A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa—an impossible dream or a call to action?

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Abstract

Despite the worldwide proliferation of think tanks since the 1970s and the development of a small number of think tanks locally, no substantial left wing think tank exists in Aotearoa. This research was driven by my desire to find out why no such entity had ever emerged and whether the state of the left in 2010–2013 provided fertile ground (or otherwise) for such an initiative. Working definitions of the terms 'left' and 'think tank' were developed specifically for the purposes of the thesis.

The research paradigm guiding the study is an emergent form of critical inquiry methodology called political activist ethnography. Reflexivity is a key component of this approach, and I am transparent in bringing my experiences, beliefs and bias to the research table. Data was collected from individual semi-structured interviews with 51 left academics and activists and from a methodically maintained research journal. Nine international left think tanks and seven community-based think tank-like organisations in New Zealand were examined for what any future think tank implementation project might usefully learn from their experiences.

The study is significant as it is the first piece of academic research ever undertaken into issues around the absence of a major left wing think tank in Aotearoa. It is also a rare and reasonably comprehensive look by the left at itself at a specific point in time. The stories of the community-based organisations outlined here start to fill a gap in the community and voluntary sector's knowledge of its own history. The thesis also appears to mark the first time political activist ethnography has been used at doctoral level in New Zealand, and adds to the growing body of literature about activist ethnographies and social movement knowledge production internationally. Many ideas for possible future research are offered.

Key findings from the study are that while the New Zealand left was fragmented and weak in 2010–2013, the ground for developing one or more major left wing think tanks was fertile. The challenges to any implementation projects were substantial, including the pervasive issue of funding. The thesis concluded that the idea of developing one or more major left wing think tanks is indeed a call to action rather than an impossible dream.

Table of Contents

Abstract ..... **ii**
Attestation of Authorship ..... **vii**
Acknowledgements ..... **viii**
1. Introduction **1**
Purpose of the research 2
The research questions 2
Methodology and methods 3
Personal background 4
Assumptions underpinning the study 5
Clarifying three key concepts 6
Clarifying historical and geographical scope and the ethnographic field 8
Further scoping decisions 10
Think tanks in New Zealand 10
Think tanks in the Pacific region 10
Left activist use of online media 10
Left theory 10
Some definitions 11
Activism 11
Intersectionality 11
Neoliberalism 11
Public policy 12
Social movement 12
Te Reo Māori 12
Significance of study 12
Think tanks 12
State of the left 13
Methodology 13
Structure of the rest of the thesis 14
2. Literature review: Left and think tank contextualised **15**
Introduction 15
Defining ‘left’ 15
Transformational and reformist: A necessary distinction 18
Think tanks 19
Defining ‘think tank’ 21
Left wing think tanks: An international perspective 22
Australia 24
Canada 28

United Kingdom ... 32
Scotland ... 35
Germany ... 37
Think tanks in New Zealand ... 38
Left wing think tanks in Aotearoa: A lacuna ... 39
The activist left in New Zealand 2010–2013 ... 41
Summary ... 44
3. Methodology and methods ... 46
Introduction ... 46
Philosophical assumptions and research paradigm: Critical inquiry ... 46
Research methodology: A form of political activist ethnography (PAE) ... 48
History and origins ... 48
Political activist ethnography ... 49
Political activist ethnography: Application to this study ... 51
Methodologies considered and rejected ... 54
Participatory action research ... 55
Political autoethnography ... 56
Radical community development theory ... 57
Grounded theory methodology ... 58
Social movement theory ... 59
Ethical considerations ... 61
Methods ... 66
Interviews ... 66
Thesis journal ... 72
Data analysis ... 75
Rigour in the research process ... 78
Credibility ... 79
Transferability ... 81
Methodological congruence ... 81
Reciprocity ... 82
4. The New Zealand left 2010–2013 ... 84
Introduction ... 84
Overview ... 85
Note on style ... 85
Defining 'left' ... 86
Initial participant responses ... 86
Critiques ... 87
Meeting the research participants ... 90
Self-identification on the left spectrum ... 90
Meeting the participants: Self-identification as activists ... 92
Academics and activists ... 95

July 2010–July 2013: What were our sites of struggle? 97
Occupy 97
Unions 100
Auckland Action Against Poverty 103
Community sector 105
Churches and church based organisations 107
The transformational (radical) left 109
The Parliamentary left 111
How do we see ourselves overall? 119
State of left: Big picture 120
State of left activism: Big picture 122
Feelings about ourselves as left activists: despair and hope and some intergenerational reflection 124
Media, framing and language 129
Ideological and theoretical debates 131
"Putting a knife through the neoliberal framework": Constructing an effective left counter hegemony 134
Summary: Amidst weakness and loss, the dream of 'left' endures 138
5. We're already on the road: Nascent left wing think tanks in Aotearoa 1990–2013 140
Introduction 140
Alternative Welfare Working Group (AWWG) 141
Bruce Jesson Foundation (BJF) 144
Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA) 147
Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) 150
Fabian Society 152
Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC) 156
Kotare Trust: Research and Education for Social Change 160
A mosaic of other initiatives 1990–2013 165
Jobs Research Trust (JRT) 166
Action, Research and Education Network Aotearoa (ARENA) 167
Māori and Pasifika initiatives 167
Publications and websites 169
Union and Labour Party efforts to set up a left think tank 169
Workers Institute of Scientific Socialist Education (WISSE) 170
New initiatives 170
Building on the past, looking to the future 171
6. A major left wing think tank for Aotearoa? 173
Introduction 173
Defining 'think tank' 173
Left views of the term think tank 175

Does the left in Aotearoa support the establishment of a major left wing think tank or tanks? 177
A gap identified 177
A need supported 178
The "deep south of the planet" has no left wing think tank: Why not? 180
External situation 181
Internal: Tradition of left disunity 182
Critical mass 183
Expertise and organisation 183
Priorities elsewhere 184
An intellectual failure of the left? 185
Funding 186
Creating a left wing think tank in Aotearoa 188
Timing 188
Making a possibility visible and viable 189
People and structure 190
Funding: Ways forward 192
Activities: What might a left wing think tank do? 194
Four key relationships 200
Kaupapa 205
Summary: Let's do it 208
7. Conclusion: Building an effective left counter hegemony, from fragmentation to form 209
Introduction 209
The left in Aotearoa 2010–2013: The state we're in 210
Building left power: Ways forward 213
Left wing think tanks in Aotearoa 219
Recommendations for action 226
Methodological conclusions 228
Significance of research 232
Possibilities for further research 237
Conclusion 241
References 243
Appendices 276

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

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development of these groups—and of a more effective radical left counter hegemony—in times ahead.

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1. Introduction

In late 2009 I resigned as a Green MP following defeat in a party leadership contest earlier that year. I had planned to stay on until the next general election in 2011, but had come to realise that my heart was no longer with the Greens, or with the work of trying to change the system from inside. After 10 years in Parliament it was time to return to the groups and people from which I had come, the radical activist left in Aotearoa, especially those working with and for unemployed people, low wage workers and beneficiaries. From the vantage point of Parliament and its well-resourced privileges, I had become increasingly concerned about the loss of organisational capacity and a decline in the culture of resistance in this sector. Nine years of Labour-lead governments and the establishment of a Green presence in Parliament had taken their toll, pulling much of the left's leadership into their respective orbits with jobs, funding and political opportunities. At the same time, the will and ability of many community based organisations to undertake political advocacy and action had been compromised by a mix of new charities legislation and controls imposed by government funding and contracting practices (Elliott & Haigh, 2012; Grey & Sedgwick, 2013; O'Brien, Sanders, & Tennant, 2009).

As part of the process of post-Parliamentary recovery, I decided to enrol for a doctorate with Professor Marilyn Waring at AUT's Institute of Public Policy. It seemed an opportune moment to take time out from my perennially busy life to reflect on what had been happening in the left world around me and to use a focused, in depth research project as a way of contributing to the regeneration of a stronger and more effective left in Aotearoa. There were, of course, many possible topics I could have studied, but the question paramount in my mind was one that had been simmering for nearly two decades: why was it that we on the left had never been able to develop a major think tank to counter those of the right, and what might it take to establish such an entity? Since around 1990 I had been part of many conversations with friends and colleagues about the need for a left wing think tank. The New Zealand Business Round Table (NZBRT) had become a highly visible presence during the 1980s, and by 1990 many of us on the left perceived the NZBRT as Bruce Jesson had described it in 1987:

> A cabal of hardline right-wingers now exists in the Roundtable and it has become a strident organisation of the libertarian Right. . . . The battle for political power is a battle for public opinion, and people like Kerr[1] and bodies like the Roundtable are still fighting it. They are more aware than other New Zealanders of the intellectual content of this battle. (Jesson, 1987, pp. 131–132)

Bruce Jesson was not alone in understanding that a major component of political power concerned the ability (or otherwise) to influence and change public opinion. In the activist circles in which I moved, there was a keen awareness that we were constantly on the losing side in the battle place of ideas. Yet despite that early awareness, no major left think tank emerged during the intervening decades. Motivated by my dismay at the state of the New Zealand left in 2009 and keen to understand why this glaring institutional gap continued to exist and what it might take to fill it, I set to work trying to find some answers. In this opening chapter, I introduce the research question and purpose of the study; provide a short reflexive statement about my personal and political background; offer some clarifications regarding key terms, scope, definitions and exclusions; explain the significance of the research; and outline the structure of the thesis.

Purpose of the research

The research questions

The aim of this research is to answer the question posed by its title: 'A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa—an impossible dream or a call to action?' In other words, should the New Zealand left give up on the idea of creating a major left wing think tank, at least for the foreseeable future, or should some of us be prepared to start serious work on creating one (or more)? A number of specific queries sit behind this overarching question:

- Why has a major left wing think tank never developed in New Zealand?
- Is there any support from left academics and activists for such an entity (or entities)?
- If there is, what is the nature of any think tank they would like to see established?

[1] Sir Roger Kerr, founding Director of the New Zealand Business Roundtable.

- What did the state of the activist left in Aotearoa 2010–2013 indicate about the possibility or otherwise of establishing a left wing think tank in future?
- With such an initiative in mind, what might be learned from the experiences of some of the think tank-like left organisations that had already existed in New Zealand, and from left wing think tanks overseas?

There is a further related question which I consider integral to the investigation.

- What did the state of the activist and academic left indicate about ways in which the ability of the left to influence public policy in Aotearoa might be strengthened post-2013, beyond consideration of the establishment of one or more major left wing think tanks?

Methodology and methods

The purpose of this research is to find out the answers to these six questions. In order to achieve this, the study is grounded in the left activist and academic world from which the impetus for the thesis questions derived, using a critical inquiry methodology called political activist ethnography. The site of study is the activist and academic left in Aotearoa nationally. Methods employed include individual semi-structured interviews with 51 participants selected by purposive sampling techniques from among a large pool of left academics and activists; the maintenance of a thesis journal recording observations, reflections and analysis from the research field July 2010–July 2013; the examination of the experiences of a number of organisations engaged in community based knowledge production and termed 'nascent left wing think tanks' for the purposes of this study; and the carrying out of desktop archival research into a sample of nine left wing think tanks in comparable jurisdictions internationally.

There is one further question posed by my methodological choice which I hoped the research would answer.

- What might be learned from this first use of political activist ethnography in Aotearoa, applied to an ethnographic field daunting in size and scope by a researcher whose primary identity was activist rather than academic?

Personal background

Reflexivity is core to political activist ethnography (PAE), the methodology which guides this research, making it critical that I situate myself clearly within the context of this study at an early point. I am a biased and value-laden radical left political activist, descended on my father's side from two English missionaries (Davis, Matthews) who set up mission stations in the far north in the 1820s and early 1830s. I carry with me an awareness of that Pākehā settler heritage, along with the ideological and experiential accretions of a lifetime of street and community organising and action. I am of and from the milieu which is the site of this study. I first became active in left politics while still a pupil at conservative Auckland Girls' Grammar, and was 15 when I joined the Communist Party-aligned Progressive Youth Movement in 1967. I started university in 1969, and by the end of that year was one of the group of disparate anti-Vietnam War activists who founded Resistance Bookshop on Queen St. I was a founding member of the first women's and gay liberation groups based around Auckland University campus, and was active in the anti-apartheid movement from the early days of Halt All Racist Tours (HART). My first experience as an ally in Māori struggles against the impacts of colonisation and cultural disempowerment was as a student supporter of Ngā Tamatoa in the early 1970s. I was deeply involved in the 1981 mobilisation against the Springbok Tour, with a particular focus on organising and participating in nonviolent direct actions aimed at using the tactic of mass arrest for maximum disruption.

In 1983 I was a member of the initial group which established the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC), whose goal was to fight unemployment and poverty politically, while also providing direct assistance to beneficiaries and their families. I spent much of the next 16 years working with AUWRC and associated organisations, including Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa (the national unemployed and beneficiaries' movement), the Auckland Peoples Centres, Kotare Trust, and COMMACT, a Commonwealth-wide NGO working in the field of community economic development. During the 1980s I was a member of the Workers Communist League, until it dissolved itself at the end of 1989. In December 1999 I was one of the first tranche of seven Green MPs to enter Parliament under the party's own name. There I remained for the next ten years until I resigned in October 2009. Key Green Party portfolios held included welfare, employment, children's issues, housing, mental health and the community and voluntary sector. My commitment to the Greens

from 1998 onwards meant extensive exposure to ecological thinking, and by the late 2000s I consciously identified as ecosocialist. I continued to consider myself a feminist in theory and in practice, as I had since 1970. The paths I took following my exit from Parliament and from the Green Party became one element of this thesis.

Assumptions underpinning the study

Even though I held university qualifications, I began the doctoral project as a researcher who identified as an activist, not as an academic. By the time I had completed postgraduate studies in 1983 I was working fulltime as a volunteer at AUWRC, and was well on the way to becoming a mother of five. I had neither time nor inclination to pursue a career trajectory within the academy. However, my career in movement based 'knowledge production', described by Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor as "the voices, ideas, perspectives and theories produced by those engaged with social struggles" (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010a, p. 2) started in 1984 when I worked with a social work student on placement with AUWRC to design a small study aimed at uncovering true levels of unemployment in several Auckland streets, after we had become increasingly suspicious of the accuracy of the government's employment statistics. As the years went by I played a part, along with others, in working to lift the quality and quantity of AUWRC's education, research, policy development and publication work. I was also deeply involved with Kotare from the time of its inception, active in both the pedagogical and research elements of the Trust's operations from 1999 through to the present day.

Some key assumptions I brought to the study at the time I commenced this research were that:

- Academic recognition of the achievement of left wing community based knowledge producers in New Zealand would be limited.
- Lack of funding was likely to be the main—if not the only—reason given by participants for the left's inability or unwillingness to establish a major left wing think tank.
- The left would continue to be deeply divided along various fault lines, including major divisions between the radical and social democratic left and between anarchists and socialists/communists.

- The work involved in setting up a think tank would be seen as low on the list of left activist priorities, as it does not involve either front line direct action or the provision of employment, health, welfare, housing or other services of immediate benefit to those most in need.
- Respondents would consider the work already being done by existing think tank and think tank-like organisations based in universities, church groups, the private sector and the community would be enough to meet any research and policy needs the left might have, so nothing new or different is needed.
- The term 'think tank' would be perceived as highly negative and only applicable to right and centre think tanks, and that this in itself may have been a barrier to the establishment of such an entity by the left in the past—and in the future.

The one assumption I did not bring to the start of the project was that I knew all or most of the answers to the research questions. I genuinely did not know whether the academic and activist left supported the idea of a left wing think tank or had any interest in such a concept whatsoever. I had little idea of what I would uncover about the state of the left outside Parliament, as I had been living at a distance from it for ten years. The challenge in this study would be to design and carry it out in ways which ensured the answers to the questions posed would be uncovered in as rigorous and full a way as possible, despite the beliefs, experiences and assumptions brought to the project by the researcher.

Clarifying three key concepts

It is important at this early juncture to clarify three key concepts used in this study: *left, think tank,* and *nascent left wing think tank.*

Any attempt to define *left* carries with it the burden of hundreds of years of historical, political and philosophical theorising, advocacy, interpretation and dissent. Yet without defining *left*, this research would be rendered meaningless. One of my first research tasks was to assemble a working definition of *left* of sufficient substance to survive interviews with 51 thoughtful and critically minded left individuals. The next chapter contains extended discussion of how I came to the following definition, which is

designed solely for the academic purposes of this particular study, and is not intended for any use apart from that.

> ***Left:*** a commitment to working for a world based on values of fairness, inclusion, participatory democracy, solidarity and equality, and to transforming Aotearoa into a society grounded in economic, social, environmental and Tiriti justice.

The second concept requiring urgent and early clarification was *think tank*. Internationally there is an extensive academic literature on think tanks. By 2010 think tanks existed in most parts of the world, over 6,000 in all according to one respected source (McGann & Sabatini, 2011). Think tanks come in a huge variety of size, structure, operational activities, purpose and political orientation. For reasons which will be explained shortly, I chose to exclude from my proposed definition think tanks which are fully government funded or are part of government itself; are based completely inside universities or other academic institutions; are established by churches, church agencies or other faith based entities; or are transnational. The definition of *think tank* used for the purposes of this research is:

> ***Think tank:*** A community based not for profit organisation which undertakes detailed research and policy development in order to influence and enhance public policy formation across a broad range of issues, through publications, media work, lobbying, conferences, workshops and other forms of advocacy and education.

One significant element of this study is an investigation of what might be learned from the experiences of a number of organisations who meet this definition of think tank in some ways or to some extent, and have existed at some point during the period 1990–2013 in Aotearoa. I have chosen to call these groups *nascent left wing think tanks*, defined as:

> ***Nascent left wing think tank:*** A community based organisation, network or other initiative whose structure, operations, political orientation and purpose meet to at least some extent the definitions of left and think tank used in this study.

Clarifying historical and geographical scope and the ethnographic field

In examining the history of the nascent left wing think tanks and in considering the absence of any major left wing think tank in New Zealand, I chose to limit the ***time*** of historical contextual research to the period October 1990 to July 2013. Late 1990–1991 was a time of significant transition in New Zealand. The National Party won the general election on 27 October 1990 after two terms of Labour rule, during which "New Zealand suddenly became the test bed for a daring experiment in free market economics" (Gould, 2008, p. 18). By Christmas 1990, National was announcing its intention to slash welfare benefits and radically reshape employment law to the detriment of workers, the unemployed, beneficiaries and unions. Coming on top of six years of sweeping neoliberal restructuring under Labour, there was a shift in mood among the people with whom I worked on the left, a sense that we were in it for the long haul, and things were going to get a lot worse before they got better.

The 1980s had also been marked by the rise of the first major New Zealand think tank with an economic and fiscal focus, the New Zealand Business Roundtable (NZBRT). Initially established as the 'Roundtable' by a group of chief executives around 1980 (Kerr, 1990), the NZBRT permeated public consciousness through its visibility in the media and perceived influence on Government policy development. One major study notes "Successive governments since 1984 have put into practice many of the policies advocated by the Roundtable, in whole or in part" (P. Harris & Twiname, 1998, p. 10), while renowned left academic and activist Jane Kelsey says "The Roundtable has undoubtedly been the dominant external influence on the policy agenda of successive New Zealand Governments since 1984" (1999, p. 60).

It is my contention that until the emergence of the NZBRT as a major player in the political scene there had not been much awareness among the New Zealand public or among left activists of the existence and role of think tanks, even though such entities had been playing a very active role in public policy discourse in other jurisdictions for decades, most notably in the United States, where the number of think tanks quadrupled between 1970 and 2000 (Rich, 2005). Thus I found it unsurprising that when I looked back from the vantage point of 2013 it was the year 1990 which marked my own earliest recollection of discussions with friends and colleagues about the possibility of establishing a major left wing think tank in New Zealand. The 1990s and 2000s also

saw the emergence of a number of initiatives I have termed nascent left wing think tanks as just outlined above, organisations which have some or all of the characteristics of think tanks, but do not identify themselves as such, and are often limited in size and scope of activity.

October 1990–July 2013 covers just over two decades, in effect a generation of political activity. This was a period when (a) a small but growing number of right and centre think tanks became increasingly visible within the New Zealand public policy environment; (b) a number of nascent left wing think tanks emerged; and (c) the first indications appeared that some left academics and activists were beginning to consider the need for a think tank that would deliver for interests not represented by institutions like the NZBRT and the socially conservative Maxim Institute, established in 2001. I was also aware of the practical necessity of applying some arbitrary but unavoidable constraint on historical scope, and for all these reasons, I confined contextual research to this period.

The second way in which ***time*** has been constrained in this study is by the necessary boundaries implied by ethnographic method. Raymond Madden says "an ethnographic field provides an interrogative boundary to map on to a geographical and/or social and/or emotional landscape that is inhabited by a participant group" (Madden, 2010, p. 54). While context is offered within the longer timeframe stretching back to 1990, the boundary of time for the ethnographic study undertaken by this project is the three years from July 2010–July 2013. The thesis journal I maintained as a source of data and reflection and which was in part a fieldwork diary encompassed this three year period; the 51 research interviews took place in the second half of 2012.

The ***place*** of this research is New Zealand. The material which constitutes the bulk of data analysed for this study was derived from interviews with 51 respondents from around Aotearoa, and from the thesis journal. One qualification for participant selection was that respondents had to be resident in New Zealand at the time of interview, even though there were left activists and academics living overseas who would have met other selection criteria. The only ways in which I extended geographical scope beyond these shores was in providing an international context for think tank research and in the consideration of a selection of nine left wing think tanks overseas, both offered as part of the literature review in Chapter 2.

To summarise, the ***ethnographic field*** for this research, stripped of contextual analysis beyond its chronological and geographical boundaries, is the academic and activist left in New Zealand from July 2010—July 2013.

Further scoping decisions

There are a small number of further scoping decisions which warrant clarification before the study enters its somewhat dauntingly large ethnographic field.

Think tanks in New Zealand

There has never been a major piece of research into the history, typology and influence of think tanks in New Zealand, nor does this study attempt or purport to do this. Apart from brief contextual consideration of the think tank environment, the focus of this research in on addressing the questions outlined in the Purpose of Research section.

Think tanks in the Pacific region

There are few think tanks in the Pacific region beyond the shores of Australia and New Zealand. James McGann and Richard Sabatini put the number at four in their 2011 survey (McGann & Sabatini, 2011, pp. 10-11). At an early stage in the research I gave serious consideration to extending its scope to include the Pacific's island states, but quickly came to the conclusion that such an enterprise would not be humanly or methodologically possible given the scale of what was already being pursued.

Left activist use of online media

Issues around left activist use of online media arose frequently in the course of this research and it would have been interesting to write up an extended analysis of the data collected. However, I chose to leave this issue out of scope as a theme for investigation in this study. Dealing with it adequately would constitute a full doctoral thesis in itself. I note Nathan Bromberg's 2013 dissertation which makes a useful start on this area of research in the post-Occupy era (Bromberg, 2013).

Left theory

One of the most difficult tasks in applying boundaries to this research concerned the matter of left theory. Behind every academic and participant reference to Marx, Freire, Gramsci and many other theoreticians, historical and contemporary, lay the potential

for political and philosophical explorations of unequivocal relevance to my research topic in general and my attempts to define 'left' in particular. The only way I could manage this was by coming to an early decision to limit investigation and analysis of left theory to the minimum required for consistency, transparency and coherence.

Some definitions

In line with the decision just outlined regarding theoretical scope, I am using the following definitions, supplied by others, for a small selection of words and concepts critical to this research and not defined elsewhere in the thesis. All definitions are highly contestable, and contested. They are offered here as a close fit with my own interpretation as pertinent to this study.

Activism

"Being an activist does not mean studying—or being a participant observer in or a visitor to—someone else's struggle. Nor does teaching count as activism. . . . Real activism means actually taking on an organizing challenge yourself, working collectively with others, and doing the slow, plodding, tedious work of bringing people together to make change" (Peters, 2005, p. 46).

Intersectionality

"Intersectionality, the assertion that social identity categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are interconnected and operate simultaneously to produce experiences of both privilege and marginalization . . . " (Smooth, p. 11).

Neoliberalism

"My view is that it refers to a class project that coalesced in the crisis of the 1970s. Masked by a lot of rhetoric about individual freedom, liberty, personal responsibility and the virtues of privatisation, the free market and free trade, it legitimised draconian policies designed to restore and consolidate capitalist class power" (Harvey, 2010, p. 10).

Public policy

"Public policy is not just an activity engaged in by specialists, but occurs within a wider social context of actors including lobby groups, the media and, of course, the sectors of society to which policies are targeted" (Duncan, 2004, p. 4).

Social movement

"There is no precise definition of what constitutes a social movement. At best it is a somewhat nebulous reference to a loose alliance of organizations and activists who participate at local, national and international levels to advance transnational and ethical issues that embody an alternative way of thinking through which to understand the world" (Lowes, 2006, p. 220).

Te Reo Māori

As someone who has worked for decades across the tauiwi and Māori left, I often use kupu Māori (Māori words) in my daily life. A number of research participants spoke some Māori during my interviews with them. Pākehā Treaty activist and academic Heather Came says the way she used Te Reo in her doctorate was "a response to kaupapa Māori theory and is a way of positioning Māori experience as ordinary" (Came, 2012, p. 27). I took Heather's wisdom and example to heart in the application of Māori language in this study. There is a glossary of Māori words available in Appendix A. The words 'Aotearoa' and 'New Zealand' are used interchangeably; this is how I and those with whom I work apply them in practice.

Significance of study

This research makes a significant original contribution to the academic literature, as well as providing a source of detailed material of considerable practical use to those individuals and organisations that choose to avail themselves of it.

Think tanks

- There is no existing research on the questions posed by the absence of any major left wing think tank in Aotearoa. This is the first investigation of an issue of longstanding interest to many on the academic and activist left.

- The process of the research itself, and its findings, may assist in the establishment of one or more major left wing think tanks. It is, in effect, a feasibility study for such a project.
- There is very little academic literature in New Zealand relating to think tanks despite a wide ranging literature internationally. This research will be a contribution towards filling that gap.
- The information and analysis offered regarding the sample of nine left wing think tanks overseas will be of potential assistance to any left think tank implementation work which develops.
- The research provides an insight into the history, roles and influence of a number of the community based organisations termed 'nascent left wing think tanks'. It contributes to the growing body of research about and from the community and voluntary sector in New Zealand, and to the international literature on social movement knowledge production.

State of the left

- This study sought to generate insight into how the activist and academic left in Aotearoa viewed itself at a given historical moment. I am unaware of research on this scale ever having been attempted in New Zealand before, either from a left standpoint or any other. It will provide a rich source of data for future investigations and histories.
- The findings about the state of the left will contribute to the educational, political, research and organisational work of those individuals and groups who choose to make use of it. Wide dissemination of research product in forms accessible to the activist left will encourage this.

Methodology

- The application of political activist ethnography (PAE) as the methodological framework for this study will (a) add to the international literature around the development of PAE and other forms of activist ethnography; (b) marks the first time PAE has been applied in Aotearoa; and (c) opens the way for further development of movement-relevant and activist-generated methodologies.

Structure of the rest of the thesis

Chapter 2 – Literature review: **Left *and* think tank *contextualised*** explains how I came to these two key working definitions; situates the study in the world of think tanks internationally and in Aotearoa; outlines nine examples of existing left wing think tanks overseas; and concludes by noting a small number of academic sources relevant to the academic and activist left 2010–2013.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and methods describes the philosophical and methodological foundations of the research design; explains my choice of political activist ethnography as a methodological framework; outlines five other methodologies considered but rejected; examines issues around ethics; provides details of how methods were applied to the project; and demonstrates the ways in which academic rigour was met.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present my research findings**: *The New Zealand left 2010–2013; We're already on the road: nascent left wing think tanks in Aotearoa 1990–2013;*** and ***A major left wing think tank for Aotearoa?***

Chapter 7 – Conclusion: Building an effective left counter hegemony, from fragmentation to form outlines my conclusions about the state of the New Zealand left 2010–2013 and the potential for the development of one or more left wing think tanks; offers some recommendations for action; makes a number of methodological conclusions; and reviews the significance of the study before going on to present a number of options for future research arising from this study.

2. Literature review: *Left* and *think tank* contextualised

Introduction

As I commenced the doctoral journey, one of the most difficult tasks confronting me was the need to examine the literature around 'left' in order to create a definition adequate to its anchoring role at the heart of the project. This challenge opened up many avenues of historical, geographical, philosophical and political interest and potentiality. What follows is the result of my attempts to confine that challenge to the creation of a definition of 'left' that made workable sense for the purposes of this one piece of research, rather than looking for a definitional outcome which would meet other and perhaps more profound political goals in 21st century Aotearoa. I then go on to consider the concept of *think tank*, situating this study within the context of the think tank world internationally and proposing a definition explicitly and solely designed, as with *left*, to meet the objectives of this project. The next section outlines nine examples of existing left wing think tanks overseas, focused (with one exception) on entities in jurisdictions reasonably similar to New Zealand's in language, parliamentary system and community sector culture. A brief overview of the history of think tanks in New Zealand follows: brief because the history is not a long one and because this thesis is deliberately not intended to encompass an examination of the country's right and centre think tanks. It is also brief because no major left wing think tank exists. The chapter concludes by noting a small number of academic sources of relevance to the state of the New Zealand activist left 2010–2013.

Defining 'left'

A definition of 'left' is clearly critical to this study, yet interpretations of 'left' are as various as there are scholars and activists to make the definition. One of the first key tasks I faced was to create a working definition of 'left' that I could use during interviews with research participants, and which could serve as a base on which informants were invited to comment. The use of the terms 'left' and 'right' to describe political positioning first occurred in France in 1789, when the radical deputies supporting the emancipatory goals of liberty, equality and fraternity sat to the left of the president of the Constituent Assembly, while those who supported the monarchy and the old regime to varying degrees sat to his right (Jones, 2002, p. 434). The intervening 224 years have seen the meaning of 'left' splinter and change in accordance with time,

place and protagonists, and there is little indication scholars of any recent era see any definition as fixed or absolute (A. Cameron, 1996; Caute, 1966; McKnight, 2005). As Spehr puts it "The Left is a continuum – that means it has no sharp borders" (Spehr, 2005, p. 45).

In 2002, Pat Moloney and Kerry Taylor offered this definition of 'left' in their introduction to a book of essays on socialism in New Zealand "In this collection we have defined the 'left' in the broadest possible terms, as any critical response to industrial capitalism offering collectivist solutions aimed at minimising inequalities" (Moloney & Taylor, 2002, p. 15). Jim Stanford, from the left wing think tank Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, proposes a similarly simple definition, this time for 'socialist' "…the goal of socialism is to consciously manage economic activity with an eye to maximizing collective economic well-being, rather than individual profit" (Stanford, 2008a, p. 333). Michael Kazin in his recent book *American Dreamers* defines 'left' as "…that social movement, or congeries of mutually sympathetic movements, that are dedicated to a radically egalitarian transformation of society" (Kazin, 2011, p. xiv). Social theorist Zygmant Bauman proposes that the two fundamental premises of 'left' are "the duty of a community to insure its individual members against individual misfortune" and that "the quality of a society should be measured by the quality of life of its weakest members" (Bauman, 2007, p. 1).

In grappling with how to create a definition that was simultaneously broad and focused enough to encompass 'left' in New Zealand in 2012, I considered it important that it include a commitment to action, beyond simply values and beliefs (Bobbio, 1996); and to the concept of transformation of the sort Kazin talks about, of system change that goes beyond making minor improvements to existing social, economic and environmental conditions. It was also critical that any definition should be as nonsectarian as possible so as to maximise inclusion among those whose ideological identity arises from any or all of the three classic phases of the left: the 'old left' arising from the traditions of 19th and 20th century socialism, communism, and anarchism; the 'new left', whose starting point is traditionally given as the student protests in Paris in 1968, and which includes the rise of the identity politics and social movements which flowered from the late 1960s onwards; and the postmodern era following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in 1989, characterised by increasing numbers of cross border solidarity movements in the face of globalisation, the strengthening of

indigenous peoples' struggles, and a much deeper appreciation of the criticality of ecology (Boraman, 2002; Spehr, 2005, p. 47; Taylor, 2008).

Indeed the centrality of the ecological crisis to the theoretical and practical work of the left in the 21st century is unquestionable. Significant contributions come from leading figures including Naomi Klein, John Bellamy Foster, Ian Angus and others (Angus & Butler, 2011; Magdoff & Foster, 2011; Wall, 2010). Writers like these do not shy away from acknowledging that past and present state socialist regimes like the Soviet Union and China took and take actions disastrous for the ecology of the planet, but contend that taking action on climate change and resource depletion is a critical part of the agenda they call 'ecosocialist.' An ecoanarchist tradition also exists, grounded in the work of theorists such as Peter Kropotkin and Murray Bookchin (Pepper, 1993), with more recent authors such as Matthew Hall and Stewart Davidson providing insight into ecoanarchist debates around issues such as scale and bioregionalism, the role of the state and global institutions (Davidson, 2009) and the nature of relationships with non-human life (Hall, 2011).

A further factor, and one specific to Aotearoa, is the role and relationship between any definition of 'left' and the political aspirations of Māori. Over recent decades a number of Māori and tauiwi academics and activists including Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith, Annette Sykes, Brian Roper and Bruce Jesson have noted the importance of considering class and economic factors when making any analysis of the political and economic situation of tangata whenua in Aotearoa (Jesson, 2005; Poata-Smith, 2004; Roper, 2005; Sykes, 2010). As leading academic and activist Moana Jackson says "More of our people now struggle to critique and understand that the new model of economic development espoused in globalisation merely empowers the old colonising state and the forces that established it" (Jackson, 2007, p. 182). Younger writers have also taken up the call, as with Maria Bargh's characterisation of the Crown-lead Treaty settlement process as a mechanism by which successive governments have imposed the neoliberal agenda on Māori, thereby "corporatising the tribe" (Bargh, 2007).

Taking all this into account, and in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible, I came to a working definition which attempted to cover the full spectrum of 'left', was grounded in concepts I considered necessary to any interpretation of 'left' in New Zealand in 2010–2013, and which also retained an essential internationalist perspective.

> ***Left:*** a commitment to working for a world based on values of fairness, inclusion, participatory democracy, solidarity and equality, and to transforming Aotearoa into a society grounded in economic, social, environmental and Tiriti justice.

Note on 'progressive'

Later in the thesis the term 'progressive' is used at times as a synonym for 'left', particularly when discussing left wing think tanks internationally, as in some countries this is the preferred terminology.

Transformational and reformist: A necessary distinction

In seeking to explore the state of the New Zealand left 2010–2013 and its readiness or otherwise for the establishment of a major left wing think tank (or tanks), I realised early on that a further definitional issue would arise as I sought to find ways to clearly differentiate between what I consider to be two of the fundamental components of 'left': reformist and transformational. While there are endless permutations on the left spectrum, other paradigms exist within and alongside 'left' and 'right', and lines are often blurred, this particular bifurcation of 'left' plays a fundamental and underpinning role in this research. The *reformist left* encompasses those who believe in social democracy and hold that capitalism can be improved for the betterment of people and the environment, while the *transformational left* includes those of a more radical bent, who believe that the entire capitalist system must be overthrown and replaced with a new society in line with a vision that both strands may often share, and which I have endeavoured to reduce to one sentence, above, as *left*.

Any attempt to provide a summary of the literature on this would cover the combined left-related works of philosophers, historians and political scientists since at least the French revolutionary era of the late 18th century until the present day. However, as an indication that this distinction is neither new nor of my own devising, I offer perspectives from an English historian in the 1960s and a lecturer in Women's Studies in the 2000s.

> Neither philosophically nor historically do revolution and reform constitute a single dichotomy. Nevertheless the history of the European Left reveals a fundamental divergence between those … confident in the power of moral

> persuasion and those who regard force as the indispensable midwife of social regeneration. (Caute, 1966, p. 73)
>
> Radicals often divide approaches to fighting capitalism into two types: reformist and revolutionary. A reformist is someone who believes that capitalism can be pressured into becoming more egalitarian and humane. Those supporting revolution have argued that capitalism cannot be reformed … [it] is an exploitative economic system and must be overthrown. (Kaufman, 2003, p. 113)

In the interests of transparency, I acknowledge here that despite the many changes I have gone through during the course of my political life, my personal beliefs have, at heart, always sat more comfortably within the transformational portion of this dichotomy.

Think tanks

There is a substantial international literature on think tanks. At least one think tank has been established to specialise in the study of think tanks, the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, whose website is a source of constantly updated and relevant material about the think tank scene globally (http://gotothinktank.com/). While the term 'think tank' was first used by the United States during the Second World War to describe secure locations where military personnel and civilians could work on war strategies together (McGann & Sabatini, 2011), histories of think tanks often include mentions of organisations whose antecedents substantially predate this. For example, one writer posits that the first think tank was the Society for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, set up by Thomas Clarkson in England in 1782 (Goodman, 2005), while another suggests that the Fabian Society, established in England in 1884, was an early example (Stone, 1996). The earliest American think tanks emerged in the 1900s as wealthy philanthropists set up private research foundations to carry out policy research and analysis, including the Russell Sage Foundation (1907) the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1910) and the Brookings Institution (1916) (Abelson, 2009).

Abelson talks about four main waves of think tank development in the United States and Canada. First came the early privately funded institutions of the 1900s, then a second wave after World War Two, paid for by governments for their own purposes, like the RAND Corporation (1946), whose purpose was to assist the US Air Force, and Canadian government-funded bodies such as the Economic and Science Councils of Canada (1963 and 1966 respectively). The third wave was marked by an increasing

number of advocacy think tanks designed to carry out research which supports particular political agendas, for example the Heritage Foundation established in 1973 on an overtly conservative, free enterprise policy programme (Feulner, 2002; Gonzales & Delgado, 2006). This was followed by a fourth wave of what Abelson terms 'legacy-based' think tanks, developed by a mix of aspiring and former legislators, such as the Carter Center set up by former President Jimmy Carter (1982) and the Canadian Institute of International Peace and Solidarity, set up by former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1984 (Abelson, 2000, 2009).

In the United States and worldwide there was an exponential expansion in the number of think tanks from the early 1970s onwards ('t Hart & Vromen, 2008; J. A. Smith, 1991; Stone, 2007). By 2011 the number of think tanks within the definition proposed by researchers from the Think Tanks and Civil Societies programme in Pennsylvania had grown to more than 6,000 in 169 countries, of which the United States continued to boast by far the largest number (1,815). By way of comparison, in jurisdictions particularly relevant to this study the United Kingdom had 285, Germany 190, Canada 97, Australia 29 and New Zealand six (McGann & Sabatini, 2011, pp. 9–12). Another development over the past few decades has been the ever growing globalisation of the think tank phenomenon, with an increasing number of entities operating at a transnational level, either as a network of think tanks, or as one organisation with a number of offices in different countries (McGann & Sabatini, 2011; Pautz, 2012; Stone, 2004b).

Pautz and others have in the past identified a tripartite typology of think tanks: academically oriented entities which focus on producing lengthy, university-level research and ostensibly aiming for ideological objectivity; think tanks which contract to or are run by government departments to meet their own research needs within the governing party or parties' policy framework; and 'advocacy' think tanks which are openly partisan and geared to maximising their influence on public policy processes through every means at their disposal (Pautz, 2012; Weaver, 1989). Frequent additions to this taxonomy are the type of vanity think tanks set up by the likes of former presidents and prime ministers, mentioned above; 'policy clubs', where academics, analysts and sometimes policymakers come together to discuss particular issues (Abelson, 2009); and political party think tanks driven by the party's internal needs and ideological imperatives (Ahmad, 2008; McGann & Sabatini, 2011; Thunert, 2004).

Prominent think tank academic James McGann offers this breezy but useful five-part "field guide" to contemporary think tank typology: policymakers (influential, operate closely with governments); partisans (ideologically driven, whether left, right or centre); phantoms (appear to be NGOs but are in reality the tools of governments); scholars (academically respectable, in depth research); and activists (issue based research and advocacy) (McGann, 2009).

Academic debates about think tank taxonomy are continuous and ongoing. As Diana Stone observes "Scholarly difference exists over how to identify these organizations: this is symptomatic in the competing typologies" (Stone, 2007, p. 261). It is perhaps also worth noting that typologies become even more diverse when applied to the wide variety of jurisdictions in which think tanks now flourish, way beyond their North American and English homelands, as seen, for example, in these explorations of the worlds of Argentinian (Braun, Cicioni, & Ducote, 2004), Chinese (Zhu & Xue, 2007), and Italian think tanks (Lucarelli & Radaelli, 2004).

Defining 'think tank'

With the exponential growth in the numbers of think tanks, and an equally impressive proliferation of researchers in the area, it is perhaps not surprising that it is difficult to find agreement in the literature on a definition of 'think tank'. As Weaver notes, there is "no clear definition of what a think tank is" (Weaver, 1989, p. 563) while Stone characterises it as "a slippery term" (Stone, 2004a, p. 2). However, as with 'left', it was imperative that I identified a working definition of 'think tank' before commencing interviews, as this concept was likewise located at the heart of my research question.

> ***Think tank:*** A community based not for profit organisation which undertakes detailed research and policy development in order to influence and enhance public policy formation across a broad range of issues, through publications, media work, lobbying, conferences, workshops and other forms of advocacy and education.

This arbitrary definition sits clearly within the original 'advocacy' think tank model cited above, and excludes many bodies which would fall into a broader standard definition of 'think tank', for example, policy institutes funded by governments or religious networks or institutions, or based completely within the academy. I decided to

keep these out of scope for this research because (a) it is highly unlikely that any New Zealand government in the foreseeable future would provide substantial funding for the establishment and maintenance of a left wing think tank—although it is possible that such a body might successfully tender for government research contracts in some circumstances; and (b) I wished to focus this study on community based initiatives that already exist or have existed (the nascent left wing think tanks) and on the potential or otherwise to develop a think tank from a community base, rather than from or within a religious institution or university. This is not to preclude the possibility that any new entity might have some association with academic, church, governmental or other bodies. For the purposes of this research, I also deliberately excluded transnational think tanks from my definition, as cross border think tanks are not within the scope of the research questions.

In the context of the roles think tanks play in public policy discourse and formation, this thesis briefly examines the goals, structures and functions of a small number of left wing think tanks overseas and of seven New Zealand nascent left think tanks. A more thorough history and impact evaluation of all, or even some of these organisations, is well beyond the scope of this study. It is also important to note that my research questions are not focused on a broader consideration of the role and influence of think tanks in public policy development, either in Aotearoa or overseas.

Left wing think tanks: An international perspective

Internationally there are far more think tanks on the right of the political spectrum than there are on the left, wielding substantially more influence than their progressive counterparts ('t Hart & Vromen, 2008; Hassan, 2008; Rich, 2004). As Susan George points out, advocates on the right have, ironically enough, been far more effective at using the Gramscian notion of cultural hegemony than the left, "raising funds to found and to sustain a broad range of institutions at the forefront of the 'conservative revolution'" (George, 1997, p. 3). These institutions have changed the political landscape to one in which neoliberal ideas have become the norm (George, 1997; M. Smith & Marden, 2008). The Heritage Foundation is cited as one of the most successful of these bodies (Abelson, 2000; Rich, 2004) and has even spread its influence to Aotearoa, where it provided at least $84,000 to fund the New Zealand Climate Science Coalition, a lobby group launched in 2006 which denied the existence of human

induced climate change (Davison, 2012; Jacques, Dunlap, & Freeman, 2008; Renowden, 2012).

A range of studies demonstrate the relatively high and stable levels of funding which attach to think tanks of the right and centre compared to those of the left (Covington, 1998; Hayes, 2006; McLevey, 2013; Rich, 2004; Shuman, 1998), but as a number of studies also point out, the predominance of the right in the world of think tanks is not just about access to resources, but also about levels of commitment and organisation (Lexington, 2003; Rich, 2005). Scholars also note some of the other weaknesses left think tanks in the United States face compared to their counterparts on the right: a tendency to be organised on an issue by issue basis, with funders expecting a focus on the specific areas for which they provide grants, rather than allowing left think tanks to range widely and opportunistically in response to developments; project rather than institutional funding means that it is hard to sustain infrastructure; and progressive think tanks are more likely to strive for some notion of objectivity than their right wing equivalents, weakening their lobbying voice (Feldman, 2007; Rich, 2005; Schulman, 1995; Shuman, 1998). As Shuman notes "too many progressive funders treat their grantees like disobedient children who need to be constantly watched and disciplined" (Shuman, 1998, p. 14), rather than taking the more effective approach of conservative funders who allow the think tanks they support much more freedom to operate broadly and pragmatically.

Conditions for the development of left wing think tanks differ hugely from country to country. Even given the limitations on funding for progressive think tanks in the US compared to those of the centre and right, they are still part of an environment of philanthropic support which is beyond the wildest imaginings of the New Zealand activist and academic left. While not every group on this list of organisations funded by George Soros and his Open Society Institute is a think tank (Discover The Networks, 2012), this compilation offers a glimpse into the prolific world of American think tank funding. In a second and quite different setting, Germany's federal government provides substantial funding for think tanks linked to each political party in the Bundestag, including the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation associated with *Die Linke,* a party of the transformational left (Thunert, 2004).

The world of left wing think tanks internationally is the context into which any local initiative(s) will be born. Because there is no generalist left wing think tank in New Zealand, I considered it useful at this juncture to offer brief descriptions of a small but eclectic selection of nine such entities overseas, in order to present an initial taste of what both the reformist/social democratic and radical/transformational left have achieved elsewhere. The definitions of 'left' and 'think tank' outlined above were used as baseline criteria in making this selection. All organisations were in existence as of July 2013. I have chosen to describe organisations based in jurisdictions similar to New Zealand's in terms of language, political and philanthropic cultures, with one exception, explained below.

Australia

While a comparatively small player in the international think tank world, the Australian think tank scene is manifestly larger than New Zealand's, unsurprising given the disparity in population size, with Australia at 23 million and New Zealand at 4.5 million people in 2013. The proportion of Australian think tanks that could be reasonably described as left or progressive has traditionally been small in comparison to pro-market entities, and conservative think tanks have tended to wield substantially more influence on successive governments ('t Hart & Vromen, 2008; Lyons & Passey, 2006; Marsh, 1994; Murray & Pacheco, 2006). What follows is a snapshot of three think tanks, examples of very different initiatives since the 1990s: the Search Foundation, the Australia Institute and the Centre for Policy Development.

Search Foundation

This is an organisation not often included in lists of Australian think tanks, but I introduce it here because it started its life as a legacy product of the transformational left; describes itself as a think tank; and because one of its most interesting projects within the context of this study has been the production of what it calls a *Roadmap of the Left*, available with other detailed background information on the Foundation's website (http://www.search.org.au/). The *Roadmap* was a project initiated in 2006, providing case studies of left political organisations, including think tanks, in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand, affording a useful starting point for an exploration of what left think tanks exist (or existed) in those jurisdictions. In the case of Australia, the left think tanks named were the Australia Institute, the Australian Fabian Society, the Centre for Policy Development, The

Change Agency, The Evatt Foundation, Get Up! Action for Australia and the Search Foundation.

The full name of the Search Foundation is The Social Education, Action and Research Concerning Humanity Foundation. Based in Sydney, it was set up as an incorporated not for profit company in 1990 by people involved with the Communist Party of Australia at a time when the CPA was about to voluntarily dissolve itself. By 2008, following an internal renewal process, the Search Foundation's core beliefs were stated as follows:

> Our vision is for an environmentally sustainable, new democratic ecological socialism to change the power relationships in our society, so that power is no longer based on class and wealth, gender and race. Instead the power to make decisions would be much more widely shared by the people, based on their equality and democratic practices and institutions. This would mean a change in the nature of ownership and regulation of the economy, so that the economy would serve social justice and environmental sustainability. (SEARCH Foundation, 2008)

Some of the main activities in which the Foundation engaged during the 2000s included a series of "Left Renewal" forums aimed at regenerating theoretical debates among the wider left as well as within the organisation itself; training for youth activists called "InspirActivism" (http://lipmag.com/uncategorised/inspiractivism/); international solidarity activities; labour history research and publications; the provision of two research scholarships; political education for trade unionists; an informal political and economic debating network called the "Monty Pelican Society" (parodying the far right's Mont Pelerin Society); breakfasts where people shared information about campaigns and strategies; the *Roadmap* project; and the dissemination of information, including speaking tours. The Search Foundation did not appear to produce major academic research papers.

The Search Foundation is a membership based organisation. To apply for membership, individuals must be supported by two existing members. Apart from individual donations solicited via its website, the only other identifiable source of funding was start-up money provided by the Communist Party of Australia at the time of its dissolution, estimated at between three and five million dollars (Norington, 2003). In 2013 the Foundation's website reported that it employed a coordinator and two campaign organisers, as well as running an internship programme.

The Australia Institute

Based in Canberra, the Australia Institute is one of the country's most well-known and largest left-leaning think tanks, included in standard directories and lists since its inception in 1994. Its comprehensive website (http://www.tai.org.au/) advises that the Institute carries out research "on a broad range of economic, social and environmental issues in order to inform public debate and bring greater accountability to the democratic process" and identifies itself as Australia's "most influential progressive think tank", a claim backed by mainstream media comment such as: "On the left, the Australia Institute is the most prominent think tank" (Hannan & Carney, 2005, para. 26). Its directors in 2013 included, among others, Ged Kearney, the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, and Ben Oquist, former Chief of Staff for Green Senators Bob Brown and Christine Milne.

The Institute's founding director was academic Clive Hamilton. He was closely identified as the public face of the Institute, holding the post until 2008. Specialising in issues around climate change and the role of consumerism within advanced capitalism, Hamilton went on to stand as an unsuccessful candidate for the Green Party in a 2009 by-election. Both during and after Clive Hamilton's directorship, it was apparent that the Australia Institute operated with a reasonably high level of funding, enough to employ 12 staff in 2013. Sources of funds over the years included monies secured from the Poola and Treepot Foundations run by the Kantors and associated with Rupert Murdoch's family (Farouque, 2008; Howden, 2011; Norington, 2003), as well as other individual and philanthropic donations. It has carried out contract research for organisations including the NSW Environmental Protection Agency, AGL Energy and Greenpeace.

Since 1994 the Institute has placed a priority on high quality research and publication work accompanied by extensive media coverage. Areas covered vary widely, and have included a multitude of economic and environmental issues, matters to do with government, democracy and public accountability, social, health and community issues, science, and the forestry, mining and the banking industries. In 2013 the Institute's Executive Director was Richard Denniss, an adjunct professor at the Crawford School of Economics and Government at the Australia National University and formerly a strategy advisor to Green Party Leader Bob Brown.

Centre for Policy Development (CPD)

The Centre for Policy Development is located in Sydney, and was founded in 2007 as a project of the left wing but political party independent online publication *New Matilda* (https://newmatilda.com/), with which CPD maintained a close relationship subsequent to the official separation of research and publication functions. On its refreshingly modern and attractive website (http://cpd.org.au) CPD described itself in mid-2013 as "a public interest think tank dedicated to seeking out creative, viable ideas and innovative research to inject into Australia's policy debates" and asserted the "real and urgent challenge of putting our economy and environment on a fair and sustainable footing." On the 'Support Us' section of its website in May 2012, CPD asked "Wouldn't it be great if grassroots movements like Occupy were armed with a coherent and transformational policy agenda to deal with the root causes of the problems they highlight?" (Centre for Policy Development, 2012). A recent article in *The Australian* described the CPD as one of the country's four most prolific think tanks, praised for using research, statistics, submissions and media releases as "indispensable sources of news content for a media hungry for ideas and angles" (Phillips, 2011).

Areas of focus for CPD in 2013 included issues around sustainable economic development, pushing for a more positive, community–focused role for the public service, major work on refugee and migrant policies, health, what it calls "democratic renewal" and work on what a more equal society might look like. In mid-2013, CPD's staff included Executive Director Miriam Lyons, along with five others. Its board was a mix of people with backgrounds in the public, community, union and academic sectors. CPD was also actively involved in a new initiative called Centre for Australian Progress, dedicated to building "the advocacy capacity of Australia's civil society organisations" (Centre for Australian Progress, 2013), itself employing or contracting eight staff. Funding and other support for CPD came from individuals, commissioned research and organisations including several trade unions, various philanthropic and family foundations, and the Slater & Gordon legal firm. A book published by the Centre in 2013 *Pushing our Luck* (Lyons, Marsh, & Hogan, 2013) was resourced by crowd-funding.

Canada

As mentioned above, according to one global survey Canada (population in 2013: 35 million) boasted 79 think tanks in 2011, substantially more than Australia (29), but far fewer than the United States (1,815) (McGann & Sabatini, 2011). Studies of Canadian think tanks note their diversity but also their relatively low number, small size and late emergence relative to those of their North American neighbour, while recognising that they demonstrate a similar although not identical typology (Abelson, 2007; Lindquist, 2004). By mid-2013 some commentators started to note a trend towards the closure of Canadian think tanks, attributing this to a number of reasons, including a perceived historical over reliance on government funding and a lack of innovative thinking (Muggah & Owen, 2013; Think Tank Watch, 2013).

As in other jurisdictions referenced in this research, Canadian think tanks identified as in any way left numbered far fewer than those on the right and centre. The Search Foundation's *Roadmap of the Left* named 19 Canadian progressive think tanks or think tank-like organisations in its 2006–2008 survey: Council of Canadians, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Assembly of First Nations, Canadian Peace Alliance, Polaris Institute, Rideau Institute, Socialist Action, Maple Leaf Web, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, the Halifax Initiative, the Parkland Institute, the Progressive Economics Forum, Canadian Council on Social Development, the Centre for Social Justice, the Social Justice Committee, TransFair Canada, *Vive le Canada*, *Gauche Socialiste* and Alternatives (SEARCH Foundation, 2013). Brief descriptive examples of two progressive Canadian think tanks follow, one from this list, and a second which I include despite the fact that it is not usually incorporated in regular think tank lists or typologies.

