regions in Greece.

These platforms, tendencies or parties operating within a greater whole use mechanisms that are respectful of difference, and build a democratic left politics that avoids the pitfalls of populism. Sotiris expresses this well:

Front politics necessarily means that militants’ opinions are influenced not only by the group or organization they belong to, but also by the discussion within the fronts. In Antarsya you can see a more open discussion, questions traversing organizations. I think that by all means this is positive and trying to express or force monolithic unity to a group is a mistake. 28

However, it is not clear how these various types of front politics enable the expression of diversity of identity in all its forms, beyond acceptance. It would seem that the focus is primarily on managing the political, programmatic and theoretical differences deriving from radical left traditions, while harnessing the energy of the various memberships for co-ordinated action. Stuart Hall's concern for the 'real heterogeneity of interests and identities' seems to be absorbed within that goal, and not given equal importance to it.

Secondly, it appears that radical left front politics thrives in circumstances (Portugal, Germany, Greece) where a historically strong but now fragmented radical left tradition is attempting to recompose itself in order to recover meaning and relevance. I don't think anyone would claim such a historically strong tradition exists in Aotearoa New Zealand.

As I have indicated, there is a second approach that might also be considered in creating a broad front of the radical left. In seeking a way to be inclusive of groups and organisations which might be regarded as philosophically of the radical left, but are operating beyond party forms, I now turn to the idea of the connective party.

The connective party: Building a real 'chain of equivalence'
The connective party has been discussed in detail by Mimmo Porcaro, a theorist of the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC, the Communist Refoundation Party) in Italy. 29 With the idea of the mass workers’ party in crisis in the 1990s, Porcaro explains, the PRC determined that the roles and functions of the traditional mass party could no longer be carried by a 'single political entity'. They had to
be spread across ‘movement organisations, trade unions, civil society associations, independent media, and online networks’ as well as more ‘traditional parties’.30

The idea was therefore to create a political connection made up of several autonomous institutions. Each would be empowered to continue their own specific activity as well as, at the appropriate time, leading the overall direction of the wider connection. Porcaro describes such a political connection as ‘the material existence of an idea of socialism (or democratic society) as a network of self-organisations transforming society from below’.31 The flexibility of a connection like this is a strength and a resource which allows the connective party to operate in social contexts previously closed off to ‘traditional’ parties.

Porcaro identifies several problems in the execution of the PRC’s plan, the first of which was the dominance of rhetoric over practice – the party was unable to carry out the basic task of connection it had set itself. Secondly, many of the civil society associations which the PRC attempted to connect with were too close to the state and too reliant on the state for funding. They were unwilling to jeopardise that position to create the connective party with the PRC. Thirdly, the party was unable to organise among the precariat, i.e. people in casual, temporary, low-wage precarious jobs. It is also possible that the PRC’s strategy failed in part because the social media tools necessary to the task simply did not exist at the time. Now they do.

It has to be said that another significant factor has been the powerful appeal of charismatic populism which once again swept through Italy, this time in the guise of Beppe Grillo’s Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, the Five Star Movement). Growing out of meet-ups begun by Grillo in 2005 and formally engaging in electoral politics from 2009, this environmentalist, anti-EU, anti-establishment, ‘neither-left-nor-right’ party swept up all the attention of the disillusioned and disempowered in Italy, first blindsiding and then marginalising small parties like the PRC. In combination with the failings Porcaro identifies, this led to the PRC being hammered at the polls. While in 2006 it had 41 Deputies and 27 Senators in the national parliament, it now has none.

Nonetheless, I do not believe that the unfortunate timing and botched execution of the PRC’s plan means the underlying idea should be abandoned. So what does the idea have to offer us?

One of the issues Porcaro addresses in his writing is the importance of connecting the energy of horizontalism to contemporary answers to the strategic questions raised by Lenin (but not the embalmed corpus of ‘Leninism’).32 For example:

The fundamental demand of Lenin…is to always differentiate between two modalities of popular and class struggle: one that remains within the logic of the reproduction of capital and the other which builds the organizational, cultural and political conditions to get out of it.33

The goal of a connective party must be to build such conditions, and first of all it must build the organisational conditions. The connective party can achieve this by providing a more explicit focus for what might otherwise be an energetic but unfocused array of radical networks, groups and individuals. A party that emphasises network and connection will be – and must be – consciously developing a new and newly relevant organisational form. Rather than trying to build the mid-twentieth century style mass party, this new connective party form must incorporate ways of working that fit with ‘the new social operating system’ of the twenty-first century, intelligently combining the tools of social media with the traditional modes of community organising.34

The patient building of reciprocal relationships and trust with like-minded groups and individuals can contribute to the cultural and political conditions for change through ‘networks of outrage and hope’.35 With its focus on escaping from the logic of the reproduction of capital, the connective party can supply the hope (in ideas and in action) to go with the outrage and distress felt so very strongly by so many.

Conclusion
In reviewing aspects of the resurgence of the European left in recent years, I have emphasised what I perceive to be some valuable lessons, both in terms of what the radical left in Aotearoa New Zealand might do (such as taking an implacable stance towards the centre-left) and what it might avoid doing (such as the populist politics favoured by Podemos).
Laclau and Mouffe’s idea of a ‘chain of equivalence’ provides a useful starting point for thinking about organisational formations – though it seems clear to me that we must avoid reproducing Podemos’ attempt to ‘construct a people’ anew. For Aotearoa New Zealand, in the absence of overtly political organisations that might form a broad front or formal political coalition of the radical left, it is reasonable to suggest that a chain of equivalence could be built across a variety of radical organisations through the active facilitation of a connective party. While much remains to be explored, and much remains to be said on these matters, and on the practicalities in particular, the idea of the connective party has relevant and durable insights for the radical left here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

NOTES
1 My grateful thanks to the reviewers whose generous comments have helped considerably in improving this chapter. Any remaining gaps in the arguments and ideas are entirely down to me.
15 Corbyn has been a Labour MP for 34 years and throughout he has resolutely fought racism, opposed war and challenged neoliberal policies, and as part of the Campaign Group of MPs he has articulated a clear socialist position through the years of the Blairite Third Way in the British Labour Party. I am not aware of any NZ Labour Party MP who could make a similar claim.
18 Ibid.
19 See, for example, the Hobson’s Pledge website. Last accessed 18 July 2018. http://www.hobsonspledge.nz/
21 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. xviii.
24 Ibid.
26 Panagiotis Sotiris. ‘The other Greek left: Interview by Sebastian Budgen’ , Jacobin, 17 April 2015.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
31 Porcaro, ‘A number of possible developments . . .’
32 Porcaro, ‘Mass party, connective party, strategic party’
34 Ibid., p. 93.
The opening decades of the twenty-first century have been marked by crisis. With no collective challenge to capital underway, complete ecological collapse looks close to certain when taking a long view. The medium term prospects of the vast majority of people are set by the recurrent, cyclical crises of capital. The repercussions of the 2008 global financial crisis are still being felt, is the left sufficiently prepared to proactively respond to the next when it inevitably arrives? The more immediate perspective is set by the deepening crisis of poverty and inequality, of which the housing crisis in Aotearoa New Zealand is a spectacular manifestation. It is hard for many people to think beyond this crisis, due to its crushing, monotonous weight.