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)

Established in 1980, the CCPA is a large membership-based think tank with a national office in Ottawa and five provincial offices in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Halifax, Regina and Toronto. Its website (http://www.policyalternatives.ca/) advises that the Centre is "an independent, non-partisan research institute concerned with issues of social, economic and environmental justice." The 'non-partisan' descriptor refers to its steadfastly independent position in relation to political parties and concomitant commitment to working with any group or movement which shares its philosophical

purpose, not to its underlying stance. The CCPA is widely recognised as progressive or even 'left' (Novakowski, 2007; D. Smith, 2004), and is also described as 'moderate' (Fetherling, 2007, p. 3) and 'social democratic' (Abelson, 2007, p. 11). Set up originally as a direct counterbalance to influential right wing think tanks such as the Fraser Institute, the CCPA was comparatively small and fragile in its early years. In the mid-1990s, however, it joined forces with a number of trade unions and community organisations and effectively transformed itself into a major player in the Canadian think tank landscape. By 2004 it was reported that the CCPA had $3 million in annual revenue, and 10,000 members (D. Smith, 2004).

The Centre engages in a wide variety of activities, with a major focus on producing high quality original research and maintaining a constant media presence, while developing and promoting solutions which, according to its website, are based on "human dignity and freedom, fairness, equality, environmental sustainability and the public good." It publishes a monthly national magazine *The Monitor,* sent free to all members; a quarterly education journal; an impressive range of short, easily digestible fact sheets; and maintains an online bookstore. A sample of the Centre's activities in 2013 included a Climate Justice Project, carried out in conjunction with a range of academics and more than 40 union, indigenous, environmental and other organisations; the Education Project, focused on support for public as opposed to corporatised education; and Making Women Count, measuring the gender gap and proposing solutions to continuing inequalities between women and men in Canada. One of the Centre's most high profile long term initiatives has been its Alternative Federal Budget, organised annually since 1994 as an exercise in economic literacy education and as a finely honed and costed alternate budget grounded in principles of social and economic justice.

CCPA had over 12,000 members in 2013. Its national board comprised people from trade unions, social justice organisations, individuals elected by the membership, and researchers and academics appointed for their skills and knowledge. Provincial offices had their own governing bodies, with strategic objectives and organisational direction determined locally. Each CCPA office had its own section of the main website, its own staff, and its own activities, producing location-relevant research in conjunction with local unions, community groups and academics. The British Colombia office alone had a team of over 50 paid staff and volunteer researchers in 2013, whose recent work

included a video *How much is poverty costing BC?*, a research report *Beyond the 1%: What British Colombians think about taxes, inequality and public services*; and *Working for a living wage 2013*, a summary published each year identifying the true cost of bringing up a family in the province. Funding for CCPA comes from a wide range of sources, ranging from membership donations, research grants and targeted government funding through to substantial trade union backing. In 2011 its income and expenditure for the year stood at over $4 million, and 23 full time and 32 part time staff were employed (Charity Focus, 2013b). Writing at the time of the think tank's 30th anniversary, former CCPA President Duncan Cameron said "The Canadian left may be under continuous attack, but social activists need more of the 'worldly philosophy' of Canadian political economists. Both fighting back and looking ahead mean building an ever-better capacity for research and analysis" (D. Cameron, 2010).

Canada Without Poverty (CWP)

Canada Without Poverty is not an organisation usually identified as a think tank. However, it is included here because its research and policy reach is wider than its anti-poverty focus might suggest and because I suspect that its history, structure and scope contain potentially relevant lessons for any future Aotearoa-based think tank initiative. CWP began life in 1971 as a project of the Toronto-based Poor Peoples Conference, and was originally called the National Anti-Poverty Organisation (NAPO). NAPO was a coordinating body for poverty and low income groups from across Canada, campaigning, advocating, publishing and disseminating material on many issues, and providing a way in which those most affected by poverty could seek to have their voices heard at the federal level. A distinctive feature of the organisation was its commitment to a structure run only by people who were living or had lived in substantial poverty for extended periods.

NAPO was the recipient of considerable federal government funding, reaching $225,000 per annum by the mid-2000s. This constituted 55% of its financial base, so the organisation was hard hit when this was withdrawn in 2007 "due to the Conservative government's disinterest in supporting national social justice NGOs" (Canada Without Poverty and the CWP Advocacy Network, 2011, p. 28). After a major internal reappraisal process, NAPO changed its name to Canada Without Poverty in 2009, and a sister organisation called the CWP Advocacy Network was established as a means of distinguishing between the research and education and political advocacy

functions formerly combined in one organisation. Issues around charity law and its impact on advocacy are as contentious in Canada as they are in New Zealand and Australia, with Canada's legislation allowing no more than 10% of a group's financial resources to be spent on anything which might be defined as political activities (Martin, 2012; Yundt, 2012). Structurally the two groups CWP and CWP Advocacy remained closely allied, sharing cross directorships and offices in Ottawa (head office), Montreal and Vancouver.

In 2013 the CWP strapline on its website home page (http://www.cwp-csp.ca/) stated "Poverty is a violation of human rights. We work to address the structural causes of poverty by raising awareness, educating and inspiring others to support its eradication in Canada." Like its NAPO predecessor, it continued the tradition of selecting directors who "have or have had personal experience of living in poverty" (Canada Without Poverty, 2013). From 2009 onwards CWP's activities included researching and producing publications and fact sheets on a wide range of issues; drafting two bills aimed at eliminating poverty and securing housing for all; holding 'street music-justice' and 'poverty and punchlines' events; helping organise a national day of action on housing; and organising panels, online 'webinars', and other forms of public discussion and engagement. Particular initiatives focused on poverty and human rights; an 'ethno-cultural' project using participatory research to better understand poverty among first and second generation migrants; and two collaborative research projects on disability and poverty and financial literacy. The mission of its associated organisation CWP Advocacy was to lobby and critique politicians, parties, government and other policy makers directly and to take on court challenges in defence of the rights of low income people. Both groups shared the same overall purpose of ending poverty in Canada.

Funding difficulties continued after CWP's restructuring, and it ran deficits three years in a row 2007–2010. However, it moved onto a somewhat firmer footing in late 2010 when it received a $340,000 legacy gift from another organisation, and has continued to diversify its funding sources through donations from individual supporters, philanthropic foundation and other grants and fundraising events. In 2012 CWP employed three full time and four part time employees (Charity Focus, 2013a), as well as utilising the services of many volunteers.

United Kingdom

There is a vast literature dealing with think tanks in the UK, reflecting its position as home of early precursor think tanks like the Fabian Society, as well as the fact that there are a lot of them. The McGann and Sabatini index put the number at 285, in a country whose 2013 population was estimated at 63 million. A related cultural artefact has even appeared, with the alt-rock band Blur issuing an album called *Think Tank* in 2003, featuring a striking cover design by well-known graffiti artist Banksy. On a more serious note, it is clear that in recent decades conservative think tanks such as the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute played a key role in influencing and supporting the Thatcher government of the 1980s, followed shortly thereafter by a period in which think tanks like Demos, the Institute for Public Policy Research and the Fabians were significant in helping Tony Blair's 1997–2007 administration piece together its revisionist New Labour conception of social democracy (Abelson & Carberry, 1994; Denham & Garnett, 1999; Lloyd, 1998; Pautz, 2012). Think tank growth in this era intensified the comparative power and influence of elite individuals and networks based in and around think tanks, superseding the leverage of many of the more traditional sources of policy expertise such as universities, the civil service and (in the case of Labour) trade unions (Ball & Exley, 2010; Bentham, 2006; Mulgan, 2006).

At the same time, leftward leaning think tank commentators have warned of the dangers of privatised policy making by these non-accountable, opaque think tank elites, while also questioning why social democratic policy institutes are so keen to follow conservative models (Hassan, 2008; Monbiot, 2011). George Monbiot in particular has done a good job of tracking some of the conservatives' hidden networks of funding and power, saying in 2012 "For 30 years big business, neoliberal thinktanks and the media have colluded to capture our political system. They're winning" (Monbiot, 2012, para. 1). In line with other jurisdictions, the UK has far fewer left wing think tanks of any shade or variety when compared to those of the right. The Search Foundation's *Roadmap* project recognised nine organisations as examples of left wing UK think tanks: CentreForum, Compass, Demos, the Fabian Society, the Institute for Public Policy Research, the New Economics Foundation, the New Policy Institute, Unlock Democracy and the Policy Network.

New Economics Foundation (NEF)

The New Economics Foundation was founded in 1986 in the wake of several TOES (The Other Economic Summit) conferences organised to parallel the annual gatherings of the G7 group of industrialised nations. Committed from the start to an agenda of "economics as if people and the planet mattered", and to bringing about what it calls a "Great Transition", by 2013 NEF had grown into one of the largest think tanks in the UK (http://www.neweconomics.org/). Based in London and commonly characterised as a 'think and do tank', the Foundation's work over 25 years displays an impressive range and depth alongside a constant commitment to innovative thought and practice, "big ideas and fresh thinking" (New Economics Foundation, 2014, para. 4). One of NEF's earlier initiatives, the development of social auditing techniques and their application to community and cooperative enterprises, even reached New Zealand in the 1990s in the form of a pilot project run by the local branch of a Commonwealth-wide community economic development NGO (Nowland-Foreman, 2000).

Some of the other developmental activities undertaken by NEF have included work on time banking, ethical investment, the development of financial institutions which can back the work of the community economic sector, and local money flow analysis. In 2006 it released a 'Happy Planet Index', which by 2012 was ranking 151 countries according to life expectancy and wellbeing measured in conjunction with the ecological footprint of each nation. On top of its regular research and publications work, NEF has also created a swathe of new organisations to forward particular aspects of work it had initiated and/or championed, among them Time Banking UK, the London Rebuilding Society, the Community Development Finance Association, the Centre for Global Interdependence, the Ethical Trading Initiative and others. In tandem with the E.F. Schumacher Society, NEF established an official counterpart in the United States in 2010, the New Economics Institute (http://neweconomy.net/) located in Cambridge, Massachusetts. There is also a consulting arm, a social enterprise set up by NEF to assist organisations from all sectors in applying the Foundation's ideas in practice.

In contrast to the conservative think tanks lambasted in Monbiot's articles, the NEF takes pride in applying principles of transparency to its finances and funding sources. In 2012 it reported that its total income for the preceding year was £3,286,061 ($NZ 6,373,249 in mid-2013) (Charity Commission, 2013). Sources included many

charitable trusts, donations from individual supporters and income earned, including through its consultancy arm. In 2013 it had over 50 staff, a board of 13 trustees, and a group of 15 fellows. Despite its size, the NEF receives little attention in the academic literature on think tanks in the UK, whose focus tends to be on think tank engagement with parliamentary politics and parties, rather than on entities whose priority is on developing and creating a transformational, forward looking economy and society.

Green House Think Tank

Despite some of the Green House Think Tank's philosophical and political similarities to the New Economics Foundation, I decided to profile a second environmentally aware and focused UK think tank because the Green House is a much newer operation, minimal in size, and functioning right at the other end of the operational spectrum from the large, well established NEF. It also differs from most other left wing think tank examples provided here because of its close relationship with a parliamentary party, in this case the Green Party. However, when Green MP and party leader Caroline Lucas officially launched the new think tank in July 2011, she made it clear that this was not intended solely as a project of and for the Green Party, but would "present a radical challenge, not just to ordinary politics, but to all of us in the progressive and environmental wing of politics," (Saltmarsh, 2011). Later in that year of Occupy, Green House's founding chair Rupert Read wrote of how important it was for the new think tank's work to go beyond "presenting policy options for tinkering" and instead offer "deeper challenges to the mainstream so as to 'reframe' the debate" at a time when the "fundamental premises of capitalism are being called into question very widely and when talk of economic collapse is not confined to the tents outside St Paul's" (Read, 2011). Perhaps one of its most radical challenges to capitalism was a statement on the think tank's website (http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/page.php?pageid=believe) stating that the Green House believed "the ownership of land is a historical mistake, and that animals cannot be our property."

From the time of its inception the major part of the Green House's work centred on production and dissemination of three types of reports: major scholarly research and comment on a wide range of topics from Green Keynesianism and Green Science through to the presentation of analysis and alternative thinking on education, political party funding, post-growth economics, welfare reform, food security and a host of other subjects; responses and submissions to government committees; and something it calls

'Green House Gases', less academic writing about topics of current interest to the think tank. I found of particular interest the Green House reading list, aimed at reinforcing one of the think tank's key goals: "to reframe public debate so that an ecological and just worldview becomes widespread, if not hegemonic" (Green House Think Tank, 2013). By mid-2013, two years after its establishment, the new think tank was deeply involved in developing and promoting its own Post-Growth project, was organising and taking part in a number of conferences and debates, contributing internally to the Green Party itself, and was even sending speakers overseas.

Structurally, the Green House appears to be run by a group it calls 'Green House people', supported by a 13-strong Advisory Group. Both are a mix of academics and the politically engaged. Perhaps the most readily recognisable of these from distant New Zealand are ecological economist Molly Scott Cato and environmentalist and writer Jonathon Porrit. At mid-2013 the Green House apparently functioned at a very low level of resourcing especially when compared with the quality and quantity of its outputs, was not registered as a Charity in the UK, and depended completely or almost completely on the work of committed volunteers.

Scotland

The Jimmy Reid Foundation (JRF)

I decided to include this think tank among the examples given here because of Scotland's comparatively small population (5.3 million) and the fact that, like New Zealand, it has historically had few think tanks, and certainly no major entities on the left of the political spectrum (Pautz, 2007). In August 2011 the Jimmy Reid Foundation (http://reidfoundation.org/) was launched as a project of the *Scottish Left Review (SLR)*, a magazine seeking to "provide a focal point for thought and discussion for the Scottish Left" (http://www.scottishleftreview.org/). Jimmy Reid had been a respected union leader and former communist councillor in Glasgow who lead a famous 'work-in' at the Clyde shipyards in the early 1970s, subsequently becoming a rector of Glasgow University and a journalist, helping to found the *SLR* in 1999. Prior to Jimmy Reid's death in 2010, the *SLR* group had already been working on plans to turn their magazine into a think tank; it was fitting that this major new project was named in their founder's memory.

The Foundation described itself in 2013 as a think tank and advocacy group aiming to "counterbalance the well-funded conservative and neoliberal agendas being pushed in Scotland by big business, business-funded think tanks and advocacy groups and by sections of the corporate media" (The Jimmy Reid Foundation, 2013a). It sought to reach out to political parties across the spectrum of green and left, as well as to "campaigners and academics, artists, thinkers, writers and anyone else who wants to see a fairer, greener, more equal and happier Scotland." Projects listed in the Foundation's work programme at mid-2013 included work around alternative economics and the 'deceit' of growth; restoring democracy at local government level; reforming university governance; tax strategies; developing actions for dealing with poverty overall, as well as with attacks on pension schemes specifically; and the outsourcing of work traditionally carried out by the public sector. In its first two years the JRF produced a wide range of well researched publications as well as quick fact sheets covering these and other topics; received widespread, steady media coverage; and had engaged in a range of debates and other public events. Annual Jimmy Reid Memorial Lectures are organised. The 2013 lecture "We are not rats: The role of workers and trade unions in politics" was delivered by Len McCluskey, General Secretary of the Unite union (McCluskey, 2013).

The Foundation also convenes something called the 'Network', which anyone who identifies as left can join free of charge and use as a mechanism to contribute to the Foundation's planning and work (http://reidfoundation.org/network). The *Scottish Left Review*, still going strong, is seen as a sister organisation, whose editor, Robin McAlpine, was in 2013 also Director of the Foundation. The JRF is governed by a 15-strong Project Board consisting of people from a diversity of academic, trade union, creative, political and community backgrounds. It also maintains a group of 14 high profile Patrons. Funding appears to come principally from individual donations, although the Foundation also received support from unions, campaign groups and charitable trusts. It was made abundantly clear that it would not accept any funds which might compromise its autonomy (The Jimmy Reid Foundation, 2013b). In a report at the end of 2012, its Director wrote that the largest donation it had ever had was £2,000; that it had only one fulltime, low waged employee; and that it had never had more than three months of financial security since inception (McAlpine, 2013).

Germany

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

I had not originally intended to include the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation within this selection of international left wing think tank exemplars, as it operates within quite a different language, political and think tank context from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the UK and Scotland. However, I have noted over the years that the sheer size of the Foundation and its political placement on the transformational end of the left spectrum have made it a particularly interesting reference point for some union and community activists in New Zealand, several of whom (including myself) have had the opportunity of visiting its Berlin headquarters.

As indicated earlier, as part of its commitment to nurturing democracy in the post-war era, the German Government provides major funding for think tanks associated with each political party represented in its federal parliament, the Bundestag. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation works very closely with *Die Linke*, the Left Party, which won 8.2% of the vote and 64 seats in the 2013 federal elections, becoming the third largest party in the Bundestag, by a slender margin. At that time the Foundation employed over 170 full time staff, including 'apprentices'; had a headquarters office in Berlin and 13 regional offices; utilised hundreds of volunteers, and had over 800 active and over 1,000 former scholarship holders. The RLF is run by a General Assembly comprising almost a hundred people, which in turn elects an Executive Board and a Scientific Advisory Council (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2013). Its 2012 annual report noted that the Foundation's budget had increased from €30.6 million in 2010 to €45 million for 2013 ($NZ 73.57 million) (Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2012).

The first two goals of the RLF as listed on its website's homepage (http://www.rosalux.de/english/foundation.html) are to "Organise political education and disseminate knowledge about social relations in a globalized, unjust and hostile world" and to "Provide a venue for critical analysis of current capitalism … act as a socialistic think-tank for political alternatives." The Foundation's activities are wide and varied, as one might surmise given the scale of its operations. Apart from a core role in undertaking its own extensive high quality original research and publication programmes, it also runs an academy which offers left wing political education using participatory pedagogies, promoting economic literacy, political communication and

youth education projects as part of this work; operates an Institute for Critical Social Analysis "researching socialistic transformation" using critical, Marxist and feminist viewpoints; runs initiatives and has offices in Warsaw, Moscow and Belgrade, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia; and operates a major programme awarding scholarships to undergraduate and postgraduate students, German and foreign, to support study at German universities. As of 2013, the RLF had no offices in the South Pacific region.

This snapshot depiction of nine left wing think tanks in Australia, Canada, England, Scotland and Germany can only begin to demonstrate the diversity that exists elsewhere in the world in regard to size, scope, function and political direction. My main purpose in introducing this limited cross section has been to give any future Aotearoa-based think tank initiative(s) an initial sense of the range of possibilities in regards to structure, kaupapa, size and activities.

Think tanks in New Zealand

Despite the steep rise in numbers globally, particularly from the early 1970s onwards, Aotearoa was a comparative latecomer to the think tank phenomenon. New Zealand's first major think tank, the New Zealand Business Roundtable (NZBRT), started life as a group of chief executives who adopted the name 'Roundtable' around 1980, before setting up a permanent office in 1986 (Kerr, 1990). The NZBRT went on to wield influence at the highest levels of government, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. (Beder, 2006; P. Harris & Twiname, 1998; Jesson, 1999; Murray, 2006; Roper, 2005). Other think tanks have included the New Zealand Institute, the Ecologic Foundation, the Institute of Policy Studies, the Centre for Strategic Studies, the McGuiness Institute, the Maxim Institute and the New Zealand Initiative. I consider that no entity on this list meets my definition of 'left'. It also excludes institutes set up principally to carry out for-profit research for government and other organisations. The Maxim Institute, with its focus on family and social issues from a conservative perspective, and the New Zealand Institute, which arose out of the Labour Government-supported Knowledge Wave conferences of 2001 and 2003, have achieved substantial media and public prominence, alongside the NZBRT. Michael Mintrom cites these three think tanks as successful examples of policy entrepreneurship, without mentioning others (Mintrom, 2006).

Between 2010 and 2013 the most significant development in the world of New Zealand think tanks was the death of Sir Roger Kerr in October 2011 after 25 years as executive director of the NZBRT, followed shortly thereafter by an announcement that the NZBRT and the New Zealand Institute were to merge into one organisation in April 2012 (Partridge & Carter, 2011). The fruit of this merger was launched with little fanfare as the New Zealand Initiative, a think tank the *National Business Review* described as "libertarian" (Smellie, 2012), and whose website states its preference for "Adam Smith's invisible hand to government's visible fist" (The New Zealand Initiative, 2013). Its first Executive Director was German economist Dr Oliver Hartwich. Despite a background working for right wing think tanks such as the Policy Exchange (UK) and the Centre for Independent Studies (Australia), and belonging to the internationally influential Mont Pelerin Society, Dr Hartwich did not appear to have made much of an impact in New Zealand public life during his first year in office compared to that of his NZBRT predecessor Sir Roger Kerr. Meanwhile, the Maxim Institute continued its mission as described in its website's strapline (http://www.maxim.org.nz/about_us/overview3.aspx) "to foster ideas and leadership that enable justice, freedom and compassion to flourish in New Zealand."

Left wing think tanks in Aotearoa: A lacuna

While there has been a small amount of discussion about the low level of think tank activity in New Zealand in the era of international think tank expansion from the 1970s onwards (Cheyne, O'Brien, & Belgrave, 2005; Crothers, 2008; Langford & Brownsey, 1991), there is virtually no published comment, academic or otherwise, about left wing think tanks in particular; hardly surprising when none exist or have existed, at least in a form consistent with the definitions of 'left' and 'think tank' offered above, or on a scale comparable with bodies such as the NZBRT, the New Zealand Institute, the New Zealand Initiative or the Maxim Institute. One external indicator of this gap is that while the Australian SEARCH Foundation's *Roadmap of the Left* contains a New Zealand section, not one single left think tank of any description is listed (Singh, 2008). Economist Brian Easton has spent several decades attempting to draw attention to "the poor public discourse that bedevils New Zealand" (Easton, 2003) and calling for the development of institutions with the intellectual substance sufficient to enable the social democratic left to present a serious challenge to the neoliberal hegemony which has dominated New Zealand's political life since Labour's Rogernomics revolution of the 1980s (Easton, 2012). Until his untimely passing in 1999, writer, thinker and

erstwhile local body politician Bruce Jesson spent a lifetime deploring the lack of intellectual depth, coherence—and courage—on the New Zealand left.

Renowned academic and activist Jane Kelsey mounted a uniquely pointed challenge in 1995 when she published *A Manual for Counter-technopols*, a list of "strategies for resistance" which included:

> Establish well-resourced critical think-tanks – neo-liberal and libertarian think tanks have shown the importance of well-resourced and internationally connected institutes which can develop an integrated analysis and foster climates favourable to change. Unco-ordinated [sic] research by isolated critics can never compete.

Later on in the same list she added "Invest in the future – provide financial, human and moral support to sustain alternative analysis, publications, think-tanks, training programmes and people's projects that are working actively for change" (Kelsey, 1995). In a later 2002 publication she described several small left think tank projects, a Labour Party attempt called the Gamma Foundation which "held several seminars in the mid-1990s, but made little headway" and the Foundation for Policy Initiatives backed by Labour-aligned trade unionists which "went into hibernation after the 1999 election" after "hosting several low-key seminars" (Kelsey, 2002).

In 2009 left academic and commentator Bryce Edwards gave a talk in which he noted that "we still haven't seen the creation of that leftwing think tank", a reference to Bruce Jesson's frustration with the lack of thoughtful analysis and debate among the New Zealand left (Edwards, 2009). Labour Party policy analyst David Choat commented in early 2010 on the absence of any "successful attempts to establish an ongoing think-tank on the left of the political spectrum", attributing this failure to a shortage of both funds and personnel. At the same time he announced the establishment of his *Policy Progress* blog as an abbreviated form of think tank, a 'think-site' (Choat, 2010). *Policy Progress* appeared to peter out after its first year (2010) when its author became a staffer on the Labour Leader's parliamentary research team. Echoing Susan George's reflection about the irony involved in the right's superior utilisation of notions of Gramscian cultural hegemony, prominent left commentator Chris Trotter had this to say in 2012.

> It is one of the greatest ironies of recent political history that the Right has learned the lessons of effective left-wing propaganda more thoroughly than the

> left itself. Groups like the Business Roundtable and the Maxim Institute have always understood the enormous power of ideas, and how an argument well-researched, well-presented, and then powerfully and consistently advocated, will almost always shift public opinion in the desired direction. (Trotter, 2012)

These few references offer some insight into the yawning gap which marks the absence of any substantial left wing think tank in New Zealand—and the catalyst for this thesis. Alongside that gap, however, I came to the realisation early on in this project that while no substantial left wing think tank developed in Aotearoa during the timeframe under consideration, there have in fact been a number of community based organisations, networks and initiatives which either clearly identify as a think tank, albeit in a more limited form than that encompassed by my definition, or exhibit a number of think tank-like characteristics. I believe there is much that can be learned from the experiences of these groups, and that the seeds of a future successful left think tank (or tanks) may well lie in what is revealed through their stories. I have chosen to term these organisations and projects 'nascent' left wing think tanks for the purposes of this research. An exploratory consideration of a number of these organisations constitutes Chapter 5 of this thesis.

The activist left in New Zealand 2010–2013

The timescale of the research period meant there was little relevant academic literature on the state of the New Zealand activist left available at the time of writing. Most sources used were derived from mainstream media news reports, online magazine articles, websites and blogs, and were referenced in context where relevant. Even going back several decades earlier to the 1990 starting point used in consideration of organisations identified as nascent left wing think tanks, there has been virtually no academic attention paid to those particular organisations or to the state of the activist left more broadly. As one would expect given their more orthodox status in the polity, the parties of the Parliamentary left have been the subject of considerable scholarly scrutiny, but as this particular piece of research is not intended as a detailed exegesis on the history and politics of the New Labour, Alliance, Labour and Green Parties, I have not undertaken a review of the relevant literature. The Mana Party could legitimately be added to that list, but was in any case too recent a phenomenon at mid-2013 to have become the subject of substantive academic study within the timeframe of this research. However, I felt it could be useful to acknowledge the very limited number of academic sources that are in some way particularly pertinent to the radical left activist and

nascent left wing think tank aspects of this thesis, in order to recognise the contributions made; to make transparent some connections between earlier research and certain choices made in regard to those whom I interviewed for this project; and to contextualise another absence alongside the fundamental gap which underpins my research question.

The most comprehensive study I have been able to locate of the New Zealand left and left activism in the 2000s is Dylan Taylor's 2008 Master's thesis (Taylor, 2008), in which he explores the state of the then contemporary activist left through interviews with 12 mostly male respondents from environmental, tino rangatiratanga, union, peace movement and intentional community[2] backgrounds. Two respondents were later included in my own participant sample, Matt McCarten and Simon Oosterman. Taylor concluded that the extra parliamentary left of the late 2000s was fragmented and weak, yet showed signs of renewal, especially through the 'new' unionism of Unite! He also found hope in the willingness shown among those he interviewed to continue consciously building active networks and connections between different sectors and sites of struggle. The overall state of the New Zealand activist left during the three years of the first John Key-lead National Government 2008–2011 was also the subject of a brief (if depressing) exchange between two leading left academics. Brian Roper remarked that "the level of working class and social movement struggle remains historically low" (Roper, 2011, p. 36), while Grant Duncan responded that he was "not sure who might start some" (Duncan, 2011, p. 63).

In 2009, another Master's thesis offered an ethnographic interrogation of a segment of the then-contemporary anarchist scene in Aotearoa. David Foote examined what he calls an unsited 'Community' of dissent, interviewing 12 anarchist punk vegans mainly drawn from two connected sympathy groups (Foote, 2009). The research offers insight into the lifestyle and social anarchism divide described by Bookchin a decade earlier (Bookchin, 1995), as well as consideration of other pertinent and little researched issues in New Zealand to do with activist motivation and identity. Toby Boraman's detailed account of anarchism in Aotearoa from the mid-20th century onwards (Boraman, 2007) concludes its journey in the early 1980s and provides useful historical context, but falls several decades short of the time frame for this project. An article by

[2] 'Intentional communities' are residential communities such as ecovillages and communes which hold certain beliefs in common, often religious and/or political.

Boraman published in the mid-2000s (Boraman, 2006) effectively refutes the argument sometimes made that the 1980s and 1990s marked an era of inactivity and compliance across all the left, while alluding directly to splits between anarchists and those he describes as "Maoists" in the unemployed movement of the early 1990s.

Cybèle Locke's *Workers in the margins: Union radicals in post-war New Zealand* is unique in several respects (Locke, 2012). It is the only major academic work to seriously examine aspects of the history of the unemployed workers' movement in the 1980s and early 1990s, the era of nascent left think tank AUWRC (Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre), while also taking the unusual step, in a trade union context, of aligning employed and unemployed workers' unions within the same framework of struggle. Now a lecturer at Victoria University in Wellington, Cybèle's early life was grounded in student and unemployed activism, and I believe this is what allowed and encouraged her to so usefully take the unusual step of researching the histories of low-paid and unpaid workers' unions. Cybèle was one of my research participants, as was another former colleague, Paul Maunder, who has written an extensive history of community-based theatre from the 1970s to 2010 from an unabashedly radical left theoretical frame of reference (Maunder, 2013). *Rebellious mirrors: Community-based theatre in Aotearoa/New Zealand* includes coverage of AUWRC's role within that particular world in the mid-1990s.

The Māori activist left has, of course, its own stories to tell, within and without the academy. Aroha Harris's *Hīkoi: Forty years of Māori protest* (2004) remains one of the most useful summary accounts of indigenous activism through until the early 2000s. Academics such as Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith (2004) and Maria Bargh (2012) have produced robust comment and analysis about the challenges of Maori movement building and activism from what I would identify as left perspectives. Maria Bargh is another of my research participants. From a tauiwi viewpoint, a new generation of university-based Pākehā Treaty educators and activists such as Ingrid Huygens (2007) and Heather Came (2012) are breaking methodological and political ground with studies in the area of institutional racism, Pākehā privilege and the ways in which Pākehā can support the Māori struggle for tino rangatiratanga-based transformational change. With input from a number of experienced activists, Jen Margaret has also recently produced a valuable resource for tauiwi working in this area (2013).

Summary

This literature review is not as extensive as I had envisaged it might be when I commenced the doctoral journey. While there is an enormous quantity of academic writing on think tanks internationally, I felt there was a limit to how far it was useful to delve into that world when the scope of this research was very much focused on New Zealand. Some work has been produced on think tanks in Aotearoa, but what exists is mostly confined to histories and analysis of the New Zealand Business Roundtable and its influence, and to a much lesser extent, to the Maxim Institute and the New Zealand Institute. The absence of a major left wing think tank logically dictates that there is no literature about it. What does exist are fragmentary commentaries over the years from a few left activists and academics. Another gap emerged when I began to search for contemporary academic writing about the state of the radical activist left in New Zealand, a gap so large that I felt it worth acknowledging contributions which have been made, where there was a direct connection to this study.

These two absences had the effect of switching my attention to what does exist – left wing think tanks in apposite jurisdictions. I felt it was worth spending a little time examining a sample of these and the contexts in which they exist simply because the lack of a major left wing think tank means that few left academics and even fewer activists in New Zealand have much knowledge or experience of this type of organisation.

The nine think tanks described in this chapter represent a diversity of size, structure, activity, purpose and left positioning. While it is unlikely that any one of them offers a specific blueprint for the development of a project in Aotearoa, organisations like the Centre for Policy Development (Australia), the Jimmy Reid Foundation (Scotland) and the Green House Think Tank (England) demonstrate that even in hostile political and funding climates it is possible to establish successful new initiatives. Key enabling factors include the existence of a group of people already sharing a strong common purpose and philosophy at the time the project started; a willingness to reach out beyond that core in both the development and activities of the think tank; and the close involvement of individuals from both the academic and activist left.

While the larger entities like the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the New Economics Foundation and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation present a sometimes

frustrating glimpse of what is possible in countries with much larger populations and different political contexts than New Zealand's, the broad scope of each think tank's activities - and funding sources - will provide a rich source of inspiration for any future think tank implementation project. There are of course many more examples of progressive think tanks internationally than the nine portrayed here, but between them they provide a usefully disparate starting point for further exploration.

3. Methodology and methods

Introduction

When I started this project I had no experience of working with qualitative methodologies. My postgraduate studies had encompassed at various times the fields of history, journalism and Chinese language, ill-preparing me for the intense exploration of the world of methodological complexity which awaited. I leaped into one methodology after another, enthusiastically embracing each until realising that it was not going to be suitable. This chapter is, in part, a story of these serial rejections. It is also an account of why and how I chose to utilise an emergent methodology which appeared remarkably—but not completely—congruent with the purpose of my core thesis questions, my research site and my own political and philosophical perspectives. Political activist ethnography (PAE) seemed designed for a researcher whose core identity defaulted to activist rather than academic, and whose ultimate goal was to ensure her research was not just a project of personal benefit, but would also, all going well, have immediate practical application in the left activist and academic worlds in which she lived.

This chapter will start by outlining the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of my research design, before going on to examine the history and nature of political activist ethnography and explain why I employed it as a methodological base despite an element of dissonance. This will be followed by an account of the other methodological and theoretical frameworks I had seriously considered applying to this study, with reasons for my eventual relinquishing of each. The final part of the chapter will examine pertinent issues around ethics, detail the methods used in this project, before demonstrating the ways in which academic rigour has been achieved.

Philosophical assumptions and research paradigm: Critical inquiry

Ontology is a set of ideas about the nature of reality, a theoretical lens through which we as humans can view and find ways of categorising ourselves and the world around us. The ontological basis for this research is informed by an understanding that what happens in the world of human relations and structures comes about through the actions of humans, and that it is therefore possible for humans—for us—to change the world. In our economic and social lives we are not merely subjects of unchallengeable

metaphysical or human-created structures and sources of power. This theoretical paradigm can be called 'critical inquiry' or 'critical research' and sits firmly within a qualitative research framework. With origins in Marxism, feminism, critical sociology, conflict theory (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Gray, 2004; Sarantakos, 1997) and psychoanalysis (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002) critical inquiry seeks to uncover the truth about social relations, the series of mutually dependent actions which shape peoples' lives, with a view to identifying systems of exploitation and oppression which can then be challenged and transformed in the interests of the oppressed. Critical inquiry is situated within the area of what Patton terms "orientational qualitative inquiry", studies which transparently start from a particular direction or perspective, which may be ideological in nature, such as Marxist, feminist, capitalist or Freudian (Patton, 1990).

Epistemology is another philosophical concept critical to qualitative research, and is characterised by Crotty as "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge itself, and with the relationship between the human inquirer and what they are trying to find out, the unknown. The epistemological approach taken in this study assumes that knowledge is situated within a contextualised historical setting, and that there is no such thing as objective or neutral ways of knowing, separated from the realities of social and economic relations, or from the researcher herself. Reflexivity is an integral component, recognising that the researcher's own life and beliefs shape his or her identity as inquirer; and that knowledge is gained through the interactions between the researcher and those with whom they are researching. Therefore the researcher's own personal background and views must be explicit. The philosophical perspective of the inquirer cannot be separated or abstracted from the inquiry.

In summary, some of the main assumptions underlining the critical inquiry paradigm in the form applied here are that ideas themselves are mediated by power relationships in society; particular societal groups are privileged and oppress and exploit other subordinate groups, by reason of class, race, gender and/or other disadvantage such as GLBTI (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex) identity or major impairment; that there is no such thing as objective reality, as 'facts' cannot be separated from ideology and the self-interest of those in power; that making explicit underlying social and

economic structures and relationships enables people to understand their lives; and that thus empowered, we are then in a position to take action to improve and transform the worlds in which we live (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Fossey et al., 2002; Gray, 2004). There is also an assumption that the inquirer will act on the findings of their inquiry, or as Sarantakos puts it, the critical perspective means that "Researchers don't only study reality; they act on it" (Sarantakos, 1997, p. 38). Taking this a step further, an effective critical inquirer may also consciously and frequently review and renew their research practices, analysing and modifying their theoretical frameworks, in a constant dialectical process of action-reflection whose roots lie deep within Marxist and Freirean traditions (Brown & Strega, 2005; Crotty, 1998).

Ontology, epistemology and methodology are described by Denzin and Lincoln as the "three interconnected, generic activities" which define and shape the process of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 11). Now is the moment to turn to the third of these, the methodology, informed by critical inquiry, which underpinned my final choice of methods, analytical approach and writing practice.

Research methodology: A form of political activist ethnography (PAE)

History and origins

Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology with a long and complex history, whose historical roots are claimed by the disciplines of both anthropology and sociology (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, & Lofland, 2001). At the heart of early ethnography lay a practice in which the researcher studied, described and analysed the culture, relationships and other aspects of the lives of a group of people from a period of face to face contact in a fixed geographical setting. However, over the intervening century ethnography has become highly diverse in technique and method, moving far beyond its historic core fields of anthropology and sociology into areas including nursing and health, workplace and organisational studies, human geography, social psychology, education, cultural studies, performance arts (Atkinson et al., 2001; J. P. Mitchell, 2010) political science (Joseph, Mahler, & Auyero, 2007; Schatz, 2009) and feminist activism (Craven & Davis, 2013; Naples, 2003). In some forms it has become, variously, transnational, interdisciplinary, autoethnographic, multi-sited, un-sited and even virtual – in which online settings becomes the sites of study (Madden, 2010; O'Reilly, 2009). Raymond Madden says "Ethnographers are social scientists who

undertake research and writing about groups of people by systematically observing and participating (to a greater or lesser degree) in the lives of the people they study" (Madden, 2010, p. 1). One crucial defining aspect of most forms of ethnography is that it is not just about a set of theories and methods guiding research practice, but is also the research product, the final writing up of results as an internally coherent narrative.

Institutional ethnography (IE) is one of the many evolutionary branches which have burgeoned on the ethnographic tree. IE was first developed in the 1980s by feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (D. E. Smith, 2005) as a critical inquiry research strategy which aimed to "make visible and explicate the socially coordinated character and organization of people's lives" (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 614). IE starts from three key premises: that people are the experts on how their own lives are lived; that they live in particular local settings, also known as 'sites', throughout society; and that powerful outside forces, known as 'translocal' (beyond and transcending local), shape and determine how people live and experience their lives (Deveau, 2008). Researchers use institutional ethnography in an effort to find out and describe the arrangements by which the rulers, the powerful in any institution or network of institutions, control and regulate people's lives (Campbell, 2002; Devault, 2006; Taber, 2010). A distinguishing feature of IE is that it goes beyond the standard ethnographic methods of observation and interview to include investigation and interpretation of "text", the documents and messages which govern and regulate people's lives, in ways seen and unseen, and can involve analysis of mainstream media, books, film, and online sources, as well as of government law, regulation, and other policy documentation. As Dorothy Smith says "While institutional ethnography can certainly address any technology from any aspect, the technologies of texts and textuality as these enter into the coordinating of people's work are foundational to its project" (D. E. Smith, 2006, p. 65).

Political activist ethnography

Political activist ethnography is an even smaller offshoot of the ethnographic tree, a methodological twig on the branch of institutional ethnography. George Smith, an AIDS activist with a background in the gay liberation movement, wrote what is widely considered to be PAE's seminal work in 1990. He took Dorothy Smith's IE methodology and developed it as a deliberate tool of grass roots organising "based on a sociology committed to describing how society actually works" rather than on sociological theory or political ideology (G. W. Smith, 1990, p. 647). While

researching the AIDS epidemic in Ontario, George Smith realised that useful insights could be gained by starting his investigations from the standpoint of activist organisations outside mainstream institutions rather than by focusing on government policies and activities, and that once having uncovered his findings in this way, the strategies of the relevant activist group(s) could then be developed more effectively on the basis of that new knowledge. As Frampton and others describe it, Smith aimed to develop "an 'insider's' knowledge of ruling regimes based on the daily struggles and confrontations that social movements are already engaged in" (Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson, & Tilleczek, 2006b, p. 9) with the goal of providing grounded knowledge as a firm foundation from which effective grassroots political action could be taken. The key difference between institutional ethnography and the new notion of political activist ethnography as first articulated by George Smith lay in its development as a methodology explicitly activist in both its engagement and its purpose.

The theory and practice of PAE as a distinct branch of ethnography took another step forward with the publication of a book inspired by a 2002 colloquium of PAE scholars in Ontario (Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson, & Tilleczek, 2006c). Key characteristics of PAE as outlined in this collection of writings were very much derived from the work of George Smith. They included the importance of grounding research in the experiences of activists and their organisations, rather than treating them simply as objects of analysis, and an overt commitment to taking action for change from the point of view of those who are exploited and oppressed. Because of these two factors, binary ways of viewing distinctions between theory and practice, researcher and researched, and researchers and activists would need to change (Frampton et al., 2006b; Kinsman, 2006). In looking to the future of this new methodological strand, interesting challenges were raised around the relationship between university-based academics and grass roots activists who may be the optimum researchers of their own praxis, and about how best to get more activists involved in carrying out quality research of use to the groups and movements with which they work (Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson, & Tilleczek, 2006a).

Following the first discussions of PAE in the early 2000s, practitioners started to reflect on its theory and functional application. Having used PAE to research fair trade activism, Ian Hussey noted that PAE's main source book, already much referenced here (Frampton et al., 2006c), was not in fact an adequate guide to the conduct of research in

this mode (Hussey, 2012). Hussey offers several additions to how PAE might be conceptualised. He suggests that activist work be viewed in the same way as other types of work and that such work can be investigated and mapped in relation to the institutions of activism itself. In other words, PAE should extend beyond research into the ruling relations and administrations which activists and their organisations oppose into a consideration of the relationships, contradictions and tensions within activist worlds. Hussey also recognises the need for awareness of the consequences the dissemination of research results may bring for activist groups with whom researchers work, and is clear about the negative impacts the neoliberal environment prevailing in much of the academy may have on the use and development of such an overtly politically purposed methodology.

Laura Bisaillon is another activist oriented researcher who has been developing the practice of both institutional ethnography and political activist ethnography in the area of health research. Her analytic glossary of 52 terms provides a deeply-researched and practical resource aimed at supporting the application of IE and PAE in the field, in part filling the gap already noted by Ian Hussey (Bisaillon, 2012). Bisaillon also discusses other methodologies that have aspects in common with IE and PAE, including extended case method (Burawoy, 1998), multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 2010), global ethnography (Gille & O Riain, 2002) and political ethnography (Schatz, 2009). Academic and activist Jeffrey Juris has proposed a further new but related methodology called militant ethnography, focused on collective analysis, reflection and visioning within activist organisations and movements (Juris, 2007), and has recently coedited a book reporting on a number of activist ethnographic projects carried out within a wide variety of transnational struggles (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013). Given the flourishing array of options available not just within the activist ethnographic field but also well beyond its confines, it is perhaps worth taking a moment to outline the key reasons I chose political activist ethnography in particular as my methodological starting point in undertaking this research.

Political activist ethnography: Application to this study

At the heart of this project lay a few key questions. Why had a major left wing think tank never developed in New Zealand? Was there any support from left academics and activists for such an entity (or entities)? If there was, what was the nature of any think tank they would like to see established? What did the state of the activist left in

Aotearoa 2010–2013 indicate about the possibility or otherwise of establishment of a left wing think tank? With such an initiative in mind, what might be learned from the experiences of some of the think tank-like left organisations that had already existed? My inquiry was thus situated very clearly within the world of the activist and academic left in New Zealand. This was to be my research site. There were four main reasons for my choice of PAE as preferred methodology.

First, the questions I was asking were aimed at uncovering knowledge about the activities and perceptions of left activists and academics, and a small selection of their organisations. My primary focus was not on examining the ways in which the institutions of society govern and regulate some aspect of people's lives and activities, in which case institutional ethnography would have been appropriate. While the state of New Zealand's 'ruling relations' would remain of inescapable relevance, my priority was to explore in some depth aspects of the relationships, experiences, tensions and contradictions within the New Zealand left. Ian Hussey's notion of expanding political activist ethnography into the realm of the institutions and networks of activism itself struck an immediate chord. Related to this was the significance IE/PAE places on the concept of the 'problematic' which "provides an organizing frame and gives direction to projects that start from within the activities and relevancies of standpoint informants" (Bisaillon, 2012, pp. 617–618). The question at the core of this project met with some exactitude the concept of the 'problematic', grounded in a very long period of gestation among the people and groups which constitute the research field, and in the dynamics and contradictions of their work.

Secondly, there is an assumption inherent in political activist ethnography that knowledge gained from research is expected to inform the next phase of work being undertaken by the relevant activist groups or networks. From the time of its conception, this project has been developed in the hope that whatever its findings may be, they will offer some practical assistance in supporting the strengthening of the intellectual and organisational capacity of at least some parts of the New Zealand left, whether or not this results in the actual establishment of a substantial left wing think tank.

The third area of congruence lay in my own positioning as an activist researcher. While there is no question that this study was in part undertaken to gain a doctoral qualification, my underlying motivation was driven far more by my desire to find the

answers to the research questions – and, with others, act on those answers. At the time I began my research I did not identify as either an intellectual or an academic, and never had. I had, however, seen myself as a radical activist ever since I had first taken to the streets of Auckland in the late 1960s protesting the Vietnam War. I was still an activist in the years 2010–2013, mainly in my work with and for unemployed workers and beneficiaries as part of the anti-capitalist Auckland Action Against Poverty group. My experience in organisations like the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre and Kotare Trust had also caused me to reflect over the years about the roles we take as activists engaged with research, education and policy development. It appeared that political activist ethnography provided a legitimate and provocative framework within which to explore not only my research questions, but also my own shifting academic/activist identity as the doctoral project unfolded—and the shifting identity of PAE itself.

The fourth major factor in my decision to work with PAE was the ethnographic toolbox of methods which came with it, some of which appeared particularly relevant and useful. These included the concept of the ethnographic gaze, "a systematic way of seeing" (Madden, 2010, p. 100), as a means of allowing a degree of necessary separation of an insider researcher from the researched; the centrality of reflexivity and reflexive methods as a means of transparency and accountability in relation to all those potentially associated with the project, in particular academics, research participants and those of the broader academic and activist left who may have an interest; and the critical role played by writing itself as a means not only of observation and analysis but also as the final creative product. I was also interested in the potential of ethnographic methods to, as Doug McAdam put it, "shed empirical light on the meso-level dynamics that shape and sustain collective action over time" (McAdam, 2003, p. 7). In other words, I sought to go beyond methods that were either too localised and intimate, too engaged with detail to paint any bigger picture; or too meta, so large that they carried the risk of missing out on the specifics which add colour, complexity and depth to any research findings. I attempted to design this study in a way that would allow all three levels, meta, meso and micro, to emerge with some degree of clarity, and it is my hope that the mix of creative, observational, analytical and reflexive methods offered by ethnographic method within a PAE framework will help achieve this goal.

I knew when I decided to use it that PAE was a very new and largely untested methodology which may never flourish beyond the small networks of researchers who have been experimenting with it. I also realised that its congruence with my project was not going to be total as I was in part examining an institutional and structural absence rather than a presence. On top of that, the scale of what I was attempting seemed larger than other PAE studies of which I was aware, transcending any one group, movement or network, and treating the left of an entire country as a research site. I was heartened by Dorothy Smith's statement that "Institutional ethnography isn't about studying institutions as such" (D.E. Smith, 2006, p. 2) but realised that as part of the scale issue there was an even more fundamental dissonance between my proposed research and IE/PAE as I had seen it evolve so far. Both methodologies use textual analysis. To examine the relevant textual practices and output of the New Zealand left 2010–2013, even within some fairly tight constraints, would certainly have been an interesting exercise, but would have entailed so much more work that common sense alone placed such an effort well out of scope. Gary Kinsman says that both IE and PAE "are alternative ways of doing sociology that are not fixed or dogmatic and thus are able to be continually open-ended and remade as new voices and new movements come forward to join in struggles for social transformation" (Kinsman, 2006, p. 155). In adopting PAE as a methodological framework I welcomed this invitation to creative flexibility. These words from Laura Bisaillon also gave me hope that experimenting with political activist ethnography would help meet the challenges posed by both the thesis questions and my own perhaps foolishly optimistic research goals.

> Political activist ethnography is intent on opening up possibilities for transforming oppressive social relations and setting a course for using knowledge derived from empirically informed research to inform the social justice and political work of those labouring on behalf of oppressed or marginalized people. (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 617)

Methodologies considered and rejected

In the process of trying to work out which methodology or mixture of methodologies would be most compatible with my thesis question, and with my own experience and beliefs, I gave serious consideration to five methodologies or theoretical frameworks which I subsequently rejected: participatory action research, political autoethnography, radical community development; constructivist grounded theory methodology and social movement theory.

Participatory action research

Participatory action research (PAR) emerged in low income countries in the 1970s as a mechanism by which those directly suffering from oppression could research their own situation, then use their findings to inform their struggle against that oppression (Borda, 2001; Gray, 2004; Mellor, 2007; Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow, & Brown, 2005). PAR was strongly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and his lifelong commitment to nurturing through theory and practice "the critical effort through which men and women take themselves in hand and become agents of curiosity, become investigators, become subjects in an ongoing process of quest for the revelation of the 'why' of things, the facts" (Freire, 1994, p. 105). As with other qualitative methodologies, different approaches to PAR have evolved over the decades, but core attributes include the involvement of the researched themselves as researchers, or as collaborators with researchers, and the use of the research process and findings as both an instrument of conscientisation and as a tool for change. PAR is often used to confront and challenge structures and systems of power on issues of poverty, injustice and social exclusion.

PAR had immediate appeal given my own political and philosophical beliefs; the fact that I had been part of a New Zealand research team carrying out a Commonwealth-wide research project under the leadership of internationally acknowledged PAR practitioner Rajesh Tandon in the late 1990s (Bradford, Nowland-Foreman, Te Korowai Aroha, & Commonwealth Foundation, 1999); and that my work with Kotare Trust had at times opened up the possibility of utilising PAR to extend the Trust's research activities in a manner consonant with Kotare's Freirean pedagogy. The development of a major left wing think tank in Aotearoa could potentially be conceived as a PAR project, to be achieved by myself working as a co-researcher with a number of others from among the left wing activist and academic community. However, it quite quickly became apparent that PAR was not appropriate for this study.

I genuinely did not know the answer to my research question at the time I commenced my research. In 2010 I could not make any assumption that interest, appetite or demand for a major left wing think tank in Aotearoa existed. PAR is a form of cooperative inquiry which requires collaboration and involvement beyond an individual researcher. With no organisation of even the loosest nature in existence as a starting point for collective research strategies, I could not identify the necessary base of people with

whom to design, implement and carry out a PAR project. Indeed a major purpose of the research itself was to find out if such a base existed and of whom it might consist. Secondly, and even more fundamentally, PAR is most commonly used as a methodology for working with people who are in an oppressed position in society and the economy. The intended informants for this research did not fit this category particularly well, as they were already politically active and well educated, and for the most part were not—at the time in their lives when the interviews took place—a class of people who could be deemed vulnerable and dispossessed.

Political autoethnography

Having considered and rejected PAR, I turned to political autoethnography as an exciting and relevant way in which I might design and shape this project. This methodology uses the research and writing of one's own story to methodically and explicitly link the autobiographical with one's social, cultural and political context (Ellingson, 2011; Voloder, 2008), and, if one chooses, to use that story as a way of confronting and challenging dominant forms of power (Denzin, 2003; Holt, 2003). Using autoethnographic techniques, I could have usefully examined the research question through the lens of my own lived experience in the left activist culture of Aotearoa, and of my active involvement over many years in several of the nascent left think tanks described in some detail as part of this study. This self-focused research and writing could also have been augmented by the use of co-constructed narratives and interactive interviewing, processes in which the researcher brings more texture and depth to the analysis by extending it beyond the self (C. S. Davis & Ellis, 2008). I could even have taken it as far as 'community autoethnography' in which a small number of co-researchers collaborate partially or fully in cycles of self-writing, group discussion and interpretation, culminating in group writing (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010).

However, after an initial period of enthusiasm, I came to realise that autoethnography was not entirely fit for purpose. I had never conceived this research as some form of autobiography, but rather as a deliberately and genuinely open exploration of the research question among as broad a sample of the academic and activist left in Aotearoa as possible, albeit from an openly reflexive, biased and insider standpoint. In addition, autoethnography is a methodology which has a history of attracting accusations of researcher narcissism from the more traditional in the academic community (Holt, 2003), "the defensive reactions of disciplinary gatekeepers" as

homeless autoethnographer BRE terms it (BRE, 2007, p. 229). Although I am convinced that autoethnography, well done, is as academically rigorous as any other methodology, I felt my identity as a reasonably well known public figure in New Zealand made me particularly vulnerable to suggestions that I might simply be engaging in an exercise in self-indulgence, and that it would therefore be wise on these grounds alone to seek an alternative methodological approach. While a cooperative form of autoethnography would have gone some way towards overcoming this type of criticism, I faced in that regard the same issues which arose with participatory action research. There was neither a group of people already in existence and visible as potential co-researchers, nor any extant major left wing think tank or think tank formation group with whom I could work to set up such collaboration.

Radical community development theory

Another way in which key aspects of this research question could have been explored is through the lens of radical community development, which Margaret Ledwith defines as "…committed to the role of community work in achieving transformational change for social and environmental justice, and develops analysis and practice which move beyond symptoms to the root causes of oppression" (Ledwith, 2005, p. xv). Other recent writers talk, for example, about the possibilities and potential of community organising which has a political as well as service provision focus, and which includes connecting day to day work with political education, action and advocacy (DeFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2009; Shragge, 2003). I was initially attracted to the possibility of working with this model both because of my own long history as a radical community development practitioner and educator, and because I could see that a useful study of the nascent left think tanks in respect of my core question could easily be developed through this radical community development lens, with detailed case studies, key informant interviews, organisational life cycle analysis and network mapping as methods to flesh out interconnections, comparisons and analysis. Upon reflection, however, I realised that a community development approach would work best if I was using organisational case studies as the primary focus of this research. While analysing what might be learned from the stories of the nascent left think tanks was planned as a key element of this study, it was only one component. A community development based approach, even a radical one, was plainly not going to suffice.

Grounded theory methodology

For some months I gave serious consideration to the use of a branch of grounded theory methodology (GTM) as the methodological basis for this study. I even enjoyed the privilege of being invited to join a grounded theory research group based in the health faculty at my university campus. Grounded theory methodology was developed by American health scholars Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967, and although it subsequently made a number of evolutionary progressions, at the heart of GTM lies the concept of researchers generating their own theory to explain what is happening with the data under examination, underpinning this with the application of a series of specific methods which work to meticulously analyse and systematise the research, including coding, memo writing, theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation (Birks & Mills, 2011; Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Stern & Porr, 2011).

There were two main reasons for my early attachment to this particular methodology. I genuinely had no idea how my thesis question would be answered, there was no extant research on the topic and I was investigating an institutional absence rather than a presence. This meant that I was attracted to a methodology which, as practitioners point out, is particularly useful when not much is known about the topic being studied and where it is expected new understandings will be generated (Birks & Mills, 2011; Nayar, Hocking, & Giddings, 2012). Secondly, leading grounded theory scholars like Norman Denzin and Kathy Charmaz were promoting the concept of constructivist grounded theory as an appropriate tool for social justice research, in an approach which "places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). Denzin situates constructivist grounded theory studies within what he calls 'epistemologies of resistance', and talks about a paradigm "…avowed in its commitment to a project of social justice and radical progressive democracy" (Denzin, 2007, p. 468).

However, upon closer inspection, and with advice from staff and student members of the AUT grounded theory research discussion group, I came to understand that I had missed three key factors in my original commitment to GTM. First of all, this was a methodology only likely to be useful when "An inherent process is imbedded in the research situation that is likely to be explicated by grounded theory methods" (Birks &

Mills, 2011, p. 16), or, as Phyllis Stern and Caroline Porr put it, "grounded theorists focus on people's experiences and the actions they are taking to cope or manage" (Stern & Porr, 2011, p. 48). It was dawning on me rather belatedly that there were good reasons for GTM's popularity in the field of health studies rather than in the arena of political activist research. There was no psychological phenomenon or process at the core of my original research question. No matter how I wrestled with it, I came to realise that without drastic revision of the question itself to the point where it became a different research topic altogether, GTM was not going to work as an appropriate methodology for this study.

Secondly, when considering methods alone, it became apparent that the sheer volume of data likely to be generated by the interviews I planned to conduct would mean that the detailed application of standard GTM processes would be far more draining of time and energy than was likely to be necessary for research adequacy, or was reasonable within the three year doctoral timeframe. And thirdly, no matter which strand of GTM a researcher might apply, constructivist or otherwise, the development of new theory stands at centre stage. The purpose of my research was not theoretical development. If a new theory or set of theories arose as a result of my research, these would emerge as a by-product, rather than a central and intended starting point. The search for a pertinent methodology or set of methodologies continued.

Social movement theory

Social movement theory was another theoretical framework apposite to the subject matter of this study. My plan to examine the think tank-like work of the community based organisations I termed 'nascent left wing think tanks' lay clearly within the purview of what Aziz Choudry and others call 'social movement knowledge production' (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010b), as did the question at the very core of this project, the viability or otherwise of establishing a left wing think tank in Aotearoa, based in the community and independent of the academy, churches and government. Social movement knowledge production refers to the theoretical and practical research which is produced and disseminated by activist groups, networks and movements. While I found it exciting that scholars internationally were beginning to recognise and examine the importance and validity of such research, my difficulty lay in any wholesale embracing of the concept of social movement theory as the necessary underpinning paradigm of 'social movement knowledge production'.

I start with a highly subjective and prejudiced statement. In a lifetime of left activism I have never consciously identified any group, network, campaign or mobilisation of which I have been part as a 'social movement'. 'Movement'—yes, at times; 'social movement'—no. 'Social movement' has not been a term used by my generation of activists, or at least not by those with whom I have worked closely, even though many of the struggles of which we have been part have been subsequently identified by academics as 'social movements', from the time of the anti-Vietnam war mobilisations and the formation of the first women's and gay liberation groups onwards. It has seemed a purely academic construct, created for university research and teaching purposes only, and of little or no interest to activists involved in the groups defined in this way. It was only when I began this doctoral project that I suddenly realised the extent to which the notion of 'social movements' and the multiplicity of theories surrounding what I had always thought of as 'our' work had taken hold, locally in Aotearoa as well as internationally. One example of this disjunction can be found in an article describing the anti-poverty networks in which I was deeply involved 1983–1999 as a 'social movement' (Grey, 2009), a concept that to the best of my recollection had never crossed the minds or lips of those of us working at the heart of that particular struggle.

From this distrustful starting point I was therefore not surprised to discover that there existed a substantial literature just waiting to inform me that I was not alone in these perceptions. Critics frequently refer to the way in which academics who apply social movement theory can so often be completely detached from the people and groups who are the objects of their research; that activists are often oblivious to the research product, even when it references their work; and even when activists are aware of its existence, they often refrain from reading social movement literature because of its alien academic language and theorisation. Lack of relevance and the corollary absence of any organisational benefit to the groups, organisations and networks being researched is also a common perception among activists, as well as among some of the academics working in this area. (Bevington & Dixon, 2005; Choudry, Hanley, & Shragge, 2012; McAdam, 2003; Nulman, 2013)

The state of social movement theory in the United States was recently described as a 'quagmire' (Bevington & Dixon, 2005, p. 1), and like other theoretical frameworks already mentioned, there is a long history of theoretical dissension and evolution

(Lacey, 2010; Zirakzadeh, 2006). Janet Conway notes that the "large and growing literature on the study of social movements is highly fragmented and diverse, marked as it is by numerous pockets of isolated debates" (Conway, 2006, p. 7). This diversity would not in itself have been enough to stop me utilising social movement theory, as all qualitative methodologies appear to have such histories unless they are very new indeed. However, my preference was strongly in favour of a theoretical framework grounded in the experience, actions, thoughts and hopeful dreams of the activist left ourselves, rather than in the debates of several generations of social movement scholarship. I acknowledge that the use of the language of 'social movement' is now so widespread that it is impossible to avoid in the context of any academic study in the field in which my research is located, but a choice was possible when it came to how deeply I wished to engage with its theorisations at this juncture. Frampton and others talk about political activist ethnography 'troubling' social movement theory.

> Despite their differences, the various social movement theories all construct social movements as objects of analysis and focus their attention on social movements themselves rather than on explicating the social relations of struggle in which those movements are engaged. In contrast, political activist ethnography is rooted in movement action and experience and does not convert movements or activists into objects of analysis or theory. (Frampton et al., 2006b, p. 11)

Ethical considerations

This study is deeply political in nature, bringing with it inherently heightened potential sensitivities. I was concerned from the start with how to create a balance between enabling the voices of those I interviewed to be heard as clearly and strongly as possible while also providing adequate levels of personal and political safety. The same thing applied when it came to examining the experiences of the groups included in my sample of nascent left wing think tanks. While I was aware of some of the contradictions implicit in a political activist ethnographer being required to seek institutional ethics approval, the sensitivities involved and the potential for personal and organisational damage meant that I found myself unexpectedly grateful for the protection and support offered by my university's ethics process.

This project was granted approval to proceed by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 June 2012 (see Appendix B). Key areas which required consideration were the safeguarding of individual participants through

processes of informed consent; the provision of the protections of anonymity and confidentiality to participants; ensuring that the interests of the 'nascent left wing think tanks', and in particular Kotare Trust, were protected; establishing the ways in which safe and respectful relationships between researcher and participants would be maintained; demonstrating sensitivity to the Tiriti obligations which could be expected of a Pākehā carrying out research in Aotearoa, particularly when the research included the involvement of some Māori participants; and explaining the ways in which researcher accountability not only to participants but also to the wider academic and activist left in New Zealand was to be provided subsequent to the completion of the doctoral project. There will also be a short discussion of particular ethical considerations arising from the application of political activist ethnography as the methodological framework for this research.

Informed and voluntary consent

Once each potential participant had been identified, they were sent an information sheet explaining the topic, scope and purpose of the research and asking if they were willing to be interviewed (Appendix C). If they were happy to take part they were then invited to fill in and return a consent form attached to the initial pānui (Appendix D). Consent indicated not only willingness to be interviewed, but also that they had had the opportunity to ask and have answered any questions they might have about the research; that they understood notes would be taken during the interview; and that they realised the full interview would be recorded and transcribed. There was also an assurance that where participants agreed to be identified by name within the research, they would be given the opportunity to check quotations and any personal references before the thesis was finalised. Written consent was obtained from all participants either before or at the time of interview. Before I finished writing, I again contacted each participant by email to check quotations and associated personal references with them. They all provided written email confirmation that the text used was signed off by them. A number of participants requested minor edits which were subsequently painstakingly incorporated into the final version of the study.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Participants

The consent form asked all participants whether or not they wished to be identified by name in the research. I worked carefully and deliberately to ensure no written or verbal pressure was applied in regards to this choice. Where confidentiality was requested, the

names of individuals were replaced with pseudonyms. In all except one case these were chosen by the participant themselves. I have endeavoured to prevent any identifying details of anonymised participants emerging contextually in my own writing or in the extracts taken from their transcripts. It was for this reason that I asked anonymous participants to check their quotes even though they were not going to be identified, as a check on any inadvertent exposure. For these respondents anonymity will also be retained in any further reports, presentations or publications which may emerge from this research. Participant data collected as part of this study, including interview recordings downloaded on to an external drive and consent forms, will be stored securely at AUT for six years, or until all ensuing publications are complete, whichever is longer. The only people to have had access to this data have been the researcher, her two supervisors, and the person who transcribed five of the interviews. He signed a separate confidentiality agreement which will be held with the other secured files.

Sensitive information: Organisations

When it came to examining the seven groups I describe as 'nascent left wing think tanks' I was aware of the need for care in managing any material that might be sensitive or damaging in relation to organisational practices. With five of the organisations this was not an issue, as the only sources I planned to use were documents already on the public record and data collected from formal interviews with research participants. However, with two of the groups, the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC) and Kotare Trust I had potentially useful unpublished primary data sitting in my own archives. The provision of safeguards was not so much of an issue with AUWRC as the organisation closed down in 1999. Nevertheless I undertook to refrain from identifying any individuals named in this material unless the information was available in the public domain or the person concerned had checked and approved the text. I made the same undertaking in regards to Kotare, and also entered into a formal agreement that any text or information which might affect the organisation adversely would be dealt with through a consultation process with Kotare's chairperson, Tim Howard. This consultation did take place, and was notified and signed off by the Trust at its October 2013 Annual General Meeting.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Thesis journal

My thesis journal was a major source of data for this project. While I intended to fully analyse it, and on a few occasions quote from its contents, I was committed to

preserving the anonymity of individuals named in the journal, unless I had their written consent to identifying them in either the thesis or in other publications or presentations arising from this research.

Researcher-participant relationships

I undertook several measures aimed at minimising risk to participants. No one I interviewed was a family member, an employee or in any other relationship with me where either overt or unspoken coercion or pressure might have influenced the conversation. While each interview was fully transcribed and some contained material that may have put the respondent at legal or reputational risk, the protection offered through the consent and sign off process outlined above was intended to protect everyone from potential harm. It should be acknowledged that a wide variety of relationships existed between myself as researcher and the participants. Some were friends and colleagues with whom I was closely acquainted through my involvement in left politics and activist organisations; some I had encountered briefly in the past, for example at an academic conference, political meeting or street action; and some were people whom I had never met before but whom I had identified as potential interviewees by reputation or reference. There was no payment, koha or other inducement made or offered to participants. From the first to the last of my thesis-related interactions with participants I did my best to work with each person in an open, collegial and respectful way.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The topic of this study directly involves and acknowledges Tiriti obligations. The definition of 'left' I have created for the purpose of this thesis includes the words 'Tiriti justice'. From my left and Pākehā perspective, this means a commitment contained in the Peoples Charter (Appendix E) to work for "the realisation of a society in which the rights of the tangata whenua as embodied in Te Tiriti o Waitangi are recognised", with a vision that Te Tiriti "will form our constitutional base, underpinning democratic, accountable and equitable distribution of power, wealth and information." Because of this definitional framing, and because many Māori are deeply engaged as left activists and academics, I considered it vital that tangata whenua participants were included in this research. However, I was not interviewing Maori because they belonged to a particular whānau, iwi or hapū, or because they lived within a particular rohe; nor was I conducting research with tangata whenua respondents because of their actual or

possible health, welfare or other vulnerability. The individuals in the pool for potential interview included only people who were political activists and/or professional academics who operated to a greater or lesser extent in the public arena already.

For these reasons I did not see it as appropriate to engage in the type of consultative processes suggested in research guidelines like *Te Ara Tika* (Hudson, Smith, Milne, Reynolds, & Russell, 2010) and the *Tangata Whenua, Community and Voluntary Sector Code of Practice* (Community and Voluntary Sector Research Centre, 2007). Instead, I worked with Maori participants in the same way as I worked with tauiwi respondents, consciously endeavouring to adhere to principles of manaakitanga, which, according to *Te Ara Tika* "encompasses a range of meanings in a traditional sense with a central focus on ensuring the mana of both parties is upheld. In this context, it is associated with notions of cultural and social responsibility and respect for persons" (Hudson et al., 2010, p. 10).

Researcher accountability to the activist and academic left

As has already been described in Chapter 1, the genesis of the question underpinning this research lay in years of conversations and discussions of which I had been part in different left activist groups and settings from around 1990 onwards. A small number of left writers and academics had also been posing similar questions about the lack of a think tank or other forms of institutional strengthening of the left's intellectual armoury in their writings, as discussed in the literature review. The impetus for this research did not come from anywhere external to these people, in this place: the world of the academic and activist left in New Zealand. One of the core principles of political activist ethnographic research is that it works, as Gary Kinsman puts it, "*for* activism. We need to identify the questions and areas of social organization that need to be further researched for the progress of movements and struggles" (Kinsman, 2006, p. 155). This identification is exactly what I did when I conceived this project. At the point of completion, what I consider to be a corollary and equally fundamental PAE principle must also be implemented. It will be imperative that the product of my research is returned, as quickly and effectively as possible, to the people, groups and movements from which the question originated.

In recognition of the particular obligation of accountability owed to those who generously agreed to take part in the research interview process, the original participant

information sheet promised that as soon as my thesis was in the public domain, each respondent would be sent a link so they could read the full work if they chose. However, in the expectation that many participants would not be interested nor have the time and patience to read an entire PhD thesis, I also offered to send them an electronic copy of a summary report of my research findings and recommendations, much reduced in length and stripped to the maximum extent possible of academic jargon, in line with Ian Hussey's suggestion that "To make research results understandable and useful, political activist ethnographers should improve their ability to write up their research in plain language as well as continually seek out ways to disseminate research results through various forms of media" (Hussey, 2012, p. 11). In regards to the broader left, inclusive of participants but also extending beyond them to any person or organisation with an interest, I planned in the months following completion to write to those on my existing contact lists, advising them that I had completed my thesis, providing its link, and attaching an electronic copy of the report mentioned above. With financial and practical assistance from supportive allies, I intended to organise a series of meetings in various parts of the country to report back on the research and its findings. I also planned to investigate opportunities to publish or present on this and any subsequent associated research in relevant academic, community sector and left activist journals and settings, internationally as well as locally.

Methods

The philosophical framework and methodology of any qualitative research project such as this are underpinned by methods, described by Grant and Giddings as "the practical means, the tools, for collecting and analysing data" (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 12). In this section I describe the methods used in this research: the organising and carrying out of face-to-face interviews with 51 participants and processes associated with that; my keeping of a thesis journal as a means of observation, reflection and analysis; and the mechanisms by which data was analysed.

Interviews

In depth individual semi structured interviews were the primary source of data for this research. While ethnographic interviewing can vary in style on a spectrum from the highly conversational and informal through to very structured situations in which

respondents are asked exactly the same set of questions in the same way each time (Madden, 2010, pp. 67–68), I opted for the midpoint of 'semi structured' interview as the best way of uncovering, in as equal and sensitive a researcher-researched relationship as possible, participant views on the core questions to which I sought answers. In carrying out these open-ended interviews and reporting on the process, I was influenced not only by ethnographic methods and political activist methodology, but also by feminist researcher Ann Oakley, who advocates for the application of principles of genuine reciprocity at all points in the interview engagement, as well as recommending that detailed information be provided about that engagement at the point of writing up, as a way of clarifying and demystifying a method which can never be a purely objective, one-way process (Oakley, 1981).

The participants

The questions which lay at the heart of this research could only be answered by people who were of the activist and academic left in New Zealand. This large and amorphous field presented me with a number of challenges. The first was around numbers. While I was not attempting to use a quantitative research framework in which numbers and counting were paramount and essential, the fact that my research site was the whole of the New Zealand left and that the quality of the research would be enhanced by a larger rather than smaller interview sample influenced my decision to set a reasonably high upper limit of 50 on the number of potential interviewees. Yet while this was high from a researcher perspective, it was not high enough from the point of view of the potential participant pool, especially when I faced particular problems to do with the nature and purpose of my research.

From the start, I realised that my choice of participants would be seen by some as a political act. I ran the very particular risk that individuals not interviewed might feel offended because they had been left out. While this was not likely to have an effect on the product or quality of the research, it could well have a detrimental impact on any subsequent project to establish a left wing think tank, as well as on future personal and political relationships between some of the non-interviewed and the researcher. To deal with the contradictions and risks implicit in these two challenges, I was careful to apply purposive sampling techniques aimed at ensuring certain criteria were met, and that the sample would be as diverse as possible given the innate limitations of time and numbers. I also hoped that by clearly writing about this process in the thesis, those who

may have felt upset at not having been interviewed might come to understand some of the necessary constraints under which academic research is carried out, including those of methodology and of researcher capacity.

The three initial criteria for including people in the pool of potential research participants were that they should be 'left', as delineated in the working definition used throughout this research; they should be activists and/or academics, and resident in New Zealand at the time of interview. After the first four interviews I added a fourth criterion to the participant sampling process, that of 'funder'. This aimed to encompass individuals who were 'left' and who were philanthropists themselves, but who did not necessarily identify as 'academic' or 'activist'. The reason for this addition was the confirmation offered by the first tranche of participants that one of the main reasons historically given for the absence of a major left wing think tank, difficulties with funding, continued to loom large in peoples' perceptions of what had hindered such a development. I therefore felt it would be useful to interview at least a small number of individuals who fell into this additional category.

Factors for which I selected to ensure range and diversity in the intended sample of 50 interviewees included age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, geographic location, union, community and church involvement, place within the reform/transform left spectrum, proximity or distance from the researcher in respect of personal relationships, and (for some) their role in one or more of the nascent left wing think tanks. In regards to age, I felt it critical that people from across the generations were interviewed. It would have been easy for me to select almost all participants from within my own and adjacent age groups, the older generation of left activists and academics in Aotearoa, but such a sample would have been grossly inadequate, missing the thoughts and experiences of younger generations. I considered gender, ethnicity and sexuality critical characteristics to assist with selection, given the definition of 'left' which I was using, and my research paradigm.

Although it was difficult because of the restriction on numbers and the costs involved with travelling to interviews, geographic location was important as I was attempting to find out what the left nationally thought about the questions I was asking. It was vital to include at least some people from outside the two large urban centres of Auckland and Wellington. Union, community and church involvement was a factor as I sought a

reasonable spread across the sites of activism in which people were involved. Where people identified themselves or were identified on the reform/transform axis was also important, as I sought to gauge thinking across the left, rather than from just one part of it. I added 'distance from the researcher' to my list of sampling criteria when I realised that a lifetime of left activism meant there was a real risk of simply selecting participants from among people I already knew well. The final criteria for selection concerned the role some participants had played in one or more of the nascent left wing think tank examples described in Chapter 5. I was keen to include participants who would be in a position to offer insights into the history and experience of those organisations.

My strategy for participant recruitment relied on my own knowledge of left activist and academic networks and on information provided by participants about further people whom it would be useful to interview, in what is often called the 'snowball' effect. My initial list of prospective interviewees in June 2012 when I started sending out invitations to participate in the study contained around 120 names. By November 2012, including the effect of snowballing referrals from those I had interviewed and from contacts made through my political activities during this period, my list of potential informants had nearly doubled to over 230 people. In total, I formally invited 54 individuals to participate in my research. Only three interviews did not eventuate from these invitations. In two cases those invited had responded favourably to the initial pānui but the interview itself proved impossible to organise; in the third case, no response was received despite repeated attempts at contact. From 54 invitations sent, 51 interviews took place, meaning that participant recruitment for this study had a 94.5% positive response. As already mentioned, all participants were offered anonymity. In the end, only five of the 51 respondents took up that option; 46 people were happy to be identified in this study.

Between June and November 2012 I interviewed 51 people. Four were in the 20–30 age group; nine 30–40; eight 40–50; eighteen 50–60; and twelve were aged over 60. Twenty were women, 31 were men. Six identified as GLBTI. In terms of ethnicity, eight were Māori, three Pasifika, three Asian, and 37 were Pākehā. Philanthropic involvement was a factor with three people, and substantive participation in one or more nascent left wing think tanks was a consideration in the selection of 13 participants. Those interviewed came from Northland (1), Auckland (24), Waikato (2),

Rotorua/Bay of Plenty (3), New Plymouth (1), Palmerston North (1), Wellington (13), Christchurch (2), West Coast South Island (2) and Dunedin (2). Selective information about participants' activist and political identification is provided in Chapter 4 and in Appendix F.

Selecting participants was a constant balancing act driven by purposive sampling and snowballing techniques and not designed to be proportionally representative. Recruitment was gradual as I moved from one small tranche of proposed participants to the next, continually reassessing whom to invite on the basis of interview content, recommendations for further additions to the pool of possible interviewees, and my efforts to keep all the factors identified above in balance. I had not anticipated such a high positive response rate, which meant an even further narrowing of options as time went on.

The interviews

With all participants I used the semi structured interview format mentioned above, aimed at allowing for sensitivity and fluidity in the exploration of questions and a mutually respectful dialogue between researcher and participant. Questions around which I initially structured the interviews explored responses to my definitions of 'left' and 'think tank'; asked participants why they thought a major left wing think tank had never been established in New Zealand and whether they supported such a concept; sought any ideas they might have about setting one up and what it might look like; and asked what they felt were the most cutting edge issues for the left in Aotearoa at the time of interview. If they had played a role in a nascent left wing think tank(s) I also asked about their experiences with the relevant organisation(s). In response to what I had learned from my experience with the first four interviews I added three new elements to the interview framework. From that time on I asked people directly where on the left spectrum they saw themselves, and about their identity (or not) as an activist; became more specific when inquiring about the potential activities of a future left wing think tank; and explicitly sought views on the strategic way forward in regards to the left's collective ability to influence public policy. The final list of indicative interview questions is at Appendix G. Participants were always invited to add anything else they wished to say, or to expand on areas in which they showed a particular interest. The sequence in which I asked questions, and the priority given to each varied widely. When participants asked me questions, I was at pains to ensure I

took time to answer them. In one interview in particular, as much time was taken up by the participant questioning me as the other way around, but in the spirit of reciprocity I felt this was the only way to proceed.

Each interview was aimed to last an hour but this varied, from a few briefer interviews at around 45 minutes through to an hour and a half in one case and over two hours in another. I split the latter interview in two in the interests of the wellbeing of both researcher and participant. In one situation I interviewed two people together, at their request. The net effect was that I carried out 51 interviews averaging an hour apiece, and most interviews did end up being around an hour long. All interviews were recorded and participants informed that the recording would be fully transcribed. Two participants requested the opportunity to check and edit the transcription of their interview, and this was done.

I took hand written notes at all interviews as well, principally as a means of recording observations and reflections that would not be captured in the audio recording. These were not extensive notes, but did assist as a reminder of interview settings, of any pertinent problems or questions that arose during the interview, of points of particular interest raised by or about the participant and of anything else about the process that might be relevant. All interviews were also the subject of notes and reflections included in my thesis journal, from a slightly more detached perspective than the notes taken at the time, as journal entries were made in retrospect. I found that the notes made at the time of interview were especially useful as a guide to modifying and improving the content and nature of my questions and the ways in which I interacted with participants, and as a reminder of researcher mistakes which should not be repeated in regards to matters like timing and equipment. The journal tended to be the place in which I recorded deeper thinking and analysis.

Transcription

At the same time as I was organising and conducting the 51 interviews, I began the process of transcribing them, adhering to Lyn Lavery's definition of 'intelligent' transcription: "a full and accurate transcript without repeated and unnecessary words that frequently occur hundreds of times during an interview" (Lavery, 2010). During the period July 2012–January 2013 I transcribed 46 interviews. Towards the end a volunteer with professional experience transcribed the remaining five, assistance which

by that stage was gratefully received. With word counts of up to 15,000 words per interview, transcription was a lengthy and time consuming process. However, the advantage of undertaking the bulk of this work myself was the resulting sense of familiarity and engagement with the material. This was to prove useful when the time came to carry out coding, data analysis and writing.

Thesis journal

The second major data source for this project was my thesis journal which I began in a rather rudimentary manner in June 2010 and stopped writing at the end of July 2013, by which time it had reached over 66,000 words. There was a three and a half month gap in journal-keeping when I took formal leave from my studies in order to stand for Mana as a parliamentary candidate in the 2011 general election, but apart from that short break, maintaining the journal was a constant and indispensable feature of my research work. I was fortunate to have a primary supervisor who advised me to maintain a thesis journal right from the start, because at that early point I had no idea of its future significance. As someone undertaking a project within the academy from an openly left activist standpoint, maximising researcher reflexivity and transparency was essential to ensuring my own integrity, and that of the product of my work. Political activist ethnography, like other similar modes of ethnographic, activist and critical inquiry, also requires a high level of reflexivity. As Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor put it "Reflexivity is crucial when starting from, engaging with, and analysing activist knowledge" (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010a, p. 3).

Keeping a journal served a number of purposes, but I believe the most critical of these was the way it helped ensure I was engaging in iterative and gradually more complex reflective practices throughout the project. Sara Nadin and Catherine Cassell talk about the way in which a research diary creates a space in which to be reflexive, of particular use when there are few opportunities to work collegially (Nadin & Cassell, 2006, p. 214). I certainly found the lack of collegial opportunity difficult as I attempted to work with an emerging methodology in a country where I was unaware of the existence of any fellow practitioners, experimental or otherwise. Keeping a journal gave me somewhere to think, talk to myself and work through methodological and other challenges. Maintaining field notes and/or a journal or diary are also core components of standard ethnographic practice. Disciplined, regular note taking and writing not only encourage reflexivity, but are also methods by which ethnographers record what is

happening in their field of study at whatever level of detail is desired (participant observation). These methods also assist in finding and maintaining a deliberate distance from the people with whom one is working (the ethnographic gaze) while enhancing researcher capacity to implement a constant cycle of action, observation, reflection and analysis which feeds into ongoing research praxis (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001; Madden, 2010; O'Reilly, 2009).

From the start, I kept my journal in handwritten form, typing up and often expanding on my original notes later when I had more time than was immediately available. Some of the material was highly sensitive, and in line with ethical accountability, the only people to read it were my thesis supervisors, with whom I shared it at each supervision session. I wrote down any and all aspects of my activist life that seemed relevant to the research project, usually with accompanying musings. The two journal segments cited here reflect entries two and a half years apart.

> Gave speech at Unite union conference today—re prospects, problems re setting up new left party in Aotearoa—interesting questions and feedback; some of this pertinent to potential left think tank as well, eg who identifies as *left*, what is *left*, what are most important next steps in building *left*? issues around organisational development; issues around left unity; or lack thereof. (November 2010)

> Mayday. And it truly is today, three union actions taking place in Auckland of a meaningful nature, ie not just the usual pissup in the Maritime Hall or whatever. I only attended one, but it was important—first deliberately organised community/union action I've known of since AUWRC/SFWU activity with Matt McCarten in late 80s/early 90s (can't remember year). With FIRST union and AAAP at Royal Oak Pak'nSave vs youth rates, nil wage offer. (May 2013)

My political and activist experiences and observations were not the only part of my life relevant to my research. At various times during the research period I was also involved at the core of three groups which are characterised in this study as 'nascent left wing think tanks', the Alternative Welfare Working Group, the Child Poverty Action Group and Kotare Trust. Relevant aspects of these engagements and subsequent reflections were recorded.

> At CPAG meeting tonight—group merrily decides to call a small symposium on the question of WFF/universality in the welfare system a 'think tank'. I had to really bite my tongue—a two and a half hour informed discussion on one topic, interesting and relevant to current policy debates though it is, does not a think tank make, at least not by any definition of which I'm aware. No one else

> blinked. Perhaps I'm starting to collect a list of popular left perceptions and conceptions of 'think tank.' (April 2011)
>
> Kotare meeting—problem of 'how many groups/people are you aiming to please?' Core tensions between working cross sectorally and/or in a non-sectarian way across the left spectrum – pleasing people – working with diversity and dissent – overcoming sectarianism: all versus having a clear kaupapa, choosing with whom we work. I guess Kotare has been working with this ever since we started, and always will be – a clear area in which any left wing think tank which develops can learn from our experience. Trouble is, of course, it's not as if we've solved all the dilemmas which arise! (August 2012)

The difficult question of whom I should and should not interview arose with reasonable frequency.

> Really struggling with whom I dare leave out of interviews, this time I'm really struggling with *x*. Tactically, if I don't interview *x*, *x* could easily become a vituperative and well published enemy of any new think tank project. *X* would be genuinely interesting to interview. … There's a trade-off … with consciously decreasing risk to the project. (2012)

Reflections and experiences research participants shared with me during interviews were often mirrored in events in my activist life.

> Met with a key spokesperson *y* … characterised by extreme paranoia, total lack of listening skills, and no clarity about why he'd been so desperate to meet with me in the first place. This only served to reinforce for me why good people left *z* [organisation] in droves. (2012)

For three years, the journal was a place where I could work through my constant methodological questioning and experimentation.

> Grounded theory talked about as a 'full package' decision on how to proceed … is it time for such a decision? I guess I can make it and see how it plays, like everything else in this amazing process. Already trying to work out how political autoethnography might fit alongside such an all-consuming methodology. (March 2011)
>
> PAE comes from institutional ethnography, very focused on the study of organisations. Part of what I'm doing is a study of organisations, but it's also a study of a lack of organisation, of an idea of something that doesn't exist – that old problem I've wrestled with before. I wonder if there are any parallels in the relevant literature. (January 2013)

Maintaining the journal allowed me a safe space to reflect on various aspects of the roller coaster experience of undertaking doctoral study. In mid-2012 I wrote

"Ethnography really fits in lots of ways, but I keep seeing big holes at the centre. Sometimes I feel as though I've become methodologically unglued, if not unhinged."

My journal evolved into a detailed account of my thesis journey. It was the place I wrote what I came to identify as 'field notes', detailed descriptions of and reflections on what was going on in the left activist and academic world in which I lived, and which was my research site. My methodological progression, doubts and challenges were recorded in detail. I used it as a safe zone, where I could express fears and aggravation about aspects of the thesis undertaking and persuade myself to carry on. Above all, the journal was a place where I could be highly reflexive, where I could think, analyse that thinking, and use that as a base from which to go forward with greater clarity and with the ability to make improvements in my data collection and analytical methods, in a constantly iterative process. As my understanding of methodology and method deepened, a number of journal entries began to assume the same nature and purpose as analytic memos, of which more shortly. My experience with keeping a thesis journal certainly echoed the benefits espoused by recent researchers in a variety of fields (Moon, 2003; Nadin & Cassell, 2006; Ortlipp, 2008), extending well beyond its standard function, in various forms, as a core ethnographic and activist research method.

Data analysis

With an ever-lengthening thesis journal and 51 interview transcripts in hand, I now confronted a sizable quantity of complex data requiring detailed and preferably competent analysis. It was at this point that I found myself grateful for my earlier engagement with grounded theory methods, even though the methodology had proved to be incongruent. In discussing the relevance of grounded theory methods to ethnography, Kathy Charmaz and Richard Mitchell say "Ethnographers who leave data undigested seldom produce fresh insights and, sometimes, may not even complete their projects, despite years of toil" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 161). The possibility of indigestion or no digestion at all felt very real as I contemplated my tower of transcripts and near-complete journal. While the methods I used to analyse this data are standard not only in grounded theory and ethnography but also in qualitative research generally, a deepened sensitivity to detail and a growing understanding of ways in which analysis can build on analysis were skills I initially learned from grounded theorists.

Coding and mapping

In qualitative data analysis, codes are words or phrases which sum up the "primary content and essence" of a portion of data in a way that is meaningful to the researcher (Saldana, 2013, p. 4). Working out and applying codes is the first step in coming to grips with whatever raw material has been gathered. One piece of data can be assigned any number of codes, although if too many are applied confusion may ensue. The selected pieces of text can be of any length. I tried to keep my coded selections reasonably succinct, as length can result in a loss of meaning. At the same time I did not attempt to work at the highly refined level of coding used in grounded theory, for reasons outlined above. Coding can be done manually, as it always was in the past, but given the large amount of data with which I was grappling, I was grateful to be a digital-era user of NVivo Version 10 qualitative data analysis software (http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx).

I coded the entirety of every transcript and the thesis journal, starting at the chronological beginning and working steadily through to the end. I felt that part of my accountability to research participants and to the wider left activist and academic world which had shaped and driven up my thesis question was a responsibility to be honest in my coding, "rigorously ethical" as Saldana calls it (Saldana, 2013, p. 37). This meant paying the same careful attention to all of each participant's contribution and not valuing some over others; trying to ensure that I kept each piece of coded text within its rightful context without transposing it to a non-relevant situation, whether by design or error; and doing my best not to ignore or downplay data because I disagreed with it or was made uncomfortable by its content or source.

The process of coding with NVivo works by creating from the source data a series of hierarchical 'nodes', which are basically categories or baskets into which each piece of interesting, relevant and/or surprising text can be deposited, in other words 'coded'. The creation, naming and organising of nodes is a constantly evolving process. While the training I received recommended that no more than 80 nodes be generated, I found that limit too constraining, such was the diversity and range of the source material. To help work through the complexities of this and in a constant effort to reshape and reduce nodes, I often made notes in my journal or created relevant memos, as well as

maintaining a ‘codebook’, a file of sequential hard copy versions of my nodes lists. My final list of thematic nodes came in at 150, and can be seen at Appendix H.

Having completed the initial coding of all data, the big question was ‘what next?’ I still had an enormous amount of material to deal with, even though it had been through this first round of categorisation. It was particularly difficult trying to come to grips with how to analyse data relating to what I came to call ‘the state of the left’, the material reported on in Chapter 4 of this study. I was seeking to uncover and explain the experience of being left in Aotearoa in 2012 from the perspective of a sample of the left itself, and from that analyse what that might mean for the possible development of any major left think tank initiative. I was attempting to find adequate ways of mapping what political activist ethnographers call ‘social relations of struggle’ in relation to the left’s own organisations and networks. Laura Bisaillon calls this “examining the work accomplished by social movements, and considering the struggles, contradictions and confrontations people working in these movements experience” (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 615).

The work I had done with NVivo can be described as first cycle (Saldana, 2013) or initial coding (Charmaz, 2006). I could see I needed a second cycle method, a further way of organising, exploring and mapping my ‘state of left’ data, but without moving into the theoretical coding phase which characterises grounded theory methodology. I turned to visual mapping software Inspiration (http://www.inspiration.com/) for assistance. Using its templates, I took the coded data related to ‘state of the left’ nodes, and created a series of 25 diagrams. Two examples can be found in Appendix I. My efforts were informed in a limited way by the work of grounded theorists Ian Dey and Adele Clarke, who use various forms of mapping as a way of carrying out situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) and as “powerful tools for grounding the substantive relations between categories” (Dey, 2007, p. 188). In conceptualising and creating the diagrams I was also influenced by my practical experience over many years of using simple SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis as a collective strategic planning tool when working with grassroots activist groups in struggle (CommunityNet Aotearoa, 2013).

Memos

Creating maps and diagrams is one method for taking coded data in its raw form and transforming it into clear and comprehensive analysis which can then be written up as research findings. Another way of doing this is by generating analytic memos, taking the coded data and working with it by writing about it, thinking as one writes, and at times coming back later and writing about it some more. As Charmaz and Mitchell describe it "An ethnographer can play with ideas, try them out and check their usefulness by going back and forth between written pages and studied realities" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 167). I often used memos as a way of trying to sort out problems and questions around coding itself, and in working on the transition between coding and writing.

Memos can be used in other ways too. They can be as short or as long as a researcher wants and written in any style at all, unconfined by academic form. They can be augmented or updated at any time. Much of this is similar to the way in which I used my journal, which is why many of my journal entries became more and more like memos as time went by. Memos do not just have to be in written form; diagrams, pictures and other formats can achieve the same goal, and at times I used hand drawn diagramming or mapping for the same purposes. Once I started using NVivo for coding, I created new memos within the NVivo system, as the software makes it easy to search, compare, move between and link different data sources and nodes. It is also possible to code memos although I chose not to take that extra step as I felt it unnecessary. Whether as conscious memos or in my journal, I used this method to help create and question concepts, patterns and assertions; reflect on books and articles I had read and on events in my activist, nascent left think tank and political life; to assist with first and second cycle coding and analysis; as a way of working out how to use NVivo itself; and to help deal with specific problems which were really bothering me at any given moment. Examples of memos from different stages of this project are included in Appendix J.

Rigour in the research process

Ensuring academic rigour in qualitative research is an issue which has been the subject of intense study and debate for decades, both at the interface with quantitative researchers, and within the qualitative research community itself. Seminal work by

Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln in the early 1980s proposed four criteria by which the soundness of qualitative research could be judged: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). These criteria have served as the foundation of an ever changing and much debated evolutionary process at the hands of their creators and other researchers ever since (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Fossey et al., 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002; Sempik, Becker, & Bryman, 2007). In considering how to approach confirmation of rigour in this project, I adopted a number of these developments, paying particular attention to the relevance and applicability of rigour-enhancing strategies to a critical inquiry paradigm and to the methodology by which this study was guided. As Michael Patton says "Particular philosophical underpinnings, specific paradigms, and special purposes for qualitative inquiry will typically include additional or substitute criteria for assuring and judging quality, validity and credibility" (Patton, 1999, p. 1190). The four ways in which rigour in this research will now be evidenced are credibility, transferability, methodological congruence and reciprocity.

Credibility

As the reflexive statements contained in Chapter 1 indicate, my *credibility as a researcher* resides in a lifetime of experience in the milieu in which this study is situated, the world of the activist and academic left in New Zealand. I have been and continue to be a street activist, radical community development worker, community-based educator and researcher, politician and – at times – a student and a teacher within the academy. What I had learned on the ground informed and gave depth to this study at every step of the way. I suspect it would have been difficult to have achieved such a positive participant response rate had I been completely unknown or disrespected by those I approached. Corollary to this has been a risk that my political beliefs and history may be perceived in some quarters as undermining any credibility this research may purport to have. My response is that the theoretical and methodological framework of this research demands that it start from an explicit political standpoint and that the reflexivity which I demonstrate at every stage of the process in reality supports the claim to rigour. Raymond Madden advocates that ethnographers adopt "a methodologically focused sociological reflexivity and a personal-political reflexivity that has developed from anthropology and feminism" (Madden, 2010, p. 22). Quality ethnography relies on the transparency and acutely conscious reflexivity of the

ethnographer in data collection, analysis and writing up. This is what I have endeavoured to achieve.

Participant credibility is a second important factor. It is critical that the voices of those who have been interviewed are presented with truth and contextual clarity.

> Central to the quality of qualitative research is: whether participants' perspectives have been authentically represented in the research process and the interpretations made from information gathered (authenticity); and whether the findings are coherent in the sense that they 'fit' the data and social context from which they were derived. (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 723)

I have outlined in some detail my purposive sampling, interview, transcription and analytical methods, as well as the ways in which I have implemented or will implement past and future accountabilities to participants, all of which support such authenticity. In addition, I felt a particular duty as a political activist ethnographer to allow participants "to speak for themselves" (Guba & Lincoln, 2008, p. 277) to the maximum extent possible within the confines of word count and sense, and to attempt as fair as possible a distribution of respondent voices across the thesis. Two particular ways in which I managed this were through keeping the participant quotes comparatively short but to the point through the use of ellipsis, thereby maximising the number of contributions possible; and by maintaining a running chart called 'Participant quote list – use and frequency' while I was writing up, in order to keep an eye on the balance of quotes I was using in each of the three reporting chapters. While parity of contribution was not attainable, I certainly tried to ensure the voices of all participants would be heard, in the most appropriate, striking, surprising – and sometimes even humorous – ways and contexts possible.

Other ways in which I worked to achieve and maintain academic credibility were through regular meetings with my supervisors at which research processes and problems were discussed, often on the basis of what my journal revealed about my experiences in the intervening month; active participation in Marilyn Waring's monthly PhD potluck dinners/seminars, which provided very useful collegial opportunities for all public policy postgraduate students under her supervision; and my brief membership of the AUT grounded theory group, from whom I learned much.

Transferability

Transferability refers to ways in which research findings might be generalised to "other bodies of knowledge, populations or contexts/settings" (Fossey et al., 2002, p. 725). My efforts to enhance transferability included the decision to interview a comparatively large sample of 50 (ultimately 51) participants despite the amount of work I knew this would entail, in a bid to maximise the diversity and richness of response from which conclusions could be drawn; the use of careful purposive sampling and snowballing techniques to extend the pool of potential participants to the largest size possible within the time available; and my efforts to write up this research in a way that provides maximum transparency in every aspect of context, researcher bias and assumptions, methodology and method, so that the product may be validly compared and tested in other relevant times and places.

Methodological congruence

A common theme among writers on rigour and goodness in qualitative research is the importance of ensuring methodological congruence between the researcher's own beliefs and values, the purpose of the research and the methodological approach employed to achieve that purpose (Birks & Mills, 2011; Morse et al., 2002; Smythe & Giddings, 2007). The early reflexive statement introducing my personal political background as an activist, researcher and educator influenced particularly by Marxist, feminist and Freirean theories demonstrates a direct connection to the ontological and epistemological choices described at the beginning of this chapter. This critical inquiry framework informed Dorothy Smith's work in shaping institutional ethnography, with its commitment "to take seriously Marx's scrupulous attention to the ontological groundings of the concepts and theories of social science" (D. E. Smith, 2005, p. 57) in investigating and explaining social relations.

Political activist ethnographers from George Smith onwards took this a step further with what has been characterised as "an epistemological and an ontological shift from conventional sociological research methods" (Frampton et al., 2006b, p. 9) towards a methodology grounded in activist praxis, whose goals include informing and strengthening their ability to change the world. The purpose of this research was to find out an answer to a question which grew from an institutional gap identified by some activists and academics on the New Zealand left, then to use that answer to inform any

future practical attempt(s) to establish a major left wing think tank(s) which might begin to fill that gap. I consider that the methods used in this study were also consistent with the overarching research design and purpose, as well as demonstrating internal coherence. In writing up the research and in the appendices I have shown and given examples of the application of methods in some detail in order to maximise transparency.

Reciprocity

One of the underlying principles of critical inquiry and political activist research is that of reciprocity, an estimation of whether and how the researcher engages with participants and others with a stake in the research during and after the study period. As Paul Routledge says "The ethics of activist ethnography are relational and contextual, a product of reciprocity between collaborators, and negotiated in practice" (Routledge, 2013, p. 265). If this had been a participatory action research project or any one of a number of other activist and collaborative methodologies, I would have established a formal reference group very early on in the process. I could have set up such a group as part of working within a political activist ethnographic framework, but deliberately chose not to, for reasons alluded to above when discussing methodologies considered and rejected. However, as a researcher committed to academic and activist quality and integrity, there were other ways in which I utilised "a continuous process, where information and analysis is shared and processed constantly with others – from beginning to end" (Choudry, 2013b, p. 144).

Academically I was engaged with institutional processes involving iterative feedback and discussion from the very start of the project, including monthly supervision, meeting the university's requirements for confirmation of candidature after one year of study and formal ethics approval. In regards to the left activist and academic world, there were a number of ways in which continuous engagement occurred. My research question did not arise in a vacuum. I had been party to informal conversations and more formal discussions around the need for a major left wing think tank from around 1990 until the point at which I formally commenced doctoral study, and this continued throughout the research period. The thesis journal was in part a record of the conversations which happened once the study began, many of which were held with people who were not respondents but were certainly part of my research field. Interviewing the 51 participants was in a sense a formalised extension of those

everyday conversations and discussions which took place in my home, at meetings, the pub, workshops, demonstrations or anywhere else I happened to connect with family, friends, comrades and colleagues. After an article about the research appeared in mid-2012 (Bradford, 2012b) a number of people contacted me from around New Zealand, and this increased the range of those with whom I was in ongoing correspondence on the research question. I have also presented aspects of my research at academic and activist seminars and meetings. The feedback from all these sources informed my developing analysis. Records of conversations and discussions were recorded in my journal or in meeting notes taken at the time and have been kept on file, as have copies of all relevant correspondence.

In conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explain the ontological, epistemological and methodological choices made in designing this study, to describe the methods used in generating its findings, and to explain how ethical accountabilities and academic rigour have been established. How all of this worked out in practice will be demonstrated in the following three chapters, which report on and analyse what I found out in regards to the state of the New Zealand left, what might be learned from the experience of the nascent left wing think tanks, and what I discovered about participants' responses to the idea of establishing a major left wing think tank. The final chapter which follows will not only contain a series of overall analytical conclusions resulting from what I found, but will also reflect on the experience of working with political activist ethnography.

4. The New Zealand left 2010–2013

Introduction

On 28 July 2010 I met with five church and community leaders over a coffee at my local campus café. They had invited me along to ascertain whether I would consider helping with the development of a new welfare activist group in Auckland in the wake of the formation of the National Government's Welfare Working Group earlier that year (Bennett, 2010). The six of us shared a common concern that no organisation existed in the entire Auckland region with either the will or capacity to organise open, active opposition to National's welfare plans from the perspective of those most affected—unemployed workers and beneficiaries. The church and community representatives had come to realise that due to funding and political constraints on their own ability to act, any effective advocacy group would of necessity have to be completely autonomous of both government and their own organisations.

At the time of this cup of coffee I was at the beginning stages of writing a PhD thesis proposal. I intended to focus the majority of my efforts over the next three years on full time study. I had also recently committed myself to six months' work with the newly established Alternative Welfare Working Group to "ensure people receiving social welfare support and providing social and community services can be part of the debate on welfare reforms" (O'Brien et al., 2010b, p. 5). However, I had for some time been acutely aware that since the closure in July 1999 of my own former group, the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC), there had been no overtly activist presence on these issues in the region, and the urgent need for organisation was very real. I agreed to help. In my journal entry 28 July 2010 I wrote "Daunted by prospect of setting up new welfare/jobs fight back group on top of everything else. Suddenly there is far too much to do."

On 25 August 2010 the first meeting of the organisation which was to become Auckland Action Against Poverty took place at a homeless drop in centre in the central city. I had come full circle. In 1983 I had been one of a small group of activists who called an initial public meeting to establish an autonomous unemployed workers' and beneficiaries' organisation. Suddenly and unexpectedly I found myself doing the same thing all over again 27 years later after a gap of ten years as a Member of Parliament,

ensconced safely inside the system and well away from the rough and tumble of street activism and community organising. This return to the same activist place I had started from in 1983 also and quite coincidentally marked the beginning of my research into the state of the left in Aotearoa July 2010 – July 2013.

Notes and reflections on events were recorded in my thesis journal, my personal appointments diary, and in other notes I kept of conversations and meetings. There is also a detailed trail of my mainstream and social media activity during this period available in web-accessible media records, my section of blog sites The Daily Blog (http://thedailyblog.co.nz/category/bloggers/sue-bradford) and Pundit (http://pundit.co.nz/blogs/sue-bradford), and on my personal Facebook and Twitter pages. A brief timeline of my activist life from July 2010–July 2013 recording marker points where there was what I perceived to be a critical connection to at least one of the key themes of this study is attached in Appendix K. As a counterpoint to this, an indicative timeline of my life as an academic researcher during the same period can be found in Appendix L.

Overview

This chapter opens with a review of participants' thoughts on the working definition of 'left' I had provided at interview, before exploring the diverse ways in which they did or did not self-identify as 'left' and 'activist'. Next I consider the main sites of activity which had engaged participants, and at times myself, during the period under review: Occupy; unions; Auckland Action Against Poverty; the community sector generally; churches and church-based organisations; radical left parties and groupings; and the Parliamentary left, comprising the Labour, Green and Mana parties. In the third part of the chapter I examine some broader questions, including how we felt about ourselves and about the state of the left generally in late 2012; media, framing and language; ideological and theoretical debates; and ideas around how the left might organise more effectively in future.

Note on style

As discussed in Chapter 3, one of my key goals in this research was to allow the voices of the 51 participants to be heard to the maximum extent possible, in all their diversity, subtlety and depth. In a bid to ensure that text is intelligible, concise and reads smoothly in a quote-laden environment, I decided to lower the word count limit above

which quotes will go into freestanding text from the standard APA 40 words as applied to written references (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 173), to 31 words when applied to participant data.

Defining 'left'

Creating a definition of 'left' that could adequately underpin my research design, participant selection and interview process was critical. My initial definition remained the same throughout the interview process, despite the occasional temptation to rewrite it after hearing a particularly cogent argument from a participant. I felt it was important to maintain the same wording throughout in order to ensure consistency of response, despite the semi structured, free flowing nature of the interviews themselves. The definition used in all interviews was that provided in Chapter 2 (p. 27).

Initial participant responses

When asked what they felt about this definition, most participants were immediately positive in their responses. Daphne Lawless said "Your definition of 'left' would be a good one, because it wouldn't alienate anybody."

> I think that's a good definition of 'left'. It certainly uses some of the words that I would have used in the past through my history of organising around these kinds of beliefs and ideas. (Cybèle Locke)

> I think a good definition needs to be broad enough to encompass not just socialism, but certainly, say, the healthier strains of anarchism, environmentalism, various currents of radical Māori nationalism and antiracism … which I think that pretty much does. (Brian Roper)

From a Māori perspective Annette Sykes said she did not "disagree with anything. The definition for me must reflect parallel values that I think underpin kaupapa Maori, and I think all of these do", while Mamari Stephens said it was "as good a definition as I've ever seen." Mark Gosche offered a Pasifika viewpoint.

> New Zealand's going to have to recognise its place in the Pacific and special relationship with Pacific people. And I think that gets captured without having a label put on it. (Mark Gosche)

Some recognised the difficulty of the task I faced in attempting to create such a definition in the first place. Ryan Bodman said "I was thinking to myself, that's a very

tricky task, defining left. But no, you've done it well." In like vein Paul Blair felt he would "hate to have to come up with a definition of 'left'."

Mike O'Brien's view of the spectrum of 'left' matched the continuum which I had aimed to encapsulate with my definition.

> Often in a defined context, left is as much about method, if you like – in other words, to what extent would I engage in illegal activities, or antisocial activities, a spectrum from on the one hand a kind of democratic engagement at a sort of a … what's the word … revolutionary, I suppose, in the sense of actual kind of active revolutionary activity at the one end, to, at the other end, soft – I suppose I might describe it as – in the sense of soft left, more in terms of engaging with governments. (Mike O'Brien)

There were those who felt the definition was too wide.

> It seems quite broad, so broad that maybe people I wouldn't consider 'left' would agree with these values. It's almost like the Green Party Charter, you could interpret that in a very radical way, but you could also be some right wing person who would interpret it in a way they wanted. (Marcelo Cooke)

Chris Trotter put the whole problem of attempting to define 'left' into historical perspective. "Many people have died over this definition. Yes, graves full of people." Bryce Edwards' stress on lucidity backed Chris's blunt but acute insight.

> For better or worse, the history of the left is factionalised and it's torn itself apart over issues of what it is we are and aren't fighting for and on what basis … so I think clarity over that would be a pretty essential thing. (Bryce Edwards)

Participants fundamentally endorsed the definition provided, apart from a few common caveats which will be outlined shortly. There was some tension between those who thought it covered the field inclusively and well and those who felt it was too broad. The difficulty of creating any definition of 'left' was acknowledged, as was the importance of having a shared, unambiguous understanding of what 'left' meant in the light of the divisiveness which has characterised left history.

Critiques

While the definition of 'left' offered was seen as a useful starting point, a number of participants did not hesitate to suggest improvements. At a basic linguistic level the immediate response from Karen Davis was "Quite long. Needs to be snappier… it's all

kind of there, just a lot of words." Cathy Casey responded similarly. "It's got lots of big words in it."

The most common criticism was that the definition was not sufficiently Marxist or class focused. Jared Davidson noted he would "like to see somewhere that it was based on a classless society, so that there was an acknowledgement of how capitalism works", while Chris Trotter felt it was "a very social democratic definition. It's certainly not a Marxist one."

> I couldn't find the word 'class' anywhere … to me the definition of 'left' is one which recognises that the majority of people who … if you want to use old fashioned language tend to be the working class … or the poor … the people who actually produce the wealth, do the work. (Murray Horton)

Sara Jacob commented "There is no reference to capital. When you think of 'left', ultimately that is one element. Where does capitalism fit in it, and where do structural inequalities fit in it?"