Further compounding these issues is the crisis of democracy, features of this being widespread cynicism and disengagement. Think of the missing million voters in Aotearoa New Zealand elections. The number of non-existent membership of mainstream political parties is down from close to a quarter of the population in the 1950s to around 2% in recent years.1 This is not a problem unique to this country. The late political-scientist Peter Mair characterised the exercise of government in most developed democracies today as tantamount to ‘ruling the void’.

The recent US elections that delivered President Trump witnessed a 42% rate of voter abstention, with only 27% of the eligible voting public signing up for Trump’s post-truth right-populism. Electoral politics appears to be exhausted in the current conjuncture.

The resurgence of far-right politics in the US and Europe signals that the liberal project itself is floundering. Its capital-centric values have fuelled the political-economic trends that are responsible for dissolving much of the material and civic infrastructure on which its citizenry depends. Discontent is widespread, resistance scattered and ineffective. No serious political alternatives are on the table, and the spectre of fascism, emboldened, is emerging from the shadows and becoming flesh. Why, in this time of crisis, does the radical left remain so weak?
A total reimagining of what might be possible is called for, and new forms of political organisation are needed.

In what follows, the historical trajectory of social movements will be considered as a means of appreciating some of the challenges the left faces today. One of these challenges concerns how the left positions itself relative to the state, which, as will be explored below, is a site rejected by many contemporary struggles. Through a return to questions of the party, it will be argued, the radical left can become, once again, a force able to effectively and productively challenge entrenched power systems. Any such project, however, will need to embrace tensions and paradoxes as a means of maintaining dynamism and integrity. While much ground must be covered by any such project in the years to come, thinking about movements, the state, and party in relation to social contestation is an important starting point.

**Social movements old and new**

A broad overview of social movement contestation offers a means of understanding the current conjuncture. While the picture presented here is international in scope, the same trends are, for the most part, present in Aotearoa New Zealand. From the nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth, there was the rise and entrenchment of the ‘old left’. Generally speaking, this was state focussed, vertically organised, grounded in class politics, and orientated around robust critiques and challenges to capital. While countervailing organisational tendencies were present, most notably with anarchism and council communism, the state-focussed currents prevailed. This took a revolutionary turn in the East, as seen with Russia and China, and a social democratic one in the West.

From the mid-twentieth century the old left came to increasingly be seen as ‘part of the problem’ by those struggling for egalitarian social change. A ‘new left’ arose, and for the most part it rejected the statism and authoritarianism associated with the old left. There was an explosion of new social movements, many of which took contestation onto a cultural terrain, shifting the emphasis of struggle from the economic dimension towards sustained critiques of dominant identities. The liberation of previously marginalised and repressed identities was an important dimension of these struggles, encompassing feminism, LGBTQI+ rights, black liberation, indigenous resistance, and so on.

In fighting these immediate, pressing, urgent battles, a broader vision of what might be possible faded from view. Indeed, utopian thinking, envisioning the future, which was once so important for the left, was maligned. Many of the movements emerging from this period tended, over time, toward horizontal, spontaneous and fluid forms of organisation. Struggles became more localised and immediate, an approach aptly named ‘folk politics’ by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams. After forty years of such politics important advances have been made on the cultural terrain, we live in societies far more respectful of difference than previously, although there is still far to go.

On the economic/material side of the ledger, however, things look much worse than they did forty years ago. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand inequality has been steadily deepening, personal indebtedness rising, and public services declining. In rejecting the state the radical left has left it in the hands of a capital-focussed elite. With the downplaying of the economic as an important front for struggle the country has found itself in a period of dramatic inequality. With the abandoning of bold visions for a better future the country has become mired in a miserable present with little hope. How can this impasse be overcome?

**Embracing tensions: Towards a new modality for the left**

Rather than seeking to break with the past as a means of overcoming the shortcomings of the left, it is argued here that a dialectical reading of the situation is needed. On one stage, the ‘old left’ had successfully organised on a large scale and profoundly influenced the geo-political and economic conditions that prevailed by the middle of the twentieth century. But ultimately its project failed. It was sclerotic, state-centric, class-bound, and its politics were no longer up to the task of extending emancipation. Rather, the old left was becoming an obstacle to effective social change.

On another stage, social movements and a more anarchistic radical politics successfully challenged the failings of the old left, and won important victories on the cultural terrain, as well as drawing attention, again, to the importance of ‘bottom up politics’. This brand
of politics, however, has done little to effectively challenge capital in the contemporary era, even in the wake of a global financial crisis. The most visible wave of recent struggle in the West, the Occupy movement, revealed the impasse of contemporary radical politics: it can effectively highlight a problem but is able to do little by way of addressing it.

A synthesis of these two stages – an awareness of the strengths of the old and the new, and of the shortcomings and failings of each – holds the promise for an effective emancipatory politics of the twenty-first century. A reconceptualisation of the party form is a vital task if such a synthesis is to be reached. To call for the party is to also position the state as an entity that must, once again, be confronted head-on. To advocate a synthesis is not to call for some static point of equilibrium, where a perfect, ideal, form of organisational and strategic development has been reached. Rather, what is being called for is the positive recognition of an existing field of tensions. It is a call for a left project capable of harnessing contradictions as stimuli for ongoing innovation, instead of seeing them as problems to be solved one way or the other.

By way of example, the following are some possible lines along which the project to found a new party, or other forms of new organisation, might develop. First, it would be an open ended project, free from the dogmatism of the old left, yet simultaneously cognisant of the need for grand visions. Second, it would destabilise the dichotomy of leaders and led, while recognising the need for leadership and clear organisational structures. Third, it would aim to be done with the state as we know it, while seeking to work within and through the state. Fourth, it would recognise a multiplicity of identities and forms of oppression, while also realising that economic exploitation and precarity create the conditions for a collective identity. Fifth, it would be virulently anti-capitalist, but cognisant of dynamics within capitalism that could be constructively tapped into to move through and beyond capitalism. Sixth, the emancipation of the individual would be an important animating ideal, although it is through our collective being, cooperation and struggle that this is realised.

As a means of fostering a shared conceptual basis for such a broad reaching project, it is useful to situate it within what Álvaro García Linera, the current Vice-President of Bolivia, has termed the ‘communist horizon’ of our current age. To call for the possibility of communism is not to enter into apologia for the fallen Soviet Union, nor identify with the state-capitalism of contemporary China. In each of these cases there is only the name, never the substance. Rather, it is to find oneself in agreement with Marx’s famous dictum: from each according to their ability, to each according to their need. It is to struggle for a society in which people are empowered within the context of their everyday lives. It is the view that all humans are productive and creative, that they are formed by their social conditions and in turn produce and reproduce these conditions.