From tangata whenua respondents came a sense that the definition of 'left' could usefully be deepened by the addition of certain core Māori values, including those of reciprocity (Annette Sykes), a sense of the spiritual (Ariana Paretutanganui-Tamati), and of manaakitanga and whanaungatanga (Helen Potter). Veronica Tawhai observed:

> There's two things, and the thing is that they're key cornerstone values that we can't ever miss, that are at the centre of what it means to be Māori, and that's the ways we're meant to operate. Whether or not that's left and whether or not these things exist on the right I'm not sure. But one is aroha and the other wairua. (Veronica Tawhai)

Differences emerged around the use of the concept of 'values' as central to the definition.

> I wouldn't change anything because I think values are the key. We're a bit lost in understanding what our values system is these days. And so then you're pointing us down a route a little bit here, in terms of what sort of values you like, but those are the values we like. (Tur Borren)

Some were not so keen.

> It's a tiny bit value based for me … The classic Marxist would say values, it's part of a middle class syndrome, that you sit above the world and have that privilege of choosing values. It's a bit like 'lifestyle', whereas the classic Marxist thing would be these things come out of economic conditions and it's a

> matter of actions and processes that are grounded in that, rather than values. (Paul Maunder)

The only word which came up with any frequency as a possible alternative to 'left' was 'progressive'.

> I would like to see the word 'progressive' because … in the Philippines when you say 'left', there is a connotation that you belong to a certain communist group. So there is a redbaiting about that. (Dennis Maga)

Counter to this, Tim Howard observed:

> It probably is more in American culture that that connection 'progressive/left' has come up, so therefore you sort of have to think again about the contextual of that. And the other part of it is its roots – the word strongly echoes the whole Enlightenment stuff about the myth of progress. And that for me is problematic. (Tim Howard)

Maria Bargh evinced hesitation around the word 'fairness'. "Terms like 'fairness' get twisted so much, it gets subverted to sometimes mean something other than what you might imagine is about what is fair."

Paul Blair raised an interesting question, not broached by anyone else, around the place of the individual in any definition of 'left'.

> For me, it's the 'where's the individual in this?' … individual freedom and the ability to reach your full potential as a human being is really, I think, a part of being 'left'. (Paul Blair)

There was also comment that there should be some focus, as Kevin Hague put it, on "collectivism, redistribution of wealth, those issues", while Mike O'Brien felt similarly that the concept of redistribution was important. "It's implied, but I don't think it's actually talked about."

Having examined participant responses in detail, I now consider that the working definition with which I started on day one of the interview process did meet the key criteria I had set myself: that it be as inclusive as possible across the spectrum from left social democrats to revolutionary anarchists and socialists; that it sufficiently acknowledge key intersectionalities; and that it adequately contextualised 'left' to Aotearoa while retaining its international essence as well.

The criticisms that the definition was not sufficiently Marxist were almost inevitable, given my intention that it should be comprehensive enough to embrace the social democratic as well as the socialist, anarchist and communist left. The difference around values and the need identified by some for more focus on collectivity and redistribution highlighted the same issue.

The contributions from a te ao Māori perspective certainly added a critical and different dimension. However, I consider that the best way of dealing with this may well be through future work by a small group of tangata whenua and tauiwi working together to construct a clear definition in each language based on a commonly agreed kaupapa, in a context in which such efforts would have a practical application. This would be an interesting exercise in itself, and far more useful than pre-empting that with an attempt at a new definition emanating from a Pākehā researcher operating alone, without any defined forward-looking context, and without the benefit of either collective wisdom across Tiriti partners or fluency in te reo.

Meeting the research participants

Before continuing with reporting and analysis of responses around the current state of the left in New Zealand, this seems a useful moment to introduce the research participants in a little more detail, as actors within the scope of 'left' in Aotearoa, and as activists and academics.

Self-identification on the left spectrum

Responses around the definition of 'left' have indicated that the purposive sampling techniques employed to select participants worked as intended, as I sought to ensure the broadest possible range of positions were represented within necessarily limited participant numbers. Another way of identifying where people stood was to examine how they labelled themselves, if anywhere, on the spectrum of 'left':

> Social democratic Labour Party – Third Way Labour – Labour right – Labour left – left social democrat – Green Party conservative – Ghandian, importance of personal change – left Green.

> Mana – commitment to tino rangatiratanga – commitment to Pasifika peoples – democratic socialist – theologically left – feminist and left.

> Marxist – historical materialist – Freirean – Marxist, but critical of Marxism – socialist – ecosocialist - libertarian socialist – antiauthoritarian socialist – revolutionary socialist – revolutionary communist.
>
> Progressive left – progressive liberal left – left of left – extreme left – anarchist – anarchist as a libertarian form of socialist.

One of the first things which became apparent from this exercise was that I had selected at least three participants who were further to the social democratic centre of the left spectrum than I had originally planned, thus slightly extending political breadth to the data.

Noticeable about the ways in which participants described themselves was how often they told me they claimed two or more identities at once, or hesitated to label themselves as any one 'ist'. Cybèle Locke told me that she felt "a sense that there's always something missing with either calling yourself simply a socialist or an anarchist or a feminist." Bill Rosenberg was open about the position in which he found himself.

> Philosophically I would put myself somewhere near Marxism, but with a critical view of it . . . In terms of my current job, where the position of the union movement is basically social democracy, the things I'm putting forward and talking about tend to be more in the social democratic area. (Bill Rosenberg)
>
> I'd tend to put entry points around environment, around Tiriti, around class, I'm using class as a shorthand for economics . . . the other entry point into the left, at least for me historically, has been the radical church base. (Tim Howard)

For others, too, the lifelong journey as 'left' had been a varied and not inconsiderable saga.

> I've been in communist parties, and I've been in the Labour Party and I've been in the Green Party, Mana Motuhake at one stage there for a brief period, and now the Mana Party. (Paul Blair)

It became apparent that the range of those interviewed, despite being hugely confined by methodological and practical limitations, was more than sufficient to cover the field of 'left' as I had originally defined it; and that complexity rather than simplicity tended to characterise people's own left histories and self-identifications.

Contributing to that complexity were intersectional identities, some of which I had deliberately chosen as part of the purposive sampling process as described in the previous chapter, such as ethnicity and gender. However, there were three other identifications within 'left' which are worth mentioning here, as part of painting a picture of the research participant group. First of all, it was clear from interviews with this sample that the feminist component of 'left' has not been forgotten in Aotearoa. A number of participants, both female and male, identified as feminist or as active supporters of feminism either directly, or with comments made about gender and its importance as both a theoretical and practical aspect of being 'left'. Consciousness of queer politics and support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (GLBTI) rights also came through reasonably strongly. At least six respondents openly identified as GLBTI and had taken part in queer activism in some form. Others also demonstrated awareness of and support for struggles of significance for GLBTI communities. Disability awareness was a third aspect of intersectionality that came through less strongly, but I would note that I neither selected for major impairment when identifying participants, nor asked questions relating specifically to this aspect of activist life. I was aware of at least two participants who were living with significant impairment, and one of these honoured me with her frank assessment of some of the impacts of this on her political and activist life.

Now the participants will be introduced again, this time in terms of their self-identification as activists (or not), rather than in relation to their positioning at certain points on left ideological and intersectional spectrums.

Meeting the participants: Self-identification as activists

As observed above, everyone I interviewed identified themselves as sitting somewhere on the left as I had defined it, ranging from Labour right and conservative Green through to a number of far left permutations. There was an equally broad range of responses when I asked about each participant's personal identity as an activist, or whether they viewed themselves as an activist at all. Nine participants said they did not identify as activists and never had, while three told me they had been in the past, but were not active at the time of interview. Altogether 42 out of 51 participants (82%), including those who were not currently active but had been in the past, saw themselves as activists.

Activist roles

The activist roles taken by participants either currently or in the past demonstrated a comprehensive diversity and many took on a multiplicity of functions simultaneously.

> *Leadership:* organiser, leader, thinker, originator of new ideas, strategist, initiator of new groups and campaigns, builder and sustainer of left institutions.
>
> *Action:* trouble maker, street activist, front liner, speaker at actions, open to arrest, nonviolent direct action activist, militant.
>
> *Research and education*: researcher, writer, policy developer, educator.
>
> *Communications*: media spokesperson, blogger, user of social media, speaker at public and other meetings.
>
> *Culture:* cultural activist, historian, creative writer, playwright.
>
> *Organisational maintenance:* member, worker carrying out the everyday tasks of the organisation, writer of funding applications, supporter, cheque-writer.

Some participants recalled why they had become activists in the first place. For Dennis Maga, it was a choice influenced by upbringing.

> I don't see myself simply as a reformist activist or I'm just going to be sitting down and doing my work on Facebook … you always see me on the streets. I don't think I can take it away from my personality. That's how I was actually brought up, in the activist world . . . history has always proven that the street Parliament is always a very effective way to show the peoples' unity and collective effort. (Dennis Maga)

Similarly Helen Potter observed that "Right from a little girl I wanted to be involved … to me activist is a person who makes a conscious and committed effort to change their world." Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati did not attend a protest until comparatively late in her political life.

> I hadn't done anything, I'd never been on a march. The first protest I went on was the Foreshore and Seabed [hīkoi] because of my mate, she had a sign 'Honour the Treaty – 4 Shore' and she stayed with me, and that was the beginning of my activism mahi. (Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati)
>
> It's about exposing and doing it as well . . . it's putting your hand up and saying I believe in this and I'm prepared to fight for it, and this is what I'm going to do. (Cathy Casey)

A number of participants referred to a spectrum of levels of activism. This went from Paul Chalmers' candid comment that while he regularly took part in union activities he "should be playing golf, of course … I'm not supposed to admit that", to Susan St John's "Occasionally I'll go and march and jump up and down and so on but I don't find that is my main way of operating", through to this from Will 'Ilolahia, talking about his past:

> I definitely won't be out there on the road picking up the gun, and that was what happened to us in the Panthers, you see. We were all young . . . we didn't care two fs if we got arrested or even shot at or in the case of a lot of us, dealt to by the police. But as we grew older and we had little kiddies and that kind of thing, we started saying mmm, had to take a bit more responsibility. (Will 'Ilolahia)

Will's comment also highlighted the way in which activist identity can change over time in accordance with evolving personal circumstances. Cybèle Locke recounted the impact of the arrival of childrearing years on her activist life.

> I only define myself as an activist when I'm actually being an activist, and I'm certainly not right now … with a baby who's only just beginning to sleep through the night, I'm lucky just to make it to work with my eyes focused on the next step ahead of me. (Cybèle Locke)

For others, withdrawal from activism was a result of employment status. Mark Gosche said "Becoming a public servant requires you to sort of submerge all your political activism."

Participants took a variety of positions in regards to the more militant end of the activist continuum. Brian Roper said that if he "was to be completely honest, I do get a real buzz out of it as well. I really enjoy a good stroppy militant protest", while from the other end of the spectrum, Robert Root noted "No, I wouldn't say I'm an activist, in that sense . . . I didn't get arrested yesterday. In fact, I've never been arrested, well not for protesting, anyway."

In introducing participants' roles as activists, a quick glimpse of their sites of struggle is also instructive. These included trade unions; numerous community based organisations and campaigns; church groups; unemployed and beneficiary organisations; tino rangatiratanga and other kaupapa Māori rōpū; Pasifika peoples' organisations; migrant and refugee support and action groups; climate justice and environmental groups and networks; feminist organisations; queer politics; animal

welfare; Parliamentary party and local council activism; radical left extra-Parliamentary groupings and parties; student and other youth activist networks; professional involvement within universities and professions; creative and cultural activities; community economic development, cooperative and community gardening initiatives; and international solidarity networks. Engagement was or had been at every level from very local neighbourhood activity through to regional, national and international engagement. From this brief consideration of how the 42 participants who identified as activists described themselves it is evident that between them they encompassed a wealth of motivations, experiences, approaches and roles.

Academics and activists

I deliberately sought to interview a number of people because of their positions as left academics. Of 51 respondents, 13 were employed at a university at the time of interview (25.5%). Universities where participants worked included Otago University (Dunedin), Victoria University of Wellington, Auckland University, Auckland University of Technology, Massey University (Palmerston North and Albany), and Waikato University (Hamilton). As discussed in Chapter 3, I also deliberately sought respondents with substantial research and policy development roles in other sectors than the academy. Eight participants (15.5%) had fulltime or close to fulltime research and policy roles outside the universities, including in Parliament, church bodies, community organisations and trade unions, or as self-employed researchers. In examining the state of the left in the context of my key underpinning question around the potential development (or not) of a major left wing think tank or think tanks, I felt it useful to briefly examine the way in which participant academics and activists viewed each other's respective roles.

A number of respondents conveyed an activist view of academia similar to that noted by writers such as Roger Horrocks, who said in 2007 "Despite an increasing number of graduates, popular stereotypes of the academic world have not changed. The term 'academics' is interchangeable with 'intellectuals' and is assumed to describe Laputa-style eggheads lost in a world of ideas" (Horrocks, 2007, p. 54).

> There's been that bit of a separation like between the academics and the activists … the elitist angle, you know, because of the anti-academic thing you get in the left, and also amongst the anarchist community … and especially because, well even me, I get tired of academics who just research stuff and don't actually do anything about it. (Karen Davis)

> We expected it to come out of the universities but I think … I don't know but it seems to me the pressures of conformity and tenure and probably laziness, they just didn't step up. And I was outraged. (Matt McCarten)

Murray Horton told me "Obviously you can't be separated entirely from academia, but academia in this country is so tainted by right wing bullshit." Vivian Hutchinson noted the comparative largesse enjoyed by academics in comparison with their community based counterparts, and spoke of his concomitant sense of exploitation.

> Many of the people in the community are not resourced to do thinking. I haven't been resourced to do all the thinking that I'm doing, and now I'm being studied by university people … they grab my book and all that sort of stuff, but they all want it for free… We are the noble heroes doing things in the community and you're sitting back in your middle class safety actually looking at us. (Vivian Hutchinson)

A university based academic herself, Sandra Grey commented similarly about the way in which she sees some of her colleagues taking advantage of community activists.

> So they narrowly define who they involve to critique and talk about the world. And they see other people as research participants, not as active creators of knowledge, which I think is where that becomes problematic. (Sandra Grey)

John Stansfield summed the situation up with this example.

> It was a $1.3m piece of research, conducted by the University of Auckland up there, and periodically they would tell the community sector to jump the bus from South Auckland, pack their sandwiches and come in and inform them for the day … the brazen cheek of it, to capture that money and pretend there was any kind of expertise around it. (John Stansfield)

Several participants commented from the other side of the academic-activist divide. Cybèle Locke mentioned earlier experiences of feeling disparaged in activist circles because of her academic role.

> I separated my own academic study from my involvement in activism … because it's belittled, or it comes across as if I'm trying to be an expert. And it doesn't get a good reaction, and it doesn't seem to enable you to build a good rapport with people. So I tended to minimise that, I guess, in my own activism work, in some ways. (Cybèle Locke)

A recent doctoral graduate, Paul Maunder, spoke of the isolating effect attaining the degree had on his community activism, at least initially.

> Getting the PhD seemed to for a little while separate me out partly in the way people treated me … there was a sort of feeling of separation. It's gone now but … I didn't like it. (Paul Maunder)

Susan St John acknowledged a sense of unease as an academic involved with the research and advocacy work of the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG). "I've always felt it's been a little bit unsupported to be involved with as an academic because it's not the work of the pure academic."

Political suspicion, a sense of being exploited and a perennial feeling of resource envy characterised the responses of a number of activists towards the academic community, often grounded in real life experiences at the interface between the two worlds. Some academics themselves recognised and noted these problems. From the other side of the fence, the suspicion and isolation which face academics who also engage in community activism was acknowledged, and Susan St John highlighted disquiet felt by some within the academy about the possible dilution of standards when engaged in research activities in conjunction with external community based advocacy and activist organisations.

July 2010–July 2013: What were our sites of struggle?

Before going any further it is important to emphasise that the events and developments discussed in this research reflect only those in which participants and at times myself took part in the three years between July 2010 and July 2013. This study is not intended as a full investigation of all left political activism in New Zealand during this period, an endeavour which would have been well beyond the scope of this inquiry.

Occupy

Between July and September 2011 a new form of activism began to spread rapidly across the United States and elsewhere. Inspired by the Arab Spring and by austerity programmes which bailed out bankers while leaving the poor to suffer, people began setting up camps to demonstrate the "anger and frustration of the 99% against an entrenched and widening socioeconomic inequality that was devouring them to feed the monstrous wealth appropriation of the richest and best connected—named by the movement 'the 1 percent'" (Juris & Khasnabish, 2013, p. 370). In response to a worldwide call for an international day of action on 15 October 2011, a number of individuals and groups began to organise Occupy activities in New Zealand. Along

with several thousand others, I marched the traditional protest route up Queen St from Britomart to Aotea Square beside the Town Hall, where the first Occupy Auckland general assembly was held and the erection of a physical camp began.

Participants in this research talked about Occupy from various standpoints, some of which encompassed more than one respondent: camped for a couple of weeks; mid-level involvement; supported from outside but did not feel safe to camp; running workshops as part of the open university; visited a lot; observer from outside, watching. Respondents had experiences of Occupy in Christchurch and Wellington, as well as Auckland. At the time of the research interviews in June–November 2012, it had already been at least six months since the slow collapse, forced removals and eventual demise of the New Zealand camps December 2011–January 2012. I found people in reflective mode about the Occupy experience. Several spoke of their hope and excitement when Occupy began.

> I was absolutely inspired by Occupy, and I thought, holey moley, this is my '68 – or our '68, I should say … This is where my generation can start to engage with much broader issues. (Ryan Bodman)

Sara Jacob told me "Occupy I think was my hope of … wow, maybe something might happen, you might change the world." However, the bulk of reflections about the Occupy experience in New Zealand were considerably more critical. Occupy had been promoted as an experiment in a new form of democracy, yet as Geoff Todd pointed out:

> If you wanted to take a position, if you wanted to head a working group or something like that, you just had to decide it, and that was seen as a do-ocracy kind of thing. But that's actually extremely undemocratic because it just means it's entirely up to the individual to decide what they take responsibility for, and there's no accountability for it. (Geoff Todd)

Ryan Bodman began to lose some of his initial enthusiasm.

> I just felt like people were blocking the consensus process so that they could hear their own voice. I mean, I lost a lot of confidence in that process as a result, and I was really supportive of it beforehand. (Ryan Bodman)

A number of people talked about the way in which the practicalities and the idea of the camp itself overtook Occupy.

> We found a lot of the time in the general assemblies was just actually about camp upkeep, which you need to do, you need to talk about all that process, but

> it seemed like there could have been a better placement of time. (Jared Davidson)

Paul Maunder said "Occupy Wall St makes a lot of sense, probably even to occupy the business centre of London would make sense. But Dunedin? Or Hagley Park? What are you doing?"

> Occupy really did work internationally to raise profile. In New Zealand it was just like kind of annoying to people, it didn't make them think about poverty, it just made them go 'they're in the park, do they have to be?' … you walked past the one in Wellington and thought, it's just a group of people who want to live in tents for a bit. (Sandra Grey)

The centrality of the physical camp caused other problems as well. As Rhiannon Thomson told me "I didn't feel safe at Occupy, it wasn't for me personally." Marcelo Cooke said "I knew another guy … some guy from the Green Party and political activist circles, and he got his tent stolen, and he left." Geoff Todd talked about the slow move of formerly keen occupiers away from the camps as problems around personal safety and security increased.

> Me and a number of other people drifted away quite significantly, and towards the end I was largely involved in the safer spaces process because there were increasingly issues of no one knowing how to handle destructive behaviour. (Geoff Todd)

A number of respondents suggested that a tactic imported wholesale from abroad was not necessarily going to work well in Aotearoa. Gary Cranston surmised "Maybe there's some issues with importing a model from overseas, to think that it's just going to fit in here perfectly." Paul Maunder told me Occupy "seemed like it just picked up on an idea that had come from the States really, rather than being locally grounded in any shape or form." Some noted issues around the slogan 'We are the 99%', inherent to the imported model.

> People got obsessed with that slogan, they used it as a way to stop people from talking about actual existing oppression … we're actually oppressed in various ways by quite a complex system. (Geoff Todd)

Paul Blair approved of the slogan, but had similar reservations.

> I liked it. The 99% versus the 1%, except it's a simplification. Unfortunately there's a middle class in there, and there's an underclass and there's a working class, so the 99 versus the 1 is a bit crude. (Paul Blair)

Many felt that Occupy fetishised form over content with camp upkeep, the '99%' slogan, and the general assembly process becoming paramount over politics. They also remarked on the way in which ever increasing state surveillance and eventual physical incursions created hyper paranoia among occupiers; that those involved at the core of Occupy lacked the ability to deal with politically, criminally or personally challenging individuals who in turn drove many away from the camps; and that not enough collective analytical and strategic thinking had been done either before or during the early stages of the occupations about how the tactic might best be employed in the New Zealand context.

On the positive side, a number of participants spoke of the way in which Occupy had politicised a new generation of young activists; provided an opportunity to experiment with novel methods of participatory democracy and activism; and that it, as Sandra Grey reflected "pushes the envelope out, and leaves the rest of us a bit more room to move."

The Occupy experience in Aotearoa mirrored many of the hopes and dreams, failures and successes which inspired and affected occupiers in other cities around the world, as outlined in some of the accounts beginning to surface by mid-2013 (Chomsky, 2012; Dean, 2012; Gitlin, 2012; W. J. T. Mitchell, Harcourt, & Taussig, 2013). The one sector in New Zealand in which there was a noticeable and sustained lift in left activism connected to Occupy was among university students. A group called We Are the University (WATU) was launched on 26 September 2011 with a four hour occupation of the University of Auckland Business School in protest at government moves to make student union membership voluntary (ONE News, 2011). Through social media and on campus, WATU members were active in promoting and participating in the initial 15 October Occupy demonstration as well as providing substantial ongoing support for the Aotea Square occupation (Fox, 2011).

Unions

Of the 51 people interviewed, 24 (47%) identified as either current or past trade unionists. Several offered substantive if depressing rationales for what they saw as the comparatively weak position of the New Zealand unionism in late 2012.

> If you look at the trade union movement in this country, it's been hammered by the ECA … which has really only been modified by the ERA and the

> subsequent amendments . . . at its core this legislation still entrenches the freeriding of non-union members on the benefits of union membership, which is why it's had such a negative effect on union membership and organisation. (Brian Roper)

> Unions are amalgamating at a depressingly rapid rate as their memberships dwindle and they try to keep that kind of critical mass of members there so that they can actually service the dwindling membership they have, let alone build a new one. (Chris Trotter)

Another historical reason for union fragility was laid firmly at the door of past left sectarianism.

> The dictatorship of the proletariat model that was practised by both the Communist Party and the Socialist Unity Party, which was small cliques, small elites running the show … the labour movement now, at 9% or less than 9%, is a direct result of those guys playing Cold War politics with people in New Zealand. (Paul Chalmers)

Others spoke of the negative role played by the close affiliation of unions to Labour. Bryce Edwards talked about the union movement being "slavishly connected to the Labour Party", while Karlo Mila had this to say.

> I was a union organiser in the 2000s, but it seemed to me that at that time the way I would frame the unions is that they had a kind of big brother, very masculine male bully boy way of operating in the Labour Party, and then not much presence in the rest of the left parties. (Karlo Mila)

Frustration about the inability of unions to move on from the past came through strongly.

> It's been pissing down for a decade, two decades, they're all still pretending it's a kind of business as usual approach. You get tired even thinking about what the mechanism would be to try and free some of that up. (John Stansfield)

Other issues identified by participants included the corporate culture and fundamental conservatism of some unions; a tradition of union anti-intellectualism alongside an inadequate education and research capacity caused by lack of funds; the lingering legacy of the failure to take a strong stand against the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act by the National Government in 1991; and the fact that deep political divisions between individuals and unions lingered on.

At a fundamental psychological level, Council of Trade Unions (CTU) researcher Bill Rosenberg referred to another serious issue for unions in 2012, remarking on the way in

which employer and government attitudes affect workers' approach to unions as a "culture of deference that it's a privilege to have a job, and you take the shit that the employers throw at you because it's a privilege and not a right." Sandra Grey took up a similar theme.

> People are losing their jobs, people are being underpaid, people are having conditions taken off them, people are being harassed and bullied in workplaces. Everything in the environment would say we need this movement, so why are people not joining? Obviously we're not looking at ourselves hard enough to say, are we actually offering what is needed for the 21st century? (Sandra Grey)

But responses were not uniformly negative. Bill Rosenberg told me "While there are always exceptions, there's actually quite a good lot of union leaders at the moment who are taking quite a broad view of their role." Bryan Gould recognised the latent potential of unions.

> Trade unions are always the sleeping giants of politics. If you can only get them to mobilise . . . I don't mean on the streets, though that wouldn't be bad either . . . but mobilise their resources. That would be big. (Bryan Gould)

Two aspects of recent union activity seen in a particularly favourable light in late 2012 were the Living Wage Campaign (Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand, 2013), led by the Service and Food Workers Union and supported by the CTU and a wide range of individual union, community and church organisations, and FIRST Union's establishment within its existing structure of a strong base for organising migrant workers, a new development within New Zealand unionism (First Union, 2013).

As an extension of the Living Wage work, Peter Conway told me that the CTU "very much wanted to develop a bigger campaign around insecure work—temporary, the whole precariat stuff—and we've got Guy Standing coming down here in February next year." Mike O'Brien commented on a related development.

> One of the things that struck me about a lot of the work of the 90s was that the trade union movement generally had very little interest in what happened to beneficiaries, quite frankly. Well, I think that's shifting, there are key people in the trade union movement now who are thinking outside of just the paid workforce. (Mike O'Brien)

There is no question that the overall picture which emerged was not a happy one. Participants talked far more about historical and current weaknesses in the labour movement than they did of its strengths. Yet there were hopeful signals as well. A

number spoke approvingly of the emergence of a new generation of union leaders who were taking a broader view of the role of unions than in the past, with an awareness of the need to take account of the rise in job insecurity and of the "culture of deference" inculcated in many worksites, and who were more comfortable than earlier generation leadership in working with groups outside the traditional union movement such as migrant workers, unemployed workers and beneficiaries, and in the coalition with church and community groups which constituted the Living Wage campaign.

Auckland Action Against Poverty

The first three years of AAAP's existence coincided with the three years encompassed by this study. One of the group's core activists wrote an MA dissertation focused on identifying the key components which enabled the group to survive and thrive during its first year of operation, concluding that these were "structure and practice, participant mobilisation, and strategy, action and media" (Thompson, 2012, pp. 112–113). Background information about AAAP is available on the organisation's website (http://aaap.org.nz/). A brief indicative timeline highlighting key points in the group's short history relevant to key themes of this research is included in Appendix M. By July 2013, the regular activities of AAAP included organising direct actions; media work and public speaking; research, education and lobbying; and the provision of beneficiary advocacy services in Onehunga and West Auckland. All activity was based on a kaupapa which called for decent jobs and a living wage/living income for all, while recognising the value of unpaid work in home and community.

Several research participants talked of the urgent need for organised political advocacy in this area. Kathleen Williams said "Beneficiaries are more scared, more condemned, even than we were in the 90s" while Chris Trotter observed:

> I think the whole unemployed workers' rights movement is something we really could do with now because the unions have enough on their plate just servicing a dwindling membership. Those who are unemployed, solo mothers, disabled people, people with mental illness, are right in the sights of this government. And if ever there was a need for a mass organisation to defend those people's position, it's now. So, attach the electrodes to that particular cause, by all means. (Chris Trotter)

Three participants had been actively involved with AAAP before or at the time of interview. Several spoke of their experience with the organisation.

> I am using AAAP at the moment because it is functional . . . there is such a range of people in that group and people interested in different things . . . I mean, we do have little units, policy, and media, and direct action. . . . That's the first group that I've been involved in where there is that real diversity of talent. (Rhiannon Thomson)

Simon Oosterman mentioned that one aspect of AAAP's work he appreciated was the way in which it was "obviously trying to reclaim that space, that organising space" and that the group was heading in the right direction in the way "you just go ahead and do stuff."

Others commented from an external viewpoint. Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati said "If I was in Auckland I'd certainly be part of AAAP" and lamented the lack of any similarly "organised strong activist" group in Wellington. Jared Davidson in Christchurch said his own group saw AAAP as an inspiring example. "For us, ways of building dual power were like solidarity networks, like AAAP."

Rhiannon Thomson offered a suggestion for improving AAAP's internal functioning.

> One of the things I would have really liked to have done and there's just never enough time is to have time together to talk about those ideas, to really develop relationships where you share those ideas and talk … I mean really talk, in that trusting way. (Rhiannon Thomson)

From Simon Oosterman came a plea to the labour movement "Unions should be building up community organisation such as putting money towards AAAP."

As described in the introduction to this chapter, the establishment of AAAP and its growth since 2010 marked, admittedly from my biased and insider perspective, a significant development in left activism in Auckland during the period covered by this study. The linking of upfront political action with individual beneficiary casework within the same organisation filled a gap that had existed since the demise of AUWRC in 1999. AAAP's organised the first three day beneficiary 'impact' ever held in Auckland, in December 2012 (Bradford, 2012a). In addition, AAAP became a place where some young activists felt they could learn new skills, gain practical organising experience and take on leadership in a more structured setting than that which had been offered by Occupy. As time went by, AAAP increasingly took on the characteristics of a nascent left wing think tank, maintaining active education and research working groups, producing high quality submissions to parliamentary select committees on

relevant welfare legislation, and running its first series of economics education workshops in mid-2013.

Weaknesses included its lack of resources, making it difficult to put together and maintain essential human and physical infrastructure, and isolation. However, three years after it began, AAAP remained the only substantial jobs and welfare activist group anywhere in Aotearoa which regularly organised upfront political street action as well as offering individual case work advocacy to unemployed people and beneficiaries in their dealings with Work and Income.

Community sector

Organisations like AAAP and many other groups with which research participants were involved usually consider themselves to be part of the wider community or non-profit sector. 'Non-profit' has been defined by New Zealand researchers using the work of the John Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies as entities which are "organized, private, non-profit-distributing, self governing," whose membership is not a requirement of the state (Tennant, Sanders, O'Brien, & Castle, 2006, p. 33). The same study also noted the difficulties in applying a similarly bound definition to rōpū Maori. The overwhelming sense that came through from participants was the extent to which the majority of Aotearoa's community based organisations had been captured by private and state sector values and practices.

> I'm on a bender at the moment just trying to talk to community organisations about how they've been so thoroughly colonised by business culture and government departments and their funders, and I think that's actually our biggest challenge at the moment in the community sector. It's completely broken our hearts. It has led to a total loss of language in the community sector as words and concepts have been replaced, even the concept of 'social entrepreneur' is a colonisation of business culture. (Vivian Hutchinson)

Former Problem Gambling Foundation director John Stansfield gave a specific example.

> I know problem gambling services have been told by the ministry what they can and cannot say and do about these things. That's just unthinkable in a democracy, really. It's quite improper, it's an abuse of state power and it feeds this kind of notion that only government and the market have any real ideas, they're the only clever ones that should be listened to. That we're not a civil society permitted to engage in debate about us. (John Stansfield)

Joce Jesson talked about groups involved in the Whānau Ora programme.

> Being forced into this process of becoming a capitalist enterprise … you get money to come in, churn it out, and you have to have the services, and it's got to be done … and then they lose it because they don't meet the deadlines, they don't meet the milestones they're supposed to reach … what it's doing is shaping it into these competing little enterprises. (Joce Jesson)

Tur Borren summed up the way many felt their time and energy was wasted in the prevailing environment.

> It seems like the world has changed from a world where people used to do things, and have ideas and implement them and work at them and all that sort of thing, to a world where we all have to be audited in what we do. All this governance stuff has become so dominant and so time consuming that you wonder whether people are doing anything very much at all. (Tur Borren)

John Stansfield concluded "We were unwitting participants in this great recolonisation of thought that was going on with a management manual one size fits all coming out of Boston across the world."

Resulting weaknesses were identified as a fundamentally conservative sector, with an unwillingness of many groups and individuals to openly identify as 'left'; constant competition between groups over access to funding alongside a deliberate government strategy to force homogeneity on a sector which traditionally saw its very diversity as a strength; and a focus on the need to acquire charitable status and the use of terms like 'client' rather than more empowering community development approaches. As Vivian Hutchinson said:

> Most community development agencies are stuffed … Certainly council ones are completely missing the point … they're not basing their work on fostering active citizenship or in encouraging a space where people take more generous engagement on the issues that matter. (Vivian Hutchinson)

It was not all doom and gloom. Jane Stevens told me that despite working in a politically conservative environment, her dream was that "we would have a much more connected, informed, political, vocal sector, and I think in the Waikato that we've made huge progress in that." Jane also described being part of organising a successful residents' campaign against the establishment of a container depot in her home town of Ngaruawahia. "Probably for a lot of people the first time they'd ever had an opportunity to take action like that and realise that they could."

Murray Horton spoke of one of the more beneficial side effects of the Christchurch earthquakes. “There’s a whole lot of grass roots stuff with people who have never ever been involved in any kind of activist activity before.” Jared Davidson also talked about some of the initial efforts his anarchist group Beyond Resistance made in the aftermath of the quakes.

> Beyond Resistance was really heavily on the ground in Linwood. We had members doing foodbanks and soup kitchens and really going around the neighbourhood. We tried to organise some community assemblies because we were really critical of the council based assemblies where just basically communities were talked at by politicians. (Jared Davidson)

Participants had many ideas on ways in which the life of the community sector could be improved, including working towards developing a more politically conscious and active sector capable of genuinely critical engagement with government and other forces; the creation of more opportunities for rich and meaningful conversations amongst ourselves – and with others; and the importance of getting capital into the hands of local communities and their organisations, where it could be used for advancing social, economic and environmentally useful goals at a time of increasing unemployment and poverty.

Churches and church based organisations

Religious organisations make up the third largest group by number of non-profit entities in New Zealand (Office for the Community & Voluntary Sector, 2013). Two participants were working for church based groups at the time of interview, and a number of others had experience of working in or closely with such organisations. None of those interviewed for this research mentioned religious institutions affiliated to faiths other than various branches of Christianity. Participants talked about the useful contribution church groups and teachings had made to their past and present activism. Annette Sykes told me she had “got into social analysis” through the Māori caucus of the National Council of Churches, and that they “funded us overseas a lot.” Paul Chalmers spoke of the influence of church thinking and activities on his own political development, saying he was “part of the ‘Catholic Mafia’ … we came out of Christian youth groups. Young Christian Students for us.” Mamari Stephens noted “Religious thinking for example – that’s why those frameworks are so helpful because they can enable us to see the world in a way that makes those clearer.”

Church based organisations appeared to have been affected by the same shift towards conservatism as the wider community sector. Remarking on the difficulties of being someone identified as 'left' in a church environment in 2012, Kathleen Williams noted:

> It's difficult for me, and it's difficult for church people to get pulled into something that's labelled 'left'. Because people say, well, you've kind of abandoned the other aspects of church teaching. (Kathleen Williams)

She added "Even when it comes to coalitions, the church is getting more and more reluctant to just throw its name into the ring." Tim Howard commented "Church based activism isn't in either position per se. They're very careful about political parties by and large, although I see people have got alliances all over the place."

Several participants noted the impact of the increasing secularisation of New Zealand society. As Kathleen Williams put it "We're just another voice in a pluralistic society." At the same time, participants were clear that churches and church organisations continued to play an important role in the public policy environment.

> There are organisations like the Salvation Army producing really good research results on important things like housing, and they … managed to get themselves heard, and they probably do it on a pretty small amount of money. (Mark Gosche)

Tim Howard said that being church based had been "a useful contribution … and has highlighted the role of acting in solidarity with other activism, and ultimately in solidarity with grass roots based international people's struggles and in Aotearoa."

In overview, participants felt that while still purveying considerable influence, church and church based groups had less influence on public opinion than they had enjoyed in the past; that ecumenism remained weak, with no body yet emerging to replace earlier groups such as the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand (CCANZ) which closed down in 2005 (Lineham, 2012); and that there was an increasing wariness among some church bodies about too quickly or easily attaching their names to either ecumenical or broader community coalitions, connected to a growing conservatism in at least some parts of the church based segment of the non-profit world.

The transformational (radical) left

In contrast to the overwhelming negativity about the state of the community sector, participants who claimed allegiance to the radical left, while very conscious of the less salubrious side of its history, were also comparatively optimistic about where things were heading by late 2012. Of the 51 people I interviewed, 30 (59%) identified as a past or present member of a transformational left grouping or party, including radical Māori and Pasifika organisations, and/or as someone whose beliefs derived from various strands of Marxism, anarchism, socialism and communism.

Participants were acutely aware of past failings. Cybèle Locke talked about her experiences as a young student at Otago University.

> We'd sit around and say, wouldn't it be great if we had some kind of movement that was based on a particular form of ideology. But every time we tried to do that we'd just end up having huge fights, and it just seemed to be so destructive. (Cybèle Locke)

Paul Maunder said that whenever he thought back "to that old communist culture, I think, oh god, that puritanical sort of rigidity." From a different ideological heritage and a younger age group Jared Davidson commented "It seems like anarchists form, reinvent the wheel and then disappear."

When it came to talking about the weaknesses of the transformational left in the second half of 2012, sectarianism, ideological purity and the short life cycle of many groups were high on the list of concerns. However, it was the small size of the organised radical left overall compared to past generations that really worried many. Bill Rosenberg said "At the moment there's so little out there of the Marxist left that's really credible in terms of what you can do." Brian Roper told me the problem was that "We're all so small and we're not as influential as we'd like to be" while Simon Oosterman reported that "There's not many anarchists really left … the anarchist scene imploded."

Disquiet was also expressed about tensions around the psychology of those belonging to left groupings, the nature of human relationships within organisations and the lack of healthy internal group processes.

> I worry about the level of frustration. Some of the people really do have aggressive … I'm just not sure how a group moderates … the young men, particularly. Talking about revolution is tricky with young men. (Rhiannon Thomson)

Maria Bargh talked about difficulties she had experienced at certain activist meetings in Wellington.

> Sometimes in meetings, for example, you just go round and round in circles and eventually you just don't want to have anything to do with them. Most of the time it's just like tearing out your hair … it gives me flashbacks sitting for like four hours in a discussion about what counts as the pinwheel or the consensus wheel or whatever the hell the wheel was. (Maria Bargh)

Ryan Bodman referred to the corrosive effect of moralistic expectations on a new generation of activists. "In my circles there's a lot of puritanism, and so if something isn't perfect then it's not of any worth." But there were also signs of hope, among them strong perceptions of growing levels of left tolerance and respect across traditional divides, and consciousness of the need to build the left overall rather than just in one sectarian or sectoral space.

> There's been a move away from left sectarian communist parties – the alphabet soup of left Marxist parties, to a more amorphous kind of left, like the Occupy movement, the environmental movement. There's probably other examples … and we've jettisoned a lot of Marxist-Leninist sectarianism and jargon. (Paul Blair)

> I think the healthiest thing, really, is to see the whole socialist left getting bigger, and of course we want the ISO to grow and probably be the biggest, to be completely honest. We're very happy to see other groups growing as well. (Brian Roper)

Ryan Bodman found himself astonished when interviewing one of his research participants.

> I couldn't believe how much I agreed with him. And I was like, this guy's a Labour Party politician … Yeah, seems like there's thousands of good people beyond the anarchist movement. Much to my surprise. (Ryan Bodman)

Other positives mentioned were the growing numbers of young people involved in radical left activities, even if not within formal parties or pre-party formations; a heightened awareness of the need to pay attention to human relationships and internal processes; and significantly improved cooperation between the tauiwi and Māori left,

particularly through the establishment in 2011 of Mana, which will be discussed shortly.

The Parliamentary left

The majority of those I interviewed held a fairly negative view of the Parliamentary left in the second half of 2012. For the purposes of this research, I am including the Labour Party, the Green Party and Mana within this category, albeit with caveats which will soon become apparent. Of participants whom I could identify as a member, employee or strong supporter of any of these three parties, five came from Labour, six from the Green Party and seven from Mana, which meant that at least 18 out of 51, 35% of respondents, were in some way associated with the Parliamentary left. These included two former Labour MPs (one NZ, one UK), one former Alliance MP and one current Green MP.

In the 50th New Zealand Parliament 2011 – 2014 all three of these parties were in opposition. As of July 2013 the country was governed by the right wing National Party (59 MPs) with support on confidence and supply from United Future (1), ACT (1) and the Maori Party (3). The Labour Party had 34 MPs, the Greens 14, and Mana one. There was also the New Zealand First Party (6 plus one discarded independent) which shifts its allegiances as it chooses, and was in opposition. New Zealand First is not a party that I consider fits within my definition of 'left' as it lacks ideological coherence and historically is as likely to support the right of the House as it is the left.

A number of participants felt that the Labour and Green Parties, while considered to be of the parliamentary left, had in reality been prey to middle class capture and were both well down the path of a long term drift to the right. Academic Sara Jacob put it this way. "We seem to think that the left is going to somehow save us from neoliberalism. But we know the left is neoliberal as well."

Community based activist Vivian Hutchinson, not aligned with any Parliamentary or other political party, noted:

> Whenever the so called left compromise all the time, they're well away from even where Muldoon was thirty years ago. So it's drifted so far there, they imagine they're on the left, but they're not. (Vivian Hutchinson)

Former British Labour MP Bryan Gould, still a member of the New Zealand Labour Party, said "Most politicians don't stand up to market forces, because we've all been told that's the way it ought to be." Paul Chalmers, also from Labour, observed that "There's been a massive shift of money to elites, a shift of power to elites, and people go, 'I'll vote for that.' Turkeys voting for Christmas." Cathy Casey told me that "The Greens are great but they're not left enough."

The impact on voters and on democracy in New Zealand did not go unnoticed.

> The Labour Party is quite happy sitting on less than 10,000 members, or whatever it is . . . all the parties are happy . . . they say they're not, but they're happy they don't get challenged, that they're able to have their parties with a small amount of people to control . . . what that's done, is it's lowered the participatory democracy down, the cynicism has increased and that people no longer see as being involved in collectivism works. . . . They don't vote because they see it as not relevant. (Matt McCarten)

The second big issue for participants was the question of whether or not left activists should engage with Parliament at all.

> Parliamentary politics always makes me melancholy for some reason . . . just its processes and the necessary structures I suppose, so the people at the grassroots are just fundraising and being the 'yes' brigade, you know what I mean. (Paul Maunder)

Maria Bargh reckoned Parliament was "a cul-de-sac for Māori in particular." Annette Sykes, President of Mana and number two on the party list in the 2011 general election, said "I don't even know if we should be going for Parliament ourselves to be quite frank. I think we should be working outside, that's my personal view."

Laila Harré proposed the counter view. "In terms of actually what can be achieved in Parliament, I still completely believe that is a place that the left has to focus a lot of organising energy." Matt McCarten put it plainly. "Activism itself is not enough."

Others complained about the way left Parliamentary parties worked with community groups and unions at grass roots level.

> David Shearer went and made this grand speech about Living Wage, without actually asking the union organisers or anyone else. Obviously someone who was involved in the campaign said to him this is a good tack to take, but he nearly derailed it because all of a sudden everyone was afraid they'd look like they were supporting a Labour Party thing. (Kathleen Williams)

Green MP Kevin Hague reflected on the same relationship from the other side.

> From the position in Parliament, it can be possible to see where organisational strategy or activism would be useful, but I don't think we necessarily have really great alliances across the in-Parliament out-of-Parliament divide. I think that's something it would be good to see some development of. (Kevin Hague)

Some were unhappy with what they saw as an increasing focus on getting elected and Parliament as a career, rather than on achieving substantive policy gains. Matt McCarten sums this up well.

> They are … toiling away not to change public opinion in effect because what you're doing is you're trying to get elected, so that becomes more the priority than the thinking and therefore your resources and peoples' time is taken up in the mechanics of politics internally and externally and not on the ideas and how they would work. (Matt McCarten)

At this point it is timely to take a look at how participants felt about the individual parties within the 'left' triumvirate.

Labour Party

The overwhelming response from participants was that in the second half of 2012, the New Zealand Labour Party was not doing well. Even one of Labour's own remarked "Nine years to get child poverty sorted and we couldn't do it. How much longer do you want?" asked Paul Chalmers. A number of people spoke of a perceived quiescence, a lack of courage and a failure to address fundamentals on the part of Labour and its leader. Karlo Mila reflected "What comes to me sadly is like a lack of options … I guess Labour's just so weak at the moment." Brian Easton said "At the moment, you just say 'David Shearer' and everybody turns off … the Labour Party, in the only area I know anything about, economics, has given up."

Paul Maunder recalled an official tour of the West Coast of the South Island by a group from Young Labour, and their lack of interest in visiting Blackball's new Museum of Working Class History which he had been instrumental in establishing.

> We had a sort of an extraordinary experience … the young Labour lot … they were doing some sort of working bee type parade through the country. Well, I said I could put on a barbecue. They came; they didn't look at it [the museum]. They took photos of themselves there, they went up the mine site to pose themselves there, and then they had the barbecue. It was bizarre. There was no registering of what the thing was actually about. (Paul Maunder)

There was evidence of the burgeoning of a closer relationship between Labour and the Greens, at least from the Labour side.

> I spoke at a Green Party meeting in Whakatane on Sunday on asset sales, a nice little meeting on a Sunday afternoon. Although I'm a member of the Labour Party, I'm not precious about that and anybody on the left as far as I'm concerned is a colleague. (Bryan Gould)

> I am in the Labour Party. I would be committed really to a Labour/Greens government, is what I see the reality as being, and I'd see myself on the left of the Labour Party. (Peter Conway)

Apart from issues already mentioned, the overwhelming take on Labour from participants was that it had become fragmented, professionalised and bereft of vision; that any sense of class consciousness had gone; that many in Labour did not care about the Treaty or Māori rights, especially given that Labour's Māori MPs did not resign or stop their party from implementing the 2004 Foreshore and Seabed legislation; and that its policies had remained right wing since the 1980s, influenced by the fact that it takes business funding for its campaigns.

Green Party

Participants in general held a somewhat more favourable view of the Greens than they did of Labour, although critiques remained plentiful. Some were the same, especially when it came to a perceived rightward drift.

> My feeling is that in the left—and this is particularly Labour, but to a large extent the Greens as well—the idea of working class consciousness or of workers' interests has kind of disappeared. I don't necessarily mean they put it in that way, but it has disappeared from the whole discourse and way of thinking. (Bill Rosenberg)

A number of people who had in different ways been close to the Greens were vocal on the matter, especially in relation to the party's positions on economics and climate change.

> It's hard enough to talk about steady-state economics. It's hard when the discourse is so well controlled by the allegedly not-Left-or-Righters that even something like Green Growth gets taken seriously, as ridiculous as it is given the nature of today's ecological and economic emergency. (Gary Cranston)

> Looking at what the Greens are doing … they're going so far with the green economy. And just trying to push them a bit further on that, on the anti-growth stuff, would be really good, because of course that ties into climate change.

> Because if we don't start working on that, then we really are stuffed. (Karen Davis)

Joce Jesson spoke of a conversation with former Green Party Co-leader Jeanette Fitzsimons. "The last time I had a big discussion with her was about carbon trading, and I thought no, no, that's just commodifying again." David Parker talked about his 'well sharp' ecopolitics blog (Parker & Larsen, 2010) and other work he and colleague Barry Larsen had done to try and achieve a more progressive party position on climate change policies.

> Whether we actually achieved anything like we had hoped is doubtful, but it grew out of this sense of a need for … an ultimately anti-capitalist green perspective. As I wrote more for it I just became more convinced of that, if I needed much convincing in the first place. But the more I wrote, the more I saw clearly that the Green Party had to be an anti-capitalist party. (David Parker)

The attempt failed.

> Whether we influenced anything in the Green Party I think is pretty doubtful … that was a pretty difficult situation because there were some entrenched views that didn't really brook any challenge. (David Parker)

One member spoke of his concern about the lack of any discussion within the Greens about how the party's Charter principles (Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2013) could be achieved under capitalism, until MP Catherine Delahunty led a workshop at a party conference.

> That was the first time I'd ever seen that kind of topic being discussed in the Green Party . . . it was clear that most people didn't understand, couldn't understand what this capitalism thing was. So it just displayed that there wasn't really an awareness of this concept of a certain type of economic system. (Marcelo Cooke)

From outside party circles came some fairly forthright views, like this from Brian Easton. "Now with respect, there are some solid people in the Greens, but there are also some pure nutters and there are also some very out of touch, very conservative nutters." Paul Chalmers remarked "Greens and their notion of consensus. How to slow politics down – have concepts of consensus, where everybody has to agree. Well, that's nuts." Mamari Stephens talked about why she had left the Green Party some years earlier. I was expecting her to cite some deep political issue, but she said simply "I got sick of the emails." Other critiques included a perceived lack of democracy within the party's internal policy formation processes; the way in which the party had moved to the right

since the death of former Co-leader Rod Donald in 2005; and fears that if the Greens became part of a Labour-led government in 2014, they would compromise their core principles even further than they had already.

On a more positive note came comments like this one from Mana activist Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati "I like lots of aspects about the Green Party." Maria Bargh told me "I like Metiria Turei and I think she, in many ways, combines a lot of the pro Māori, pro justice and concern for the environment." Murray Horton commented "They're good people and I've had long dealings with the Green Party over the years for things like the Roger Award."

Green MP Kevin Hague spoke of efforts the Party had recently taken to create broader discussion around economic issues.

> We ran a conference last year which was very much a first go . . . sustainable economy or something like that. And actually I think getting people who share this kind of analysis together is probably one way of achieving some kind of critical mass around the idea. I think that's pretty important. (Kevin Hague)

Laila Harré talked about the Greens' organisational priorities and processes.

> Our focus is on organising around the issues. People mobilise because they care about issues, that's how we engage them in the whole political process. Our team is about engaging them in campaigns our MPs are leading, and obviously from the wider Green Party perspective that can lead to people becoming more active in the party-led organising work and the electoral work – work that's outside our boundaries as parliamentary staff. (Laila Harré)

Paul Chalmers compared both Laila's and the Green Party's organising skills favourably to those of his own party.

> The [Labour] Party itself is . . . organisationally suspect, and that enables a sharp spear like the Greens to come along—not a real sort of organisation like—we've got branches all over the place - but it's got a sharp spear and it's got Laila and it's got a small team and it's very strategic – to actually pick us off. (Paul Chalmers)

Further supportive comments about the Greens included the way in which they were prepared to engage in realistic compromises to achieve results in Parliament; enthusiasm for the billboard slogan which used the word 'prosperity' in the 2011 election campaign, a controversial issue within the party at the time; and that Co-leader

Russel Norman was outperforming Labour's leadership in his role as spokesperson on financial and economic issues.

Mana

Mana emerged as a parliamentary political party in 2011, stating in its kaupapa that it aimed to be a "…truly independent Māori voice in parliament" while at the same time advocating for "…ordinary Kiwis cast adrift by this National Government" (Mana, 2013). Mana's initial leadership group broke new ground in New Zealand politics by inviting any tauiwi who supported its kaupapa to become part of the organisation, a step prefigured in the writings of such leading left thinkers as Bruce Jesson and Annette Sykes (Jesson, 2005; Sykes, 2010). I was a guest speaker at the official launch at Mahurehure Marae in Auckland on 30 March 2011, and signed up as a member the same day. Mana had its genesis in the departure of MP Hone Harawira from the Maori Party following its commitment to a formal support arrangement with the National Government and his decision to set up a new party on a kaupapa opposing massive deepening societal inequalities, and promoting the principle that "what is good for Māori is good for Aotearoa" (Mana, 2013).

Participant responses from a number of people not aligned with Mana surprised me with the extent of their support and respect for the fledgling organisation. Bryce Edwards told me he viewed Mana as "probably miles ahead of those former incarnations," referring to earlier attempts at forming new left parties.

> In some ways Mana is further to the left, certainly than the Alliance ever was, but even the New Labour Party in many regards. Probably a lot more embracing or tolerant of different lines. (Bryce Edwards)

> I watch Mana with great interest and trepidation because this is the one experiment in bringing together a Māori nationalist and a socialist perspective in a single organisation. A lot of people I've spoken to have said it'll never work, it'll be tears before bedtime. But so far it has endured and I hope it continues to do so. (Chris Trotter)

Not surprisingly, Mana President Annette Sykes took a confident, optimistic approach.

> For a long time there was no questioning of this notion of economic sovereignty based on capitalism and to his credit Hone opened the space for the discussion. I don't think he lead the discussion, but he allowed people like myself, Minto, Syd Keepa, yourself and a whole lot of people to lead the discussion which is sadly missing in this country. (Annette Sykes)

Annette also talked about another kind of benefit she had gained as a result of her involvement. “As small as Mana is, I have never felt as emotionally supported intellectually . . . I actually feel that I’m in a collegial atmosphere and I don’t feel isolated.” From another Mana activist came this.

> I see that as being some of the things that I’d like to get involved in more, seeing how can we use Mana as a vehicle for getting people to participate that don’t. That’s one of the values I see of Mana, being able to capture those population groups that don’t participate. (Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati)

Helen Potter recognised Mana’s positional clarity compared to that of other parties of the Parliamentary left. “With Mana, there is so much that is about left and a very distinctive and clear left, rather than other parties that slip towards the centre.” Veronica Tawhai spoke of her confidence in Mana’s leadership because of their roots in left activism.

> Why you’re safe is because you have your values intact … people in the Mana party, yourself, Hone … for me it just happens to be what you’re doing now. You know what I mean? Like you are really staunch community activists and you just happen to be trying to put your efforts into transforming the state through actually being in there. (Veronica Tawhai)

Brian Roper spoke from his perspective as a Pākehā supporter. “Through participating in Mana, there’s a lot of learning going on, there’s a lot of knowledge being gained.” Daphne Lawless, a Pākehā member of Mana, had this to say.