It is to call for a democracy that is not merely formal in nature but is concrete. Instead of a democracy embodied in the passive casting of a vote every three years, you will be empowered to make practical decisions with others about your workplace, community, school, and so on. It is to recognise that massive inequalities of wealth – for instance, that 8 men have as much wealth as 50% of the world’s population – are not naturally occurring phenomena, but are socially produced and thus socially contestable. It is to oppose structurally embedded inequalities and hierarchies in the name of equality.

To call for communism is to make a stand against the reign of cynicism, it is to contest the impoverished view that holds humans to be selfish animals concerned only with their own survival. To call for the possibility of communism is to recognise our capacity for cooperation, and to oppose the alienation of this capacity within our current economic and political systems. It may be an idealistic call, but ideas shape the world in which we live. While a realist surveys our situation and tells us that all is as it must be, the idealist says that we can do better – that we must do better.

To fight for ideals is to not be naively blind to the material and structural limitations faced, but it does entail fostering a vision that looks beyond what is to see what could be. Indeed, so long as the current logics structuring social life remain and continue to propel us towards complete environmental collapse, perhaps the most realistic position to assume is an idealistic one. There is a need to realise a radically different future than the one currently on offer.

Whether or not one wishes to situate oneself within the communist
horizon, what is being proposed here is a radical politics for the twenty-first century that combines actions against state apparatuses, as conducted by social movements, with the actions of a party able to move within these apparatuses. Such a project needs to productively embrace tensions and contradictions, the capacity to do so offers the chance to move beyond the shortcomings of radical politics in the twentieth century.

The state and party
Despite claims the state has been eclipsed by the corporation and transnational organisations in the age of globalisation, it remains a potent site of power in the contemporary age. It creates and maintains the conditions favourable to financial capital, and it primarily defends the interests of those with capital. The work of Nicos Poulantzas can be turned to so as to better understand some of the dynamics at play within the state.9

Poulantzas argues that state power is always a relational power. The state is not some monolithic block set apart from society. State apparatuses are shot through with contradictions, and house competing class factions. When pressed by popular demands from below, the state must respond. Power is mobile within the state, moving between different institutions. Factions within state apparatuses will try to insulate sites of power from democratic pressure. The Reserve Bank is a classic example of such an insulated institution. The capitalist class tends to hold the balance of power, one way or another, in capitalist societies. It will always, at the first opportunity, seek to roll-back previous concessions ceded to popular demands. We have been experiencing such a roll-back in this country since 1984 under the auspices of what is commonly called the ‘neoliberal’ project.

No matter how much one might come to resent the actions of those governing the state, and no matter how frustrated one might be at the rigidity of state institutions, to reject the state altogether is the weakest possible form of politics, argues Poulantzas. He repeatedly emphasises that there is no ‘outside’ to the state where political action can be undertaken. The ‘popular masses’ can deploy networks and centres of struggle at a distance from state apparatuses, but never from outside of the state. There can be no simple opposition between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ struggles. Rather, Poulantzas maintains, both must be pursued simultaneously. Successful strategy involves maintaining a certain distance from state apparatuses, while also taking action within the state to transform the state.

Not without their problems, recent events in Latin America offer examples of such a strategic approach in action.10 In Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela there have been attempts to realise state power through democratic elections, so that the composition of the state itself can be changed. In Venezuela, for instance, the success of such initiatives relies upon ongoing popular mobilisations, and entails the blossoming of the autonomous capacities of communities, workplaces, and social movements at a distance from central state apparatuses.11 Here we have examples of attempts to harness contradictions and tensions toward the realisation of emancipatory outcomes.

Syriza, in Greece, provides another example of such a project. Buoyed by social movements and popular discontent,12 the party promised much but quickly became detached from its social movement base once it reached government. Once in power it began to ape the very parties its creation had set out to discredit. Podemos in Spain, which shares a similar trajectory to Syriza, looks set to repeat the same pattern. There is a gap opening between those at the centre of the party and the wider membership, and, in turn, the social movement base.13 Both of these examples show the involvement of radical left parties in the parliamentary sphere can quickly lead to the subtraction of ‘radical’ from the equation. Success requires a strong, mobilised, enduring social base from which the party cannot become detached.

Another recent development has been the surge of support for a return to social democracy. A prime example being the UK Labour Party’s strong electoral showing in the 2017 General Election under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, buoyed as this was by the Momentum campaign; notable here, also, was the support Bernie Sanders’ presidential bid attracted in 2016. In some respects, Momentum is an attempt to create a social movement from above and is probably quite limited, in ways that Syriza and Podemos have been, through its immediate subjection to electoral politics. A further problem as was
faced by Sanders with the Democratic Party, and which Corbyn will continue to face with Labour, is the power of entrenched party elites to resist the possibility of a radical popular turn.

Attempts to transform existing political parties involve immense expenditures of energy, which, given the small existing membership of these parties, and the inertia that established interests in these parties can generate, begs the question if efforts might be better spent elsewhere? A possible answer being the creation of a new party able to directly address those currently disengaged from, and ill served by, existing political parties. Despite the limitations, though, the traction that parties like Syriza or the Momentum campaign have been able to achieve shows an appetite for a more stridently left form of political contestation.

But it can also be asked what could happen if a more radical party came into being that did not immediately seek to pitch itself into the parliamentary domain: one that situated itself, for want to a better term, under the communist horizon? Such a party should avoid the immediate temptation of engaging with electoral politics and cycles, as tends to be the case in this country for new parties, as previously seen with New Labour, Alliance and Mana. A new party could instead position itself in a longer temporality. It could make claims against the state in the immediate period, and only engage in electoral politics when it was sure of a large, mobilised social base able to back it.

Effectively connecting with such a social base would involve a long process of organisational work. Social tendencies toward radical change are already present, but tend to be disconnected from one another. They are often reactive, addressing immediate problems, such as our current housing crisis; or they are very localised, and directed towards building autonomous capacities within particular communities, as seen, for instance, in the proliferation of urban gardening initiatives across Aotearoa New Zealand. To add another dimension here, in the case of tangata whenua, there is a separate yet overlapping field of contestation from which tauiwi need to learn and find ways of productively connecting with. As Latin American examples have shown, a radical politics attuned to indigenous struggles, and with indigenous leadership, has the capacity to seriously challenge embedded social hierarchies and inequalities.

A party aiming at dramatic social change would be grounded in, and informed by, existing struggles. It would also serve as a dense nodal point for connecting diffuse struggles within a shared conceptual space. Through connecting different struggles and transformative projects the party is able to amplify them, making the sum greater than the parts. Further, the party would be able to contribute toward an upward scaling of struggles and contestation, both within the national realm and internationally. The party would aim to support and encourage the flourishing of society’s autonomous capacities, while also developing strategy aimed at initiating deep structural shifts in the nation-state, economy, and the relations of power that stem from patriarchal, colonial, and heteronormative social relations.14

What is being called for is, quite simply, a new common sense, a counter-hegemonic project. To say this is unrealistic is to buy into the fallacy that there is no alternative. Another world is possible, it is already with us, but the conditions of its full flourishing need to be nurtured.

The party provides a space where those seeking to move beyond the inequities of the present can find one another, and develop new means of working together. To aim for more specificity than this, at this moment, as to what the party might be, would be counter to the call. An important element of the party to come is the principle of openness and the pursuit of novel organisational capacities, something the persistent remnants and remainders of previous communist and radical socialist parties have been unable to achieve in this country. Through embracing the many tensions it will necessarily face as it develops, a new party will remain supple as it gains momentum and grows in size. The openness such an approach requires will be essential for overcoming the current impasse faced by the left.

NOTES
WHY WE NEED A NEW LEFT WING PARTY

Sue Bradford

The glaring organisational gap on the left of New Zealand politics has never been greater or the need to fill it more urgent. When I undertook doctoral research between 2010 and 2013 looking at questions around the need for a major left think tank in New Zealand, the message came through loud and clear that our left activist world was changing.1

Drawing on analysis of interviews with 51 research participants from diverse parts of the left academic and activist worlds, my thesis concluded that more and more of us were keen to move past weaknesses perceived at the time of research. These included a depleted union movement, a colonised community sector often unable and unwilling to advocate politically for those it served, lack of financial resources, a rightward drift by the Green and Labour Parties and a history of factionalism on the radical left.

A clear call emerged around the need to start building our own new counter-hegemonic institutions capable of changing this country even in the face of the gross power held by the economic and political structures we confront. It was not only think tanks of the left that were urgently needed. Without the concurrent creation and development of a radical left party or parties, we were never going to develop the mass-based ideological and organisational bases necessary if we were to become serious about moving beyond capitalism.

During my research period Mana had been just such a possibility for some of us. Launched in April 2011, Mana was a brave experiment in which radical left Māori invited radical left tāuiwi to become part of a Māori-led, Māori focused political organisation. After joining Mana on the day it launched, I quickly became involved in policy development and stood as a candidate at number four on its party list in the 2011 election. I remained active in the organisation for three years until a national hui in April 2014 welcomed German billionaire Kim Dotcom into our ranks as an honoured guest speaker. He told us, among other things, that the way forward for the New Zealand economy was through

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increased foreign investment. The contradiction between Mr Dotcom’s lifestyle and philosophy and that of Mana was too extreme for some of us to tolerate, but the vast majority of members decided that Mana and Dotcom’s Internet Party should join together to contest the 2014 election.

I quit Mana at that point along with a few others, leaving us party-less pending further developments. For Mana itself the result was an electoral disaster which saw the party lose its sole MP. In February 2017 the Mana and the Māori Parties signed a deal to work together up until the date of the September election, with the Māori Party agreeing to stand aside in Te Tai Tokerau electorate so that Hone Harawira had a better chance of regaining his seat in Parliament. While this agreement makes sense within the world of Māori politics, by its very nature the new formation is unlikely to encourage the participation of large numbers of non-Māori activists in either Mana or the Māori Party. Mr Harawira’s call in June 2017 for the execution of Chinese meth dealers only served to emphasise the fragility of Mana’s remaining support base and the sometimes awkward relationship with its aspiring Te Tai Tokerau candidate.

When my doctoral research turned to exploring ways in which we might fill two of the glaring gaps in left counter-hegemonic institutions, party and think tank, one of the key things to come through was a call for the New Zealand left to become braver. There was a sense that we needed to build unions and community based organisations – and think tanks and parties – with a more highly developed sense of our own latent power, of our genuine capacity to take our future into our own hands. We would also have a better chance of success if we could establish organisations that value internal debate, that have clear accountable structures, are based on respectful relationships and which also understand that courage and risk taking are essential components of effective activism. These were lessons I sought to actively take forward into real life organisational work from the time I graduated in 2014.

My experience over the past seven years since my detour into the parliamentary arena as a Green MP (1999 – 2009) has not only been in the academy. I have also been deeply involved in the development of Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP) and close to the work of FIRST Union and its migrant workers’ wing the Union Network of Migrants (UNEMIG). I see in the work of these organisations some of the practical seeds of what we need to learn for any party project.

Auckland Action Against Poverty was set up in 2010 as an overtly anti-capitalist organisation undertaking both individual Work and Income casework and political advocacy that challenges the neoliberal agenda on jobs, welfare, poverty and housing. At AAAP’s 2016 beneficiary ‘impact’ in Mangere the full force of poverty in this country hit us front on. Despite a huge effort in which we managed to help over 700 people get their full entitlements from Work & Income over a three day period we also had to ask an estimated 800 people to turn around and leave. Some had walked for miles with babies in their arms, slept outside in the carpark waiting, or had driven from Northland or Coromandel to get our help. The worst moment came when a few of us had to turn people away using the same tactics police use against us on demonstrations. A small number of those at the head of the queue tried to charge through the doors of our community centre base in a desperate bid to get our help. We linked arms and used the force of our bodies to keep them out. This was a heartbreaking moment on a reversed front line. We had promised to help those who came to us. Now we were sending them away with nothing.

A stark lesson we learned from this is that AAAP on its own cannot even begin to cope with the desperate need now present in our communities, through either individual or political advocacy work. Without a political party or parties who can mobilise, amplify and carry a broader counter hegemonic agenda forward, AAAP’s efforts will continue to be a drop in an ever-widening ocean of poverty, homelessness, anger and despair. Its focus must be squarely on meeting its own kaupapa the best it can in an environment in which much of the community sector has been rendered toothless by decades of government and corporate colonisation. Activists have often come to work with AAAP because it is one of the only comparatively stable long term bases for action in the region. While this is helpful in boosting the group’s volunteer base, it is not viable that AAAP substitute for the much broader opportunities a party or parties would bring for education and conscientisation, strategic action and the building of membership and bases way beyond the natural limits of AAAP’s capacity and kaupapa.
On the union side of things FIRST has been experimenting with new ways of strengthening unionism, including through its novel three month organisers’ training school in 2015, and through its deliberate organising of actions involving community based activists as well as unionists. An example of this type of action took place at Bunnings New Lynn in October 2015 when a number of AAAP people locked on across the checkouts, closing access to the store while a major picket raged outside. Community activists are at times able to push militancy beyond the legal and employment constraints affecting union members and organisers. Both FIRST and Unite! unions are taking the lead in developing new ways of working and organising in sectors like supermarkets, big box retail, fast food outlets and call centres, where low paid precarious work and hardnosed employers make unionisation and successful bargaining an uphill battle.

For those of us interested in developing new forms of political organisation, these unions have lessons for us about how to work effectively with workers without the patronising approach taken at times by some on the left; about the importance of recognising effective organising as a highly skilled occupation; and about the need to find new ways of operating across old union and community divides at a time when so many workers are constantly moving between paid work and the intimidating intricacies of the welfare system. However, like AAAP, neither FIRST nor Unite! nor any other union or group of unions can substitute for a party or parties. The primary function of unions is to serve the interests of their members in an environment hostile to collective bargaining and to unionisation itself, particularly in the private sector. An effective party could certainly assist unions in their work by providing a site of conscientisation, education and action (and much else) but the two kinds of work cannot substitute one for the other.