> Your Pākehā left, who’ve generally been trained on stuff coming out of America and Britain and other places which have historically had a white English speaking working class . . . have got no idea how to deal with a multicultural, multilingual Aotearoa of today. . . . You see the beginnings of people trying to grapple with this in Mana, and that’s why I’m very glad to be part of that organisation, because you do get the feeling that Pākehā leftists are at least trying to engage with a grassroots force of Māori people. (Daphne Lawless)

Criticisms of Mana centred around Hone Harawira’s role as the party’s sole MP and leader, and the pros and cons of his personal leadership style; a perception by some that a portion of Pākehā within Mana were still acting from a position of white privilege without much understanding of that privilege, or the will to change; a shortage of strong, high profile potential MPs and leaders coming through from the grassroots; a lack of democracy within the party’s decision-making processes; and issues around Mana being seen as too Māori (by some tauiwi) and too Ngāpuhi (by some Māori),

without having broad enough appeal to widen its membership and electoral base beyond a few Māori seats in the North Island.

On the positive side, factors not already mentioned included the fact that Mana was seen as attractive to young people in a way not happening with other parties of the left, or with the Maori Party; that it saw itself and acted as an activist movement as well as a parliamentary party; that in some localities it had the capacity to mobilise the vulnerable and dispossessed in ways other parties found difficult to manage; and that its culture of manaakitanga opened up a space for Pākehā, Pasifika and other left tauiwi to work together with Māori on a common kaupapa in a way not seen in New Zealand left politics before.

Summary: Parliamentary Left

From this snapshot of how the left viewed its parliamentary arm in the second half of 2012, I came to three key conclusions. The first was that there existed a widespread feeling that the Greens and Labour had both drifted rightwards in recent years. How participants saw this shift depended on their place on the left spectrum. Secondly, a number of participants felt that there were dangers in the way parliamentary parties at times disrespected activists and undermined the work of left activist groups in various ways, and that too much focus on Parliamentary politics had a tendency to weaken the development of effective community and union organisations. Third, the sudden appearance of Mana on the scene in 2011 marked the emergence of a surprisingly well supported experiment in new ways of organising, with the creation of a Māori-led, Māori focused left parliamentary party which also saw itself as intrinsically activist, and was deliberately inclusive of any tauiwi who supported its kaupapa.

How do we see ourselves overall?

Having considered how participants viewed the proffered definition of ‘left’ and where they saw themselves sitting within both left and activist spectrums; and having examined facets of both Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary left activities as they evolved during the research period, it is now time to take a bigger picture view of how respondents saw the state of the left in late 2012 Aotearoa.

State of left: Big picture

Perceptions that the left had moved rightwards were reiterated, captured in essence by this reflection from Vivian Hutchinson. "I don't think we have a left wing and a right wing in New Zealand, I think we have a centre and a right."

> In some ways we thought that post neoliberal period, that whole Third Way period, that in between period, was going to somehow be a new kind of a left which would still attend to all the politics of capitalism, it would still attend to the structural inequalities, but it was still fundamentally neoliberal. (Sara Jacob)

Pasifika respondents commented on the way in which they saw their own people becoming more conservative. Will 'Ilolahia told me "My major hassle at the moment with my community is that the New Zealand born PIs, they're becoming more right wing than the Pākeha." This was backed up by Karlo Mila.

> A lot of my colleagues and peers at the moment, especially Pacific, are noticeably what I would say right … I think because to some extent National markets itself as having the monopoly on upward mobility. And then they're identifying themselves as having merit based journeys … another layer of it is that we've come from these church dominated cultures. (Karlo Mila)

In te ao Māori too, the pull to the right had become increasingly visible in recent years. The rise of a tangata whenua corporate elite was seen a manifestation of this.

> We've become so insular into little pockets of iwi corporatism that there is no national Māori strategy that puts people first … it's gone towards 'we're moving from grievance mode to development mode' … and their 'development mode' is capitalist development. (Annette Sykes)

Veronica Tawhai talked about why some Māori have sought to minimalise the role of the state, one of the major reasons for the Māori Party's support for some National Party policies on, for example, state sector devolution and privatisation.

> The reason why Māori have become confused as to we shouldn't be on the left is because we've had a state that is oppressive. And so … Māori have gone 'oh yeah, what's better for us is a place where the state is minimally involved.' (Veronica Tawhai)

Alongside the sense of an overall rightwards shift came explicit acknowledgement of the power the left was up against and the serious plight of people and planet, locally and globally. Bryan Gould observed that "On the left you tend to lose a lot of battles.

That's just the way it is, because you're up against the big battalions, the big power in society."

> We collectively either create a better world, or else things are going to get much, much worse than they are at present. So they're the choices facing humankind in the twenty first century. (Brian Roper)

A number of respondents noted the way in which a new generation of politicians were following the tactics initiated in New Zealand by the 1980s Labour Government, described by Bruce Jesson as "so extreme that New Zealand could be considered a freak among nations" (Jesson, 1999, p. 19), followed by those of National in the early 1990s. Jane Kelsey had depicted National's 1991 attack on the welfare system as "overwhelming in its scale, audacity and arrogance, and shocking in its effect" (Kelsey, 1993, p. 354). David Parker noted "The left is, I think, dealing with yet another round of blitzkrieg." Mike O'Brien talked about the way in which so much time had been spent "in the last twenty years, still is . . . in quite legitimate firefighting kind of activities and trying to stop the onslaught."

An intense sense emerged of the way in which the left in Aotearoa had been diminished and weakened, if not broken. Paul Blair was forthright. "We've lost this battle . . . right is right and left is wrong. The battle's not over yet, but we're losing."

> We failed, actually. Love us all to bits, but we failed. Things are worse now than they were when we were children, income distribution is worse, fairness is worse, the potential rise in fascism is much worse, the only way people escape this is on a jet. (John Stansfield)

> We're just operating under the radar. And it's almost like there's this cycle we've gone through, there's been a huge amount of political activity, upheaval, all those kind of things that have happened. And I don't know, it's almost as if in a sense the left's been . . . crushed to a degree in terms of its political effectiveness, and I guess it takes time to come back from that. (Jane Stevens)

Some participants mentioned the traditional lack of unity on the left, already cited in various ways as participants critiqued recent activities. Will 'Ilolahia told me "We're so divided that we're maybe alienating also big masses." Ryan Bodman reckoned "When I think about the left and its failings, it just comes down to personalities."

> Standing together we can achieve so much more . . . we are being fractured and divided by things that in the scheme of the planet are not as major as they're made out to be. (Maria Bargh)

In the face of all this, how should the left respond? Younger generation environmental activist Gary Cranston told me "If you don't have your own strategy, you become part of someone else's strategy. That's what's happening with the left in this country." Chris Trotter observed that the "ideological hegemony of neoliberalism is so profound across the whole world, the left's most urgent task is simply to engage in counter hegemonic activity."

> A broad left movement is difficult to establish because the philosophical connections are difficult to make – but also there hasn't been a concerted effort to make them … Take stock of the fact that just because someone prefers Marx over Bakunin doesn't mean that you can't sort of work with them. (Ryan Bodman)

> It's needing to put the neoliberal economic/social framework to bed. In the coffin, underground. We have to learn from how the New Right revolution started here. So for me, in the area of policy debate and the way you look at the world, it's really needing to put a knife through that neoliberal framework, because it's still so powerful. (Robert Reid)

So, how might a debilitated New Zealand left begin to "put a knife through that neoliberal framework"? The sections which follow will not only reveal more detail about the state we are in, but will also provide some insight into the diversity of strategies and solutions offered by participants.

State of left activism: Big picture

Alongside consideration of the state of the left overall, it seemed important to explore how respondents viewed the current situation of activism as a subsection of 'left'. Again, the picture was not a particularly positive one. Concern at the weakness of the activist left compared to the forces arrayed against it mirrored earlier observations.

> It seems like there's a low level of struggle in general at the moment, and I think it's maybe been downwards … I've only been involved since the mid-2000s, so it does seem like since the 80s and 90s it has been on a downward slide … I think a lot of the left, because of maybe burnout or people really jumped on board the Occupy thing and that burnt out, and so there's a real low energy on the left at the moment. (Jared Davidson)

> In New Zealand we have a very thin civil society … the state's quite dominant, political parties are quite dominant, and the media's quite dominant … it carries through to lots of other things like a relatively low participation in lots of activities, whether it's politics, protest, community organisations. (Bryce Edwards)

Others referred to Parliamentary factors as one of the reasons for the activist left's perceived fragility over the last two decades.

> My hunch is the strong influence of the Labour government from the past actually affected that. People are just relying on the Labour government and some activists thought that as long as Labour government is in power, that's enough. (Dennis Maga)

> MMP, by putting more parties into parliament . . . undercut a lot of the grassroots organising that took place under FPP. There is a diverse voice in there with MMP . . . so there isn't the same impetus for movement building. (Ryan Bodman)

The disruptive impact of state surveillance and infiltration was raised. One participant talked about his group's experiences in Dunedin.

> We just found that the police had clearly had people working undercover who were getting heaps of information on what was actually going on … also we had some people who were ideologically opposed to militant tactics, even just militant civil disobedience, and they would essentially tell the police what was going on. (Brian Roper)

There was plenty of attention paid to internal weaknesses as well. Perhaps the most common issue raised was a perceived lack of in depth thinking, education and analysis on the part of some activist organisations. Tim Howard observed "Activism as a fetish for its own sake is problematic" while Chris Trotter told me "There's been 40 years of change and the left is still fighting the battle unintelligently; that's true in a lot of areas."

> Rushing down the street holding banners talking about 'the working class must take over the world' and that kind of thing isn't actually going to solve it because there's a whole educational process that needs to be gone through. (Bill Rosenberg)

> Left wing political organisations, by which I would count everybody from Mana leftwards, they barely have enough time and space to get their members organised for on the ground political agitation let alone matters of grand theory and grand strategy. (Daphne Lawless)

A third major theme to surface focused on relationships and processes within groups. Simon Oosterman told me that "It's partly because we're small . . . but a lot of our activism is driven by individuals which I think is problematic . . . there's not enough coordination of what people do."

> There are a lot of people involved who, for one reason or another, are very very difficult to work with. It's hard to know what to do with those people when you've got ideas about inclusive movements, but they sap so much energy from those around them. So that's really difficult. (Ryan Bodman)

Constructive ideas about the way forward for New Zealand's activist left continually emerged alongside the critiques. These included the need for thoughtfulness and strategy before rushing headlong into action; the critical role of education; and the importance of organisational processes which enable activists to cope with challenging people (of various types) within and beyond groups themselves. Nevertheless, it was clear that the left was experiencing numerous difficulties in late 2012, with an acute sensibility of being on the losing side in a battle against overwhelmingly powerful economic and political forces. It is not surprising that the impact of this on respondents manifested itself clearly and often.

Feelings about ourselves as left activists: despair and hope and some intergenerational reflection

Despair and powerlessness

Older activists with a long track record of building successful organisations and campaigns talked about what happens when people and groups feel weak and under constant threat over a protracted period. Jane Stevens told me "People have been pretty much knocked into submission in lots of ways. It doesn't feel like a good place to be, really", while John Stansfield reckoned "It's almost like we've lost heart, that we don't really believe in our own case anymore." Feelings reached an even more personal level at times. Referring to the experience of listening to the morning news, Bryan Gould said "I get really angry, depressed, frustrated every day of the week." Helen Potter talked about the impact of living with constant compromise. "So you're not even holding the line. And it's pretty wearying on the soul; you don't have enough energy at the end of the day."

> What I'm trying to say is I don't expect anybody to take any notice of me until after I'm dead … I've had a very battered 26 years, and I just do what I can do. I don't have a long term strategy. And I don't see a way through. (Brian Easton)

Participants felt the ideas and actions of the activist left also suffered from a loss of capacity for risk taking and bravery. Matt McCarten noted "I think that the left generally lacks courage and are fearful. They are very timid." In like vein John Stansfield told me "The real poverty of the left is the poverty of ideas and a poverty of

boldness about those." He went on to give an example about this lack of boldness, surmising some reasons for it, based on his local work with community gardens.

> I think we're far too obedient about not simply taking over ground that both the state and private owners aren't using. We need to be a whole lot bolshier about that. That's a great story to tell, how to do that. How to organise. There's a real loss of organising skill is one of the things that I observe, and I think that's a function of the decay of community sector organisations and student unions which were an enormous training ground for the left. (John Stansfield)

There were good reasons for some of the expressions of fear. Apart from widespread awareness of matters like state surveillance mentioned above, for the economically and socially vulnerable the consciousness that at least one government minister had in the past not hesitated to expose and shame individuals who spoke up publicly (Trevett, 2009) meant that there was even greater apprehension around this than in earlier decades.

> We've got the situation with Paula Bennett with the privacy concerns, which mean that people are afraid to speak out even when they were willing to before. There's far more fear in revealing your circumstances now than there ever was in the 1990s. (Kathleen Williams)

Related to the notion of a retreat from bravery was a perception that many on the left in 2012 had no idea that they could ever take even a modicum of power into their own hands. Gary Cranston told me "Maybe there's a lack of faith in people's ability to do things collectively together to make big scale changes." Another young activist, Ryan Bodman, said "Even though I think I have a vague idea of how power works in society … I've never actually been part of a truly empowered social movement."

> People haven't had enough experience in fighting in the last 15 years or so. You have this sort of deceptive cosiness of the nine years of a Labour-led government and people doing deals and getting what they can out of that. That impacts on the whole … on the universities, on the community sector, the trade unions, on the places where the radical thinking or new thinking or even old fashioned thinking might come from. (Laila Harré)

> One of the things I feel is really crucial is that we have to accept we want to win. And that we do want power. Because I have met far too many who seem to … it sounds really disparaging, but they seem to take pride in being on the losing end of everything, every time. (Sandra Grey)

Tim Howard summed up what he saw as the possible consequences of life as a left activist at a time when the neoliberal hegemony seemed virtually unchallengeable, explaining that we risked:

> Taking on internally the dominant discourse that means that they are right, that their perception—corporate capitalist stuff from the neoliberal perspective—is 'the way things are'. While fighting that norm, we can be taking that perception as somehow centralised in ourselves, and leave ourselves peripheralised by that. (Tim Howard)

There was another side to this litany of despair and powerlessness, fear and frustration. When participants talked about what motivated them to act and what gave them hope for the future and what might move us beyond self peripheralisation, a different story began to emerge.

Hope and confidence

Many of those I interviewed spoke movingly of what had inspired or moved them to activism, whatever form it took.

> There's that real sense of doing something. It's the sense that even if it's not changing the world, sometimes it's even just taking a stand with people of a like mind … that sense you get of being with people who are united around that cause and are really standing up to that sort of injustice. (Brian Roper)

> That has primarily more been about the lack of something and our need to do something or we're going to explode … we literally need to get together or else we'll just die, we mentally will just go insane. So we need to get together. (Veronica Tawhai)

Sandra Grey offered a big picture view. "Ideally, I want to live in a lovely left wing utopia. It's just a long way away." Other stimuli to left belief and action included a desire for a better future for children and grandchildren in the face of global economic and ecological crises; particular music which had awakened consciousness; the way in which some participants had consciously felt themselves left and activist since childhood; and specific issues, events and situations which had affected respondents deeply in their personal lives.

Participants talked about other factors which they viewed as positive about being left but which were sometimes forgotten. Cybèle Locke reflected on the importance of realising that the more effective the group, the more likely it is to be vilified by opponents.

> Keep reminding ourselves that it's when we're being attacked that we're truly being successful. I think there were a number of moments when things felt pretty bad, but that's because we were being successful. And I think we've always been hopeless at celebrating tiny little victories and I think that we have to be realistic about the slow steps we're taking, but remember to celebrate those slow steps. (Cybèle Locke)

In contrast to remarks from a number of participants about unfortunate experiences with left purity and puritanism, Mamari Stephens believed that being left may inherently imply a greater sense of compassion and empathy.

> I think the left has a greater sense of what society should be and could be, and are more forgiving of people's failings. There's recognition on the left that we're not perfect human beings. (Mamari Stephens)

Interestingly, a widespread sense emerged of a recent upsurge in support for left ideas and principles. As Bill Rosenberg said "You keep on coming across people who are more progressive than you ever expected" while Bryan Gould observed "You have all sorts of mainstream people that question all sorts of aspects of capitalism which seems like an incredible opportunity for the left."

> Perhaps it's my age … I've seen people almost doing a full circle, like some people that I thought were reasonably right wing are seeing the effects of things, or perhaps have hit a point in their life where they're mature enough to see. I think they're becoming quite aware just of those divisions between the haves and have-nots and workers and some of those workers' rights things. Amazingly, since we've been so down for so long, people are becoming aware. (Rhiannon Thomson)

Rhiannon's awareness of her age matched that of many other participants who spoke with an acute consciousness of their own generational place in time and history.

Intergenerational feelings

In designing this study, I felt it was critical to provide intergenerational voices to the maximum extent possible. At time of interview and as best I could elucidate or judge, four participants were aged 20–30; nine 30–40; nine 40–50; 17 were 50–60; and 11 were aged 61 or over. A number of older participants had clearly been doing some deep thinking about their role in the final stretch of an active political and community life. Vivian Hutchinson was explicit. "If we've got any experience to put on the table for the next generation, now's the time to get clear about it, and put it out there."

> When you're within about 10 years of so-called retirement, you think about, what's your last hurrah going to be? I guess for me—and it wasn't just a matter of deciding, it's a matter of where life thrusts you as well—of landing in a senior trade union position. (Robert Reid)

> One of the roles that I really like being able to take on at the moment, is to start to look for, in particular, young Pacific people who need to get involved in politics and want to get in involved in politics, and quite often don't know the entry point and don't know how to do it and how to go about it. (Mark Gosche)

John Stansfield applied a spot of self-criticism when reflecting on the Occupy experience, telling me that certain problems which arose were not the "fault of people who were camping out in Queen St, that's the fault of old buggers like me who didn't go down and apply a bit of effort around that." Jane Stevens commented on what being an older generation activist felt like at times.

> When I come and get together with people that I might have been engaged with on the left in previous years we sort of end up feeling like dinosaurs, almost, that have become extinct. (Jane Stevens)

Some older participants compared today's young activists to those of their own generation, and shared anxieties about perceived differences and dangers. Annette Sykes said she was worried about "the next generation of activists coming behind me. Are they going to be co-opted away from this opportunity to create the culture change?" Rhiannon Thomson had similar concerns about the new wave of young student activists. "So there's been this activism amongst them and they've been excited by the feisty protesting. But would they hang in there for something else? I don't know."

> Our young people in those days, the 70s and 80s, even the 60s and 70s, young people were growing up wanting to be left, wanting to be Gandhi. Young people these days want to drive a BMW. (Sara Jacob)

> The backlash against the feminist movement is still sitting underneath that. And our young women don't understand what you and I went through at all. They just think it's always been like that. (Joce Jesson)

Critiques were fired off in more than one direction. Mid generation respondent Daphne Lawless, talking about some left politicos older than her, said "We are still dealing with people who got their political education on what might as well be called another planet, historically speaking." A comparatively young activist himself, Gary Cranston talked about issues he saw in the next cohort coming through.

> I don't think that younger people identify with the word 'left' any more … they see it as being an old sort of thing, and they've got that sort of neither-left-nor-right thing going on. … It's my observation of environmentalists … the support for neoliberal policy, and a blind faith in it, from people who are generally under 25 years old. No critique of power at all. (Gary Cranston)

Some were in reflective mode, acutely aware of the cyclical nature of political engagement across age groups. Jane Stevens told me "I think that what was happening for us as young people has come around again. I think what kind of legacy is being left by what's happening now is critical."

> Every generation always talks about the next generations as somehow a different animal … but it's just the same. People will always work together if they can see a benefit in doing what is right, and they also want to be able to have something to better themselves." (Matt McCarten)

After hearing respondents speak so generously of their feelings about their own situation and that of others on the left in 2012 Aotearoa, I took away an overwhelming impression that despite all the very real talk of despair and loss, there was at the very least an equally strong sense of commitment, hope and a will to solidarity – including across generations.

Media, framing and language

It will perhaps come as no surprise that one of the biggest practical areas of difference between activist generations centred on use of social media. For the digital natives, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and websites were viewed as natural and essential everyday tools for getting political messages and stories out into the world, locating and building networks of friends and allies, and mobilising people to action. Conversely, some older participants felt quite distanced from the online world, believing that an over reliance on social media detracted from the many benefits of face to face communication and undermined successful long term organisational development.

When it came to opinions about the role of mainstream media, such differences disappeared. Participants from across the board felt that media control belonged to the right. Speaking about the need for a left wing media, Sandra Grey longed for a situation in which "the message wasn't disparaged straight away and kind of chucked in the too hard, loony, crazy bin which is where the media often stick left wing commentary."

> I get a sense that the *New Zealand Herald* is trying its damndest to bury as much of the news as possible and come up with the weirdest front page stories at any cost to bury what's happening in terms of health, education, welfare policy, you name it. (David Parker)

> I can't watch television, it's disgusting . . . and generally I find it difficult to read the newspapers . . . the only way that I can sort of cope with what's happening in this country being framed to me is via my Facebook friends, because at least they have some kind of critical analysis. (Karlo Mila)

Some noted the existence of media allies, albeit with strings attached.

> We have Māori TV and things like that, and I do find *Native Affairs* really great. . . . but they're still absolutely controlled by funders who . . . are not interested in our issues. (Veronica Tawhai)

Many participants saw room for improvement in the left's media work, identifying the need for improved skills training for spokespeople; calling for a more thoughtful balance between the use of mainstream and internet based media; and highlighting how useful it would be if the left could develop a whole range of traditional as opposed to web based media under its control, including newspapers, magazines, publications in te reo Māori, radio and television.

Alongside and substantially integrated with consideration of the role of media came much talk about the importance of framing and language, and of the ways in which the neoliberal right consistently outdid the left on this. Kathleen Williams expressed a common sentiment. "They're doing a really good job of colonising our language." Referring to unions, Chris Trotter said "When you start feeding back the messages that they [the right] sent out as reasons why you can't do anything, they haven't just won, they've destroyed you."

> Language and the framing is what it's all about, you know. The framing of the issues. I think in some ways the left has lost the power of reframing the future. (Gary Cranston)

> One of the reasons the right wing have been so massively successful politically speaking is because they've learned to tell a good story . . . how to appeal to the non-rational senses of the brain . . . how to speak in mythical language whereas the left wing have been thinking, oh, only rationalistic discourse is valuable. (Daphne Lawless)

I was struck by the fact that so many participants talked about language and framing in those exact terms. It became clear that the ideas of George Lakoff (2004) have

permeated widely through much of the New Zealand left. While there was ample acknowledgement that so far the right had done much better than the left on language and framing, there was also widespread awareness of the need for the left to find ways to compete, and plenty of ideas about how that might happen. Kevin Hague summarised this well.

> All of that Lakoff work about how the right basically has had a multi decade project to frame issues, to reinforce values that are associated with the right and with conservatism has to be countered, and the more coordinated and deliberate we can be about that countering on the left and on the progressive side of politics, the better. (Kevin Hague)

Ideological and theoretical debates

Given the inherently and highly political nature of the thesis question it was only to be expected that ideological and theoretical motifs would emerge as a fundamental component of this study. An awareness of the intrinsic and useful place of ideology in pursuing left goals surfaced often, from the social democratically as well as radically aligned. Bryan Gould reflected that to be of the left "you have to be quite hard edged. I don't mean hard edged in personal terms but you've got to have a view, and work to that view."

> It becomes harder to create that sense of solidarity among people and sometimes political ideology helps that process because if you can conceptualise the world in a way that makes it more obvious where the links should be and how solidarity ought to be created, that's what political ideology can help to do. (Mamari Stephens)

Brian Roper talked about the pivotal role left groupings driven strongly by ideology had played in the mass mobilisations against the apartheid South African Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand in 1981.

> There were a whole range of different parties, like the Socialist Unity Party, the Workers Communist League, the Socialist Action League … I had strong political differences with a range of those organisations … oh, the Communist Party is the other one … they still played a really key role, as you'd remember, in building those protests. (Brian Roper)

A second critical issue to come up was a fear among some activists that without ideological clarity and commitment to a kaupapa which took into account class as well as other considerations, the strength of left activism in late 2012 was being weakened and diverted. Annette Sykes offered a Māori perspective.

> One of my biggest criticisms of our current thinking is this notion of Kaupapa Māori theory … because when you go into it, it becomes a bit like this mystical feast of something that's in a bit of a fog, moving … I would like to know whether kaupapa Māori embraces or rejects capitalism as part of its theory. No one's been brave enough to take that on. (Annette Sykes)

In concerns already reflected in earlier discussion around the Green Party, some participants were perturbed by the shift in recent years, particularly among environmental activists, towards a loss of any coherent left ideology, and a belief that concepts of 'left' and 'right' were no longer of any relevance. As Peter Conway said "It seems to me that an '-ism' is being replaced with a kind of vague framework around sustainability." Gary Cranston's anxieties on this front extended to his perception that this was a cohort not only ideologically suspect from a left viewpoint, but one that was also capable of mobilising substantial and effective resources.

> The young progressive, so-called, neither left nor right – they're actually right, they're very good at . . . ploughing ahead with it, coming up with new ways of thinking, new models, new organising tools for the neoliberal middle ground or whatever the hell it is . . . I could think of a lot of examples of it, with a lot of backing and money behind it as well. Online organising tools and stuff like that. (Gary Cranston)

Also noticeable was a widespread acceptance across all parts of the left of the notion of intersectionality as being the norm in 2012, whether framed explicitly with that descriptor or not. Sara Jacob was one of those who did make the point with academic precision. "In my own intellectual frame, I've embraced this notion of multiplicity and post modernism and post structuralism."

Several young participants were quite clear that they did not want to define themselves ideologically in a manner that would constrain their ability to work with others, and that on the contrary, they were keen to see and assess their own beliefs within a broader framework and in different, less sectarian ways than may have pertained in the past.

> I don't see myself as too fixed in ideology because I feel it's quite limiting in engaging with people and I used to be much more into ideology … I would say that anarchy, in my understanding, is just a libertarian form of socialism. (Ryan Bodman)

> I think we're reassessing what activism means to us in 2012 and what anarchism and class struggle looks like. We've always wanted to move away from an activist approach that wasn't grounded in our realities, our everyday lives. (Jared Davidson)

Some talked about a yearning for something they had not yet found. Cybèle Locke told me "I'm still looking for that home, ideological home . . . and a really, really beautiful utopia . . . I'm still looking for that too. I've never given up trying." Gary Cranston spoke with longing and admiration of a recent political experiment in which a friend had been involved.

> A number of the most politically active young people in all of Germany, active on all sorts of different issues, very progressive, very strategic, intelligent activists . . . have decided, as of about three years ago, that they were all going to move to Leipzig together. I don't know if it's a group or a movement, I don't even know what it's called. But the point is, they've all decided to move there together so that they can look at all of these interlocking issues in this extraordinary context that the world is in at the moment. (Gary Cranston)

Helen Potter posed a question which struck at the heart of the matter.

> There might be different political parties and groups but can you actually come together and maybe set in place some really key pou and actually work collectively for them? I mean we have the numbers in the country, we have the nous, we have all the things, so why does it not happen? What are those things that stop that from happening? (Helen Potter)

There is no doubt that the underpinning ideological division on the broader left in Aotearoa at the time of this research was between the social democratic left and those who believed that transformational change beyond capitalism was necessary. This reached one of its most marked expressions in the Green and environmental movements, in the contrast between those who believed that the days of 'left' and 'right' were over and those who felt that notions of 'left' and of class and capitalism were still relevant. It also found expression in the divide between most supporters of the Green and Labour Parties and those whose priority was to take action outside Parliament, or as part of Mana, itself a mix of parliamentary and extra parliamentary aspirations. The reformist/transformation split was also identified as critical within the politics of te ao Māori, where differences over where 'left' sat (if anywhere) within a nationalist indigenous kaupapa reached an apogee in the split between the Māori Party and Mana.

Varying beliefs about theories of change were raised by participants, and were often the subject of debate at meetings I attended during the research period. Some contentious issues included the role of leadership; the role of the state; whether violence on the part of the left was ever justified; the question of whether it was worth working within the

parliamentary left to some degree or at all; issues around where the balance should lie (if anywhere) between active involvement in local community based and cooperative initiatives and working for broader radical left change; a tension between those engaged in what some called constant 'mindless activism' and those who believed that collective thinking, analysing and planning were always important. There was also a simmering debate over whether a constant focus on 'winning' as a tactic of change-making was helpful or not.

When I began this study, I had assumed it likely that the left would still be riven by the kind of hostile prejudice and simmering tension between tendencies and factions which had characterised much of our history in Aotearoa. While elements of this persisted, they occurred primarily when people looked backwards historically, and not so much when they were considering present and future. This did not mean that people were happy with those they saw as too far to the right or to the left. As mentioned already, those of a radical hue particularly regretted the drift to the right by some of the parliamentary, environmental and corporate Māori 'left'. Others were particularly derogatory of individuals and groups they saw as engaging in disruptive and counterproductive behaviour within groups and campaigns.

However, for the most part I found an overwhelming eagerness among participants for more opportunities for conversation and debate across current differences and historical ideological divides. Many respondents actively sought to go beyond the sectarian rigidity and preconceptions that had so frequently littered the past, and felt that to build an effective counter hegemony to neoliberalism in Aotearoa, new and far more cooperative ways of thinking and organising were required. The search for new ideological homes, for "some really key pou" around which people might collectively work was real, and urgent.

"Putting a knife through the neoliberal framework": Constructing an effective left counter hegemony

Every participant in this study had ideas about how the New Zealand left might build more effectively into the future. Despite the talk of failure and despair, and in spite of the divide between radical and social democratic left, there was an abiding sense of hunger for something that had not quite yet been perceived, or grasped, much less

achieved. A recurring theme was a perception by and about younger activists that they lacked the consciousness that they could themselves take power over anything.

> The march against mining in Auckland was the biggest thing a lot of us have seen and it's hard because we're removed from that down here . . . so we just can't imagine, we don't have a framework of mass political action, so we theorise about it and wish for it. (Jared Davidson)

Kevin Hague posited "There was a generation always feeding the next generation with ideas and experience and history. And I think there's been a break in that somewhere." Reflecting on 1970s feminism, Sara Jacob asked "There was a moment, and we grasped it. Can we create that momentum and moment here now, in the 21st century?"

The question of how the current cohort of activists, younger and older, might begin to better understand and exercise the power that resides in our own hands was often answered by proposals for more analysis, training and education. Veronica Tawhai put it succinctly. "I can see what is needed in this generation is the real effort to . . . decolonise, it's revolutionise, it's conscientise people's minds." Speaking of the union of which she was president at the time of interview, Sandra Grey said:

> It's having enough guts to be part of a debate, and not be scared to . . . be challenged. We've been particularly bad on the left at critiquing ourselves . . . we need to pick up our game. We have lost members, we have lost conditions out of collectives, and it's been a disaster for us. And we have never taken the time to analyse what we did wrong. (Sandra Grey)

> You just see how people grow from actually seeing the world from a different paradigm. Actually all the things that they've kind of got force fed down their throats about that we are an economy not a society, and what's important, and then they start to be able to challenge those things by having different world views. (Jane Stevens)

Alongside the quest for ways to improve the left's capacity for analysis and conscientising education, came an equally strong call for the development and communication of inspiring alternatives to neoliberalism and capitalism. Kathleen Williams told me that she never wanted to be in the position that "People are saying there is no alternative again. You and I lived through that phase, there was no alternative. There are always alternatives." Mike O'Brien said "We've not developed, let alone articulated, some kind of alternative … some alternative vision, for want of a better word."

> For me when you say progressive left, you mean change, you are looking for change, you are looking for alternatives. Some new sources of hope outside of the market and outside of . . . greed being harnessed to make change and pushing people around. (Dennis Maga)

> We have to overcome the imbalance of power by being smarter and by finding ways to win when we're not in power, we haven't got the numbers, we haven't got the money. We have to find solutions creatively, in a smarter more creative way, up against a bigger, stronger, richer more powerful opponent. (Paul Blair)

Robert Root advocated, in one of the more optimistic offerings:

> It's inevitable that the left is going to win at some stage. And so you really want them to come with a coherent programme so that they're running the country intelligently, with some deep thinking. (Robert Root)

At the same time, participants understood that without the development of effective organisation, all this vision, education, and analysis, no matter how coherent, would not build a newly vibrant left. For some, an ideological home which provided a framework and impetus for action was a big part of the answer.

> If Marx was around, he would have said our long term vision is for a classless society. . . . We don't have a vision any more . . . let's move towards that kind of a vision, of creating a classless society eventually in the next 30 years or so. . . . If we had a sense of 'this is our vision, and this is where we want to go,' then we can start attaching work on how we get there. (Sara Jacob)

> Lately I suspect there's a real need for a communist party again. It just feels like an absolute lack there, of something like the old communist party with its deep engagement with the community, with the local union . . . that thing of being there rather than stuck on the end of a computer doing some electronic petition or something. (Paul Maunder)

Brian Roper spoke of the importance of "rebuilding a working class vanguard, and as part of that process, rebuilding the mass activist base of progressive social movements," while Bill Rosenberg identified the importance of developing new forms of unionism.

> We're never going to get back to 50% unionism or whatever in this conventional way, so the question is, what are the models we're going to have for organising working people? It might not be called unions, hopefully it is, but it might not be . . . it seems that people don't like to talk about wages and working people and all those kinds of things, but it so much underpins all of this. (Bill Rosenberg)

Even participants who were clear about the need for 'vanguard organisation' were not proscriptive about the form it or they might take.

> Having a common project is one of the dreams of the left. It's often talked about in terms of the party but it doesn't necessarily have to be the party … You'd want vanguard organisations which were playing a role … and basically acting as a memory for the class, looking at the lessons of class struggles and playing that kind of role, and playing a consciousness raising role. (Geoff Todd)

> It's one that's not a political party, but I guess I've always thought of it as a movement. But at its core is some kind of set of ideological principles that truly inform the work that you're doing, that there's a real reciprocity that really exists between those ideologies and those visions, that's not just about fixing bits of society. (Cybèle Locke)

The creation of the left's own institutions, in whatever form, was viewed as critical. Cybèle again:

> At the same time as dismantling capitalism, is … what's the terminology? … growing the new in the shell of the old. That you're doing both of those things as well as of course accepting that personal change at the self-level as well, which is the Ghandian stuff coming through. (Cybèle Locke)

> When you're perhaps at the end of a working – hopefully not activist – life, it's doing those things that, taking a more medium-long term position, are leaving behind structures which are stronger, which then have the potential to do what the current politics and material society may not allow you to—may not be on the immediate agenda … but creating those institutions and strengthening them for the time that, hopefully, they can have more and take more power themselves. (Robert Reid)

Poet Karlo Mila asks:

> I almost wonder whether the left as a concept is even strong enough to hold it all together. It probably is … I was just reading this book … 'The centre cannot hold', which … comes from a line from a poem. The centre does not hold – what would hold it together? (Karlo Mila)

> Gramsci is dealing with exactly the same thing. All of those philosophers, left thinkers, were actually dealing with that problem. How do you meld the social movements so that everybody's committed to the new dream? That's the really big problem. So it's big question stuff here. (Joce Jesson)

Participants may have felt battered, and in some cases despairing and afraid; their understanding of the power they were up against acute. Yet at the heart of what I heard them telling me was also an enduring commitment to the kaupapa of 'left', whatever any individual's particular alignment; a sense that the old dream of a more cohesive and effective left endured; and a determination to create more of our own autonomous institutions within "the shell of the old." I found Paul Maunder's précis of the circumstances in which the New Zealand left had found itself by the end of 2012

particularly apt. “We’re in the swamp, we’ve got the decline of capitalism and that just produces incoherence for a hundred years… as something else slowly works through.”

Summary: Amidst weakness and loss, the dream of ‘left’ endures

The first thing I had to ascertain from each person taking part in this research was how they viewed the definition of ‘left’ which I had provided. Without some platform of common understanding of what ‘left’ might mean in Aotearoa in 2012, the questions and responses that followed would have rested on shaky ground indeed. As it turned out, my attempt at a workable starting point met with broad agreement, although it was clear that it was more acceptable to the social democratic than to the radical left. Nor did the definition bear the attributes of a clarion call to action. It proved to be adequate for the purposes of the specific academic project for which it was devised, but I would not presume it to be necessarily useful or adequate in any other setting. This in part reflects the inherent difficulties of crafting any definition which could adequately please such a wide cross section of the left. The interview process revealed an even greater spread across the spectrum of ‘left’ than I had anticipated. It also became apparent that traditional tensions in the activist-academic relationship within the world of New Zealand progressive politics continue.

There were seven particular sites of activity in which participants – and in some cases myself as activist and researcher—were particularly engaged during the research period: Occupy, unions, AAAP, the community sector, church based organisations, the radical left and the parliamentary left. Despite problems, it is evident that the experience of Occupy was an occasion of hope and learning for many of those who participated either directly or on the periphery. The unions, individually and collectively, were universally perceived as being in a weakened state, although a small number of initiatives were seen as welcome indicators that some positive changes were taking place. AAAP was also identified as a beacon of hope as the first reasonably substantial and politically active unemployed and beneficiary group to emerge in the 2000s, but it was isolated and starved of resources. Its very existence also begged the larger question of why no other similar group had emerged over the same period, despite the impacts of the government’s welfare reforms and continuing high levels of unemployment.

When it came to the community sector more broadly, participants were almost universal in their perception that most parts of it had become colonised, increasingly conservative, weak and unwilling to directly confront governments even on the kaupapa upon which groups had been founded in the first place. The church-based part of the community sector was also identified as having been affected by the same trends.

Participants from the radical extra Parliamentary left identified traditional concerns about sectarianism, lamented the small size of the transformational left compared to some periods historically, and some spoke of psychological issues associated with the internal dynamics of radical organisations. In regard to the parliamentary parties, many from both inside and outside Labour and the Green Parties were critical of what they saw as a rightward drift by both. Some activists rejected working with the parliamentary left at all. There was broad interest in Mana as a novel experiment in bringing the Māori and tauiwi left together, even from some whose allegiance lay elsewhere, or who were unaligned.

Overall, the interviews revealed a palpable sense of grief and despair at being on the losing side in a long term struggle against far more powerful economic and political forces. This sense of defeat manifested itself in a range of political and deeply personal ways. Yet alongside ran plentiful strands of hope and renewed confidence, a frequent desire for fresh forms of organisation, a newfound willingness to transcend old ideological, generational and ethnic boundaries, and a feeling of urgency about the need to encourage younger activists to understand that power, even in limited form, can be taken by those determined enough to work for it. The big dream of a left future was still alive even if the exact shape and nature of its vital institutions were still in gestation and barely perceived. The next chapter examines what might be learned from the experiences of organisations whose stories might offer clues as to how a more united and hopeful left might develop at least one of these new institutions, a major left wing think tank.

5. We're already on the road: Nascent left wing think tanks in Aotearoa 1990–2013

Introduction

One foundational goal of this research was to explore what might be learned from a brief examination of the groups termed 'nascent left wing think tanks'. From the start, I considered that in the event that this study revealed substantial support for the establishment of a left wing think tank(s), it would also be opportune to begin to identify what might be learned from the experiences of existing and earlier forms of left think tank-like organisations in New Zealand. I asked all respondents what they knew of nascent formations 1990–2012, and in particular sought their opinions and knowledge of the seven groups specifically covered in this chapter, should they be aware of their existence at all. Of those interviewed, 13 (25.5%) had had deep involvement with at least one of the seven groups. This was one of the key indicators used as part of the purposive sampling process for selecting study participants. Besides the interviews, other sources for this chapter included notes and reflections from my thesis journal, extended personal experiences with some of the organisations, documents publicly available, and documents, diaries and notes from my own archives.

The examples presented here are the Alternative Welfare Working Group (AWWG), the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC), the Bruce Jesson Foundation (BJF), the Campaign against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA), the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Fabian Society, and Kotare Research and Education for Social Change in Aotearoa Trust. In looking at these seven groups, I briefly describe those aspects of their history, functions and development which could be considered as think tank-like activity, not necessarily all facets of their identity, which in one example at least (AUWRC) go markedly beyond anything close to my definition of 'think tank'.

The main reasons for covering these particular groups were that they had a number of the characteristics of a 'think tank' as per my working definition; that they operated somewhere within the spectrum of my definition of 'left'; that they represented a variety of left positions on the social democratic-radical continuum; and that I judged their activities as having reasonable scale and significance. A further reason for

selecting four of the groups (AWWG, AUWRC, CPAG, Kotare) was that in these instances I had the benefit of reasonably substantial personal involvement and access to archival resources which I hoped would enable deeper insight and texture when cross referenced to other aspects of the study. I cover AUWRC and Kotare in somewhat more detail than the other organisations because I consider that there are implications arising from their experiences which may be of particular relevance to any think tank implementation project, especially if such an initiative happens to be towards the more radical end of the left spectrum.

I considered that the critical point of demarcation between what made any particular group 'nascent' rather than a 'think tank' as I had defined the term for the purposes of this study, was that the former were not attempting to carry out most or all of the nominated think tank-like functions across a broad range of issues. Instead, the nascent groups were confined, in my estimation, to a limited issue focus and/or to a comparatively low level of activity compared to the scope and scale of a major cross-sectoral think tank. In this chapter I look at each of the seven nascent groups in turn, providing an outline of their history, kaupapa, organisational form and leading personnel, alongside a very limited assessment of their impact and influence, mainly as seen through the eyes of participants. In each of the seven examples, I conclude with a brief analysis of what I consider may be useful learning for any future left think tank initiatives. I then go on to outline the myriad of other nascent or proposed left think tank initiatives either mentioned by research participants, or which I came across myself between July 2010 and July 2013.

Alternative Welfare Working Group (AWWG)

On 9–10 June 2010 the Victoria University Institute for Governance and Policy Studies hosted a two-day forum on behalf of the government's Welfare Working Group, which had just been established under the leadership of former Commerce Commission Chair Paula Rebstock (Bennett, 2010). During the course of the conference, I was one of a small number of attendees who met informally to discuss whether there was a useful contribution that might be made as an alternative to what we viewed as an inherently flawed and dangerous process (O'Brien et al., 2010a, p. 14).

Shortly afterwards the Catholic social justice agency Caritas, the Social Justice Commission of the Anglican Church and the Beneficiary Advocacy Federation of New

Zealand (BAFNZ) came together to commission the body which later became officially known as Welfare Justice: the Alternative Welfare Working Group. Six members were appointed: Mike O'Brien (Massey University), Paul Dalziel (Lincoln University), Mamari Stephens (Victoria University), Bishop Muru Walters (Anglican Church), Wendi Wicks (Disabled Persons Assembly) and myself (nominated by BAFNZ) (Caritas, 2010). Two members, Mamari Stephens and Mike O'Brien, were participants in my doctoral research.

The AWWG was formally launched in Wellington on 8 July 2010 and was deliberately set up to exist for a fixed six month period. The group's principal tasks as determined by the three commissioning organisations were to hold public meetings around Aotearoa inviting comments and submissions, particularly from those likely to be most affected by the proposed welfare reforms; to write a report reflecting that response, informed by the knowledge, academic integrity and experience of the six members; and to work at "bringing together a coalition of groups who wish to work together on benefit issues" (O'Brien et al., 2010a, p. 162). Key concerns about the government process expressed in the commissioning document included a fear that the outcome of the Rebstock group's deliberations had already been predetermined; that the expected changes would deepen poverty and extend the disempowerment and suffering already experienced by many beneficiaries in their dealings with government; and that the official group would not engage in any genuine consultation with the community sector or with beneficiaries themselves.

For six months from July–December 2010, the AWWG's six members, working voluntarily and operationally supported by Caritas and a very limited pool of funding, met with people at 15 public meetings at marae and community halls around Aotearoa, from Invercargill in the south to Whangarei in the north; invited and received 91 written submissions; and researched and wrote two reports *Welfare justice in New Zealand: What we heard* (O'Brien et al., 2010b) and *Welfare justice for all* (O'Brien et al., 2010a). A considerable amount of media work was undertaken throughout the six months, particularly by Mike O'Brien in his role as AWWG Chair, as well as by the five other members who also spoke publicly at times from their various sectors and areas of expertise. The release of the final report coincided with the formal termination of the AWWG process and of the group itself on 9 December 2010 (Alternative Welfare Working Group, 2010).

During research interviews conducted several years later in the latter part of 2012, participant awareness that the AWWG had existed was still reasonably high. All who mentioned it were positive about its contribution. Jane Stevens described it as "one of the kind of shining lights in a very empty sky … very current and fresh in its thinking and its experience." Tim Howard said "The thing that jumps out for me is that it was very contextualised, thereby focused, thereby effective." Paul Blair talked about his experience with the AWWG's consultative hui in Rotorua.

> I went along and made some brief submissions to that group. Yeah, a perfect example—an ad hoc think tank set up for one particular purpose, to try and engage in counter hegemony against Paula Bennett's little working group. Effective and important kind of work. (Paul Blair)

> What I think is the biggest gap and what's missing, and what the AWWG was trying to fill, is the reality of life for the poor in New Zealand. People don't know it … At the very least, it may have lessened the despair of some beneficiaries." (Kathleen Williams)

Members of the AWWG were also positive. Mamari Stephens told me she thought "we did far better than we thought we could at the start" and noted consequential benefits for her academic career. "I was able to use that material as a teaching resource … in actual fact, the work with that also lead to a contract to do a social welfare law book." Mike O'Brien felt that one of the group's strengths was that it was "an interestingly diverse group of people who were right in the middle of it—in terms of Māori, people with disabilities, people like yourself … and so on."

There was widespread acknowledgement that on a tiny budget dwarfed by the government's $1.1 million contribution to the costs of its own working group (Bennett, 2012), there was a limit to what could be expected from a small group of volunteers. Some participants were disappointed that the group did not continue to exist, as they believed it filled a need not otherwise being met at the time. Geoff Todd noted that the AWWG "didn't seem to break significantly out of the existing networks and I suppose that's what you'd want to be doing." A number of participants commented on the fact that, as Mike O'Brien put it, "the agenda had already been scripted," meaning that any impact on government policy was likely to be non-existent. From an AWWG perspective, this indeed proved to be the case, as evidenced by the recommendations contained in the 180 page official report released by Paula Rebstock in February 2011 (Welfare Working Group, 2011). Geoff Todd's comment also highlighted the fact that

the third task nominated by the commissioning group—the creation of a new network of welfare groups—never happened.

In comparing the AWWG with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that it met most of the criteria, except that clearly it was only concerned with one issue, welfare reform. It was also a short term, one-off organisation, with neither the intention nor the capacity to become more than that. *Some lessons that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include:* budget limitations constrain everything and there are limits to what time even the most dedicated volunteers can contribute to a project, and thus to the results of a project; that despite a lack of resources, a huge amount can be achieved when a small group of reasonably capable people have their collective energies harnessed with effective operational backing; that productive results can emerge when academics and community based activists have the opportunity to work closely together, leading to further benefits from both viewpoints; that there is a hunger on the part of those most affected by negative government activity to have their voices heard alongside a concomitant interest among at least some parts of the media and public to hear those voices; and that there is a hunger on the left for the stimulation and information provided by well researched, locally grounded and carefully documented alternatives to the neoliberal agenda. As Mike O'Brien said:

> One of the things I've been quite amazed with is the way—maybe I shouldn't be – is the way in which the Welfare Justice report keeps getting picked up. I hadn't expected it to have that kind of impact, I have to admit. (Mike O'Brien)

Bruce Jesson Foundation (BJF)

Bruce Jesson was one of the luminaries of my early political life. I first remember him as the person who bravely started publishing *The Republican* in 1974 at a time when open opposition to the monarchy was viewed by many as dangerously radical. He went on to contribute hugely to the intellectual life of the left through his magazine and through numerous articles and books, including several seminal works describing and analysing what he described as political and economic changes "so extreme that New Zealand could be considered a freak among nations, the Kampuchea of the free market, and 1984 could be considered Year Zero" (Jesson, 1999, p. 19). In the 1990s Bruce Jesson also became something of a left wing icon for his instrumental role as an Alliance councillor in keeping Auckland's port in public ownership. Tragically, Bruce

died in 1999, shortly after the publication of the book from which the above quote was taken.

In the wake of his death a small group of people including Bruce's wife Joce Jesson and Jane Kelsey from Auckland University's law faculty decided to set up a foundation in his name, with two main goals. The first was to promote "activities designed to generate critical, informed, analytical and creative contributions to political debate in New Zealand and about New Zealand"; the second was to archive Bruce Jesson's works (Bruce Jesson Foundation, 2011b). The founding chair was former Labour Prime Minister David Lange (1999–2005). Members of the Trust Board in mid-2013 included Sir Edmund (Ted) Thomas (retired Court of Appeal judge), Dr Anita Lacey, Bryan Nunweek, Dr Joe Atkinson, Simon Collins, Camille Guy, Dr Joce Jesson, Dr Geoff Kemp and Jon Stephenson. Professor Jane Kelsey continued to chair the board, as she had done since 2006.

The main activities of the BJF since its inception have been the presentation of the annual Bruce Jesson Lecture and the offering of two awards for senior and emerging journalism which "will contribute to public debate in New Zealand on an important issue or issues" (Bruce Jesson Foundation, 2011a). A number of participants in this research have themselves delivered a Bruce Jesson Lecture, including Brian Easton (2001), Chris Trotter (2002), Gordon Campbell (2006), Laila Harré (2007) and Annette Sykes (2010). Despite appearances, BJF lecture delivery was not a criterion I used in selecting potential research participants, but I did interview Joce Jesson, in part because of her critical role in the Foundation's life and history.

When participants talked about the BJF, the main thing they mentioned was the annual lecture. Maria Bargh told me she had "only heard about the Foundation because of the Bruce Jesson lectures… though I feel compelled to add, I've heard of Jesson's work, just not the Foundation per se." Murray Horton commented "I don't know what the Bruce Jesson Foundation does, all I see is the thing once a year when they do the lecture, do they do anything apart from that?" Frequent and enthusiastic mention was made of Annette Sykes' 2010 offering. Gary Cranston told me her lecture was "one of the most important things I've heard said in this country in recent years."

> I think the Bruce Jesson Foundation lecture from Annette Sykes was an absolutely pivotal speech. It signalled a sea change in attitudes from radical

> Māori which has led to Mana and I think gone a huge way towards erecting some sort of bridge between the Pākehā left and Māori radicals which needed to be done. (Chris Trotter)

Views on the BJF overall were not quite as wholeheartedly enthusiastic. Bryce Edwards said "I always had hopes for the Bruce Jesson Foundation becoming a bit more significant." Brian Easton told me "It's a foundation giving lectures, not a think tank doing original research." Daphne Lawless remarked "I didn't even know the Bruce Jesson Foundation was still going" while Robert Reid reckoned the BJF "as they'll tell you themselves, is maybe running out of steam a bit."

To the best of my knowledge, Joce Jesson was the only research participant with detailed insider knowledge of the Foundation's history and current organisational life. She told me a little about the group's genesis.

> David Lange was the first chair. Jane was the organiser … she was the one who ran around … She was the one who put the idea up. It came from Jane, and Barry Gustafson. Jane talked with Barry Gustafson … he just happened to be the head of the department of political studies. (Joce Jesson)

Joce also told me that the Foundation's main source of income was the gold coin collection taken at each annual lecture, raising $1500 at Nicky Hager's 2012 presentation. Such funds went primarily to fund the BJF's journalism awards.

> That's really important to keep those poor journos writing important ideas, so Jon Stevenson's stuff on Iran and Iraq and Afghanistan … all of those journalists have done really good things. And that's why Nicky's lecture was really important for journalists. (Joce Jesson)

When I asked Joce directly if she saw the BJF as a think tank, she replied "I think that's what Jane wanted to set up originally. She wanted a think tank." Joce went on to say that there was no mood among current trustees to extend operations, a comment which also contrasted with a possibility raised in 2011 by AUT media academic David Robie. "The Bruce Jesson Foundation may also be reconfigured to take on even more of an investigative journalism support role" (Robie, 2011, p. 9).

In comparing the BJF with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that at the time this research was carried out it met several of the criteria, albeit in a very limited way. It appeared to be an organisation highly regarded by many on the left for its annual lecture and journalism awards, but with no visible intention of extending its

work beyond these two functions. *Some lessons that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include:* confining a group's activities to limited but achievable goals is one way of sustaining an organisation's reputation and kaupapa on a very limited budget; and that while not going to external funders for support may limit the reach of a group's activities, it also ensures its original purpose and philosophy remain intact.

Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA)

CAFCA evolved from an organisation called Campaign against Foreign Control in New Zealand (CAFCINZ) established in 1975 (Rosenberg, 2009), making it the longest lasting of the nascent groups outlined in this research. CAFCA identifies itself in its Charter as "a protest group, an educational group and a Leftwing progressive group" which opposes foreign control "because it is harmful to the interests of people everywhere" (CAFCA, 2013). The Charter also notes that CAFCA does not see itself as a political party, defining itself as "anti-imperialist rather than actively anti-capitalist" and stating that "Above all we assert the essential need for national sovereignty." By 2000 CAFCA had become a group "dealing comprehensively with all aspects of foreign control in this country, be they economic, political, social, military, covert, cultural etc" (Horton, 2000, p. 2).

Throughout CAFCA's history Christchurch based activist Murray Horton played a key role as organiser, researcher, speaker, writer and editor of its magazine *Foreign Control Watchdog*. Bill Rosenberg was also prominent in the organisation from the beginning, acting as Chair for around 20 years until he took on a new role as Economist and Director of Policy at the CTU in 2009. In early 2013, members of CAFCA's mainly Christchurch-based Committee included Jeremy Agar (Chair), Lynda Boyd, Brian Turner, James Ayers, Paul Piesse, John Ring, Colleen Hughes, Warren Brewer, Murray Horton and Bill Rosenberg (Horton, 2013). Both Murray Horton and Bill Rosenberg were participants in this research.