In the work of UNEMIG, ‘a network of migrant workers within FIRST Union’ Dennis Maga and others have for years been taking a brave stand fighting for the rights of some of the most exploited workers in New Zealand, people who have come here in the hope of a better life only to find themselves underpaid, at times working in dreadful conditions, and in the worst cases surviving in conditions of modern day slavery. This is another cutting-edge site of union struggle in 2017, and a place from which we locals can also learn a lot, if we take the time to listen. A couple of us were in conversation with a migrant worker recently when he asked straight out in a tone of disbelief ‘Where’s your party?’ This worker could not understand why we have no communist or socialist party here. He too was looking for that organisation we have not yet built. That incident highlighted how much we can potentially learn from setting up groups which welcome and involve a diversity of peoples including new migrants, who will at times have more to offer us in terms of political, union and community organising experience than we can begin to imagine. A deeper understanding of the courage, analysis, commitment and organisational capacity required in struggles in the home countries from which many migrants come will only deepen our ability to organise here, despite often vast contextual disparities.

I will return to the question of the party shortly, but first it is perhaps useful to consider the relationship between Economic and Social Research Aotearoa (ESRA) and any party or parties which might develop here in the near future. ESRA is a radical left think tank which is being slowly established by a network of academics and activists around the country in a collective project which grew out of the findings of my doctoral research. ESRA was officially launched in Wellington in September 2016. The new entity aims to build an intellectual armoury for the left, a place of research and knowledge, of dissemination and debate, and a centre for nurturing new thinking and ideas. The underpinning goal is that ESRA will become an increasingly effective counter-hegemonic institution geared to strengthening our organising, policy and academic work across the left. However, ESRA is also very clear that it should not and cannot be a political party. It can never be a think tank’s job to act as the mobilising and organising force which a party must be.

It is also possible that there will be more than one party in the radical left and constitutional transformational space in Aotearoa. I hope there will be. In the early days of Mana I argued with Pākehā friends inside that party that it might be better for we tāuiwi to build a sister organisation aligned with Mana and its kaupapa, rather than trying to achieve our goals through one organisation. As history shows I clearly did not
the notion that it was better to vote for a social democratic party than to cede the field to National. I did not trust that a new Labour-led government would do any better than they have in the past, where often enough the plight of the people whom I have worked with most of my life, unemployed workers, beneficiaries and their families, has been worsened rather than improved by a victorious Labour government. The Greens still have many good policies and people within their ranks (as do Labour and Mana, for that matter), but have become increasingly a party dedicated to promoting socially and environmentally responsible capitalism. The Labour-Green Budget Responsibility Rules agreement signed in March 2017 was the clearest signal yet that the Green Party now places a business-friendly commitment to fiscal control over any serious intention to legislate for major and effective economic, social and ecological change.9

I suggest that the time is ripe for building a new kind of left party in New Zealand. Many of us are aware of this but the task is not easy. As my doctoral research showed, we are conscious of the failures of the past, and often lack confidence in ourselves. But it is time to move past this, and start to actively conceive and build new forms of organisation, now. In this challenge, which I hope we will relish rather than fear, there are at least eight central things I believe we must take into account.

First, any new organisation must be committed to supporting the existing efforts of unions and other organisations demanding change on the streets, encouraging them to do even more and to take the struggle further, without attempting to take them over. Nor can unions and community organisations be conflated with any new party. They can and must remain autonomous of each other, for the sake of both. It has been recently argued that one option for effective new extra parliamentary political organisation in New Zealand may be the Bayan model from the Philippines.10 While this is interesting to consider, I would contend that our situation is too far removed from that of the Philippines to make this viable, at least for now, because we lack the existing mass based and multi-sectoral organisations on the ground who could constitute this kind of alliance. Nor does setting up a broad alliance substitute for the absence of a party or parties.

Second, while I believe any party we set up should stand strongly
outside the parliamentary process in the beginning and make its priority the building of collective organisation and struggle outside the parliamentary sphere, there should be an option that at the right time it may in future engage in parliamentary elections as well. If we can’t give people hope that at some point there may be a chance to build power through parliament rather than by force of arms, we will be making fools of ourselves and of those we hope to win to our cause. In Aotearoa 2017 we must promote an expectation that together we can build organisations capable of taking power without the use of violence or relying on vague notions of revolutionary change which fail to explain how that change might in fact become a reality.

Third, we should become more capable of talking clearly, openly and analytically about these questions of power. It is a reality. So is the state. These are not figments of our imagination and transformational power cannot be magically taken. Some strands of radical left thinking contend that ‘the people’ will spontaneously rise up when the time is right. It is hard to identify any occasion in history or contemporaneously when this has actually happened. Whether via parliaments or the streets, there are always thinkers and organisers involved, openly or covertly. The right has no qualms about questions of power and uses its vastly superior economic resources and political dominance to make sure the left has as little access to power as possible. Do we really want to cede all possible futures to them? If we continue to avoid the necessary combativeness involved in driving up and naming the contradictions inherent in capitalism and taking on its structures and systems, then we eliminate forever the possibility of radical change.

Fourth, the language we use is critical. We need to talk in ways that ordinary people can understand. We need to move people with words that relate to their lives and realities in this time and this place. Our efforts will be pointless if we persist – in inappropriate settings – in using political jargon and abstract academic language which alienates and confuses people, or which they simply cannot understand.

Fifth, for tauiwi, relationships with Māori will be vital. Moana Jackson challenged the tauiwi left at the 2016 Social Movements, Resistance and Social Change conference to seriously pick up the tauiwi side of the work for constitutional transformation arising from the extensive Matike Mai consultations and subsequent report. Any new organisation we form must take up this task with sincerity and determination, without expecting Māori friends and allies to do the heavy lifting for us, as has been too often the case in the past.

Sixth, any party we build must be one that working class people see is actually of them, reflects their needs and is not going to sell them out. Building that kind of trust takes time and effort.

Seventh, one of the biggest challenges we face is around the question of leadership. Post-Occupy there has been considerable recognition among young activists that there is a place for known and accountable leadership rather than a dependence on whoever quietly and without accountability takes such roles. But enabling and effective organisers and leaders don’t just magically come into being. These are skilled roles for hard workers who are serious about a lifelong commitment to struggle. We need to become more conscious of actively bringing more people into skilled leadership, and more willing to have conversations about the nature and qualities of leadership without belittling or berating each other in the process.

Eighth, there is also the associated question of populism. On both left and right of the political spectrum internationally populism is being touted as the way forward, and in some cases has been remarkably successful, catastrophically so in the case of Trump. But I would urge caution before we start looking too urgently for our New Zealand Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders or Pablo Iglesias as some have urged over the past year. The one-man hero may be a short cut to mass mobilisation but surely we can find here in Aotearoa a different way – leadership which is shared, operates from an enabling rather than hierarchical foundation, and which involves more than one person and one gender.