Operationally, CAFCA is a membership based organisation whose funding has always come solely from subscriptions and donations from those who backed its kaupapa. As Murray put it in his organiser's report in early 2013 "We are beholden to nobody except our own members and supporters; we can, and do, say what we think without fear or favour and without worrying about biting the hand that feeds us" (Horton, 2013,

para. 17). Apart from producing *Foreign Control Watchdog*, CAFCA's other major activity from 1997 onwards has been the organisation of the annual Roger Award for the Worst Transnational Corporation operating in New Zealand, based on criteria including corporations' roles in economic dominance; treatment of people, environment and animals; and interference in democratic processes (CAFCA, 2009).

CAFCA was reasonably well known among those I interviewed in the second half of 2012. Much of the feedback was positive. Gary Cranston noted "CAFCA – a very small outfit doing amazing stuff. Unfortunate that it has to be so small." Several respondents described CAFCA as a think tank, with John Stansfield saying:

> I think CAFCA is really clearly a left wing think tank. I use their material from time to time when I'm looking at issues that I'm dealing with … there's been some pretty good solid gritty research stuff grinding out of that. (John Stansfield)

Awareness of the part played by Murray Horton and respect for his work was high. Ryan Bodman said "I've always associated that with a one-man band, but he's a very active one-man band and he produces some really good stuff." Chris Trotter noted "CAFCA – god bless 'em … been around forever. Murray Horton is a national taonga and long may he live and more power to his elbow."

> Like a lot of these things, it comes down to an absolutely committed person or persons, and it's a funny thing, isn't it, that CAFCA gives me – the fact I can see its magazine coming out each month, probably not reading one word of it, but it feels good – it actually keeps me going, because you know there is work happening behind, and now and again it will be referenced in something we do. (Robert Reid)

CAFCA was not without its critics. Some were concerned about the accessibility of its material, with Dennis Maga commenting that its articles were too long, and that "sometimes people should also understand that working people have small time to read … if ever I cannot get any interest within fifteen seconds, I'm going to drop the article." Most criticism centred, however, on a critique of CAFCA's political kaupapa. Daphne Lawless said "People like me who come from what we would call the internationalist left get put off by the idea that we are supposed to be campaigning against foreign control."

> I feel conflicted because as an anarchist I'm really aware about the contradictions of advocating for nationalist arguments and nation states, so I

> have a critique of that, but I also think that there needs to be a critique of multinational corporations but I wouldn't just subsume it to a national New Zealand Aotearoa level. You have to have some sense of how that relates to class. (Jared Davidson)

Murray Horton was well aware of what "the commos said about me" as he put it in his interview with me.

> For years they regarded CAFCA as … as sort of bourgeois nationalist and that sort of stuff. We weren't opposed to New Zealand capitalists and therefore we were just tools of New Zealand capitalists, and all capitalism. (Murray Horton)

Murray went on to emphasise that CAFCA members saw themselves as "progressive nationalists as opposed to the Winston Peters[3] or Piggy Muldoon[4] reactionary nationalists." Murray also demonstrated self-awareness about his own role in the organisation. "I'm sufficiently realistic to realise that a lot of the money that comes in to the thing that pays me, a lot of that is name recognition", while also stressing the importance of the collective efforts and credibility of the CAFCA Committee around him.

Bill Rosenberg told me that, like Murray, his lifelong activism had primarily been with CAFCA, alongside his union involvements, and that on the CAFCA side of things he had mainly focused on research. "It was just that was my inclination, to do the research-ey side of things." Bill also noted, as did a number of other participants, that *Foreign Control Watchdog* had become "the only magazine on the left now in many ways" although Murray was keen to stress "We're not going to become the next *Monthly Review* or *Political Review* because our focus is foreign control."

In comparing CAFCA with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that it met all the criteria apart from that of being broadly based across issues, and that it was not surprising that several participants viewed CAFCA as a think tank. Its work was seen as effective, although some had political issues with its kaupapa of economic nationalism. *Some lessons that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include:* the vital role played by a competent core worker with a long term commitment to a group's kaupapa and deep knowledge of its areas of expertise; the importance of backing that person with an active, interested and supportive

[3] Winston Peters, former National Party MP, NZ First party leader in 2013.
[4] Sir Robert Muldoon, New Zealand Prime Minister 1975–1984, National Party.

committee or other form of governance body; the concomitant potential vulnerability of an organisation that has been dependent on one person over a protracted period; and the liberating clarity that comes from operating as a group which is funded solely from kaupapa-driven sources, and therefore not subject to the donor or contractor requirements of other forms of funding.

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)

CPAG was established in 1994 to work for "the right of every child to security, food, shelter, education and healthcare" (Child Poverty Action Group, 2013a, para. 8). While there is a large charity of the same name in the UK which has been in operation since 1965 (Child Poverty Action Group, 2013c), there is no formal link between the two organisations. CPAG has steadily grown in size and influence since it started life as a small group of concerned academics and community activists. By the time of its July 2013 Annual General Meeting, CPAG Convenor Mike O'Brien reported that the group had four branches in Whangarei, Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch; that there was growing financial support from both individual supporters and from the philanthropic sector, particularly from the JR McKenzie Trust; and that CPAG "through its high quality and independent research plays a crucial role to illustrate the complex multi-faceted nature of child poverty" (O'Brien, 2013, p. 3).

As of its July 2013 Annual General Meeting the CPAG Management Committee consisted of Mike O'Brien (Chair), Alan Johnson, Innes Asher, Hannah Anderson, Helen Bull, Claire Dale, John O'Neil, Gillian Roach, Susan St John, Nikki Turner, Janfrie Wakim, and Rawiri Wharemate. Three staff were employed, comprising an executive officer, a communications officer and a researcher/policy analyst. CPAG activities included the production and dissemination of a number of research reports; public speaking and media work; many submissions to parliamentary select committees; the holding of well-attended budget breakfasts in different locations on the morning after the presentation of the government's budget each year; and the mounting of a major court case which challenged the discriminatory In Work Tax Credit which was part of the Labour Government's 2004 Working for Families legislation (Child Poverty Action Group, 2013b). I was a member of the CPAG Management Committee from April 2010 until July 2011, allowing me the opportunity to directly experience life inside an organisation with whom I had worked as an external ally for many years. Two

research participants—Mike O'Brien and Susan St John—had played long standing core roles in CPAG.

CPAG was well recognised and highly regarded by many respondents, with frequent comments similar to this from Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati, who told me CPAG had done "a lot of research in terms of policy or what type of interventions or what kind of policies help eliminate or prevent child poverty. They do really good work." Gordon Campbell said "It's got really effective spokespeople … a proven track record of really quality research, and it manages to get its message into the media."

> What can you say really? They're amazing. They're an organisation that's on the smell of an oily rag and they're still able to produce really great research. They've got committed brainpower and people who have got that sort of credibility, Susan and Mike and people like that. (Helen Potter)

Others commented on the worth of CPAG's high profile legal activism on the In Work Tax Credit, the quality of their submissions to parliamentary select committees, and, as Tim Howard said "I give CPAG some credit for this—ensuring child poverty is on the political agenda, where it really hasn't been until this year." He also offered a gentle critique of one aspect of CPAG's work in particular, commenting that he saw CPAG "as being a bit more distanced from activist bases and more academically captured. I don't mean that too disrespectfully, because I do value all their contributions." In similar vein, Karen Davis observed "You see all this wonderful information come out, like Child Poverty Action, but then without the campaign linked to it, it just dissipates."

Susan St John had been involved with CPAG from the start. She said that in the beginning "We thought we would be a group that would disappear after a while, it wasn't a permanent idea, but the need for it just made it one." She went on to say:

> I think CPAG has done it the right way. We started off with a few people with the energy and we slowly built. We've attracted more people with energy to do research and contribute in a range of ways. So it's got slowly bigger and bigger and more substantial and more respected. (Susan St John)

Mike O'Brien emphasised the contribution of university based academics to the quality of CPAG's work.

> A lot of the work we've done has been in fact done by academics, gratis … they've done it as part of their work, published out of it, and so on … people like Susan particularly … Innes [Asher] is another one … people who have

> brought good rigorous expertise to it, a strong commitment to what they're doing and so on. (Mike O'Brien)

Both Susan St John and Mike O'Brien commented on ways in which the conservative political context was affecting CPAG's work. Susan St John spoke of "a very strong neoliberal environment where students have wanted just to do core economics … and even when they've been interested … they've seen their job opportunities as elsewhere."

> The Children's Commissioner now currently has got an expert group on poverty that he's drawn together, and in putting the group together, as I understand it, the Minister said to him that none of us who were involved in the Child Poverty Action Group were acceptable on that group. And our reflection was 'great', that allows us to sit outside and not be compromised in any kind of way. (Mike O'Brien)

In comparing CPAG with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that it clearly met all the criteria except the cross-sectoral aspect. It was a substantial organisation operating over an extended period, producing what is viewed by left respondents as high quality and useful research, as well as playing a critical advocacy role on behalf of one of the most voiceless groups in society, children living in poverty. *Some lessons that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include:* its work demonstrates the valuable role university-based academics can play in carrying out research and advocacy for a community based organisation when their time and energy can be brought to bear; part of CPAG's success in utilising university staff was probably due to the fact that academics are a core part of its organisational infrastructure and decision making processes; some activists felt that what they identified as an overly academic focus may have limited the organisation's ability to more effectively pursue its goals in an activist and campaign context; and that in the neoliberal context of its time, even a highly respected, predominantly academic group like CPAG suffered negative political consequences because of its staunch advocacy for all children in poverty.

Fabian Society

In March 2010 the latest incarnation of the Fabian Society in New Zealand was launched with a series of seminars in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch, its earliest local forebear having been founded in January 1896 to "work for the transfer to the Community of the administration of such industrial capital as can be managed

socially" (New Zealand Fabian Society, 1896, para. 3). Both earlier and later models of the New Zealand organisation were based on the UK Fabian Society which was established in 1884 and calls itself "Britain's oldest think tank" (Fabian Society, 2013). There has also been a Fabian Society in Australia since 1947. Former Labour Party secretary Mike Smith, Labour activists Jordan Carter and Paul Chalmers and businessman Selwyn Pellett were closely involved with the establishment of the new Fabian Society. At the time of the its launch in March 2010 Mike Smith said its aims were "to generate and disseminate ideas that are original, meet the challenge of the times, and are high quality" (New Zealand Fabian Society, 2010, para. 7).

Mike Smith and Selwyn Pellett said the Society deliberately sought to be independent of the Labour Party (Rotherham, 2010; Tolerton, 2010), although the fact that Labour's leader at the time, Phil Goff, told interviewer Duncan Garner on national television that the Fabian Society was "an inhouse think tank that the Labour Party operates" (TV3, 2010) meant talk of independence was perhaps slightly disingenuous. The Society's website also made its political orientation clear. Prospective members were asked "Do you share social democratic values …?" and were told that by joining they can "support a new voice for the centre left in Kiwi politics" (New Zealand Fabian Society, 2013, para. 4).

By the end of July 2013, the Fabian Society had been in existence for three and a half years, running a steady programme of lectures and seminars in New Zealand's three main centres. One of its better known repeat events was "Voyage of a Lifetime", featuring speakers such as Rick Boven, Rod Oram, Selwyn Pellett and Bernard Hickey and using the metaphor of the Titanic to examine ways in which the economy could be better and more actively managed before it foundered completely. In line with the Society's promotional caption "inciting debate", not all guest speakers were associated with Labour or necessarily of social democratic alignment. For example, in June 2010 progressive economist Jim Stanford from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives delivered a popular lecture series on understanding the logic of capitalism and examining the failure of neoliberalism, and later on that year I addressed several seminars on radical structural solutions to child poverty.

Funding for the Fabians appeared to be mainly sourced from membership fees and donations, although in 2010 the Gamma Foundation was also thanked as a "significant

contributor to its finances" (M. Smith, 2011, para. 24). Mike Smith noted in the same report "We do not have the necessary resources for a full-scale think tank, and run a very lean operation" (para. 24).The Society had no paid staff, and was run entirely by volunteers. One participant in this research, Paul Chalmers, had been involved in the Society from the start.

Two and a half years after it was launched, awareness of the Fabian Society among participants was high, although a number who mentioned it were in the same position as Matt McCarten, who told me "I haven't been to any of their seminars, I've been meaning to go but it's just always just been the wrong time for me to go." Others were like Jared Davidson who said "I only know about the Fabian Society in terms of their past, I don't even know what they do any more." Tim Howard was supportive, telling me "It would be great if somebody could internally challenge the Labour Party with some intellectual grunt from the left." It was unsurprising that views on the worth of the Society's work depended somewhat on the political orientation of the participant. Former Labour MP Mark Gosche commented:

> The thing that interests me about the Fabian Society is their ability to have attracted people that you wouldn't expect. So they've got the business types coming and committing, and publicly committing, which is actually for them probably quite a brave thing to do … there's nothing more challenging to the status quo thinking than people who would normally be seen to be part of that status quo to be challenging it and speaking out against it. (Mark Gosche)

Young activist Marcelo Cooke had attended one of the Fabian Society's "Voyage of a Lifetime" events. He felt that the featured speakers were sending a message that "we're quite wealthy and we're going to be fine if the equivalent of an iceberg hits the Titanic, the New Zealand economy." Marcelo went on to say:

> I was wondering if their concern was more that they're feeling the pressure, that they're worried about the social discord which might affect their lives … they don't seem to be that critical of capitalism or anything. (Marcelo Cooke)

Chris Trotter was explicit about what he saw as the core purpose of the new Society.

> There is a quid pro quo that is quite open and clear, that if Labour gets in, the manufacturing sector is going to get a lot of help, a lot of taxpayers' funds is going to be diverted in their direction. Economic policy will be shaped to favour the export sector over the service sector. So the Fabian Society is very much an exercise on the part of the Labour Party to draw into its orbit a fraction of New Zealand's capitalist class and to offer to be its handmaiden. (Chris Trotter)

Paul Chalmers provided an insider's glimpse into the genesis of the new generation Fabian Society.

> When Smithy [Mike Smith] resigned as the general secretary, I said, "Mate, we've got to get these Fabians going, otherwise where's the alternative thinking coming from?" Mike had been proposing the Fabians for some time and he'd had experience in the eighties with Public Eye. He'd retired and had time to put into it … We've got to put economics on the agenda, and we've got to have economics that make sense for New Zealand. So sovereignty economics, I suppose you'd call it. (Paul Chalmers)

When I asked Paul if the Society saw itself as a think tank, he replied "I like to think of us as a think tank, and Mike Smith is the think, and I'm the tank . . . I pushed it along a bit." Talking about his take on the Labour Party's role, Paul told me "generally speaking, it's been those people who are in the Labour Party that are on the left that have been plugging it."

> It's reasonably middle-of-the-road, so you get people from the sort of conservative left, the small left, you're able to pull people from the left-left, and then you've got – we've been able to call on economists and business people who make sense, who are realists. They don't care about left and right, they want New Zealand Inc. to work. (Paul Chalmers)

In comparing the Fabian Society with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that despite seeing itself, quite validly within its own terms, as a think tank, it only met a limited number of the criteria I used for this study. While it certainly engaged in stimulating public debate through seminars and lectures, it did not produce or disseminate its own research and its policy advocacy was primarily focused on working to influence the Labour Party's economic direction. *Some lessons that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include:* high attendance at many of its events demonstrated widespread interest throughout the 2010–2013 period in public education and debate on economic issues; the pivotal role of two capable, experienced project champions who could afford the time to focus on building and sustaining the initiative without any financial remuneration; visible alignment with one political party was useful in its ability to gather support from likeminded people and to nurture focused input into party policy processes; but at the same time, such alignment was also likely to have been a factor in making some on the left wary of or disinterested in the group's activities.

Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre (AUWRC)

On 17 February 1983 a public meeting of over a hundred people at the Pitt St Methodist Church Hall in central Auckland agreed to set up a new unemployed workers' group aimed at helping people with their problems with the Department of Social Welfare and the Department of Labour, and to educate, organise and advocate around a kaupapa of "Jobs and a living wage for all." I was one of a small group of unemployed and student activists who called together that first meeting. Little did I know that most of the next sixteen years of my life would be spent working with AUWRC and a number of its organisational offshoots.

In its early years, AUWRC was not an entity that I would now label a 'nascent think tank'. When it started, it was a standard unemployed workers and beneficiaries' centre or union of its time, just one of the 28 such groups Cybèle Locke identifies as existing in 1983 (Locke, 2012, p. 77). Cybèle's book *Workers in the margins* remains the only substantial academic work to deal at least partially with the history not only of AUWRC, but of other unemployed and beneficiary groups in 1980s–early 1990s Aotearoa. Paul Maunder's history of community-based theatre in New Zealand also briefly outlines AUWRC's role as a small but active component of consciously left-political cultural workers' networks in the 1990s (Maunder, 2013). AUWRC's journey from its origins as a simple unemployed workers' group subsisting on free rent in a dingy church hall to an organisation which generated and supported a multiplicity of initiatives before dissolving itself 16 years later is briefly outlined in Appendix N.

The fact that at July 2013 AUWRC had been defunct for 14 years meant there was no possibility of identifying current or even recent governance group members as I have done with other nascent left wing think tank organisations. However, I believe one of the major reasons AUWRC developed in the way it did from 1987 onwards was because there was a core of people who maintained a long term involvement with the organisation, even if their engagement fluctuated depending on what else was going on in their lives. This core included Bill Bradford, Ivan Sowry, Karen Davis, Caroline Selwood-Hatt, Dave Tolich, the late Fr Terry Dibble, Alastair Russell and myself. Four participants in this research had been substantially involved with AUWRC in a variety of ways: Karen Davis, Cybèle Locke, Paul Maunder and Tim Howard.

When I interviewed participants in the second half of 2012 I found widespread recognition and acknowledgement of AUWRC and its work, although unsurprisingly the majority of this came from mid-older generation respondents. Chris Trotter told me that "AUWRC in its heyday, I think, provided an extremely useful service to marginalised people." Daphne Lawless noted that AUWRC "was a little bit before I became seriously politically active but we did hear some good stuff about what was going on there." Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati said "I was a member of AUWRC, and really appreciated the doctors and advocacy for beneficiaries, it was awesome" while telling me that she regretted a more recent loss.

> It was sad to see what happened with the Wellington Peoples Centre, I was really annoyed how they let that go. As a client I didn't even know that it was in jeopardy of closing. (Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati)

The establishment of the Peoples Centres was seen as significant. AUWRC set up its first Peoples Centre in 1990, offering a mix of medical, educational, hairdressing, green dollars, advocacy and other services for five dollars (later ten dollars) a month per family. Two more centres were subsequently established in Manurewa and Mangere, and several unemployed and beneficiary groups in Wellington set one up there in 1992, following Auckland's lead. Murray Horton described the Peoples Centre as "an excellent model of action in providing services at a grass roots level." John Stansfield recalled some of the early work in Auckland, particularly the risk and work involved in the development of the Peoples Centres.

> I can remember Bill [Bradford] asking me to do a financial analysis on dentistry, how bad could it be—how much could it possibly cost – and sitting down and working away with him on that—and getting to the end of it … well, so it's actually completely unfeasible, there's no way that we can ever afford this, it costs more money than we can ever find. And Bill saying, oh that's good, we're going to do it anyway, I just wanted to know how bad it was going to be. Work was done. (John Stansfield)

Others stressed the importance of the link between AUWRC's radical political activism and its research and policy related activities. Tim Howard talked about "a rawness in the thinking and the action being intimately connected … Within the counterforces you were quite a flagship group … because you had the thoughtful base behind there." John Stansfield again: "If you look at all that organised resistance around the benefit stuff, something informed it; what informed it, where did it come from? It came from that organisation."

The Building our own Future (BOOF) project funded by the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand (Bradford, 1994) was noted by a number of participants as a crucial stage in the development of AUWRC into an increasingly think tank-like organisation.

> That was us reaching out to all the different sectors, rather than just looking at social welfare, but also trying to reach out to unions, to church groups, and Maori as well, and … trying to find all the people who were on a common wavelength, hence 'common ground'. (Karen Davis)

One participant surprised me with her perception that BOOF had played a part in the demise of the last major ecumenical organisation in Aotearoa. Kathleen Williams told me BOOF's comparative radicalism was a "key reason for the collapse of CCANZ" and suggested that the ripple effects were still being felt.

> There's been about three years' worth of effort gone in to trying to set up another ecumenical structure that's just fallen over, and that's one of the things that's still there, is to what extent is an ecumenical structure representing church points of view, or to what extent is it a vehicle that other people who are not church people might get involved in, and start to take it on? (Kathleen Williams)

A number of respondents talked about the significance of AUWRC's leading role in organising two large welfare conferences at Massey University in 1997 and 1998 (1997; 1998). Mike O'Brien had also played a critical part as someone willing to use his academic position to work effectively with external activist allies. Looking back from the vantage point of late 2012, he said:

> We were doing more than just resisting … if you think about the actions around the Beyond Dependency and the Beyond Poverty conference… yes, they were driven by the kind of dependency debates … at the time … but they also weren't just 'we don't like this', but also trying to reshape some of those debates. (Mike O'Brien)

> The media and the government did their utmost, they worked so hard to sideline the Rights Centre. . . . But with conferences with well-known academics held at Massey University, it just makes it so much harder to dismiss. It's not a coincidence that that was finally the moment when the National Government started saying oh, yes, perhaps we do have a bit of poverty in New Zealand. (Cybèle Locke)

Cybèle also told me she believed that AUWRC had actually established a think tank.

> I guess the most obvious would be the think tank that you guys started at the Peoples Centre. . . . It was a meeting we had, I felt incredibly intimidated with

> these high powered people in the room. Annette Sykes was there, Anne Else was there, someone else was there. It was a meeting in the Peoples Centre to talk about visions and ideas and alternatives. I thought about it as a think tank, in my mind, my memory of that was as the possibilities of a think tank. And I remember going to this one meeting and then I don't remember what happened to it after that. (Cybèle Locke)

I asked Karen Davis whether she thought that if we had kept AUWRC going instead of shutting it down that we would have, in due course, created a left wing think tank.

> The Peoples Centre at that time had taken over all the advocacy and service side of it which left us free to do the think tanky things . . . we were getting more involved in the political campaigns so we were still the activist group, so activism would have been a big part. But I think if we'd stayed we'd have got dragged down with all that stuff that went wrong, because we would have wanted to save it . . . so we were lucky to get out, really, and be able to do Kotare. (Karen Davis)

The "dragging down" that Karen referred to was the slow demise of the Auckland Peoples Centres once AUWRC had closed its doors in mid-1999, caused in part by the loss of the kaupapa-driven core group of activists operating from within the Rights Centre; by difficulties in maintaining large low cost medical and dental services in a constantly changing and always challenging funding environment; and by a gradual loss of management and governance capacity as time went by.

In comparing AUWRC with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that despite its origins as a simple unemployed and beneficiaries' advocacy and fight back group, from 1987 onwards it increasingly took on characteristics of a fully-fledged think tank. The main aspect in which it did not meet my definitional criteria was that its focus was clearly on welfare, employment and related economic issues, although even that began to change and expand, especially from the time of the BOOF project onwards. Looking back from the vantage point of 2013, I considered it likely that if AUWRC had been able to maintain and continue its activities at the kind of levels sustained until 1998, it may well have played a key role in helping to create a major left wing think tank by the early 2000s.

Some lessons from AUWRC's experience that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include: the importance of having a core group of capable people with a long term commitment to the organisation; that key competencies among such a core should include an understanding of how to sustain and develop cohesive

organisation and activities in a politically driven, resource-poor context; that there are substantial benefits in being able to work cross sectorally with groups such as church people and academics who traditionally may not have been viewed as allies; that to carry out research, writing, publications, policy development and associated functions an organisation needs to include at least some people who have the education and skills to do this work well; that linking think tank-like activities directly with radical activism can prove beneficial from both perspectives; and that if a group ultimately has no longer the means or the will to survive, it won't. Yet the legacy of AUWRC lived on in 2010–2013 through the work of Auckland Action Against Poverty, whose active membership included people who carried with them hard won knowledge and experience gained during years of involvement with AUWRC and related organisations – and in the life of Kotare Trust.

Kotare Trust: Research and Education for Social Change

One of the most active work streams to emerge from the March 1994 National Peoples' Assembly which marked the conclusion of BOOF was a commitment by a number of people to work together to develop education and training for community organisers. The official history reported that this was the area which had attracted the most interest of all the new initiatives arising from the BOOF project, adding that a group based at the Auckland Peoples Centre was "working towards the establishment of a Charitable Trust with the aim of setting up an Aotearoa equivalent of the Highlander School in Tennessee" (Bradford, 1994, p. 65). This marked the birth of the organisation which was to go on to become known colloquially as 'Kotare', whose website (http://www.kotare.org.nz/home.html) describes its core purpose as supporting "community action for a more just world through participatory education and research."

The BOOF Peoples Charter was the initial guiding kaupapa of the project (see Appendix E). At no point was Kotare affiliated with any political party or parties. Those most deeply involved at the start came from a variety of backgrounds including adult and community education, Catholic social justice networks and community based organising. Regular meetings were held from 1994 onwards, with coordination provided by AUWRC. The formation group was very influenced by the example of the Highlander School, set up in 1932 by Myles Horton and others in Tennessee to educate and train ordinary people in how to take leadership in organising on social justice

issues, often in very harsh conditions. Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King both trained at Highlander (Highlander Research and Education Centre, 2013; Lewis, 2001). The pedagogy of Paulo Freire (Freire, 1994) and the methodology of structural analysis first brought to Aotearoa by Fr Filip Fanchette in the early 1980s (Auckland Workers Educational Association, 2010) were also highly influential on Kotare's early development.

By 1996 Kotare had become a legal entity in the form of a charitable trust. The next step was to establish a physical base from which it could operate. This was achieved in late 1997 when three relocatable classrooms from the Manukau Technical Institute were purchased and moved on to land at Kingfisher Farm in Hoteo North, near Wellsford, then owned by a partnership of the Bradford family and the Sisters of St Joseph at Whanganui. It took until February 1999 before Kotare could afford to pay its first staff member, employed to organise and run its educational programme. The earliest official Kotare workshop took place at Raglan soon afterwards, with a two day programme aimed at strengthening the work of local tangata whenua and tauiwi sewage activists. By 2001 an American researcher on citizen action movements was noting that Kotare was part of an encouraging development of "growing popular education infrastructure" in Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Stoecker, 2001, p. 14).

Educational programmes over the years 1999–2013 included work with individuals and groups from many sectors and areas of interest, including environmental, youth, women/feminist, union, unemployed and beneficiary, nonviolent direct action, cultural work (creativity used for left activist purposes), Pākehā Tiriti education, disability activism and community economic development. Workshops were also run on various aspects of the pedagogy of adult participatory education, the use of structural analysis and on campaigning and other organisational skills. In a paper given at an Australian conference on education and social action in 2004, Kotare's first paid education worker Catherine Delahunty described the organisation's programmes as "divided into two main strands, the work to strengthen activists and community workers with a critical analysis to carry on their work, or the conscientisation of potential activists and social change workers" (Delahunty, 2004, p. 2). Throughout its operational life education was always the group's priority area of work. The research aspect of Kotare's activities never came close to matching its educational endeavours in scale or scope. A major 2010 project carried out with the assistance of a skilled community intern identified

many possible directions which Kotare's research work could take, but recommendations were not implemented due to the group's failure to secure any form of community based research funding. One major obstacle to acquiring such funding was Kotare's lack of institutional attachment to any academically acceptable ethics approval entity.

Financial sustainability was a constant struggle. The difficulties of maintaining funding streams through grants, donations and contract work in an era when most community funders had become increasingly conservative and risk averse meant that by June 2013 Kotare was obliged to make its two employees redundant. From that point on the organisation returned to the situation it faced during its initial years, once more completely reliant on volunteers to forward its work. At July 2013 Kotare's trustees were Tim Howard (chair), Quentin Jukes, Karen Davis, Sue Bradford, David Parker, Barry Larsen, Mandi Gregory, Rachel McIntosh, Ilai Amir, Hannie Treadwell, Garrick Martin, Catherine Delahunty and Sue Berman. Tim Howard, Karen Davis and David Parker were participants in this research. Another respondent, Cybèle Locke, had been a Kotare trustee for a time during the organisation's earlier years.

I found only moderate awareness of Kotare's existence and work among research participants overall. Of those who did comment, some were immediately positive. Jared Davidson told me "I know a lot about Kotare, I have a lot of respect for them." Simon Oosterman said he had not been to "enough of the training because I've been too busy … I think it's really important. We don't have anything else." For others it was a more distant recognition. Murray Horton asked "Is it an activist training centre? A trainer of trainers, is that right? . . . I've never done anything at Kotare. I have never been up there." Karlo Mila said that when she thought of Kotare she "kind of envisaged this tall, slightly elderly man wearing sandals that was really gentle. You know?"

> I've heard of them, but I've never done anything with them . . . my perception of them, which could be completely wrong, is that it's quite alternative, and connected in to the alternative lifestyle thing. But I don't know why I think that. That's my impression. (Laila Harré)

There were a variety of responses from participants who had been close enough to Kotare's work to evaluate aspects of its efficacy.

> I'm glad I engage with Kotare personally, and I've learned from Kotare. I've learned about how do adults learn, how do adults change their thinking, how do

> we engage in order to share our thinking and come up with new ideas. So I got a lot out of Kotare in that regard. (Paul Blair)

David Parker recalled the first Kotare programmes in which he participated, long before he became a trustee.

> I remember the first couple of workshops that I attended so vividly because it was so affirming to find a space where not entirely likeminded people, but people subscribing to a sort of world view, kaupapa, and way of behaving as well, could come together and talk, think, do work, and ultimately go away feeling enormously energised, and I still get that. (David Parker)

Other reflections were not quite so upbeat.

> With Kotare I feel like … from just that workshop I went to … and from a little bit I've heard about them otherwise … that they simplify historical lessons a bit much. And direct people towards quite single issue reformist politics. Like the way they summarised the civil rights movement is they were quite focused on a single issue, but it isn't, and the reason it was a powerful movement … and it actually went well beyond the civil rights movement. (Geoff Todd)

Dennis Maga explained why "despite how many invitations you give me, I'll never come."

> However, for me, if ever you invite me for example to discuss about anti-imperialism, I always look at the audience, about who are the people coming, because if I present my own analysis, if ever we have gathered from different backgrounds, it will be a war of analysis. I would prefer to work with certain groups that I think that I can actually work with. (Dennis Maga)

From Blackball on the West Coast, far from Kotare's north Auckland base, Paul Maunder talked about the difficulties of geography. "The problem is one of location and how do you spread yourself?" From inside the organisation, Tim Howard had regrets on this front as well.

> I would have liked to have kept a stronger South Island base for our action, because if we're about social change we do need to look at the periphery in a particular way, and I don't mean that derogatorily. (Tim Howard)

Ryan Bodman indicated frustration that he had offered to host a workshop helping ordinary people learn how to research "different aspects of their identity … Māori history, queer history, workers' history, all these subaltern histories" but had been told that "it didn't really complement the exact focus of Kotare."

> In our workshops with young people … outside knowledge was not brought in so much, or was seen with suspicion. It was unfortunate because sometimes

> when we did bring in outside people to do a little bit of that, they did tend to be people who maybe talked down or didn't really understand the philosophy." (Cybèle Locke)

Longstanding trustee Karen Davis outlined three of the reasons she felt were behind Kotare's maintenance of a deliberately low profile.

> We often don't want to publicise, in effect – now whether that's been an issue because of certain funders we've had . . . that may change as we lose those funders. . . . There's the whole paranoia that came down with the Urewera thing[5], so everyone not wanting to say what they were doing . . . and also it's the Green Party side of things too. Because you know we've always had people being Green Party MPs and so not wanting Kotare to be so visible, or to be connected with the Green Party. (Karen Davis)

Talking about Kotare's role in relation to front line activism, Robert Reid said "Kotare doesn't go and sit in the Reserve Bank building, but it's backing the work that was done."

> It plays a role in terms of education, primarily in supporting activists in being more effective in working through organisational matters, planning and so forth and it's extremely important for small and often somewhat tenuous grassroots groups that there is a place to go to look for support, insight and experience. (David Parker)

A number of participants spoke favourably about the people and internal culture and processes of Kotare. Rhiannon Thomson told me she felt "the connection and the longevity and the honesty and transparency and stuff amongst the people involved."

> I think one of the real strengths of Kotare was all of that development we did as a group of trustees. I think that for me it was the closest I've had to a real home, you know, because we went through all of those processes of unpacking different aspects in terms of our own ideological baggage if you will, and our spirituality, and different forms of pedagogy and right down to connections to tangata whenua, what that actually meant. (Cybèle Locke)

Several participants identified Kotare as a think tank, or think tank-like. Paul Blair said "Contrasting it to the Alternative Welfare Working Group – Kotare is an ongoing think tank, if you like." Simon Oosterman told me "I sort of see Kotare being a part of that [a left wing think tank] in a way."

> One of the things about Kotare was the whole research and education combination that in itself was of a think tank nature … I'm sitting here at the

[5] Series of armed police raids and associated arrests of people alleged to have taken part in paramilitary training in the Urewera ranges in the Bay of Plenty (2007).

> table and Gordon said at Kotare 'around this table will be told stories that will change the world.' So in a sense that's a bit like the think tank. (Tim Howard)

Looking to the possibility of developing a major left wing think tank in future, Dennis Maga asked "If ever you can convert Kotare to a think tank, why not?" However, Tim Howard took a different approach, telling me "I can actually see it, Kotare and a think tank working as close allies … I think there's immense synergy we could bounce off each other." Karen Davis canvassed several options:

> You could have them as the same organisation, but it depends on how you see Kotare's education role and how neutral you think Kotare should be … There are advantages in structurally having separate organisations so you can have separate focus, because sometimes you don't always want to be the same thing, and also it's good to have a multiplicity of organisations saying the same thing, a proliferation of organisations is not a bad thing. (Karen Davis)

In comparing Kotare with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that while it was engaged with a "broad range of issues" geographically and across sectors, what it did not do was undertake policy formation, media work, lobbying or advocacy in its own right. In addition, when compared with its education work, Kotare's research functions were vestigial. *Some lessons that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include:* the benefit of maintaining clear, common kaupapa and good processes and relationships between those people who are at the heart of an organisation; the importance of understanding the tensions and dealing with the consequences of sustaining an overtly left organisation in a hostile external environment; the need for awareness of the problems which can arise from too close an association with any one political party; the importance of providing avenues through which external stakeholders can have a voice in critiquing and influencing the organisation's direction; that it is difficult to develop a substantial research base as an autonomous group without any integrated connection to the academy or academically-recognised institutions; and that having a physical place from which to operate is advantageous in many ways, but can be limiting if that base itself contributes to a reduction in geographical reach.

A mosaic of other initiatives 1990–2013

During the course of the interviews I asked participants if they had been part of or had awareness of any nascent think tank-like groups apart from those already mentioned, or if they had plans for similar initiatives in the future. Over the three year research period

I also became aware of several new projects apart from those mentioned by respondents.

Jobs Research Trust (JRT)

The Jobs Research Trust was set up by Taranaki community economic development practitioner and former Māori land rights activist Vivian Hutchinson in 1994, with fellow trustees Jo Howard, Roger Smith and Dave Owens. In 2003 the JRT noted that its main projects at that time were the publication of *The Jobs Letter*, which provided soundly researched information about employment issues every two to three weeks; involvement with the Employment Catalyst, a philanthropic trust supported by the Tindall Foundation; and a partnership with the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs, a national project in which Vivian Hutchinson played a crucial role (The Jobs Research Trust, 2003).

Vivian Hutchinson described the genesis of the JRT and *The Jobs Letter*.

> 1990 – right? . . . you'll remember those huge changes in work schemes and all that sort of stuff . . . as schemes change, people move on and I felt like I was losing a generation of colleagues who were doing quite useful things, just because the money was running out and it was just awful . . . we just felt people were dumbing down as to what was possible in our field. And we were losing connections with each other, so we just started putting out a letter. (Vivian Hutchinson)

The Jobs Letter ceased publication in 2005, but was still remembered with appreciation by a number of those I interviewed. Robert Root recalled that at the time he thought "Right, here's a place I can go and understand what's going on. Just have some depth about what's going on." Laila Harré thought it was still being published. "That was great. I thought that was a really useful . . . is that not being done any more? . . . We used it a lot when I was in Parliament."

In my interview with Vivian Hutchinson, he also talked about other projects in which he had been involved since the days of *The Jobs Letter*, including the Social Entrepreneur Fellowship, set up in 2007 as a three year peer learning opportunity for 15 carefully selected leading social enterprise practitioners. A book about the project was recently produced "as an activity of The Jobs Research Trust", proving that the JRT was still alive and publishing as recently as 2011 (Hutchinson, 2011, p. 247).

Action, Research and Education Network Aotearoa (ARENA)

A number of participants mentioned the work of ARENA, established in Christchurch in November 2000 as a network which aimed to help build active resistance to globalisation in Aotearoa and internationally, while undertaking research and education around people-centred, environmentally sustainable alternatives to globalisation. The group appeared to have remained active in a substantial way for about three years from 2000–2003, although it was difficult to locate any detailed information about its history. Participants who referred to ARENA viewed it as a positive example of a think tank-like group that had been active and visible in its time. Robert Reid told me that he felt ARENA had been the only left wing think tank attempt "of any significance" of which he was aware, and that it had come out of "the struggle against the MAI [Mulilateral Agreement on Investment] and Building Our Own Futures." When I asked Bill Rosenberg if he had been part of any efforts to set up anything like a left wing think tank as I had defined it, he replied "I suppose the closest was ARENA" and went on to say:

> That was going to be a kind of think tank around those trade issues and never really got off the ground … It did a few things but it didn't get the money it wanted, and we didn't get a group who made it their thing together around it … I think it always had a problem that it wasn't quite clear what its kaupapa was, whether it was a researchy thing or an activist thing. (Bill Rosenberg)

> Like lots of things, when the funding runs out, and we all say we'll do it voluntarily and then get even more busy with other parts of our life, the other thing just runs out of steam, basically. (Robert Reid)

Perhaps one clue about what became of ARENA came from Joce Jesson, who told me "ARENA was really important … it's now morphed into the TPPA", referring to the coalition established to oppose the New Zealand Government's bid to sign up to the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (http://www.itsourfuture.org.nz/news/).

Māori and Pasifika initiatives

Māori and Pasifika participants identified a number of think tank-like initiatives with which they had been involved within the 1990–2012 timeframe. Annette Sykes spoke of "a group of us that got set up … there was me, Angeline, Leonie … it was like 'indigenous women of Aotearoa in favour of environmental justice'.".

> Maria Bargh, we were all in the group, it was all Māori women. We went out internationally because we were sick and tired of Tuku Morgan, Paul Morgan, Tipene O'Regan, so we went out as the counter pedagogy of what the Māori men were doing to show that no, there's another reality. (Annette Sykes)

When I asked Maria Bargh whether she had ever been part of anything like a left wing thing tank in either te ao Māori or te ao Pākehā, she told me she had.

> Our group Aotearoa Educators thought about being like that for a while back in about 99 or something like that, aiming to educate about mostly anti free trade, and make the connections between the international stuff and local Māori things. (Maria Bargh)

Maria went on to say that the loose grouping around this kaupapa had continued to meet and work since then, albeit with difficulty.

> It's hard to get together. Probably the foreshore and seabed hikoi stuff was the last time we were all really together in Wellington as our Takutai Moana Collective, that's what we called ourselves in Wellington. I think that was the main difficulty was that people who were doing things with government, they couldn't … we could think together, but nobody could put press releases out, except me because it doesn't really matter. No one could act, so that constrains it. (Maria Bargh)

Mark Gosche talked about his involvement in developing a new group called Raise Pasifika, "a cross-sector Pacific education lobby, so it's a voice for Pacific, and they've just had their second fono last month."

> You can help create organisations that have got credibility in a wide sense, so government agencies will now engage with Raise Pasifika; which is independent from everybody, it stands alone as an incorporated society and is run by hard working volunteers. (Mark Gosche)

Veronica Tawhai was another participant whose 'think tank-like' rōpū had a focus on education.

> I'm part of a group called Te Ata Kura … our Pākehā name changes because we don't really care about the Pākehā name … but really at its base we're a society for conscientisation. Whenever an issue comes up that we think is particularly pressing … what we do is that we will get together, we'll write a submission, we put out a pānui to everyone to come along and whoever turns up is Te Ata Kura on the day. We don't have a membership list. (Veronica Tawhai)

Helen Potter may have summed up the situation for a number of left wing tangata whenua academics and activists when she said "In terms of Māori, we've always been having hui about something, so it feels like we're constantly in think tank mode."

Publications and websites

There were a small number of publications and websites identified by participants as having played or continuing to play a role of some significance in aspects of left think tank-type work, including Chris Trotter's former magazine *Political Review* (1992–2005), which by the time of its demise had been merged with Bruce Jesson's earlier publication *The Republican*; the *wellsharp* blog produced by David Parker and Barry Larsen (http://wellsharp.wordpress.com/), which dealt mainly with "ecological politics, green politics, political economy, and social change" (2007–2010); and the *Scoop* online news initiative (http://www.scoop.co.nz/) which, as editor Gordon Campbell said, "publishes a lot of stuff from everybody, its strength is that it is right across the board" as well as including *Werewolf,* "an alternative source of New Zealand-generated, in depth journalism."

Union and Labour Party efforts to set up a left think tank

Many participants referred to attempts in the 1990s to set up a Labour Party and trade union oriented think tank. Susan St John told me she thought one early effort was "a public policy centre or institute … it was Maryan Street and some of the union people, Peter Harris I think, and it just didn't go anywhere." The closest I could get to identifying an actual organisation was in my interview with CTU Secretary Peter Conway, who told me that in 1996 he was one of a group of people who established the Foundation for Policy Initiatives.

> It was essentially a reaction to the Business Roundtable. So there was a feeling that we needed to have a centre left think tank. We linked up with the IPPR in the UK, and Demos. (Peter Conway)

However, the group did not manage a lot of activity, hosting just one public event featuring Labour MP Steve Maharey in 1999.

> We never got over the line. Money was just the stumbling block. There were all sorts of progressive people out there but when it came to saying 'we'll put up money' … The second stumbling block was Labour got elected … it kind of frittered out. (Peter Conway)

Workers Institute of Scientific Socialist Education (WISSE)

WISSE was established in the latter part of the 1980s by the late Bill Andersen, at the time a prominent trade unionist and leader of the formerly Soviet Russian-aligned Socialist Unity Party (SUP), and then of the Socialist Party of Aotearoa, which had emerged from a split within the SUP. Before I started this research I had believed that WISSE had ceased to function many years earlier. It was only as a result of information received from participants that I discovered that it was still a functional entity. In August 2013 its website (http://www.wisse.org.nz/) described an incorporated society with members in Auckland, Waikato, Wellington and Christchurch, set up to "teach the theory and principles of scientific socialism to both the working class and members of the union movement" through classes, seminars, publications and online resources.

New initiatives

Through both the interview process and as part of my everyday political and academic life, I became aware of the existence of a small number of new and proposed left think tank or think tank-like initiatives between July 2010 and July 2013. In summary these were: the work lead by Max Rashbrooke researching income inequality in New Zealand, culminating in the publication of *Inequality: A New Zealand Crisis* (Rashbrooke, 2013); a project championed by Jan Rivers of Wellington to set up a national organisation aimed at strengthening, promoting and defending the public sector and public services; Heather Came's initiative in starting to bring together people who shared her interest in establishing a national activist scholarship network and journal in Aotearoa; a project lead by artist and researcher Melissa Laing to establish a Dissenting Histories project in Auckland; and a proposal from some young Green and Labour Party aligned activists to set up a left wing think tank aimed at building a renewed socialist left, which as far as I was aware had gone no further than initial discussions and proposal writing by July 2013. Political Organisation Aotearoa (http://poa.org.nz/) and the Hobgoblin Network (http://www.hobgoblin.org.nz/) were two new projects which arose during the research period. Both carried out some think tank-like functions, particularly in promoting radical left theoretical debate. The Hobgoblin Network was itself a project of the much older WISSE, mentioned above.

In comparing this mosaic of think tank-like initiatives with my working definition of 'think tank', I considered that none met all the criteria. They were all relatively limited

in either scale of operation or in substance, although without question some made a large contribution to the wider work of all those operating in their field during their time of operation. The very new projects had yet to come to fruition in any major way, and with the exception of the young activists' proposal to establish a full left wing think tank, none would have met the every aspect of my definition, including the cross-sectoral factor.

Some lessons that may usefully assist in the development of a major left wing think tank include: the critical role played by key individuals in some organisations, such as the part played by Vivian Hutchinson in the Jobs Research Trust and associated projects and organisations; the importance of having clarity of kaupapa, the absence of which was offered as one of the reasons for the eventual demise of ARENA; the whakaaro offered by Helen Potter indicating that left Māori academics and activists may feel that they are actually operating in think tank-like mode much of the time because of frequent participation in relevant hui; and that, as in the case of the Foundation for Policy Initiatives, the election of a Labour Government can have a detrimental impact on think tank-like developments initiated by the left. It is also interesting to consider the range of projects and groups that emerged as realities – or as yet-unfulfilled dreams – during the research period, demonstrating a vibrancy of aspiration that may bode well for future attempts to establish a more substantial entity or entities.

Building on the past, looking to the future

This examination of a variety of 'nascent left wing think tanks' has revealed just how much has already been learned by different parts of the New Zealand left about building organisations of this nature. Each of these stories is to a lesser or greater extent a practical demonstration of how think tank-like work might be successfully operationalised, while also containing a number of warning signals about where even the most well considered project might go astray.

From across the seven groups, some of the key lessons to take into consideration include the crucial role played by those individuals who champion projects from genesis to at least medium term sustainability; the importance of aligning funding sources with kaupapa, even when this comes at considerable cost; the realisation that no matter how large or small the organisation, the quality of its output matters hugely if is to build and maintain respect; and that none of this is possible without a skilled core

of people capable of carrying forward the governance and operational aspects of organisations, often with little or no remuneration.

Any future think tank implementation initiatives will be able to take into account not only the findings outlined here, should they so choose, but may also benefit from clues to where further research into a specific group might be of particular relevance. During the course of this research I became aware of a number of new initiatives as well. This flowering of think tank-like activity added weight to what I had found earlier, providing practical evidence of the longing for greater unity and new organisational forms I had uncovered when speaking with people about the state of the left overall. The following chapter will examine whether this longing transmuted itself into support for a major left wing think tank—or not.

6. A major left wing think tank for Aotearoa?

Introduction

The overarching question with which I began this research was "A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa – an impossible dream or a call to action?" In Chapter 4, I examined what my research revealed about the state of the New Zealand left 2010–2013, and its potential readiness or otherwise as a space in which a major left wing think tank or tanks might be successfully developed. Chapter 5 identified a number of lessons that may be usefully learned from the history and experiences of a selection of what I have termed nascent left wing think tanks in Aotearoa, for the benefit of any implementation project(s) which may evolve in future. In this chapter, I examine how participants viewed my working definition of think tank (see page 24), and how they felt about the term itself; assess whether they believed that the lacuna I identified early on in my research actually existed; and report on the level and nature of support (or otherwise) for the development of left wing think tank(s) in Aotearoa. I then go on to explore what barriers people identified as having prevented the establishment of such an organisation. The final section summarises participants' views on when and how a think tank might be set up, what its activities might involve, and what its practices, key relationships and kaupapa might look like.

Defining 'think tank'

As with the term 'left', it was critical that I had a working definition of 'think tank' that I could use to gauge the responses of research participants. Besides presenting them with the working definition provided in Chapter 2, I also advised respondents of my early scoping decision constraining the range of think tanks or think tank-like entities to be included in this study. These limitations meant I was setting aside organisations funded by government or by religious networks or institutions, those based completely inside universities, and transnational think tanks. Most respondents were positive about the proffered definition, especially when I explained clearly that the entity I was talking about was both 'left' and a 'think tank', and that the two definitions should be considered in tandem. As Paul Blair pointed out, without the modifier of 'left' "there's nothing that identifies it as a left think tank. I mean, this could be a definition even for the BRT." Bryan Gould told me "That's a good broad definition of a think tank and that's what I would expect a think tank to do." Daphne Lawless said it "certainly looks

like a left wing equivalent of the kind of organisations they've had on the right of politics for ages, which have had a major effect on public policy."

> I would agree with what's written here, and it seems like a good flip of a right wing think tank. I like the community based not for profit, that's really core at the front there. I think it's a good definition. (Jared Davidson)

Several participants expressed favourable views of the definition through other lenses. Sandra Grey placed it in a broader context. "It accords with what I see as the think tanks I know internationally that work on the left, but also the ones that work on the right." Kathleen Williams commended my original decision to keep church based think tanks out of scope. As already discussed in relation to the impact of the 1990s BOOF project on Christian ecumenism in Aotearoa, Kathleen said "I think your decision not to make churches part of the institution of this is a very sound one, because there are still those fallouts."

The most frequent area of concern was around the words 'community based not for profit.' Cathy Casey told me "That sounds like a very good definition of think tank. The bit I would rewrite would be calling something a community based not for profit organisation." She went on to say:

> The word 'independent' has got to be in there . . . because the problem with all think tanks is that they get linked to government funding or funding from whoever and it's really important that there's . . . no expectation that you have to be beholden to anybody that funds you. (Cathy Casey)

> The trouble you've got there in the definition 'community based not for profit'. I've run one of these things, and the issue is funding. That's in the end how they got me at the Institute of Economic Research, simply by undermining my funding. . . . Remember, the community has forward-looking desires but it actually tends to be very backward looking. (Brian Easton)

Vivian Hutchinson was critical specifically of the phrase 'not for profit' and wanted it removed.

> I think just call it a community organisation . . . you can tell a colonised entity or group in society because they usually define themselves by what they're not, rather than what they are. And so when we say 'not for profit' that's actually saying we're not the real game, which is business. (Vivian Hutchinson)

Several participants were concerned that the definition did not fit well with the transformational/radical part of the left spectrum.

> It sounds very much reformist, from this definition … for me just reading it in this context makes me think that we're there to throw up some different ideas for the current government, if you know what I mean. (Cybèle Locke)

> I don't necessarily disagree with that definition of a think tank but I would question the ability of a leftist organisation to be independent and to be potentially radical if it were part of the not for profit sector, if it were in any way tied to funding, or anything like that. (Geoff Todd)

Participant response to my working definition of 'think tank' was favourable overall. Most comments around 'not for profit community based' reflected deeper anxieties about the ability of any such entity to acquire and sustain sufficient funding, the lack of autonomy dependence on particular funders might bring, and about the way in which the conservatism of the community sector had the potential to derogate from the political kaupapa of any such entity. Vivian Hutchinson's critique was an interesting indictment of the tendency of community groups to define themselves in terms of what they are not. The last two comments reflected fears that the focus of any potential think tank guided by such a description might merely be to influence the policies of the government of the day, rather than reflecting a commitment to any broader kaupapa. Further examination of participants' responses will build on the themes emerging here, but first, it is worth taking a moment to look at what those interviewed felt about the term *think tank* itself, rather than my definition of it.

Left views of the term *think tank*

I was keen to use this research as an opportunity to ascertain how participants viewed *think tank*. I suspected that I might find a certain lack of enthusiasm, based on my own experiences in left activist meetings and conversations over the years. I was curious to discover whether negative prejudice around the words themselves might be one reason for the lack of any successful major think tank initiative(s) in the period from 1990 onwards, or might hinder the future implementation of any such project. Bryce Edwards cast immediate doubt on the term's utility. "It's not a common usage in New Zealand, think tank—in some ways it might not be worth using that word."

> The word think tank is a very problematic expression in New Zealand … you have lobbyists who call themselves think tanks; they don't do very much thinking. So it's not a phrase I use a lot. (Brian Easton)

Several participants noted its warlike origins. Sara Jacob told me "it's very military", while Paul Maunder remarked "Anything that's been developed first by the military

always I think mmmm, that's interesting." He then went on to say "the neoliberals have had them and that tends to be associated with them rather than us." Paul was not the only respondent to observe that the term had right wing connotations; in fact, it was the prevailing view.

> It makes me think of right wing think tanks, that's the association I have with the term think tank, it's not a left wing thing, but is a right wing thing in my mind. (Maria Bargh)

> Well we were opposing those bastard business think tanks, the BRT, right back in 1990 or something, so we were aware of think tanks, but we mainly saw them as the enemy … You sort of associate think tank and horrible right wing bastards in the same breath, so they do get a bit mixed in that way. (Karen Davis)

Another common perception was that *think tank* implied a mix of aloof isolation and elitism. Gordon Campbell told me "It's handy shorthand, but … it sounds old and like a policy wonk type of nerdy beltway kind of word." Jane Stevens said "It kind of creates a picture of academics sitting around with a glass of wine having a nice little chat, or beer or whatever." Vivian Hutchinson felt much the same, telling me "academic traditions often have this sense of think tank . . . individuals going off and sitting in big armchairs and having conversations with each other, all that sort of thing."

> We're more comfortable with activity and that, so it's seen as a bit of a wanking type thing for people that like just to debate stuff . . . there's an assumption that the thinkers and the doers are separate people rather than people that want to think about what they might do. (Peter Conway)

Participants offered alternative wording in English (institute, policy institute, foundation, academy); te reo (wānanga, rōpū kaupapa); and Samoan (fono). However, Murray Horton reflected something of my own sentiments by the end of the interview process when he said, referring to the descriptor for any prospective future initiative "It could be called something quite different, but off the top of my head, I can't think what it would be." Several respondents suggested that whatever alternative words might be used for the idea of *think tank*, in the end semantic realities meant it would be used for any such initiative anyway. Laila Harré observed "You could come up with another word, but I think you'd always find yourself in the vernacular saying it's a think tank, wouldn't you."

> It's a creation of the media that's been around for a long, long time. And if you set something up like this it wouldn't be very long, like a day or two, before the media started calling it a think tank anyway. (Paul Blair)

Most participants viewed the term *think tank* in an unfavourable light. It was seen as a questionable concept in the New Zealand context, carrying unfortunately militaristic connotations; deeply associated with the political right whose think tanks had been highly visible since the Business Roundtable emerged in the 1980s; and as expressing an implication of elitist isolation from the everyday world. At the same time, several respondents also noted that in pragmatic terms, any entity that carried out the functions of a think tank as commonly understood, and as specified in my working definition, would end up being known as a think tank, no matter what else it was called. Participants' suggestions for alternative names were fairly sparse, and in line with designations commonly used elsewhere by both left and right, although I sensed an excitement from several Māori participants about exploring possible names in te reo should any implementation project eventuate. As Maria Bargh said "I'm sure there's a better term in Māori … something that in its name inspires people, inspires hope, because 'think tank' doesn't really get there."

Does the left in Aotearoa support the establishment of a major left wing think tank or tanks?

A gap identified

I was keen to find out whether participants discerned the same absence I had, the gap which motivated this research. Or had my initial assumption been wrong, and I was about to discover that others on the academic and activist left felt that in reality one or more major left wing think tanks already existed? I was quickly disabused of any notion that I was alone in recognising an absence. Bryan Gould told me "I've had some experience with that kind of thing, but I've yet to see, in New Zealand at any rate, anything that would fit that bill." Robert Reid voiced similar sentiments. "I've always thought that something along these lines was missing, and certainly it's missing in this country." Cathy Casey said "I just know there is nothing to counter the Maxim Institute."

Pasifika and Māori voices were unambiguous on the subject. Karlo Mila told me she thought it was "so stink that we don't have anything like this at all. It's just not fair, because you could see how they were able to mobilise and play a game." Will 'Ilolahia

said "We've had quite a few little micro type attempts. Issue focused . . . but we've never had a community based NGO trying to take it on overall."

> I have wondered to myself where the Maxim Institutes were . . . there does seem to be a bit of a lack of a coherent institution or entity that presents information in a way that's accessible across the political spectrum, but that has that kind of voice there. (Mamari Stephens)

> I'm not trying to say we need to be like the right, but I mean it is concerning. They have the Maxim Institute, they have the BRT, things like that, and on the left, what have we got? (Veronica Tawhai)

As a trade unionist who had worked with several large left wing think tanks in the Philippines before emigrating to New Zealand, Dennis Maga offered a unique perspective.

> For example, when I listened to ASB economists, how come there is only one opinion? . . . especially in 2008 and 2009, during the financial crisis. I was actually looking for alternative analysis because most of it is coming from government agencies or coming from banks. . . . Where is the alternative . . . where is the think tank organisation? This is what I'm looking for ever since I stopped in this country. (Dennis Maga)

Matt McCarten summed up the absence – and the need – in a way that reflected the opinions of many.

> We just keep losing and when you think about what this government's doing in things like the reform of social welfare and what previous governments have done on the economic thing, the reason they're able to get away with it, the intellectual armoury to fight with wasn't there. (Matt McCarten)

A need supported

Every person I interviewed supported the strengthening of the "intellectual armoury" of the left through the development of some form of think tank or think tank-like organisation(s). This ranged from a careful scepticism through to passionate enthusiasm, and almost everything in between. Starting at the more moderate end of the continuum, Gordon Campbell explained why his support might well be tempered by the requisites of his role as an independent journalist and commentator.

> I'm supportive of the notion … It's like apple pie, of course it's a good idea. But in practice I can also envisage that part of my job may well be to end up carping at it from the sidelines, if it gets captured by particular policies and parties. (Gordon Campbell)

Some were hesitant because of particular structural and operational concerns. Paul Maunder said "I have a few issues with it …. it would probably be in Auckland . . . and that's a long way away." Mamari Stephens told me she "would be interested . . . I'd like to see Māori participating in that process as well and not just off to the side."

> I would subscribe to a think tank, but only if I was satisfied that its funding base or its funding strategy made sense in what is, for lack of a better term, the real world. Because good intentions are not enough . . . I'm sure you'll forgive me if I remain sceptical. (Chris Trotter)

Several respondents placed political conditions on any support they might offer an aspiring think tank. Cybèle Locke told me she would "like to be part of a think tank that didn't just work on public policy formation, but created alternatives to capitalism."

> I think I would pay attention to it. I wouldn't oppose it … I could see myself participating in it, but I'd tend to take a wait and see approach with something like this … If it were just purely advocating reform and nothing else then I'd see it as somewhat of an ally, but I probably wouldn't want to be that involved in it. (Geoff Todd)

Academics were encouraging. Sandra Grey saw "a left wing think tank or a longer term strategising for the left as being immensely necessary in New Zealand." Brian Roper thought "the idea of establishing this kind of left wing think tank is a bloody good one." Veronica Tawhai told me "this is just the most amazing idea, we definitely need it" while Karlo Mila said "I was just thinking, wouldn't it be so cool if heads were coming around the table for good rather than evil."

From those whose identification was primarily activist, the support was just as strong. Paul Blair reckoned "New Zealand could do with one, definitely. The deep south of the planet needs a left wing think tank, sure, why not?" Jared Davidson told me "I'd definitely support it from the outside . . . I just think that it's really good that you're doing it." Kevin Hague said "It's a good idea. I would definitely support the attempt to build one. I don't think it will be an easy idea to pull off." Gary Cranston reflected "I've always been thinking about it since I came back to New Zealand . . . just make sure you get in touch with me when you start up your think tank."

By the time I interviewed him, Murray Horton had already gone back to his organisation to garner a more collective opinion on the matter.

> I've asked the CAFCA committee, because . . . Sue's coming to talk to me . . . do you guys have any views you want to express on this? And they all basically said yes, we support this idea of a left think tank. (Murray Horton)

Some were passionate about the notion and about the role they might personally play in any implementation plans. Cathy Casey said "If you want to form one, I'd love to come and be part of it. Right? I'd be first in line." Jane Stevens put her position even more bluntly "I'd be pissed off if I missed out on that!" Daphne Lawless said "What we need on the left in this country is what I call in my head an alternative academy … I would love somewhere to be able to contribute."

> When Bill [Bradford] actually mentioned this to me, I was very excited, finally someone is thinking about a think tank organisation . . . it is a lot of work, but very interesting. I would actually like to work with a think tank organisation, yeah. (Dennis Maga)

> The thought of a left think tank is such a wonderful idea . . . I hope it comes to pass … I would certainly support it in whatever capacity I could, whether it was contributing a little cash, or participating in whatever ways. (David Parker)

When I asked Matt McCarten if the idea of a major left wing think tank was something he had thought about in the past, his response was quick and to the point. "Not more than once or twice a day, for some years. I have never not thought about it." Despite the variations in participant response, I was left in no doubt that one of the key questions underpinning my research had been unequivocally answered. This sample of the New Zealand left not only recognised the same gap which drove me to propose this thesis in the first place; they also universally supported, in varying ways and with varying degrees of enthusiasm, the development of a major left wing think tank or tanks. The next step was to examine why, if such widespread backing existed, it had not already happened.

The "deep south of the planet" has no left wing think tank: Why not?

When I first began raising the possibility of setting up a major left wing think tank with friends and colleagues in the early 1990s, the most frequent reaction can be summarised as "It's a good idea, but of course it can't be done, we'll never get the money. That's why it hasn't happened, and it's not likely to happen either." I therefore began this research curious to discover whether this would still be the predominant approach, or whether anything had changed in the intervening two decades. As Chris Trotter's above comment indicates, financial constraints did indeed remain high on the

list of reasons given for the absence of any such entity. However, as the interview process proceeded, it quickly became apparent that funding was far from the only – or the main – perceived barrier to the development of a major left wing think tank in New Zealand.

External situation

Many of those I interviewed situated the absence of a left wing think tank within the broader context of New Zealand's recent political history. The success of the neoliberal agenda was identified as a major cause of the left's failure to build such an institution. Gordon Campbell told me "The mountain it has to climb is that one. There doesn't seem that any amount of evidence will shake that belief, the commitment to that belief, in the neoliberal prescription."

> I think the left in New Zealand hasn't been very organised for a couple of decades. . . . There's been a lot of damage done to the left, especially since the fourth Labour Government but also the attacks in the early 90s. So there hasn't been the level of organisation to get to that point. (Geoff Todd)

> In terms of a political left think tank . . . you're always in such crisis mode or putting out fires because the rollout of neoliberalism is so persistent and demanding and underhand and nuanced and you have to be constantly on the alert just to maintain what's there. (Helen Potter)

Annette Sykes offered a succinct contextual history from the perspective of those she identified as left intellectuals working within te ao Māori.

> The whole move towards capitalist thinking or the iwi corporatism is definitely being triggered by that 1990 period. Neoliberalism comes in, there was a capture of us as intellectuals, too. And some of us as intellectuals moved to an invisible space in the Pākehā world. We went into kaupapa Māori development, spent a lot of time developing our own schools, kura, and our universities, so for 10 years . . . that's where we spent a lot of time. While we were doing that, of course, these guys were getting all the energy and all the generation of a following because they had the money to dangle. (Annette Sykes)

Others talked about the way in which the quest for survival in a colonised community and voluntary sector played a role in the failure of any left think tank to emerge. Sandra Grey said "Probably the direction we're all heading is the same . . . worried about the label that comes with being 'left' and the government contracts . . . that depoliticisation of the world."

> Groups are tightly and narrowly focused often on their own survival at the moment, and thinking more broadly just hasn't happened . . . by 2012, that juggernaut has really just rolled on and got itself established so strongly, that it's hard sometimes to see where the possibilities are for change and where a think tank might contribute to some of that. (Mike O'Brien)

Internal: Tradition of left disunity

Blame was not only laid at the door of government agendas and external political circumstances. Respondents often suggested the likelihood that the factionalism and culture of mutual suspicion seen as endemic in left politics may have played a major role in hindering the development of a think tank. Bryce Edwards told me "That's one of the first things when I think of someone setting up a left wing think tank, oh dear, the fights that would happen, the fallouts that would occur." In like vein, Bill Rosenberg said "I guess there are always problems on the left of tending to splinter, so it's to get a big enough core to actually keep it going." Helen Potter observed "You can become very precious about, I suppose, your principles and somebody else is not as principled. And not as left or not as committed to justice."

> The left has never been able to get behind one message. I think there's a pathology on the left that's simply … a psychological need to project their anger onto … those nearest to them … because it's so unsatisfying to project it on to the real enemy. So the more convenient, more accessible—the nearest at hand target usually gets it. (Gordon Campbell)

> There are many fragments and a huge amount of good will and action on a regular basis but a sense of the broad left doesn't seem to quite exist, and I just wonder if some individuals desire or demand for a particular vision of socialism or left politics is a potential danger for division. (David Parker)

Dennis Maga detailed by example the hurdle he saw confronting the development of any potential left wing think tank.

> If ever you do it at Trades Hall, then you will be inviting anarchists, socialists and Christians and then they'll be debating about their ideologies … It's something that will be the first challenge of a think tank organisation, how would you differently shape yourself to this group? (Dennis Maga)

There was recognition, too, of an allied problem, the sense of an innate lack of trust in any specialised or smaller group seeking to represent the left more broadly. Kevin Hague put it this way. "Some in our movement are probably allergic to the idea of a small group working on behalf of the larger group. There is an issue there."

> I almost feel that those on the left are less inclined to put the work into this sort of stuff than the people on the right … a certain reluctance maybe within the community on the left of active people … to value and support people doing

> that work. … it's a very specialised thing, and it does in ways sort of concentrate a bit of power within the people who do it. (Gary Cranston)

Critical mass

A third major theme to emerge was around critical mass, a perception that New Zealand's small population was in itself a factor inhibiting the establishment of any major left wing think tank. As Robert Reid put it "Because of being in such a small country, almost none of us are able to specialise." Karen Davis said it could be "a little bit about the critical mass you need, the size of the place that you need for such a thing? It's always seemed like a luxury."

> It's a matter of scale … if you think of America as being roughly 70 to 80 times larger than New Zealand, what that means in practice is that instead of one person having a good idea, about 80 people have a good idea. So if one person isn't able to do it, there are 70 others who will. Whereas in New Zealand if you don't do it, then it probably won't get done. (Chris Trotter)

> I look rather enviously at a country that has enough of a population to create a critical mass for these types of operations and think New Zealand out of 4.3 million people, could you gather together enough to fund and support such an enterprise? (David Parker)

Expertise and organisation

Limitations associated with size and scale were linked with inadequacies in organisational expertise and capacity. Simon Oosterman observed "There's generally a problem in that because we've got small numbers of people, often ideological views dominate over practical organisational skills and experience." He went on to say "Without a permanent structure to maintain things beyond individuals' relationships, I don't think that's ever going to be enough to sustain stuff."

> I would say when I look around the left, that people are reliant on the things that worked 20, 30, 40 years ago, with the only add on being 'and we'll Facebook it.' Which is kind of ludicrous in some ways. (Sandra Grey)

Some placed a perceived lack of organisational capability on the New Zealand left within a broader national and international context.

> People like yourself and people like Annette Sykes, I suppose, and lots of others at the universities and Mike O'Brien and Susan St John and the Child Poverty – it is happening but it's not in a big picture way like you've presented it here. It's not being done in an organised way, like the right wing are organised. (Paul Blair)

> We have to have a certain political-social context for these things to work, and we don't have that at the moment here … we are issues based … we don't have enough of a coherent coalitionist kind of grass roots movement. (Sara Jacob)

Priorities elsewhere

Associated with the question of organisational capacity were observations that there was no left wing think tank because no one person or group had pursued this goal with sufficient commitment, time or passion. As Laila Harré explained "I don't think that we've actually ever tried to do it, so that's the first reason you fail, is because you don't even try." Peter Conway said "I just don't think any of us treated it as a high priority compared with the other things we were involved in. Didn't mean it was a low one."

> It's kind of like we've all got our huge lists of things to do and really only the things at the very top of those lists ever actually get done … The problem is everybody's commitments to their other political involvements, organisations, parties, movements and things. I don't know how we get beyond that barrier. (Brian Roper)

Mike O'Brien alluded to a further factor which may have inhibited some potential think tank champions from taking leadership in the implementation of such a project.

> Nobody emerged or was pushed forward … to take the thing by the scruff of the neck and make it happen. It was always—at least for myself, and probably for a number of others I talked to—a reluctance to push yourself forward, in the sense of not wanting to be seen to be paddling your own waka, all that stuff. (Mike O'Brien)

Participants who had been involved in various nascent left wing think tanks demonstrated an awareness of the huge commitment required from individuals involved in the work of building and sustaining long term organisations of this nature. Susan St John from the Child Poverty Action Group said "Where's the energy coming from, where's the passion? Because if it isn't driven by passion it's not going to work." Joce Jesson talked from her experience of working with the Bruce Jesson Foundation.

> It's the emotional housekeeping that you have to do to keep it going all the time that actually undermines things in a way . . . There's only so many hours in the day, so you have to sort of decide what you want to do, and what you want to support. (Joce Jesson)

> We've been engaged in setting up Kotare and keeping Kotare going so that's taken our energies and focus . . . in the past it's been the Peoples Centre, and other groups too. (Karen Davis)

For some, it was factors in their personal lives that had prevented a greater commitment to any left think tank project. Annette Sykes told me "When I was in my 20s, I had two kids, solo mother, I couldn't do it . . . that's why it didn't happen." Tur Borren addressed me directly, underlining another kind of reason that may have underpinned the failure of even such long term think tank champion as myself to bring such a dream to fruition. "It's such a big idea, isn't it? It's probable you individually didn't quite have the confidence to make it happen." Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati told me she thought the failure was because "All of you were so insanely engaged, fully engaged in your own domains."

> There've been lots of people willing to repudiate neoliberalism, but maybe the immediate battles, the front line fight has absorbed just about all of the people who were able to participate in those things and few people able to step back and say 'let's take a longer view' or a broader view and create something. (David Parker)

Paul Blair captured the essence of all this. "It's probably been talked about a lot, but no one has ever got a group together and said, right, today's the day we're building a left wing think tank."

An intellectual failure of the left?

A number of participants felt that one of the major reasons for the absence of any major left think tank was a tradition of left anti-intellectualism in New Zealand. Karen Davis said "There's been that bit of a separation between the academics and the activists." Bill Rosenberg referred to the "kind of tensions you get between activists and theoretical people who might have quite different interests . . . especially if you're competing for resources . . . ARENA had some of those tensions."

> I'm acutely aware of how we are trapped in the past. New Zealand is not a very cerebral society . . . it's a long history of how antagonistic we are to cerebrality and intellectual work; sad but true. (Brian Easton)

Jared Davidson talked about the way he had identified similar tensions among a younger generation of activists.

> I think there is a real anti-intellectualism in the left, unfortunately. And I think . . . well in some circles I'm involved with that's changing, but …I'm going to be really negative here . . . in that kind of playground anarchism where it's no rulers, OK it's all process, and there tends to be an anti-intellectualism. It's like an action now, think later. (Jared Davidson)

Brian Roper compared the overall environment for think tank development in the United States with the far less favourable conditions found in Aotearoa.

> I think it's possibly also a reflection of differences in political culture . . . in the US, for example, there's a real culture there of setting up think tanks, so everybody does it from the neoliberal and neoconservative right through to the revolutionary left. Whereas in New Zealand I don't think there's been anything like the same culture, possibly because the culture of anti-intellectualism is stronger in New Zealand. (Brian Roper)

The tradition of left anti-intellectualism was also reflected in references by a number of participants to a lack of will on the part of the New Zealand left to engage in serious thinking and debate around issues seen as too difficult or divisive. As Matt McCarten said "I thought the left was happier with apartheid and nuclear free – those liberal traditions – and they didn't want to take on economic distribution."

> I do see a lot of my new friends in the left who I look at, and think, you only ever talk to other people who think like you. You never put yourself in a place of discomfort . . . Good critical engagement on the problems of the world . . . does hurt, and it is hard, because it can be very depressing, because theirs actually is the dominant view now. Unless we actually engage with the dominant view, we cannot make a difference. (Sandra Grey)

> The left in New Zealand is particularly paralysed, disabled, held back by focus on activism to the exclusion of a focus on ideas, theory . . . A lot of the left that I've been involved with get bored or frustrated by these airy-fairy debates and things and are frustrated because it takes time to have discussions and it's hard thinking about what does this really mean, what are the implications of this. (Bryce Edwards)

Funding

The identification of access to funding as a major barrier to the development of a left wing think tank was unquestionably a majority view. Brian Roper said "The major problem is actually at the end of the day money. That's what it boils down to." Bryan Gould was blunt. "I know it's horrible to say it but without the money you're not going to do it." Daphne Lawless told me "There's bugger all money in New Zealand for something like this, that's how I would explain it", while Karlo Mila said "There'd be like freaking no resources for it. Who would want to fund that?" Somewhat more poetically Mamari Stephens offered "There was always going to be 'mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu'—'without feathers the bird can't fly.'"

> We're not going to get the money in New Zealand …. Why? Because we've lost the battle. The big BRT think tank has won the hearts and minds of New Zealanders over to that way of thinking. (Paul Blair)

> Well I've always thought it was the money, that we didn't have the resources to do it because we channelled our resources into campaigns or advocacy organisations or social service organisations or that kind of thing, rather than into the think tanks. (Karen Davis)

Chris Trotter reinforced his scepticism about the possibility of a left wing think tank project ever acquiring the necessary resources to achieve viability.

> You need to have a lotto win or some aging capitalist who's seen the error of his or her ways and now quietly wants to do some good before they shuffle off this mortal coil. But in the absence of those two unlikely events, I just don't know where you would get the money. That's the problem. (Chris Trotter)

Participants talked in depth about the way in which the alignments and expectations of most wealthy individuals and funding bodies were likely to stand in the way of the establishment of an unabashedly left think tank, past, present or future. Sara Jacob explained "The very main purpose of left thinking is to put them out of business. Why would they fund us if you want to put them out of business?" Cathy Casey said "When you are beholden to government or to academic mores or funding you can't possibly bite the hand that feeds you."

> Any kind of slip on the part of the organisation, taking the wrong position in the eyes of its financial supporters, could see large chunks of its funding base literally walk away, leaving gaping holes in its budget. Which of course would tend to make it err on the side of caution, which for a left wing think tank probably isn't where it needs to be. (David Parker)

Helen Potter told me "When it comes to funding, the groups who might want to give you money are the very groups you don't want to accept it from." Gary Cranston gave an example from the environmental sector.

> There's a lot of business influence, you know, entrepreneurial money. There are interests in there . . . like Pure Advantage – the investors in that, and the links between them and some of the youth-based climate change stuff that's happening and money flow as well. It's part of a general trend within the Western environmental movement, not just in New Zealand. (Gary Cranston)

> If say the Tindall Foundation gave you money, it's a bit hard to argue about cheap imports . . . you're allowed to do it a bit, but not where it becomes too effective, where suddenly you're influencing public policy to introduce tariffs and protection and provide small community businesses who compete with the big department stores like the Warehouse. (Matt McCarten)

Any think tank project grounded in the radical rather than social democratic left was identified as representing a particularly difficult challenge when it came to funding. As Marcelo Cooke said "I'm not sure if there's that kind of money around for something that's not feel-good liberal."

> But to include revolutionaries, it would have to have some independence to be able to criticise the state which would mean having state funding or state recognition would be a problem. (Geoff Todd)

Brian Roper encapsulated the sentiments of all. "It's hard, it's really hard trying to create something successful on the left." Responses from participants confirmed my initial expectation that funding would be seen as an overwhelming barrier to the development of any major left wing think tank, either past or future. However, those I interviewed were also very clear that factors such as external political circumstances, a culture of factionalism and mutual distrust on the left, a lack of critical mass in a comparatively small country, a shortage of organisational expertise, and the debilitating impact of a long history of left anti-intellectualism all contributed to an environment hostile to the development of a substantive left think tank. But this was not the end of the story. Despite the perceived barriers, participants were also brimming with ideas about what they would like such an entity to look like, and how its establishment might be achieved. As Veronica Tawhai said "I have not seen anything that does work. What we need is to really get creative and think of something absolutely brand new."

Creating a left wing think tank in Aotearoa

Timing

Given the overwhelming support for the concept of a major left wing think tank it was perhaps not surprising that many participants felt circumstances were changing in ways favourable to such a development. The very external political environment that made it so hard to develop an institution of this nature was also seen as an opportunity. As Dennis Maga said "You have now a very right wing government, that's pushing you to the limit, so people are now thinking of alternatives. The think tank is becoming relevant." Brian Roper talked about the "common ground that people share around, for example, what this government is doing with respect to welfare reform." Some conveyed an almost overwhelming sense of urgency.

> I want this to happen by tomorrow … it's long overdue … this stuff here is so desperately needed … you and I know it's been needed since the 80s, late 80s–

> 90s … I think if we don't make a commitment to this now it'll be a hundred years, unless there's a revolution, a peoples' revolution in between. (Annette Sykes)

> These sorts of projects I think would be important, because the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism is so profound across the whole world, the left's most urgent task is simply to engage in counterhegemonic activity. (Chris Trotter)

Alongside the perception that changes in the external situation meant the time was ripe for such a project came a sense that the internal dynamics of the left had changed as well. Jared Davidson, told me "In my time it seems like the left is quite fragmented . . . but . . . if there's goodwill to transcend that, then there's no reason why there can't be a think tank." Another young activist, Ryan Bodman, commented:

> If I actually want to be a part of a participatory movement, then different opinions have to be understood and accepted rather than simply ramming my ideas down other people's throats. (Ryan Bodman)

> This is probably a bloody good time for it, actually. . . . Trust obviously just doesn't happen overnight but having said that, there's a lot of people who've been around these traps for a very long time now, who've got historical relationships with one another. (Mike O'Brien)

Some respondents talked about ways in which they thought a think tank might itself play a role in helping engender greater left unity. As Joce Jesson put it "You've got to have people who say 'I don't agree with that, and I'm going to put up another position', rather than 'fuck off.' . . . Let's start debating the undebatable."

> I think if you had a thing where you made sure it was broad enough left and had different voices in it where they bring in networks and so on, and you get a thousand to your conference every year, or every three years, then it's seen as this think tank is a real player. (Matt McCarten)

> You would want it sufficiently broad based that you could attract in the various strands of what is the left in New Zealand from unions to . . . you'd want the Māori movement, you'd want what's left of the women's movement, what's left of the peace movement. (Murray Horton)

Making a possibility visible and viable

David Parker linked the need to go beyond advocating any one political position to a concomitant need for organisational expertise if any think tank development was to be successful.

> Creating change is not simply about speaking the truth, or what is my truth, but requires organisation and political skill and I guess that's what a think tank also needs as part of its equipment and armoury is the knowhow and the people willing to do that. (David Parker)

Initial clear steps to creating a possible left think tank were posited as first, a simple decision by a competent group to proceed, and second, the presentation of the possibility. Cathy Casey put it simply. "You don't need a giant kind of big committee, you just need a few people who say, yeah, I'm in." Brian Roper said "If you got the right people together I can see something like this being very successful."

> I think there's no shortage of good people in New Zealand, and there is plenty of good thinking . . . and there would be more if you could set this up. The great thing about this is it will encourage everybody. (Bryan Gould)

> In New Zealand anyway, maybe it's that thing where often if there isn't a visible alternative that's in front of you, you don't notice it, and it takes someone like yourself or a few people to be actively interested, to maybe bring that perspective and make it more available. (Jared Davidson)

People and structure

Participants were very clear that the successful development of a left wing think tank would depend on the willingness and ability of an individual or group to make the establishment of a left wing think tank their priority. Simon Oosterman said "The point's not who will support it, the point is who has got the time, resources, energy to make this a priority for what they're doing." Cathy Casey told me that such a project needed "somebody who's willing to give it more than just part time interest, because that's the difficulty. That's why they all fall over, because we've all got other things to do."

> It either requires getting some money from somewhere where you can employ somebody to be an organiser, or it requires somebody who's prepared to actually really make that the number one thing that they're doing in their life, and really devote the time to doing the basic organising of it, to make it happen. (Brian Roper)

Other personal attributes were seen as essential too. There was wide recognition that for such a venture to have any hope of success, those involved would need to have the ability to attract respect and support. Murray Horton said "If there were somebody with sufficient name recognition involved, that would definitely improve it."

> Getting the right people … who have trusted links into different parts of those sectors that we're trying to corral together … I would say that is the critical thing I think that's probably more important than actually getting the definitions, scope and resourcing stuff right … the wider sector or sectors on the left will follow individuals that they trust. (Kevin Hague)

> Well you're going to have to have the people who are able to back you, you're going to have to impress them with what you think you're going to be able to do . . . the contribution that you think you'll be able to make. (Tur Borren)

Some respondents focused on the role of a front person. Robert Root told me "What strikes me is the ones [nascent left wing think tanks] I do know about, I associate their success with a particular charismatic individual, or couple of individuals." In similar vein Pip Duncalf said "I think it's really important that things like this are fronted by someone who is very charismatic." Paul Blair made a very direct comparison with the role played by the late Roger Kerr, former long standing executive director of the New Zealand Business Roundtable.

> Who's going to be our Roger Kerr, do we need a Roger Kerr? Maybe it has to be a Julia Kerr instead of a Roger, maybe it needs to be more than one person, all those kinds of things, so you have a public face that doesn't have to be tokenist . . . when he came on the radio, you knew it was the big BRT talking. So when our people in our left wing think tank come on the radio, the same thing's got to happen. (Paul Blair)

Gordon Campbell sounded a note of warning. "My fear is that people when they look around for who can do this stuff, they will look right past the people who are actually doing it right now." Others stressed how critical it was that all involved have credibility, not just those who might be taking on roles as organisers or spokespeople. Brian Roper noted the importance of having "more academic and intellectual firepower … plus also … people who have real mana on the left." Cathy Casey said "It would be really good to have some credible academics, credible writers, credible lefties, credible activists put their name to it, and to be heavily involved in it." In an interesting aside, Matt McCarten pointed out the importance of recognising that the physical appearance of any prospective left wing think tank could play a role in either adding or subtracting from the efforts and mana of those involved.

> It's got to look like not a left wing dump. Broken down chairs and messes everywhere … no, no, no, it's got to have a look that people have some confidence in. They walk in the room and they go, this is a place which takes itself seriously. (Matt McCarten)

Rhiannon Thomson addressed a similar theme when discussing the structure of the organisation. “You have to do it in a professional way otherwise these things do fall down.” Participants had many thoughts about possible organisational forms for a major left wing think tank but a point made by Gary Cranston was possibly one of the most salient. “Maybe if you wait till you come up with the perfect structure and you’ve got every ‘i’ dotted and ‘t’ crossed it won’t happen.”

Some respondents raised the question of whether a left wing think tank could be organised as a virtual network rather than as an institution with a physical base. Robert Root asked “Is it a bricks and mortar solution you’re thinking of, or is it a network, particularly with the advent of the internet? … the latter’s got more potential.”

> I would create a virtual one first, in connecting the people … that are not connected at the moment and need to be more robustly connected, regardless of where they are. (Vivian Hutchinson)

> One of the things that we learned out of the whole rubbish exercise [Waiheke Resources Trust] was that distributed systems are much safer because it’s harder to take out the core, because the core is in a whole bunch of different places. So if you were to take the difference between a network which might have twenty five or fifty individuals or groups who were part of it, it’s much easier to take out one organisation, and say, right, kebang, they’re gone, we’ll finish them. When things are kind of more plasmic it’s much harder. (John Stansfield)

Funding: Ways forward

In spite of the overwhelming view that funding had been a major obstacle to the development of a left wing think tank, those I interviewed were refreshingly optimistic and practical when offering thoughts on the matter. Susan St John said “If people want you to do it, the money comes. It follows. You don’t necessarily have to have it first.” Robert Root said “I don’t think you’re talking about necessarily a really expensive thing. I think you could do it for half a million dollars a year, something like that.”

> Not having any money—it is an obstacle and it’s a problem and if we had money it would be easier but it isn’t a sufficient reason to not do it … I think one of the important things may be actually ensuring that doors are left open so that people who are not supportive at the beginning still have opportunities to come on board later on. (Kevin Hague)

Participants noted the importance of credibility and accountability in any bid to attract financial support. Simon Oosterman told me “I don’t think you’ll have a problem

getting money actually, as long as you've got people working constantly on it to show that there's actually value in what you're doing."

> Build up the credibility and then people will start to want to be involved, people who have money who want to do something, but don't know what to do. And they can see this as a vehicle. (Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati)

Some brought hard-won expertise gained from years of sustaining union and community enterprises to bear on the fraught question of funding. Laila Harré said "You'd need to start with a fairly hefty budget. You wouldn't start just with an organiser. That would just be a waste of time."

> With something like this, in the end … what's the market and what are they willing to pay for? First of all find the market, and then you can say how the product then is sold, because that's the relationship. Unless there's a need, it won't happen. (Matt McCarten)

> This is actually how things have happened for hundreds of years. People who want to take initiative have been supported by their friends. That comes with pros and cons and all that sort of stuff, but really, that's how it happens. So we've got to get more business-like about asking for that support, and calling each other to generosity about it. (Vivian Hutchinson)

Participants came up with many ideas about possible sources of funding, ranging from the broadly general to the highly specific, down to the naming of potential donors. The latter are not included here for ethical and other reasons.

The full range of funding possibilities offered by respondents included:

- Wealthy people with left or liberal sympathies – successful businessmen and women – family trusts.
- Foundations – philanthropic trusts – other regular community sector funding sources.
- University support – project funding – assistance with space—some salary costs.
- Earning money from work done, for example conferences, publications, contract research.
- Securing research grants in the group's own right.
- Donations from individuals, wealthy or not – membership and supporter subscriptions and regular automatic payments—bequests.

- Donations and pledges through web based fundraising – crowd funding – crowd sourcing.
- Churches – community groups – trade unions – political parties.
- Māori sources – check for examples
- International sources – foundations – United Nations subcommittees – overseas left wing think tanks – international development agencies.
- Government funding and contracts –various departments and quasi autonomous government organisations.

Views fluctuated on how productive any of these particular funding possibilities might be. Concern about the risk of compromise because of funder requirements and expectations was endemic. Those respondents who came from a social democratic background were, on the whole and not surprisingly, rather more optimistic about the likelihood of funding from business people and the major philanthropic trusts than those espousing more radical expectations. Nevertheless, a sense of hope was almost universal. Most people had some funding ideas that they believed might work, especially when associated with a 'just get on with it' approach, combined with an awareness of the need to effectively manage infrastructure costs while maintaining the highest possible standards.

Activities: What might a left wing think tank do?

When it came to suggestions for what activities a major left wing think tank might carry out, participants presented an enormous range of ideas, often in considerable detail.

Research

The role of research was seen as fundamental. As Sandra Grey said "The big thing is that research base to enhance, particularly the political, to have a say in the political environment on an equal footing with everybody else." Tim Howard was clear on the way in which he thought areas of research should be identified. "If the grounding of the think tank is within the activist communities … research has to be defined by that activism, the gaps, the needs, what would be useful."

> The Children's Commissioner comes up with a report about how to deal with child poverty. Can there be an alternative? …it's like the Alternative Welfare Working Group … just having the oomph to do bits of work like that. (Bill Rosenberg)

> Bring a new perspective to issues and shift the debate. Not an easy thing to do, but that's where a think tank really would be invaluable, put in terms of Aotearoa and the unique context of this place which we don't get from anyone else's work. (David Parker)

The quality of research carried out and disseminated by any left wing think tank was seen as critical. Veronica Tawhai was blunt. "If you want to get the funding, then you have to have doctorates. And unless you're ticketed up, half the time you won't be listened to." Sandra Grey said "There is a difference in someone who has studied an issue for twenty years giving their opinion to you and the rest of us just giving our opinion."

> It does have to be at a level where it can do battle with the research which is put up by the right wing think tanks on the field of battle, as it were, in the academic marketplace. (Daphne Lawless)

> There has to be a really strong commitment to producing work which is of really good quality. Without that it's hopeless. You can argue about that being elitist, and maybe it is, but … no one's going to take any notice of it, because … someone will find a way of taking that apart, or have a go at taking that apart, irrespective of quality. (Mike O'Brien)

Respondents were clear that unless high standards were maintained, a left wing think tank would become particularly vulnerable to media and public disparagement.

> When the media is the arbitrator of news, then they can portray the dissent as uninformed and isolated and a bit nutty. And I think that the credibility of a trust, of its arguments, is going to be critical. (Matt McCarten)

> You're not ever going to get – you know, Michael Laws – appreciating a left wing think tank in a full on way. It's always going to be a moment of derision, but what you want is the *Herald* to write a sound piece that uses your framing and doesn't make a mockery of it. (Sandra Grey)

Ideas about the nature of research, policy development, advocacy and communications which might be undertaken by any major left wing think tank, summarised:

- Quick research that while rigorous, meets deadlines that maximise the timeliness of any advocacy response.

- Initiate and produce own research – have own prioritisation processes in place – have processes which allow input from wider left activist and academic communities of interest – avoid duplicating work of others.
- Methodological—carry out research which may be: quantitative—qualitative—history and oral history—participatory—local participatory action – inclusive – critical.
- Quality of research: useful – high quality – evidence based - need some researchers versed in mātauranga Māori – researchers skilled and well qualified—relevant – grounded – contextualised – capable of creating change in line with the think tank's kaupapa.
- Bring together and disseminate useful and relevant research already being produced within the academy and elsewhere.
- 'Translating' research product and other documentation into forms and language ordinary people can understand.
- Skills training and support for community and union based researchers.
- University students: internships – scholarships – work with lecturers on possible postgraduate research topics.
- Providing a collegial environment and network for left wing researchers from both inside and outside the academy.
- Archiving and dissemination: producing own journal(s) – clearing house – articles for other journals – major reports – mainstream and social media output – video and you tube – conferences and workshops – newsletters – website – library – online clearing house.
- Lobbying and advocacy: varied views around extent and nature of this – focii for lobbying could include government—all political parties – left political parties in particular – influencing political thinking and discourse generally – having an impact on the thinking and understanding of those affected by the decisions of the powerful.
- Education – use of social and structural analysis as tool of learning – wananga – teaching research and analysis skills – economic and political literacy – providing educational resources for community organisations and unions –

providing educational resources for use in the mainstream education system - consciousness raising and conscientisation.

- Alternatives – importance of the articulation and promotion of solutions to existing problems – alternatives to existing economic and political systems and structures – people centred and ecologically aware futures planning and development strategies—practical steps to create change for a future not yet known – importance of simply letting people know there are alternatives.

Ideas about topics and areas of research which might be undertaken by any major left wing think tank, summarised:

- Policy formation – examination of overseas ideas, models and alternatives – develop policy on topics that are not on the government's agenda – produce alternative reports when government comes out with major new initiative.
- Research and write ordinary peoples' histories and stories of their own lives and of collective struggles.
- Exploration of power relations in society – wealth distribution – how capitalism operates in detail – how Tiriti is subsumed into everything – lasting effects of colonisation.
- Document impacts of government policies.
- Yearly analysis of New Zealand's economic performance using alternative criteria to those of government.
- Analysis and discussion of effective left strategies – new strategies – how best to counter neoliberal hegemony at micro and macro level – how to challenge iwi corporatism – what does 'left' look like?
- Some of the most frequently mentioned possible research topics: climate change; job creation; housing; participation and inclusion for Pasifika peoples; child poverty; work and welfare; environmental sustainability; food and energy security; constitutional change; education; inequality; disability; participatory democracy; media structures and power.

A place to think

Many participants spoke of the potential significance of a left wing think tank as a place where people from different parts of the left could reflect and think together, in ways that delved more deeply than was often possible in busy academic and activist lives. As Mamari Stephens said "You need to have access to those thinkers, because that's what a think tank is, you're there to think." Jane Stevens wondered how a think tank might "start to get people to think big picture and think past just propping up a system, to how do we go about changing it, and actually realising that you can?" Robert Reid felt it might be a place where activists on the frontlines could "come back … and reflect … discuss things with people who do the other more academic or research stuff for a living and sort of feed off each other."

> There's something about providing a thoughtful voice or voices … it doesn't have to be one voice … about an alternative Aotearoa, countering the dominant discourse and the technocrats' voices. Dismantling, critiquing the dominant discourse and articulating an alternative future. (Tim Howard)

> I actually think the essence of it would be the connection between thinkers and the way thinkers actually deepen each other. And there isn't enough of that happening right at the moment. (Vivian Hutchinson)

Some emphasised the importance of mutual, ongoing challenge as part of nurturing the quality of left thinking within the mandate of a think tank.

> There isn't a static left wing position that the think tank should be espousing. It has to grow and change and be prepared to challenge its own assumptions, because otherwise … yesterday's ginger group is tomorrow's dinosaur. It has to be prepared to piss off its own supporters from time to time. (Gordon Campbell)

> It can't be restricted to the existing radical left activists, either, because …in the past I've used the critical phrase 'intellectually inbred environment'. You're going to have to have debates … to use old school Marxist language, you've got to have the revolutionary-reformist debate, you've got to have this debate about tino rangatiratanga. (Daphne Lawless)

Participants' ideas about 'thinking' activities which might be undertaken by a major left wing think tank, summarised:

- Providing spaces and opportunities for conversations, utilising thoughtful methodologies which nurture deep, robust communication and thinking.
- Provision of non-public, 'safe' opportunities for internal left debate and dissent.

- National, regional and local hui – meetings – whaikōrero—run on a participatory basis.
- Public debates – seminars – conferences – forums – workshops – colloquia – debates and discussions with political opponents.
- Encouragement of debate within and between academic and activist left – within and between reformist and radical left – between individuals and between organisations.
- Use of online methods to extend and encourage thinking and debate.

Unruly voices

A third major sphere of potential think tank activity proposed by participants was in the area of culture and voice, with visions of developing a space where views and stories from those not ordinarily heard could be articulated and amplified in ways that reached across society. Veronica Tawhai told me "The most important thing that a think tank can do is be connected and articulate the real everyday problems that are happening in the street."

> You would be seeking to hear all manner of voices and there wouldn't be a closed downness or an excluding of voices that were . . . what's that word they use in the literature? . . . unruly. You would hear all sorts of unruly voices. (Helen Potter)

> We're encouraging you . . . to actually provide a voice to all the people who might want to talk to you. That would be an outcome that I'm sure a lot of people would welcome. (Tur Borren)

Mark Gosche added a Pasifika perspective.

> One of the things I really think is important is to take people within society, like the Pacific, who haven't had a strong voice and still don't have a strong voice and try and make sure that those voices are created in a way that has power and organisations with power will listen. (Mark Gosche)

A number of participants spoke directly of the role culture should and could play in building the left, including as part of any proposed think tank. As Paul Maunder told me "The left generally is not very understanding of creative matters . . . culture is extraordinarily important in terms of hegemony, in terms of adoptive indoctrination because of television and that stuff."

> Generally the influence is on the side of the people with money, but really it boils down to whoever can tell them the best story. . . . This can't just be kind of a social sciences, economics think tank – it needs to take culture seriously. (Daphne Lawless)
>
> Most people tend to shun popular culture as being part of the problem . . . I think it's an important way of making contact with people, and then maybe because of that shared cultural experience, you can then talk politics with people. People are multidimensional, they're not just political beings. (Gordon Campbell)

Participants' ideas about how work with culture and voice might be expressed in the work of any major left wing think tank, summarised:

> Quality research that originates in the real lives of ordinary people and their organisations, and its effective dissemination.
>
> Waiata – drama – story telling – poetry – books – music – film.
>
> Oral histories – written histories—ordinary peoples' lives – left activist organisations – movements of resistance – sectors – peoples' history project.
>
> Culture jamming: "putting alternative messages into the consumer marketplace" (Gordon Campbell)
>
> Use of mythical language – prophetic language.

Four key relationships

As with any major project, the successful development of a major left wing think tank would require careful work with a large number of people and groups from different sectors. Four key areas where the nature and level of engagement are likely to be of particular significance include relationships with tangata whenua, activists, the academy and left parliamentary parties.

Māori

Given that the definition of 'left' used for this research includes a commitment to 'transforming Aotearoa into a society grounded in … Tiriti justice', and that this aspect of the definition was soundly endorsed, the question of how a left think tank might engage with tangata whenua was on the minds of many participants, Māori and tauiwi

alike. Kevin Hague reflected a common position when he told me it should be "a structure that reflects Māori interests, so honouring Treaty obligations becomes a core part of the kaupapa of the organisation" as did Peter Conway, who said "This is going to have to start from a basis of what the Treaty means in this context." Jane Stevens reflected on how decades of practical work on Treaty relationships already carried out in the community sector may be helpful to any left think tank project.

> We all come from having been through those experiences, and to a degree I think it's something that would be . . . it needs to be organic . . . in a sense I can see that something like that would be building on what's already been, and in a way being a role model for how we go forward. (Jane Stevens)

Maria Bargh was excited by one possible consequence. "It just feels like this could work as part of a way to build up the tino rangatiratanga movement again." Practical advice was offered from te ao Māori. . .

> Ensure that you've got people who are steeped in mātauranga Māori and that have that value based tikanga and wellbeing and kaitiakitanga and rangatiratanga. Make sure it comes from that good source. (Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati)

> A think tank would also spend a lot of time on our relationships with one another both in the think tank and the people who were involved, and as communities: Māori to Māori, Māori to Pākehā, Pākehā to Pākehā. We need that quality of relationships to get anywhere. (Helen Potter)

… and from te ao Pākehā.

> It's just working respectfully and being open to being challenged and learning and realising that sometimes maybe as Pākehā we can't have a say on some things that are close to the lived experience of Māori. (Jared Davidson)

> Māori get to invest as much energy or as little as they want to in the organisation. So the organisation is committed to doing its best around Treaty issues but there is no obligation on Māori to contribute a particular amount of time or control or energy. (Kevin Hague)

Kathleen Williams summed up the views of many when she told me a left wing think tank "wouldn't work unless there was a real ownership and participation in it by Māori. If it was a Pākehā left wing think tank that would be easily dismissed."

Activists

The nature of the relationship between activists and any prospective left think tank was also a matter of deep interest to many. The most commonly held position was that a left

wing think tank would be of little real use unless it had direct and meaningful connections with activist organisations. Daphne Lawless told me that "the best way any leftish organisation can keep itself attached to the real world is to have its presence in the struggles." Matt McCarten said "A think tank in my mind … supports the people who are trying to actively participate. It gives them the weapons, the intellectual weapons to build confidence, and to build."

> Ideally you want the think tank to be linked in to your activist community so you need that spectrum right across from your most radical stone throwers right to your other end which is your think tank, and then your translators in between. (Cybèle Locke)

> I don't think the situation would arise where this think tank would somehow become detached from everyday struggles, because I think the people involved are still going to be active in their own communities and groups. (Jared Davidson)

There was potential for problems at this particular interface. As Brian Easton said "You'll have an enormous tension between the community who want to control it and the researchers who want to do things, which is why I worry about the community base." Bill Rosenberg posited one way forward.

> Maybe having a two part organisation – I don't want to use the word 'two tiered' because of hierarchy – but that you have two closely allied groups that know what each other is doing and you have some overlap of people working in them, but one is clearly activist and one is clearly research. (Bill Rosenberg)

While supporting a close relationship between a left think tank and activists, Tim Howard was also clear about the one activist space he believed should not be occupied by such an entity.

> I don't think a think tank per se needs to be involved in front line struggle. I don't think that's the role. With the one caveat, that sometimes the issues of credibility and groundedness have to be addressed within the likes of a think tank. (Tim Howard)

Welfare advocate Paul Blair gave a very real example from his daily work of the way in which researchers in a left think tank might support groups like his in practice.

> Take Paula Bennett for example, who will come out with all these outrageous things about beneficiaries and accommodation supplement … she doesn't have any research basis for any of those things, so our researchers in our think tank, we'd be on the radio the same day, or the next day, with the hard grunt research.

> ‘This is absolute bullshit’- put the Minister right in a corner, that kind of stuff. (Paul Blair)

The academy

Just as participants had many ideas about the ways in which a left wing think tank might work with activists and their organisations, the same applied when it came to considering relationships with the academy.

> I think that there’s enough good will there amongst left leaning academics and others in this country to get plenty of people to sign up to it and be prepared to participate in it to some degree. (Brian Roper)

> It just struck me now … about people who over the next two, three, five years, who are now in their late 50s, early 60s, who might be able to say well that’s something that might be really interesting to contribute to. (Mike O’Brien)

Some expressed caution about the nature of such engagement. Karen Davis said “It would have to be a really genuine relationship, rather than the usual leeching kind of relationship that you get with academia.”

> I think that academics have a role, definitely have a role to play, I just don’t think they should hijack the dialogue, because we tend to have an enormous sense of entitlement. (Mamari Stephens)

A number of academics spoke of the personal and professional benefits which might accrue through engagement with a left wing think tank. Karlo Mila said “This is what really interested me in your think tank as well, because I felt really isolated and on my own.” Brian Roper saw a think tank as a possible means of improving dissemination of research. “There is a fair amount of useful work being done by left leaning academics, but not enough people involved in activist politics know about it.” Some viewed the think tank as a potential source of employment. Mark Gosche told me “I also get the sense that there’s an awful lot of people out there now with quite significant university qualifications who are struggling to find work.”

> I’m sorry if this sounds a little crass, but … it’s almost an alternative career path for people who’ve got that academic training but got the kind of left wing opinions which are not relevant to the major parties and they often don’t find a place in formal academia. (Daphne Lawless)

There were mixed views on whether a left think tank should be completely independent of any university or other academic institution, or whether it might be sited within or have some other close relationship with the academy. Cathy Casey was straightforward

in her advice. “Keep it out of institutions, keep it independent, staff it with activists, and give it some money.”

> It probably is important that it’s independent of the university system. That it’s not housed in a university. Because I think you’d just get caught up in university politics too much. (Robert Root)

The opposite position was also well represented. Robert Reid told me “Universities provide think tanks for lots of other things. As long as it has some sort of autonomy, I think a university link would add to it, not detract.”

> It has to be a structure and generally that structure … is through a university or some sort of funding thing … the thing that universities do is that they help provide structure, so that it becomes slightly less … you can seed the ideas into something. (Joce Jesson)

> Why wouldn’t universities have an interest in this? And why shouldn’t the taxpayers’ money get used for that, instead of it all being seen as something – ‘Oh, it’s grubby, we don’t want anything to do with workers’ issues and those sort of things.’ (Mark Gosche)

There were also strong reminders about the importance of remembering the contribution intellectuals from outside the academy might make. As David Parker said “Simply recognising that expertise doesn’t reside with elite of professionals is probably essential.”

> A think tank has to at least avail itself of the kind of organic intellectuals that may not be part of academia … if you can make yourself available to the organic intellectuals of all persuasions, it might be useful … people who have never been through university education who have these extraordinary contributions to make if you could just harness that intellectual energy. (Mamari Stephens)

> We’ve got to get working class people in real politics, living their politics, to actually assume some responsibility for thinking, not just – ‘that’s for those brainy people’. (Matt McCarten)

Parliamentary parties

There was no appetite among respondents for a think tank with direct affiliation to a political party or parties. Instead, it should be free to lobby all parties, without being tied to any. Kathleen Williams said “If it’s community based it really has to be community based, which means not political party aligned.” Tur Borren told me “I definitely wouldn’t have it linked to a political party because a lot of what worries us is

politicians' behaviour over the last few decades, has been so indecent." Suggesting that the Business Roundtable ultimately "chugged into irrelevance", Gordon Campbell said:

> What the lesson from that would be is that any left wing think tank has to be prepared to expose at times the shortcomings of the positions of the parties on the left, not to be seen as the servant of the left wing parliamentary parties. (Gordon Campbell)

> I think the issue's going to be how do you do something without people thinking that it's coming with its own preconceived set of ideas. That's it. I would think that a think tank needs to be non-affiliated to any political party. (Simon Oosterman)

Chris Trotter proffered a view from the perspective of the parties themselves.

> Political parties obviously won't be very helpful because they're not going to be held hostage to an independent organisation that's going to get them into trouble inevitably with virtually everything it produces. So they're not going to want to be too closely associated with it. (Chris Trotter)

Kaupapa

At the heart of developing any sustainable organisation lie the core beliefs and principles which shape and underpin every aspect of its work. With an entity as overtly political as a left wing think tank, the question of kaupapa becomes critical. Unsurprisingly, kaupapa recommendations from participants tended to reflect where they were placed on the left spectrum. Those situated in a more social democratic space were keen on a broad, inclusive approach to philosophy and purpose, stressing what those holding progressive views might hold in common. Tur Borren told me "I think you'll be amazed if you stand for decency what an enormous amount of groundswell of support there would be in New Zealand for an organisation that promoted decency."

> If there's some kind of seed or some kind of consciousness in the start-up, in the founding principles, that it's actually not just about establishing an interest group, but it's about ensuring you've got an equality of access to the information and equality of access to debate, rather than pursuing the interests of a particular sector of society. (Mamari Stephens)

Talking about who might lead such a think tank, Pip Duncalf said "You need someone who is passive and conciliatory rather than outspoken and pushy, like me and possibly you, don't you think?"

Others questioned the wisdom of attempting to build an organisation that would attempt to please the entire left across the reformist–radical spectrum.

> If the purpose is to create a knowledge base that is a strong counter to something that's right wing, you almost need to have something that is kind of a unified programme or project or a unified vision. If you're having strands of various kinds, you might find that the eco feminists may not speak to the Green environmentalists or something like that. Would you end up with fragmented thinking? (Sara Jacob)

> I expect if we all got in a room and talked through what it might look like, there might be some quite fundamental disagreements about focus, depending on who was involved in that discussion . . . whether we could find an overlapping consensus around what you would do, rather than spending all our time talking about what you don't agree about. (Laila Harré)

As might be expected, radical left views were characterised by a determination that any left think tank should be dedicated to a transformational kaupapa, rather than a social democratic agenda or an inclusive kaupapa which would attempt to meet all needs and satisfy none. Paul Maunder said "My sort of wariness would be would it prop up the system? . . . because there's an awful lot of effort going in to helping capitalism survive right now." Annette Sykes said "For me the think tank's goal must be transformative change. Without that linkage in its inception and its short and medium term, there is a danger of it being derailed." Veronica Tawhai observed that a "left wing think tank can be so much more than just the challenging of a different policy angle . . . actually the entire nature of the system needs to be changed."

> Is it designed to simply lobby, put pressure on the powers that be to change aspects of their decision making? Or would it be to actually . . . come from a more radical base and try and encourage people themselves to bring about social change? (Jared Davidson)

Regardless of left positioning, a common theme emerged around the importance of clarity in relation to kaupapa. Bryce Edwards told me "If it was to be successful, it would be better off being smaller and have a real organic sense of agreement and clarity about what they stood for." Rhiannon Thomson suggested that it would be "kind of cool to get some kind of manifesto thing together around 'left wing' and what that looks like, for the group itself, for each other and for others."

> We've got to have some means of … without being too exclusive … of ensuring that it's not just going to spin off and produce a lot of nice sounding stuff that isn't really on the left. That's another risk. (Ariana Paretutanganui-tamati)

> Politically independent, you're left wing and proud of it, that's what's missing. See, Maxim tries to pretend it's independent and it's to the right of Attila the Hun. So you'd be part of a genuine left wing think tank that looks at the world

> through a left lens and does the grunt work necessary to have evidence based research to back up your arguments. (Cathy Casey)

Despite the differences that surfaced around approaches to kaupapa, there was also a sense of emerging unity and a yearning for tolerance from all parts of the left. David Parker said he would not want to "put a huge amount of energy into creating something, and then have it blow apart over miniscule ideological differences." Laila Harré told me "You need a sense that there's no reluctance to say things that might be unpopular or politically incorrect with any particular group or whatever." Cathy Casey advised "What you want is a pan-left … that's the word, isn't it? … a pan-left think tank."