We must build organisations for change that are sustainable long term and that are unafraid of taking power. This means beginning the slow, hard work of creating new institutions where nothing has existed before. As we come to truly understand the gravity and extent of the task in front of us, some of us may become a little anxious. It is easy at such a point to revert to old tactics such as entryism into social democratic parties or to sink back into the kind of small vanguard sect type party to which most of us have no intention of returning. We need to do
CONSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE MATIKE MAI PROJECT: A KŌRERO WITH MOANA JACKSON

Moana Jackson and Helen Potter

Helen Potter: What led to Matike Mai, how did it go from an idea to an actual project?

Moana Jackson: Like everything else Matike Mai has a whakapapa. The immediate catalyst came from a number of discussions at the Iwi Chairs Forum, at a national hui on Māori development, and various other workshops around the country. A common focus of these hui was the frustration with what are called Māori perspectives or interests so often being ignored by the Crown and the difficulty in getting any real expression of rangatiratanga recognised.

That was not a new frustration of course because it has been there ever since the Treaty was signed. In the mid-1990s, Sir Hepi Te Heu Heu called a national hui at Hirangi to discuss the introduction of the Fiscal Envelope. As a result of that hui, two more national hui were held where the discussion moved from the policy of the Fiscal Envelope to what was then called constitutional change. A lot of work was done but was then overtaken by other events.

So at a national hui in 2010, it was suggested that the constitutional conversation needed to be restarted. A few people, such as Judge Caren Fox were asked to give background information on the sorts of discussions that our people had had and a resolution was passed to set up a working group on constitutional transformation. Margaret Mutu was asked to be the convener of that working group and I was asked to be the chair.

The brief given to the Working Group was very specific: that we would discuss, initially with Māori people, how to develop a constitution based on He Whakaputanga (the 1835 Declaration of Independence), Te Tiriti o Waitangi, tikanga, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

NOTES
**HP**: How was the project organised?

**MJ**: To begin with, Margaret and I called together a range of people including Ani Mikaere, Veronica Tawhai, Atareta Poananga, Joe Te Rito, and Malcolm Mulholland to discuss how we could best do the mahi. We decided we would ask iwi and other Māori organisations to give us names for the working group, and that we would also co-opt people as needed.

As a result we ended up with quite a big working group which was always available for advice or to help us organise hui in their rohe. The first hui was held at home in Ngāti Kahungunu, partly because it was there at Waipatu marae that the first Māori Parliament met in 1892 and I thought that was a good place to start. We also went there because we wanted to trial how we might structure the hui kōrero and I felt more comfortable doing that at home.

We were initially concerned that if we said to our people, come to a hui on constitutional transformation – no one would come, because it was our sense that that issue would not rank on the top 10 priorities of our people. The other concern we had was that even if people did come, they would say ‘this is unrealistic’ because all our people know is the Westminster system imposed since 1840.

However, those two concerns were misplaced because while our people might not use the word ‘constitution’ every day, they have a really clear sense of powerlessness. They know that if one of the top priorities in their life is putting food on the table for their kids, they know the reason they can’t do that is because they are powerless. They know they do not have the power to make the decisions about those things.

And the second concern was merely a misapprehension because no one in the 252 hui we held, said that a kōrero about constitutionalism was unrealistic. I think one of the reasons that happened was because when we got iwi or other rōpū to organise hui, we put the hypothetical question that ‘If you could change the way the country is governed tomorrow, what would it look like?’ and we found that our people responded to that really well. What became clear really early on in the hui, was that although our people didn’t talk constitutionalism, there is actually a great deal of knowledge and history that our people knew about our own systems of government, about mana motuhake, and so on. It varied from place to place of course depending on the history of each rohe and their experiences, whether it was through the Kotahitanga, or the Kingitanga, or He Whakaputanga. That knowledge was widespread and it was knowledge that a lot of our people kept turning back to in the kōrero.

It all took a while to organise everything and while iwi contributed to the costs of organising hui in their own rohe we wanted and had to seek independent funding. Just as one doesn’t like being beholden to the Crown for funding, we didn’t want to be beholden to an iwi – and we needed to be seen to be independent. We therefore set up a finance committee, chaired by Bill Hamilton, and they eventually got funding from the JR McKenzie Trust which enabled us to do the four years of hui and rangatahi wānanga. Margaret got some funding through the University of Auckland for Kingi Snelgar to do a literature review of early discussions of constitutionalism by Māori. Veronica and the rangatahi group also applied for and received funding from the United Nation’s social development fund. So we became self-sufficient which was really important. It wasn’t extravagant funding so we had to be careful but certainly we couldn’t have done it without the JR McKenzie Trust.

Something else that was really important in organising terms was that we managed to take on Kayleen Neho as a kind of Project Manager. She was crucial to the whole process if only because among other things she managed to keep me organised through attendance at all of the 252 hui.

And I think one of the most important kaupapa decisions we made in the organising stage was to hear what rangatahi had to say and to ensure that the process of hearing their voice was led by rangatahi. We approached Veronica Tawhai and she agreed to organise what became an exciting part of the whole project. I went to the first planning hui that the rangatahi group had, there were only about 12 people, but they were just stunning. I didn’t go to any more for that reason and, we just left them to it!

Veronica began by pulling in people she knew, and Margaret and I rang different iwi and various rōpū to see if they could select a rangatahi representative as well. Eventually different groups of rangatahi had
training sessions and then ran the hui in their rohe. They ended up holding 70 wānanga which were amazing.

The other important decision we made I think was to go wider than iwi. We knew that a lot of our people don’t go to iwi hui so we basically decided we would go wherever we were asked to go. That’s why we ended up having hui with groups such as organisations for Māori people with disabilities, Māori LGBTRōpū, gangs, churches and so forth.

At the end of the project, when we finally decided that 252 hui was enough, over 10,000 people had come to the hui. We also received 843 written submissions. The fact that so many people came was important, not just for the validity of the report but because it showed that, in spite of what a lot of people say, our people aren’t content with the current constitutional system.

After the hui were over we were faced with transcribing everything but thankfully my mokopuna Tira who was part of the rangatahi group undertook that task along with Kayleen.

While that was being done we had a number of smaller discussion groups – mainly to have further kōrero on things which had come up during the hui. For example, one of those smaller discussion groups was at Te Wānanga o Raukawa because the Anglican Church three-houses constitutional model, developed by Whatarangi Winiata, was often mentioned in the kōrero so we wanted to have a specific discussion about that. We also had a smaller group hui back home about the Māori Parliament. Those smaller group discussions happened quite often and I like to think that the overall process was really good.

Once all that mahi was done we then tried, as honestly as we could, to synthesise and reflect what our people had said in a written report. During the write up stage, we also talked with various members of the working group who became our sounding-board, which was a really important part of the writing process. For instance, in working through transcripts of hui held by Ngāti Raukawa, I’d call Ani Mikaere to ask about some of the things that were discussed and she was able to bring a very considered view of what had happened. So those sorts of kōrero were really important too. At the same time the rangatahi group were writing a separate report that was included as part of the final document, *He Whakaaro Here Whakaumu Mō Aotearoa*.

If there is a whakapapa to all of that, it is the history since 1840 where there has always been a constitutional discussion among our people as well as various attempts such as the Kingitanga to institutionalise some sort of constitutional framework that is different to and not under the Crown. We realised we were, if you like, walking in the footsteps of what our tūpuna had done. For me personally, it was one of the most rewarding bits of mahi I’ve ever had the privilege of doing because our people were just amazing. At one of the early hui we had in Wairoa, just a small hui of 20 or so people at the Tai Whenua Office, one of the kui came up to me afterwards and slipped her arm through mine and said, ’I’ve been waiting for this kōrero all my life’. That was a really special moment.

The work of hui and kōrero took four years. In the original application for funding to the JR McKenzie Trust, we suggested 30 hui, but by the time we got the funding we’d already had 87 requests for hui – and so we knew that 30 hui wasn’t going to work. We could probably have wrapped it up in a year, but both Margaret and I thought that ‘have kete, will travel’; that if our people ask us to go, then we should go and that’s what we tried to do.

In some ways we learned that the way we were doing things was tika because we discovered that when our tūpuna were planning the Māori Parliament of 1892 they also travelled, holding hui in Kahungunu from Wairoa down to the Wairarapa and then other rohe asking questions like ‘do you think this is a good idea?’, ’should we try this?’ One of the fascinating debates was, if we have a Māori Parliament, should we vote? Should we have votes? No, we can’t have votes because votes aren’t Māori, but if it’s a Parliament we should vote – so there was this neat debate. Because of the times, in the early 1890s, women couldn’t vote in the Pākehā Parliament and so it was also asked if women could vote in this Māori Parliament. So there was this lovely discussion, they went out and talked with our people.

Almost every time we went to a hui I’d tell that story – that what we’re doing isn’t new; this is what our people did a hundred or more years ago. When the question occasionally came up about what a new constitutional model might look like – and our people didn’t talk very much about models and instead talked more about the tikanga and
was interviewed for a Pākehā current affairs programme, and I did another – so we did two or three early interviews and then the kumara vine took over really.

Kayleen would get requests for hui from all over the place which reminded me how effective the kumara vine is. However, that wouldn't have worked if our people weren't interested. They wanted to know what it was about and how they could contribute and so on. When it became obvious that we weren't going to have just 30 hui, and we'd made the decision 'have kete, will travel' it then often became a matter of just juggling how we did it in a practical sense. So when we had hui in Ngāti Porou, for example, we had one hui organised by the rūnanga and we had others organised on different marae – and so practically it just made sense to do all those in one hit and so on. And, over time, we got better at the organisational side of things.

HP: So clearly Māori were eager to participate and contribute and felt it was a continuation of mahi that our people had been doing since at least as far back as 1835?

MJ: Yes, I think it's fair to say that. Obviously some people had more knowledge of that history than others, and the emphasis was different in different rohe too. When we were in the North, in Tai Tokerau, they talked all the time about He Whakaputanga. When we were in Tainui, they talked about the Kingitanga. When we were in Ngai Tahu, they didn't talk about either of those things. The kōrero reflected the iwi histories so that was interesting.

If you could crystallise what the hui said, there were six general principles. One was the absolute, unwavering view that the current constitutional system is not just contrary to the Treaty but it's also a denial of tino rangatiratanga. The view of some, that you can exercise rangatiratanga in Parliament for example, was not even contemplated really.

The second was a really clear analysis of the Treaty; that Māori did not cede sovereignty and therefore a constitutional system had to be based on that fact. It also had to recognise the grant of kawanatanga. The view of some, that you can exercise rangatiratanga in Parliament for example, was not even contemplated really.

The conclusion our people reached in the hui we had was different to that of the tūpuna though. The hui leading to the establishment of the Māori Parliament decided that they would have voting and that women wouldn't vote because women didn't vote in the Pākehā Parliament. That didn't last very long because our women basically said, get a life! But that was a decision they came to which I thought was really interesting and showed how pervasive the Pākehā influence had become by the early 1890s.

In terms of the hui themselves, they were interesting too because most of the hui organised by iwi ran alongside hui organised by others within that rohe. The iwi would organise hui, sometimes at their iwi offices, and then people out in the community would say for us to come and meet with them as well – so that was interesting. The meetings with all the different sorts of Māori groups was fascinating and in some ways sad. When we had the big hui with Te Rōpū Waiora, which is the national body for Māori with disabilities, a couple of the speakers broke down and cried because 'no one ever comes to talk to us about these things – they only come to talk to us about disability issues'. And when we had the hui with the Māori LGBT community in Auckland, a couple of the old people cried there too because they often felt excluded by marae and so on – and certainly the Crown never asks for their views, unless they want to talk about AIDS or something.

I'm so glad we made that decision to go and talk to our people, whoever and wherever they were. I remember going back to the LGBT group in Auckland with the draft of the report and talking it through with them and they were just really pleased that we had taken the time. With the time and the resources we had, I do think that we reached a cross section of Māori people.

HP: How did people get to know about the project?

MJ: When we had the first meeting of the working group at Waipapa Marae at Auckland University, Māori media came. And then Margaret values that would underpin a Treaty-based constitution – but when they did talk about a model, the same debate came up about voting; should we vote? If we don't vote, what should we do? So those debates were interesting and really neat.

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MJ: When we had the first meeting of the working group at Waipapa Marae at Auckland University, Māori media came. And then Margaret was interviewed for a Pākehā current affairs programme, and I did another – so we did two or three early interviews and then the kumara vine took over really.

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rangatiratanga was the kawa or tikanga of this land.

The fifth principle therefore was that a new constitution needed to flow not just from the Treaty but it had to be based on tikanga. So if there was a conflict between the two, say, then the guide to the resolution of that conflict would be tikanga. That was as important a starting point as the emphasis on broader values; that you can’t have a Treaty-based constitution if it’s based on Pākehā law – it has to be based on tikanga.

The sixth principle was the need to find space for kaumātua and kuia and rangatahi; that a constitution based on tikanga has to acknowledge those spaces.

Those principles were really important but the hardest part of the project was that we had been asked to come up with a possible constitutional model. We found that really hard to do and instead came up with six ‘indicative’ models. These are some ways in which the values and the tikanga that our people talked about might be expressed in structural terms. But for us, that was always less important than the values that would underpin the eventual model.

HP: Do you think the project helped build or rebuild a movement for constitutional transformation?

MJ: Yes. At the hui I often talked about the kōrero that preceded the establishment of the Māori Parliament in 1892, and I often also talked about the Constitution of the United States. While it’s a flawed, racist constitution – it dismisses Native Americans and classifies Black People as only three-fifths human – part of the process that led to the constitutional conventions was that people travelled around and held what were called ‘town hall’ meetings, which they still have in the United States where Members of Congress have to front up. It seemed to me that those two quite different processes were essential if you’re going to talk about a constitution for the people. And that’s what we tried to do as well.

When the report came out, I’d like to think it was a reflection of what our people said. At the end of the report it says, ‘that the desire for constitutional transformation is not a pious hope but a reasonable Treaty expectation.’ And that’s what I thought our people were saying.
Not long after our working group was established, the National government, as part of its confidence and supply agreement with the Māori Party, set up a constitutional review panel in 2011 – which had some really good Māori people on it like Ranginui Walker, Linda Smith, Leonie Pihama, and Hinurewa Poutu, plus some really interesting Pākehā people as well. At public hui they encountered some really violent, racist opposition from Pākehā, rather like that of Hobson’s Pledge.

I went to a Hobson’s Pledge meeting once just to hear what they had to say and my brother and I were the only brown people there. The audience was nearly all white men most of whom were older than me. There were no young people. So the conversation will outlive them. It doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy. I’m never naïve about the reality of colonising power, and its intransigence, but the fact that you’re getting more and more young people, even being prepared to contemplate these issues is really heartening. That’s what I’ve been taking from these other hui that we’re having. With the hui we had with the Sri Lankan Association I was interested why they’d asked us to come and one of their koroua smiled and said, well we were colonised by the British too. So they come at it from that history.

I guess if I have a hope from all of the constitutional hui, and it is a hope that Margaret has as well, it is that in the future when our people and Pākehā people want to talk about how this country can do better in constitutional terms, then maybe our report will be something our people can refer to. In the end that may be its greatest value. When the constitutional transformation happens, it might be quite unlike anything like what we imagined in our six indicative models. But there’s now something, a reference point if you like, that our people might look to that wasn’t there before.

HP: How has the presence of Māori parties and more Māori MPs in Parliament contributed to or limited conversations around constitutional transformation?

MJ: I’ve often said, ever since our first tūpuna went into that place over 100 years ago, some really good people have gone into Parliament.
He also says: ‘Nations and peoples are largely the lies they feed themselves. If they keep telling themselves lies they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, their own origins, then they free their histories for future flowerings.’

Until we get brave enough to acknowledge what the Treaty says in constitutional terms, then in this country we’re living a lie. I’m also mindful of my hero Frederick Douglass’ comment that ‘Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will.’ It’s not easily achieved but the Treaty, I think, gives us the chance to achieve that. And in some small way I hope this constitutional mahi will help in that.

But in the end what they’re able to do is limited by the fact that it is a Westminster system; it’s not a Māori system, it’s not a Treaty system. Often what those good people do is merely minimise the harm that that system might do to our people. I don’t think that should be underestimated or disrespected, but in the end, it is not structured either in terms of the Treaty or in terms of promoting Māori interests.

If we are to be honest, in Treaty terms, about where the country goes then we have to look beyond that system and hope that the Māori MPs in the meantime can make some incremental changes. I think that the fact there are more Māori MPs, certainly now in the government, is a good thing – within that system. If they sometimes mistakenly think that’s an expression of rangatiratanga they are people who I think will be less likely to fall under the party leviathan if a Māori issue comes up.

For example, when the foreshore and seabed issue arose under Labour, only Tariana moved. All the others, good people, stuck to the party. I think with the range of people we have there now, particularly some of the younger ones, that might be less likely to happen. There may be a certain strength in numbers that will do two things. I think that a government with that bloc of Māori are less likely to do a foreshore and seabed and if they did behave in a similar way on some issue, then I think this group of Māori MPs would react differently. But that doesn’t, in the end, negate the fact that that system is not what the Treaty envisaged.

The Treaty allowed for two spheres of influence and we still have just that one sphere. The Crown still assumes it should be the only sphere and that while Māori might participate in it, we can’t have anything different - but in the end that is an unsustainable assumption. I always believe that until a country acknowledges where it’s come from or what it has established to preserve colonising power, then it can’t be a just country.

As Ben Okri has said: ‘Before we can create a new world, we must first unearth and destroy the myths and realities, the lies and propaganda which have been used to oppress, enslave, incinerate, gas, torture, and starve the human beings of this planet. Facing the lies of history of basic human responsibility, it is unpleasant to do but liberating to accomplish.’

NOTES
1 This interview was conducted in December 2017.
5 Frederick Douglass, Two Speeches by Frederick Douglass, Rochester, NY: Dewey, 1857, p. 22.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Sue Bradford is a community organiser, political activist and between 1999 and 2009 was a Member of Parliament for the Green Party. In 2014 she was awarded her PhD for a thesis A Major Left Wing Think Tank in Aotearoa: Impossible Dream or a Call to Action? She led the establishment of ESRA.

Moana Jackson (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Porou) has worked with an extensive number of whānau, hapū, iwi, and Māori organisations and collectives over the past four decades to assist them with a vast range of kaupapa, and has led a number of high profile research projects, including his seminal research on Māori and the criminal justice system and more latterly on constitutional transformation. He has also worked extensively on international Indigenous issues over this time and is regarded as an expert on Indigenous constitutionalism. Formerly a secondary school teacher of te reo Māori, Moana is a lawyer and a guest lecturer in the Ahunga Tikanga (Māori Laws and Philosophy) programme at Te Wānanga o Raukawa.

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Helen Potter (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāpuhi) has been involved in kaupapa Māori research for nearly 20 years – predominantly in the fields of Māori education, adult learning, health, housing, and whānau and environmental wellbeing. Following completion of her PhD in 2003, Helen worked as a senior researcher and advisor for first the Māori Party
OUR KAUPAPA

We are a national left think tank in Aotearoa whose work includes:

- Developing an intellectual armoury for the radical left, based on high quality research and the development of theory relevant to the antagonisms and contradictions of our place and time.
- Working to build a radical left hegemony in Aotearoa, based on a kaupapa of social, economic and ecological justice, honouring tino rangatiratanga and grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- Generating a body of knowledge which incorporates different traditions of thought and ecologies of knowledge, to nurture and fuel activists and academics.
- Seeding a culture of resistance, solidarity and hope, informed by and translating the issues and hopes of exploited, oppressed and marginalised people.
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- Establishing spaces where we can have respectful conversations, debates and disagreements with each other from different parts of the left, and from academic and activist bases.
- Disseminating and popularising alternatives to capitalism and collective visions of a better future.

Ben Rosamond is a Researcher at ESRA, an activist, and a union organiser for the New Zealand Educational Institute, in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland.

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and then the Mana Party in Parliament, and as a senior researcher in Te Wāhanga, the kaupapa Māori research unit at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Helen is a co-director of Tīaho Ltd, a kaupapa Māori research, evaluation, and policy development company.

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Could politics be anything other than the boring administration of the economy in the interests of the already privileged? This volume collects innovative thinking about new forms of politics, new forms of political organisation and new ways of thinking politics. Contributors propose radical social change including a new social contract between Māori and others, constitutional transformation by 2040, new ways of relating to the natural environment, new ways of understanding housing and land, new forms of society outside and beyond colonial capitalism. Some propose new political parties, while others look to the rise of new forms of politics outside parliament. This book is a call to arms and an invitation to new forms of politics and new ways of understanding politics. Far from utopian dreaming, it announces that new forms of political organisation were here all along but are today promising to break into the open.