> You're actually looking for a new left discourse for the 21st century. And yes, a left discourse which engages with capitalism in its current form, a new left discourse that engages with left governments or left leaning governments that have actually latched on to neoliberalism in their own way. (Sara Jacob)

There was also discussion about the way in which the kaupapa and operational practices of a left think tank should be consistent with the kind of alternative future it espoused. Tim Howard put it neatly "I'm mirroring the vision of an alternative future with the value base of the think tank, and I think they have to be congruent." Annette Sykes said "I don't want it to be modelled like the BRT which is their think tank. I want it to be much more accountable to communities."

> Every step of the way you are actually acting and doing what you are proposing for the future, so you are already creating a future by being it. I think also that's your most fruitful grounds for newness … the how you do things is just as important as what you're doing. (Helen Potter)

A positively celebratory element crept in as some participants contemplated how joyfully straightforward it might be to simply start work on the establishment of a major left wing think tank.

> I think if you sat us all together, we're all going for a big lunch together or whatever, we'd all end up saying 'what a fabulous idea, we should have done this years ago, let's do it.' (Brian Roper)

> It would be really really cool to get together and throw those ideas around together, wouldn't it! Imagine going somewhere like Kotare with a few bottles of wine and just going, 'Hey, how could we work together in this way?' (Rhiannon Thomson)

Summary: Let's do it

As I entered the interview process, the importance of achieving a common understanding of the term 'think tank' was as crucial as identifying a shared meaning of 'left'. Most participants felt the offered definition was adequate, although there were some misgivings around the implications of 'community based not for profit'. As I had suspected, the expression 'think tank' itself was the source of considerable distaste among a wide range of respondents, who viewed it as militaristic and redolent of the two right wing New Zealand think tanks with which they were most familiar, the NZBRT and the Maxim Institute. Participants shared my view, and that of the sparse literature on the topic, that as of the second half of 2012, no major left wing think tank as described in my working definition had ever existed in Aotearoa. When it came to assessing why such an entity had never come into being, a number of significant reasons were suggested, including external and internal political context; the lack of critical mass in a small country, associated with a shortage of the necessary organising skills and expertise; the simple fact that no one had picked up the challenge and run with it because of an individual and collective focus on other priorities; a history of left anti-intellectualism; and the vexed issue of funding. All this made it very clear that while resourcing was undeniably a major factor, it was far from being the only reason no major left wing think tank had emerged in New Zealand during the research time frame.

On the question which lay at the heart of my thesis, the response was clear. All respondents supported the goal of establishing a major left wing think tank in Aotearoa, although exactly what such an entity might do, what its kaupapa should be and how it might operate in practice attracted a vast array of suggested options. The sheer diversity, quantity and quality of proffered ideas was stunning. However, there were clear differences, especially around kaupapa, which in the main reflected participants' positioning on the left spectrum. The next and final chapter will draw together my conclusions on the prospects for the development of a major left wing think tank, taking into account all that I had discovered on my journey through at least part of the landscape of the New Zealand left July 2010–July 2013.

7. Conclusion: Building an effective left counter hegemony, from fragmentation to form

Introduction

The impetus for this study did not suddenly materialise when I approached Marilyn Waring to canvass the possibility of doctoral study following my 2009 decision to resign from Parliament. Nor did it originate in some personal version of the somewhat frantic scratching around seen at times among intending PhD candidates as they try to identify an appropriate question around which to focus their research. It came instead from a very long period of gestation, of discussion and strategic soul searching in the various left activist circles in which I have worked. As this study has well and truly demonstrated, I was not the only left activist who, from the early 1990s onwards, was thinking and talking about the need for something like a think tank, an institution (or institutions) which could help build the intellectual armoury of the New Zealand left. In undertaking this project, I was consciously using my own unexpected loss of career momentum as a pragmatic opportunity to divert back into the academy in order to research a question of some magnitude that had been simmering unanswered for several decades. Vivian Hutchinson's words have echoed in my mind ever since my interview with him. Talking about our generation of older activists, he said "If we've got any experience to put on the table for the next generation, now's the time to get clear about it, and put it out there." That is exactly how I felt about my decision to undertake this research, and about the concrete actions I intend to take post completion.

The question I was asking 'A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa—an impossible dream or a call to action?' was also the identically-worded title I gave the project from the start. The question and the title remained the same even as my doctoral work neared its conclusion. I considered a change to the title, but upon reflection realised there was no point. It was the question which expressed the essence of what I wanted to find out. It was not the product of either abstract theorising or idle speculation. Talking about political activist ethnography as a tool which allows activists to effectively map out social relations, obstacles, opportunities and potential allies in their struggles, Gary Kinsman says "This process begins from where movement activists are with their practices, insights and questions, with what they are confronting and with what their

knowledge is" (Kinsman, 2006, pp. 139–140). This sums up for me both the genesis of my core research question and the means by which it was investigated.

This project has in part been an opportunity for the New Zealand left to take a partially collective look at ourselves and the condition we were in in at a particular point in history; a necessary step as I investigated our readiness or otherwise to support the establishment of one or more major left think tanks, or think tank-like entities. The first part of this final chapter will outline my overall conclusions about the state of the New Zealand left in 2010–2013 and the potential for the development of one or more left wing think tanks in Aotearoa, including some recommendations for action. I will then offer some methodological reflections before going on to review the significance of this study and to propose a number of possibilities for future research arising from what has been started here.

The left in Aotearoa 2010–2013: The state we're in

As I began the interview process what struck me initially and with considerable force was the sense conveyed by so many participants that the left had lost, that we had in effect been permanently defeated in the struggle against much stronger economic and political forces upholding and pursuing a neoliberal agenda. Unions were seen as weak and unwilling to do the analysis and work necessary to develop new and more effective forms of organisation in times very different from those in which the older generation of union leadership started work. The community sector had by 2012 become almost completely colonised by the state and by private sector modes of operating, in a process that had started decades earlier and was now coming to fruition, with many organisations unwilling or unable to mount overt structural challenges to society's ruling institutions. The fact that despite the decimating impact of National's welfare reforms Auckland Action Against Poverty remained in mid-2013 the only group of any size combining militant direct action with individual beneficiary advocacy epitomised how much had changed in that part of the community sector since the flourishing of such organisations in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The major parties of the Parliamentary left, Labour and the Greens, were perceived as edging ever further to the centre and right of the political spectrum, which in turn was shifting the politics of the left overall in an increasingly conservative direction. Pasifika participants remarked on a rightward shift in their communities, too. In te ao Māori,

tangata whenua were divided at every level, from parliamentary parties to grassroots rōpū, in the face of the growing power and influence of corporatised elites bolstered by Treaty settlement processes. Overall, there was acute awareness of the negative impact of intra left factionalism on the ability or otherwise of our capacity to flourish as a more effective counterforce to ruling agendas.

Loss of confidence

Accompanying all this was a sense of diminished left confidence. Some younger activists talked about never having been in situations where they had felt as if they were taking power, as had happened in some of the mass mobilisations and organisational development undertaken by earlier generations. This left them with little practical or theoretical understanding that power could be taken on the streets and elsewhere, even temporarily and partially. Among some mid and older generation feminists, there were questions about whether the necessary momentum in the struggle for women's full liberation was being maintained in an era where the patriarchy still ruled. Older participants spoke of diminished courage and risk-taking, across generations, despite deeming these characteristics essential to the left's capacity to organise and act effectively. There was also a sense of organisational fragility in the wake of the dashed expectations of Occupy and related ongoing problems, including the impact of security issues on groups and the negative effect difficult individuals had on personal and political relationships and on movement efficacy overall.

Mindless activism

Many participants also perceived a rise in mindless activism, actions undertaken without sufficient collective analysis and planning. As Daphne Lawless said "Left wing political organisations …barely have enough time and space to get their members organised for on the ground political agitation let alone matters of grand theory and grand strategy." Whether referring to the work of Occupy, unions, community organisations, or other activities of the social democratic and transformational left, there was a frequent sense that groups were not taking enough time for organisational thinking and strategising; that while there was a lot of focus on complaining about problems, not enough work was being done on developing alternatives and solutions; and that creating effective new forms of organisation relevant to the reality of the times was simply not happening in most places. Alongside this came widespread recognition that there was a lack of sufficient time, space and opportunity for different parts of the

left to debate with each other in ways that went beyond the superficial without exacerbating past or present sectarian differences.

Signs of hope

On a brighter note, many signs of hope were also apparent. Initiatives like the nascent left wing think tanks AWWG, CPAG, the Bruce Jesson Foundation, CAFCA, the Fabian Society and Kotare Trust were, in their different ways, viewed for the most part as offering significantly useful contributions to public policy development, advocacy and education. A number of these organisations provided examples of successful collaboration between left academics and activists. Increased momentum among student groups following Occupy, Occupy itself, the growth of Auckland Action Against Poverty and some signs of newly relevant cross sectoral activity in the union movement were all seen as indications of a welcome resurgence of street activism.

On the parliamentary left, feelings were mixed and often aligned, understandably, with party allegiance. Interviews were carried out at a time when David Shearer was still the leader of Labour, which I suspect influenced perceptions. By late 2012 he was not broadly supported, even among his own party. The Green Party met with more respect overall, including from some whose allegiances lay elsewhere. With both Labour and the Greens there were real concerns about the parties' ability to work constructively with left community based organisations, alongside a questioning of how much activist energy should be expended on parliamentary politics in the first place. Despite internal and external challenges, Mana garnered surprisingly widespread respect for its role as a novel experiment in party and movement building, from some sections of the Māori and tauiwi left.

Signs of hope were visible on the transformational left too. Some organisations were successfully attracting the involvement of increasing numbers of young people; groups were attempting to abandon the kind of alienating jargon that had bedevilled radical left organisations in the past; there was evidence of enhanced receptivity to listening to the views of others and debating across traditionally sectarian lines; the principles of what is academically known as 'intersectionality' were taken as a given by most participants, across generations; and there was evidence of a growing willingness to cooperate in organising actions, meetings and other initiatives involving groups and people from different factional and ideological tendencies. Occupy and Mana were both identified

as sites of struggle which had encouraged these developments. New networks Political Organisation Aotearoa and Hobgoblin held a sense of promise about improved communication and support at the interface between academics and activists (POA) and as a deliberate attempt to break down long held factional rivalries on the radical left (Hobgoblin).

Permeability

In conjunction with my feeling that there had been a reduction in factionalism among at least some parts of the left, I also identified a growing sense of permeability, both through my interviews with participants and developments in the field. This permeability was demonstrated, for example, in the willingness of the Fabian Society to occasionally include radical left speakers at their events, and to invite participation from across the left, well beyond its Labour Party and social democratic base; through the healthy cross-left engagement with activities like CPAG's annual budget breakfasts; participation levels in AAAP's eight-part economic literacy workshop series and Kotare's annual summer schools; and by the crowds that turned out for the Bruce Jesson Foundation lecture each year. From the time of Mana's inception, tangata whenua and tauiwi activists found themselves obliged to find ways of working together within a Māori-lead tino rangatiratanga kaupapa, and continued to do so throughout the research period, despite frequent difficulties and differences. Among participants the generosity of spirit towards activists of a different generation than their own was also noticeable, indicating a widespread mutual interest in debate and learning across and between age groups, despite lingering doubts, questions and practical challenges. While traditional suspicions remained between academics and activists, the desire for greater connection and an awareness of missed possibilities was frequently expressed from both perspectives.

Building left power: Ways forward

As part of determining whether the New Zealand left was in a fit state to support the development of one or more major left wing think tanks, and of working out whether and how such initiatives might fit within broader strategies, it was crucial to explore how we might develop counter hegemonic power more effectually than we had done so far. Robert Reid summed up the thoughts of many when he said the left needed "to put a knife through that neoliberal framework, because it's still so powerful." Referring to a line from Yeats' poem *The Second Coming* "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold"

(Yeats, 2003), Karlo Mila posed the question "What would hold it [the left] together?" In assembling a response I found myself asking "What would Robert's 'knife' look like? What strategies, ideas and actions might more cogently hold us together as we wield that knife?" From the data gathered and analysed for this project I identified four key components which I believe will be significant factors in building a more robust left counter force to neoliberal capitalism in post-2013 Aotearoa.

A shared dream, an ideological home

The first of these is situated in the desire for a shared vision, and a shared way of achieving that vision. As Geoff Todd put it "Having a common project is one of the dreams of the left." Alongside this came the pining for a place to belong on the path to achieving the shared dream. Cybèle Locke said "I'm still looking for that home, ideological home … and a really, really beautiful utopia … I'm still looking for that too. I've never given up trying." These are powerful sentiments. Geoff and Cybèle were far from the only participants to express them, and I suspect these aspirations are a form of left litany that transcends generations, ethnicities and geographies. Finding an ideological home which provides a fitting mechanism to achieve the common dream requires organisations which are able to meet these purposes in alignment with the beliefs and hopes of those who are doing the seeking. Given that I was deliberately interviewing people from all parts of the left spectrum, some of whom were completely comfortable with their current affiliations, or were not in search of such a 'home' in the first place, this absence only affected some participants. But for the latter, the search for something not yet born, a party or movement that fully expressed their dreams while providing a mechanism for realising those dreams, was one of the strongest motifs to emerge.

It is not possible to portray with accuracy something which does not yet exist; which, if ever formed, will be made up of shared left visions, not those of any one individual; and which may well be more than one organisation. However, my perception of the first major organisational gap on the left in 2010–2013 Aotearoa was that there was no mass-based political movement or party, inside or outside Parliament, which fully or adequately gave expression to the aspirations of the tauiwi transformational left nationally, in the way that Mana was more satisfactorily doing for the tangata whenua left. While a number of Pākehā radicals were active in Mana, there were some tauiwi Mana members, some on the left of the Greens, and some without affiliation, for whom

Mana was unlikely to ever be a fully compatible organisational and ideological home. An underlying question was whether Mana had any realistic hope of ever being able to act effectively as a vehicle for building a mass movement across the Māori and tauiwi left, or whether it was more realistic and tactically more useful for Mana to focus on becoming a broadly based left Māori party and movement, while the tauiwi left built new allied organisation(s) separately.

Although this organisational gap was only perceived by some, I believe it was significant, affecting not only the left's capacity to effectively counter the immediate damage being done by a succession of neoliberal governments but also its capacity to develop broader influence and power, inside and outside Parliament. Any solutions to this problematic lie with the individuals and organisations who are already working, even tentatively, towards filling the gap, and with those who may in future join them in that work. And who knows, it may not be just one form of party or movement that forms to meet the needs of those seeking an ideological home, but several, especially when the changing demographics of New Zealand's population are taken into account (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). It is also possible that Mana may evolve in such a way that it comes to more adequately meet the aspirations of a wider portion of the tauiwi as well as Māori left.

Courage and the will to power

The second component identified by participants as critical to developing a more effective New Zealand left was the need to become braver, more aware that courage and the will to power are essential attributes of successful and sustainable activist practice. Some younger participants were conscious that their lack of lived experience of taking any form of collective power may have weakened their capacity to act more effectively. A number of older generation respondents clearly felt they should take more responsibility for sharing their experience and knowledge, as exemplified in John Stansfield's observation that the problems with Occupy were "not the fault of people who were camping out in Queen St, that's the fault of old buggers like me who didn't go down and apply a bit of effort around that."

Job insecurity, the corporatised environment within the academy, and frequent left suspicion about those seen as too eager to take up leadership roles were all seen as factors in the retreat from Cathy Casey's notion of "putting your hand up and saying I

believe in this and I'm prepared to fight for it, and this is what I'm going to do." In building a more effective left, much importance was placed on constructing relevant, respectful and constructive organisational cultures. Participants often paid respect to those within the universities and wānanga, including a number of academics interviewed for this project, who had demonstrated by example the possibility of combining a high flying academic career with an overt and active commitment to forwarding left kaupapa. There was a strong sense that the more unions and community-based groups provide environments which value internal challenge and debate within clear accountable structures, and which understand that courage and risk taking are essential components of effective activism, the better equipped members and supporters would be to take on the power of the right and to conceive and foster new forms of economic, social and political organisation.

Theory matters

The third major element of left weakness—and potential—identified in this research concerns the role of theory. In July 2013 I was tutoring an AAAP workshop on 'challenging capitalism' when suddenly one of the younger participants called out in a tone of some surprise "You're talking about theory!" This lead to a lively debate about whether theories were any use at all in grassroots organising or whether they were just useless and incomprehensible abstractions for academics to worry about. Prejudice against the idea of 'theory' was strong, but once the discussion got underway it became increasingly obvious that many in the room were keen not only to debate theories, but also to discover and play with new ones. The lack of time put into theorisation by the activist left was noted by a number of participants, including Bryce Edwards when he said "The left in New Zealand is particularly disabled, paralysed, disabled, held back by focus on activism to the exclusion of a focus on ideas, theory."

Research participants were vocal in their appreciation of the worth of ideology, that close relative of theory. As Mamari Stephens noted when talking about how to build solidarity "Sometimes political ideology helps that process because you can conceptualise the world in a way that makes it more obvious where the links should be." There were fears that a diminution of theoretical clarity was weakening the left, for example in Gary Cranston's and Peter Conway's critiques of the 'neither left nor right' tendency. As Peter Conway said "It seems to me that an 'ism' is being replaced by a kind of vague framework around sustainability." Annette Sykes mounted a strong

challenge to a powerful theoretical framework within te ao Māori and the academy when she said "I would like to know whether kaupapa Māori embraces or rejects capitalism as part of its theory. No one's been brave enough to take that on." Jane Stevens summed up the feelings of many on the need for ideological frames of reference when she said "You just see how people grow from actually seeing the world from a different paradigm . . . they start to be able to challenge those things by having different world views."

A thoughtful left is a potent left

A fourth key point to emerge from the research was that despite the hard work of the groups termed 'nascent left wing think tanks' and the efforts of many activists and academics outside those organisations, what was urgently needed was simply the creation of opportunities for the left to become more thoughtful. It was seen as imperative that the left develop the spaces and free up the time to talk deeply together, confront and provoke each other (respectfully), undertake research and education, and explore new and more effective ways of organising. Paul Blair talked about the need to "overcome the imbalance of power by being smarter … to find solutions creatively, in a smarter more creative way, up against a bigger, stronger, richer more powerful opponent." Tim Howard said "There's something about providing a thoughtful voice or voices . . . about an alternative Aotearoa, countering the dominant discourse and the technocrats' voices. Dismantling, critiquing the dominant discourse and articulating an alternative future." Such comments epitomised widespread awareness among research participants of the need for the New Zealand left to become more thoughtful as a prerequisite of strengthening its latent potential.

Fertile ground or barren soil? A key question answered

Finally, it is critical to consider what this investigation into the state of the left has revealed about the possibility or otherwise of establishing a left wing think tank in post-2013 Aotearoa. When I began this work, I realised that it was never going to be sufficient to find out whether or not individual respondents supported the idea. Those involved in any near-future implementation projects would need to know whether the ground into which the seeds of a left wing think tank might be sown would be fertile enough to sustain life, or whether such an initiative risked an early and predictable demise. My conclusions are as follows:

- The experiences of all the nascent left wing think tanks, past and present, show that there is a reservoir of experience and knowledge that has barely been tapped, but which is just sitting there waiting to play an invaluable role in any future project, should those involved choose to learn from some or all of these hard-won histories.
- The sense of weakness, defeat and loss of confidence which widely permeated the left at the time I carried out the interviews should not be seen as a barrier to any prospective development. The desperation felt by so many in the face of the very real powers arrayed against us may actually become one of the strongest spurs to the creation of a left wing think tank.
- While the activist left remains fragmented, the newfound and widespread interest in exploring new ways of working and thinking together across all kinds of boundaries bodes well for any think tank initiative, as does the heightened awareness of the need to find ways of moving beyond a culture of 'mindless activism' and towards a far more analytical and thoughtful left.
- This is not a quantitative research project. However, one of the biggest surprises has been the sheer number of people whom I have discovered or identified over the period 2010–2013 as being 'left' and interested in any potential think tank project. My pool of potential participants grew rapidly from dozens to hundreds. Once all respondents had been selected, the purposive sampling file transformed into a list of 'potential supporters of a left wing think tank project' instead. I have continued to add names ever since. I had no idea there were so many left wing academics in New Zealand, and I am sure there are many more than those whom I have already identified. Among the activist left, I have been approached at pickets and demonstrations, meetings and workshops, as well as through email and social media, by people asking about my research and seeking inclusion as potential supporters for any project. The possible base of support for left think tank development is much greater than I had thought it was before I started this research, although such support is tempered in ways which will be discussed in more detail shortly.

A number of respondents told me they thought the time was far riper for the development of a major left wing think tank as of late 2012 than it had been at any point in the previous two decades. While there are no certainties in such an enterprise,

and many difficulties and risks remain, everything I learned about the state of the left at the time of this study convinces me that those participants were right. The ground is fertile and the opportunity for initiatives to flourish exists, if the challenge is picked up and implemented in ways that draw deeply and proficiently on our collective knowledge, experience and resources.

Left wing think tanks in Aotearoa

One of the questions at the heart of this research "Was there any support from left academics and activists for a major left wing think tank in Aotearoa?" was comprehensively answered in the affirmative. My analysis of the state of the left more broadly has also indicated that left wing think tank developments have a reasonable chance of success post-2013, if carried out appropriately and well. It is time now to consider what 'appropriately and well' could mean in practice, but first it is worth taking a quick look at what might be learned from the nine overseas think tanks outlined in Chapter 2, and from the experiences of the nascent left wing think tanks in New Zealand.

Left wing think tanks overseas

The left wing think tanks in Australia, Canada, England, Scotland and Germany described earlier offer three particularly pertinent insights. The first factor that drew my attention was the clear correlation between population size and the number of think tanks in a country overall, with progressive think tanks always constituting a minority subset within that. Critical mass clearly influences the ability of our left counterparts in similar jurisdictions to secure sufficient funding and organisational backing to sustain think tank or think tank-like operations. Scotland's Jimmy Reid Foundation (JRF) provides a particularly apt illustration of this, with its comparatively recent establishment as the first substantive left wing think tank in a country whose population is just slightly larger than New Zealand's.

It is interesting to note how the various organisations were generated in the first place. For the most part they were not the product of some blinding flash of inspiration or of an individual's vanity project, but of already existing left organisations whose experience and analysis had moved them to this next developmental step. The Centre for Policy Development in Australia and the Jimmy Reid Foundation both grew out of left publications. The Search Foundation was the legacy not of an individual, but of a

communist party whose last act before closing itself down was to bequeath a healthy endowment to its think tank successor. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the New Economics Foundation both started life as the result of left individuals and organisations recognising the need to build their own institutional counterparts to the influence wielded by right wing think tanks (CCPA) and the G7 group of industrialised nations (NEF). A small, fragile organisation in its early years, the CCPA only started to grow in size and significance once it developed effective linkages and mutual support arrangements with a range of trade unions and community organisations from the mid-1990s onwards.

Anyone keen on establishing a left think tank in New Zealand is likely to look closely at how each of these nine think tanks is funded, and what the implications have been for their kaupapa and activities. In most cases funding derived from similar sources to those commonly available to community based groups in Aotearoa: grants from philanthropic trusts; donations, pledges and membership fees from supportive individuals and entities; and contract work for government and other organisations. Australia's CPD has used online crowd funding to support a particular project, while the NEF has its own social enterprise wing whose profits help support the mother organisation's operations. The Search Foundation's financial genesis as a legacy organisation has already been mentioned. Canada Without Poverty was also the beneficiary of a major bequest in 2010 which substantially boosted its chances of survival. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation thrives in a completely different environment, of complete irrelevance to Aotearoa unless a future government decides to emulate Germany's commitment to fostering democracy by funding think tanks associated with each party represented in Parliament. It was interesting to note the way in which Canada Without Poverty split itself into separate research and advocacy arms as a way of coping with politically-constraining charity legislation similar to New Zealand's.

Nascent left wing think tanks

The examples of the Alternative Welfare Working Group, the Bruce Jesson Foundation, CAFCA, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Fabian Society, the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre, Kotare, ARENA and the Jobs Research Trust have illustrated both the significance of their contributions to the development of a more thoughtful and influential left and their importance as repositories of

information and experience relevant to any future think tank initiative(s). Comparing movement-based knowledge production with regular activist campaign work, Janet Conway says "Knowledge production requires long-term investment of hopes and resources, greater continuity in personnel, sustained attention to some particular issues and questions, and the time and space for the accumulation of specialized knowledges and skills" (Conway, 2006, pp. 131–132). In their different ways, all these groups demonstrate that Conway's learning from her experience with the Metro Network for Social Justice in 1990s Toronto is very similar to what can be identified in 1990–2013 Aotearoa. While the Alternative Welfare Working Group was a project of only six month's duration, most of those involved at its core were building on their university and activist work of decades. The AWWG experience also highlighted how much more might have been achieved if an already existing think tank had been sitting there ready to back the initiative taken in June 2010, instead of depending on a hastily cobbled together and under resourced coalition of support organisations.

Kotare presented a conundrum throughout the study period. In participant responses and from discussions within Kotare and associated networks 2010–2013, the question was often raised as to whether Kotare itself might become the major left wing think tank I was talking about. To those outside the organisation, Kotare's very name "Kotare Trust: Research and Education for Social Change" made it sound like a left wing think tank. However, the organisation's commitment to education as its primary focus; its funding difficulties; the lack of external infrastructure capable of supporting high quality but low cost autonomous community-based research; and Kotare's shallow level of engagement with the academic left in recent years made any move to develop a major think tank from such a low base appear extremely unlikely. With the benefit of hindsight and this research project, I now believe a left think tank was far more likely to have evolved sustainably and well from the base of AUWRC and the Peoples Centres than it ever was from Kotare. The closure of AUWRC in mid-1999 not only triggered the slow decline and eventual loss of the Auckland Peoples Centres, but also spelt the death knell for the tentative discussions which were happening at AUWRC by the late 1990s around the possible establishment of a left wing think tank. The question of what role Kotare might play in or with any future think tank project, if any, is an open one.

The overarching conclusion I take from these histories is the importance of individual commitment in the sustaining of any organisation committed to left think tank or think tank-like work. With the partial exception of the AWWG, one thing all the groups have in common is the vital role played by a group of dedicated individuals over a protracted period. While people like CAFCA's Murray Horton, Vivian Hutchinson with the Jobs Research Trust and Susan St John from CPAG may be among the most visible as the driving forces and public faces of their respective organisations, alongside them there have always been others, equally committed to the pursuit of the groups' goals and just as vital to long term organisational sustainability. The champions such as those named are vital. Without them, it is unlikely any of these organisations would exist or have existed. But in all cases, these groups have only achieved what they have through the protracted foresight and commitment of a small number of dedicated individuals who were willing and able to move beyond the day-to-day of activist and/or academic praxis.

Aziz Choudry says "Many scholarly, NGO and activist accounts pay inadequate attention to the significance of low-key, long-haul political education, and community organizing work, which goes on underneath the radar, as it were" (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010a, p. 2). This goes to the heart of the matter. Any project to establish a major left wing think tank will ignore this lesson at its peril. One reason for the failure of union and Labour efforts to set up a think tank in the 1990s may well have been the lack of such an ongoing core of people dedicated enough to the project to sustain its implementation beyond the formation of a Labour-led government at the end of 1999.

No template

It is possible that some will expect this study to contain a fully-fledged project plan for the establishment of a major left wing think tank in Aotearoa. While I have collected an enormous amount of data which could usefully inform a detailed proposal, I have deliberately chosen not to produce one as part of this research. In accordance with fundamental community development precepts and with the principle just enunciated above, I believe any sustainable and left-consistent initiative will need to be a collective rather than individual effort. In New Zealand and around the world there are examples of think tanks and policy institutes set up and driven by one person, with perhaps some practical assistance from family and friends, backed by low levels of funding derived from a wider support network. Former ACT MP Muriel Newman's New Zealand

Centre for Political Research (http://www.nzcpr.com/) is an example of this phenomenon, and it is not one I recommend replicating. A think tank would have no claim to call itself 'left' nor have any chance of becoming 'major' unless it was grounded in a group effort from day one. There would be practical dangers and ideological incongruities implicit in any attempt at individual pre-emption of the collective effort necessary right from the start of planning such a project. A second reason for not offering a template is that there is, in any case, no one way forward. The possibilities of how a major left wing think tank might be developed, and what its kaupapa and activities might be, are infinitely variable.

Left wing think tanks: Multiple possibilities

The support for a left wing think tank uncovered by this study transcended all differences between participants, including their positioning on the spectrum of 'left'. Cathy Casey raised the idea of a 'pan left' think tank which did present an immediate appeal. However, my analysis of the data gathered for this project and my own long experience of life on the left leave me very clear that it would be foolish in the extreme to expect an initiative which tried to include the entire left within its brief to have any chance of success. The differences between the reformist and transformational left are too significant, revealing themselves particularly in participant responses to questioning around the definition of 'left', the state of the left, and the kaupapa of any potential think tank. There is also a substantive difference between much green thinking and that of others on both the social democratic and radical left, in the 'neither right nor left' tendency prominent in some Green Party and environmental activist circles (Browning, 2011; Tanczos, 2011).

Any project to establish a think tank will find the going tough, for all the reasons outlined in Chapter 6: the comparative weakness of the left's organisations compared to those of the right; the legacy of left disunity and fragmentation; lack of critical mass in a small country, with parallel limitations in human expertise and capacity; the inability of capable people to prioritise a think tank project due to other personal and political prerogatives; a tradition of left anti-intellectualism; and the vexed issue of funding. I do not consider it possible to overcome these very real barriers with a project whose kaupapa is internally confused and contradictory. Trying to blend the radical and social democratic left together, or force a conjunction between those who contend there is or should be no such thing as 'left' or 'right' with those whose beliefs and actions are

shaped by the side they take in capitalism's enduring war on the poor, would simply not work.

There are many potential permutations, but I believe that there could be a place in New Zealand for at least three major left wing think tanks: social democratic, green and left radical. The question of what might work for the Māori left and for Pasifika and other migrant peoples of a progressive persuasion is of course up to those involved, but with the right groundwork I think it possible that they could be an integral part of any or all of these three initiatives. It is just as likely that completely independent options may be preferred. My own interest is in being part of the development of a radical left think tank encompassing ngā iwi tatou kātoa and grounded in left activism as well as left academia. At the same time I would welcome the flourishing of initiatives based in other parts of the New Zealand left. To build a more effective counter force to the neoliberal agenda we need a more thoughtful left, and this applies to all parts of us, not just some.

At the beginning of this section, I referred to the need to consider what 'appropriately and well' might mean in regards to the establishment of a major left wing think tank. While I have no intention of reiterating and commenting on all the detailed suggestions regarding think tank kaupapa, structure, activities and relationships contained in Chapter 6, or of repeating points already made in this section, there are certain further factors any think tank project may wish to take into consideration.

- A number of participants spoke of how they did not want any left think tank to mirror the think tanks of the right. An organisation whose kaupapa and organisational structure are congruent is far more likely to last than one which attempts to simply emulate the NZBRT, the Maxim Institute or others. Nevertheless, it is always worth looking out for what might usefully be learned from these and other think tanks here and overseas, of whatever persuasion. And once major left think tanks exist, dialogue and debate between our institutions and those of the right and centre will help to deepen democracy in Aotearoa.
- There is no point in magical thinking. If we expect to build an organisation more quickly than is practicable or to set goals which are so vast as to be unattainable, we set ourselves up to fail. This would only serve to deepen the

sense of powerlessness and loss that afflicts so much of the left already. Theorising about the possibility of bringing everyone together into a 'pan left' think tank comes into the ambit of magical thinking, which is why I consider it would be a dangerous voyage upon which to embark.

- The quality of a think tank's work will be critical. Over and over again participants stressed the need for a left think tank's research, publications, policy development, advocacy and other output to be of the highest possible standard, not only to increase its ability to influence public policy processes and bring about change, but also because the powerful forces ranged against the left will do everything possible to undermine our projects if given the chance. Any think tank initiative will need to give serious consideration to how it deals with issues around ethics and academic rigour without sacrificing either its principles or financial sustainability.

- Respectful non-tokenistic relationships with many individuals and groups within the left activist and academic worlds, including te ao Māori, will be fundamental.

- Some respondents made the case for a left wing think tank organised as an online network rather than one which maintained a physical base or bases. While this is an option which offers the undoubted benefits of frugality and flexibility, my response is that such an effort would likely remain small and less capable of building widespread support than an entity with physical as well as human infrastructure. Alongside this, and like many participants, I also believe that face to face communication and activity will be vital to a healthy organisation, rather than reliance on the internet. However, I certainly agree that it would be imperative to maximise the effective use of all possible online tools as part of sustaining a strongly networked and influential left wing think tank.

- One of the biggest challenges facing any think tank project will come at the point a Labour and Green Government is elected. The achievement of parliamentary power can all too easily spell the end of extra parliamentary activity by those who suddenly become caught up in the employment, funding and political opportunities which open up when a left-leaning government takes the reins. The ability of any think tank project to ride out and even thrive during

a period of Labour/Green rule will be a significant marker of any longer term capacity for survival.

- The successful establishment of one or more left wing think tanks will reflect the state of the left in Aotearoa at the time. This study can only be a snapshot of the three years 2010–2013. What the future holds is unknowable. Any project group will need to use all the analytical tools at its disposal to constantly assess and reassess the external and internal context in which it is attempting to achieve its goals.

The two major institutional gaps revealed by this research have been the absence of a movement or party on the radical left capable of mobilising and inspiring a far wider range of people than any existing organisation had been able to achieve by mid-2013, and the lack of any major cross sectoral think tank situated in any part of the left. Early 21st century capitalism remains overwhelmingly powerful in this small Pacific nation. The neoliberal agenda has spread its tentacles into every part of society, and is deeply entrenched in our communities, organisations and universities. Progressive forces in Aotearoa are in a weakened state. However, this study has shown that there are far more signs of hope and far more of 'us' than I had ever realised, despite my long acquaintance with the world of the New Zealand left. The opportunity to build a more effective counter force through filling these institutional gaps is in our hands. No one else is going to do it for us.

Recommendations for action

Crucial to political activist ethnography is the notion that research produced using this methodology should be of real use to the work of the groups, networks and movements from which the research question or 'problematic' has been generated. I hope that this proves to be the case, and indeed I have started to discern that this is already happening in various small ways, as I demonstrate shortly in the section discussing the significance of this research. For reasons already discussed, I am well aware of the inadvisability of any individual, no matter how well-meaning, attempting to 'tell' friends, colleagues and comrades on the left how best to proceed. However, I offer four overarching recommendations for action, in the hope that these will be viewed in the spirit in which they are intended: as matters for consideration, rather than any attempt on my part to dictate the possible future activities of others.

1. Take the decision to proceed

If those who are interested in creating a major left wing think tank of any description want such a project to happen, it is no use waiting for someone else to do it. Some individuals will need to make up that initial group of committed people who say "Yes, I will take this power, and build this institution, with you others." Should more than one major left wing think tank initiative develop in the years ahead, this should be an occasion for rejoicing, not rivalry or fear, especially if such initiatives are not competing for support from the same part of the left.

2. Strengthen effective union and community-based left activism

One of the biggest weaknesses of the New Zealand left in relation to its capacity to sustain the development a major left wing think tank post-2013 is the low number of union and community based left organisations with an overt interest in extending their work beyond the exigencies of day-to-day operations. Jim Stanford says "Social change movements are interesting subjects and partners for radical academics only so long as they are ambitious, militant, creative, and at least potentially effective" (Stanford, 2008b, p. 217). Unless union and community activists keep working to build existing groups and set up new ones committed to working for a left future in the ways Jim Stanford describes, it will be much harder to establish and maintain a left think tank(s) capable of serving their purposes.

3. Do more to find each other

This study has left me in no doubt that the left in Aotearoa, including the radical left and the left within the academy, is potentially far more powerful than any of us individually realises. The research results contain many clues about how we might more effectively begin to realise that power, but one area of activity strikes me as being of particular significance. Writing about Occupy Wall Street, Naomi Klein says:

> Yesterday, one of the speakers at the labor rally said, "We found each other." That sentiment captures the beauty of what is being created here. A wide-open space (as well as an idea so big it can't be contained by any space) for all the people who want a better world to find each other. (Klein, 2011, p. 45)

Part of our mission now is to find each other. It is neither possible nor desirable that we inhabit just one space, one encampment, one party or one think tank. What we do need is the will to seek each other out, and to open our minds to the possibilities of what we

could create should enough of us decide to take a few, careful first steps together—in and between the different spaces we inhabit.

4. Build organisations we truly believe in

One of the biggest hurdles we are up against in creating a more powerful left counter force is the scarcity of boldness and the will to power identified early on in this study. This was epitomised for me in a 2013 pub conversation with a young Pākehā radical left doctoral student. He told me he had joined the Greens even though they fell far short of meeting his ideological aspirations. When I asked him why, he responded "There's no other choice. At least they're sort of left, and that's a lot better than nothing. And I guess there's still a chance some of us can change them from inside." Questioned whether he had ever considered that a better option might be working with others to set up a new party or movement that fully reflected his beliefs, he responded with a hesitant "No." If we want to build left power, it will be critical to impart and nourish the sense that we will be collectively stronger if we work to build organisations we truly believe in, rather than simply accepting the limitations of existing options.

Methodological conclusions

"Ethnography is not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical and political. Through our writing and our talk, we enact the worlds we study" (Denzin, 2006, p. 422). My research question was not an innocent one. Anything discovered was aimed at serving those who aspire to "put a knife through the neoliberal framework." From the point at which I first became aware of its existence, political activist ethnography seemed a close if not quite perfect fit for this far-from-innocent purpose. There were times when a newly emergent methodology felt a risky choice for a geographically isolated researcher new to the world of sociological theory. I could not identify anyone in the New Zealand academic or activist worlds who had used or was using this methodology, which meant I lacked opportunities to engage in collegial discourse. There were moments when I regarded my erstwhile colleagues in the grounded theory group with more than a little envy. Yet despite the risks and uncertainties, the experiment was attempted. I now offer a few reflections on the experience.

There were four main reasons for my selection of political activist ethnography as the methodological framework for this study: Ian Hussey's extension of PAE into the work

of activists ourselves and the related notion of sourcing a 'problematic' derived from and located in the activist world rather than at its intersection with ruling powers; the expectation that knowledge obtained through this research will be useful and relevant to the people, groups and networks which gave birth to the problematic; the congruence between this methodology and my own lifelong identification as an activist rather than as an academic; and the particular utility I saw in a number of the associated ethnographic methods. These reasons seemed as valid as the research neared completion as they did when I first started working with PAE.

Particular ways in which the study demonstrated congruity with principles inherent to the political activist ethnographic paradigm included:

- The thesis question or 'problematic' arose from inside the activist world; not just from the mind and memory of the researcher, but also from the acute consciousness of many others of the left wing think tank gap, as the research findings demonstrate.
- Social relations, "sequences of interdependent actions that shape people's daily practices" (Bisaillon, 2012, p. 619) within the ethnographic field were observed, discovered, described, analysed and mapped; contradictions and problems were investigated; historical, geographical and political context was provided.
- The research results contained in the thesis itself and in subsequent publications and presentations will be of direct and immediate use to some organisations, and to any left wing think tank formation group(s). In a number of small ways the research has already made a useful contribution to the work of the activist and academic left, as described in the next section below.
- In undertaking this study I have accepted the challenge presented by the original group of political activist ethnographers, to "move beyond the binary opposition that separates 'activist' and 'researcher' as identity categories" (Frampton et al., 2006a, p. 258).

Ian Hussey talks about research that "aims to disrupt the ideological procedures of ruling regimes, including explanatory social theories and political ideologies that externalize and subsume subjects' consciousness to the regime's transtemporal, trans-spatial, trans-situational understandings of the social" (Hussey, 2012, p. 9). I believe

this is exactly what the results of this research will achieve, should at least some among the academic and activist left act on the recommendations outlined above.

However, I could never escape the feeling that I was not acting with fidelity to IE/PAE theory and practice. There was very good reason for not undertaking textual analysis given the size of the research field and the scope implied by the questions I was asking, yet every IE and PAE study I had seen included consideration of texts and the ways in which they were used. More troubling than this, however, was my sense that integral to political activist ethnography as it had been practised so far was a commitment to mapping, as Ian Hussey puts it, "the social organization of the ruling regimes activists confront, while simultaneously explicating the social organization of the ruling relations that hook into and coordinate activist work" (Hussey, 2012, p. 20). While the "social organization of ruling regimes" formed necessary backdrop and context, the core of this research was focused on understanding and mapping aspects of the social organization of New Zealand's activist left work and world, not that of the powers we are up against.

There is no question that this research as presented is political, activist and ethnographic. The underpinning ontological and epistemological critical inquiry paradigm is consistent with the study's purpose and methods. Both the research question and its goals are consonant with a PAE framework. Yet I have come to believe that if I was starting this research again in the light of what I have learned, I would commence with the construction of a modified or new form of political activist ethnography or look at working with one of the other emerging activist ethnographic methodologies. It is important, as PAE practitioners and others involved in activist methodological work often point out, that research templates and frameworks are developed from activist bases, adapted to our kaupapa and congruent with our purposes. For research similar to that undertaken here, it would be interesting to develop a form of political activist ethnography that:

- Does not have textual analysis at its core, although it could always be an option in the toolkit.

- Is focused primarily on examining aspects of the social relations and practices of activist work, and the ways in which these are organised. This is not to imply

that historical, political, economic and social contexts should be ignored; these are always relevant.

- Incorporates and experiments with collaborative methods, such as methodically integrating aspects of the research process with organisations' own action/reflection cycles.

- Explores the methods by which meta-meso-micro studies on the kind of scale attempted here might be further enhanced. I am interested in the possibilities created by bringing together ideas on mapping derived from constructivist grounded theory methodology and from PAE.

The issue of the congruence of PAE to this study was brought into sharp relief when I considered a possible project AAAP's research working group has discussed frequently: a comprehensive study of a three day beneficiary 'impact' from start to finish. PAE appears the perfect tool for such research, as the impacts operate at the interface between a welfare activist group and the state, in the form of the Department of Work and Income. This doctoral research project, on the other hand, has had a very different and far broader orientation. I am much taken with Aziz Choudry's statement that "Rather than attempting to categorize activist research processes into neat, finite models, I contend that it is important to capture and understand the dynamic interplay between activist research and organizing" (Choudry, 2013a, p. 14). I believe there is much exciting potential for this to happen as increasing numbers of us at the academic activist interface continue to trial methodologies and methods in ways which will become increasingly relevant to the activist as well as academic worlds, including here in Aotearoa, where such research is barely visible.

Finally, in my role as a researcher from a strongly activist background working in an experimental way with a comparatively new methodology, it is important to stress that high standards of institutional compliance and rigour were maintained throughout the doctoral process. Some of these have been outlined in Chapter 3, but in summary they include: monthly supervision sessions from the time of the first preparation of a formal doctoral proposal through until submission; regular six monthly reports on progress; the presentation and acceptance of the 'D9' confirmation of candidature research proposal; the submission and acceptance of the application to the AUT Ethics Committee;

participation in monthly postgraduate 'potluck' seminars with students and staff connected to Marilyn Waring's student group; various presentations made to that group, resulting in useful feedback from colleagues; and a formal presentation at the AUT Postgraduate Student Conference in June 2013.

Significance of research

This project makes an original contribution to knowledge both in its academic field overall and in expanding the intellectual resources available to those committed to developing a more coherent, capable and influential academic and activist left in New Zealand. It provides a helpful starting point for a range of specific actions, should individuals and groups choose to use it for that purpose. This inquiry has also already resulted in some practical outcomes which will be described shortly, as will the way in which the research process has had a quite considerable impact on my own sense of identity.

Original contribution to knowledge

This is the first piece of research ever undertaken into why a substantial left wing think tank had never emerged in Aotearoa and whether the ground at the time was fertile for such a development. It adds to the very sparse literature on New Zealand think tanks and is a similarly rare local contribution to the internationally thriving field of think tank studies.

There has been very little research undertaken into the state of the New Zealand activist left in the period from 1990 onwards, or in the specific timeframe 2010–2013. This thesis adds significantly to the meagre literature available, providing a snapshot of how at least some parts of the activist and academic left viewed ourselves and the condition we were in at one particular point in the nation's history.

While there has been a welcome growth in the quantity and quality of research about and from within the community and voluntary sector in Aotearoa since 1990, very little of this has focused on the work of overtly left community based organisations such as the 'nascent left wing think tanks' whose stories have started to be told here. This project makes a start in filling that gap in the sector's knowledge base.

The study also offers a useful starting point for many possible future areas of research, both inside and outside the academy. Some specific ideas are listed in the next section, but it is possible researchers will be stimulated to pick up work which takes them in a number of other directions as well. I certainly hope so.

To the best of my knowledge, political activist ethnography has not been used as the methodological framework for any doctoral research in New Zealand before. This project marks a first experiment with this form of critical inquiry ethnography, which may well help inform and spark further work in this and related methodological areas in future. The study also adds to the growing body of political activist ethnographic literature internationally, and to associated studies in social movement knowledge production and other forms of activist ethnography and activist scholarship.

A starting point for action

This research is in one sense a feasibility study assessing the pros and cons, opportunities and risks involved in setting up one or more left wing think tanks in New Zealand. It will be supplemented by further reports, presentations and papers which will be disseminated post-doctorally. As signalled earlier, my own intention is to be part of a radical left think tank formation group which will use this data to assist its work in whatever ways those involved feel is appropriate. If other left think tank initiatives develop, those involved will be able to access and utilise the findings of this thesis and any further related publications, should they choose to do so.

There are many other possible actions and activities, general and particular, large and small, which may be triggered or encouraged by aspects of this research. There is no point in listing these again, but in many different ways they offer a myriad of generative starting points for those individuals and groups with a will to act in one or more ways towards the foundational goal of this research—strengthening the power and influence of left thinking, culture, organisation and action in Aotearoa.

Practical results already demonstrated

By early 2013, I was starting to identify ways in which the work I was doing was affecting developments in the political and organisational world around me. I will elaborate on four of these, in chronological order, as this gives a taste of how much

more may be stimulated and achieved once this thesis and associated reports and papers are disseminated post completion.

The programme of the annual Kotare summer school in February 2013 included a number of sessions whose content had been prompted by what I was beginning to find out from my research interviews, as well as from other sources internal to the organisation. As a result of a workshop looking at the role of ideology in left organisations, an activist in his 20s from an anarchist background and myself agreed to take part in a brief formal fishbowl debate with each other, highlighting what we perceived as key differences between anarchists and socialists/communists in Aotearoa in the contemporary era. Many workshop participants told us they had never seen anything like it before. The animated discussion which followed and later feedback indicated that for some this had been a watershed moment, opening up the possibility of further dialogue, debate and collective activity between what had historically been deeply divided tendencies. I doubt I would have had the motivation or the courage to enter that debate if I had not been the early beneficiary of the findings of this research. I have also noticed ongoing ripple effects in a number of places, including within the practical and educational work of Auckland Action Against Poverty.

The POA (Political Organisation Aotearoa) network launched itself in March 2013. The nature of my research project meant I was delighted to see the emergence of a group which described itself as "a collective experiment in political thinking and organisation" aiming to "explore alternative vehicles for political involvement and expression" (Political Organisation Aotearoa, 2013b) on a clearly left kaupapa. However, I was stunned by the new network's commitment to anonymity. Nowhere on their website did they say who was involved. Authors of written material were not identified. I wondered immediately if there was some connection between this passion for remaining anonymous and my research findings around the perceived lack of boldness and risk-taking, particularly among younger generation activists and academics. I wrote an article challenging POA on this (Bradford, 2013), which in turn attracted a formal response (Political Organisation Aotearoa, 2013a). By late 2013 POA had not changed its policy on anonymity, but it had invited me to join their network, and internal discussions continued on this and other theoretical matters of interest to the activist and academic left. I doubt I would have bothered to publicly engage with the group without the stimulation of my research project in the first place. It is also

possible that my recent involvement with the network and the dissemination of the product of this research, once available, may assist POA in its future work, possibly even prompting at least some of those involved towards a slightly less anonymous engagement with intellectual and practical developments on the New Zealand left.

In May 2013 the Hobgoblin Network advised that the WISSE (Workers Institute of Scientific Socialist Education), as part of their support for the Hobgoblin project, had pledged funding which would allow me to hold a number of meetings around the country to report back on my thesis research and findings once doctoral work was complete. The Network also offered to assist with the organisational logistics of such a tour. This early contribution was a welcome and practical signifier of left interest in the project. Of more importance, however, was the fact that the funding originated in an organisation whose ideological heritage (SUP) was one with which I had once been engaged in bitter factional wars within the unemployed movement. The offer symbolised what I had been discovering during the research interviews: that there was genuinely a new mood among the radical left for debate, reconciliation and practical movement forwards in ways which transcended old sectarian lines.

The research process and findings have also had a direct impact on my thinking and work with the organisations with which I have been most closely involved during the 2010–2013 period: Auckland Action Against Poverty, Kotare and Mana. Kotare is probably the only organisation where this has been made visible, through my writing and presenting a number of background papers as a resource for internal discussions about the organisation's future following a major restructuring process which started in June 2013. Research findings have influenced and expanded the content of these papers, and are likely to continue to play a role in supporting and informing various aspects of Kotare's work for some time to come. In regards to Mana, the main impact of this research has been in the way it bolstered my commitment to the organisation through many moments of questioning and doubt. For better or worse, I remained an active contributor to Mana's work throughout the research period. My analysis of findings told me over and over again that whatever its eventual fate, the experience of attempting this journey together as Māori and tauiwi committed to left tino rangatiratanga was going to underpin in all sorts of ways the future of the radical left in Aotearoa. With AAAP, specific research findings informed my input into the planning and teaching of our first economics education series in 2013. More broadly, the

research contributed to my awareness of the need to sustain AAAP as an activist space in which people from across all parts of the left could come together and take action in a common cause, in ways which moved beyond the divisions which had afflicted unemployed groups of earlier generations.

Significance–reflexive statement

It was only in the last few months of the research period that I began to realise how much the process had affected me, although not in regards to my activist identity. Close to the deadline for thesis completion I was on a balcony picketing a National Party Christmas barbecue with AAAP, challenging the government on the impacts of its welfare reforms and tussling with police after they turned on young women on our front line (Day, 2013). I had been this kind of activist since I first picked up a loudhailer and placard in the late 1960s, and that had not changed. However, there was another way in which the doctoral journey had deeply challenged my sense of who I was within the left world I had always inhabited.

As I drove home down the dusty road from a late-2013 meeting at Kotare's educational centre in Hoteo North, it suddenly dawned on me for the first time that I was no longer just an activist with an interest in using research and education to further our daily work. I had become something else. Somehow I had metamorphosed into an academic, an intellectual, without having realised that I had done so. Whether in Kotare, AAAP or Mana I constantly wanted to take conversations about practice and strategy deeper. Theoretical debates were suddenly interesting in ways they never had been before. The limitations of Kotare's research and pedagogical capacity were becoming even more apparent and frustrating than they had ever been before. I was suddenly apprehensive about the implications. I could not afford to give up on or lose interest in the day to day work of the organisations with which I was involved just because they were not operating at the level of the left wing think tank I now dreamed of building. When initiating this research project I had sought to build stronger left institutions, not weaken those in which I already played a role by becoming the archetypal patronising intellectual. What was to be done?

After the first shock of my shift in awareness about my new identity, however, I began to understand that what had happened to me was not only a natural consequence of undertaking a PhD, but also epitomised the research project itself. I had started out by

wanting to build the intellectual capacity of the left through finding out the answers to certain questions. On the way through my own ability and will to work within the stringency of theoretical and academic frameworks changed too. Now the task ahead for those of us who shared the aspirations enunciated by participants in this research, was to turn those answers into reality by bringing the academic and non-academic left together in more productive ways than we have managed in the past. All going well, my new mixed academic-activist identity would assist that process, not only through possible left think tank development, but in other ways too.

Possibilities for further research

The sheer quantity of data gathered and analysed for this study, the intelligence and insight of participants and the provocation created by my experiment with a methodology at the activist-academic interface combined to generate a broad range of possibilities for future research.

Think tanks

1. It is not only Aotearoa which lacks a major cross sectoral left wing think tank. The Pacific region as a whole would benefit from a deepening and strengthening of the left's capacity to think. A research project which asked similar questions to those posed in this study could be useful should sufficient left activist and academic support exist in at least some parts of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa to make such a project viable.

2. It would clearly be useful to any future projects if further and more substantial research could be undertaken into a small selection of pertinent and successful left wing think tanks overseas.

Left activist

3. There are many possible entry points for research into Occupy and its aftermath. There may already be substantial studies underway with a focus on the New Zealand experience, but if this is not happening, it should be. Such contributions will be significant not only to left activist studies and practice in Aotearoa, but also to the growing international literature on Occupy.

4. At the intersection of welfare and student activism, an examination of the role of students and student organisations within and in alliance with unemployed and beneficiary groups from the 1980s onwards would be useful, including an exploration of the implications for future work in both sectors, and how this fits with traditional notions of left anti intellectualism.

5. The full history of AUWRC and the Auckland Peoples Centres should be researched and written before memories fade and key actors pass on. In 1991 Karen Davis wrote "We wish in [the] near future to write a much fuller history of the struggle against unemployment in Aotearoa" (K. Davis, 1991, p. 73). Over 20 years later this had still not happened, either in the full form envisioned by Karen, or in any more limited version focused, for example, on AUWRC and associated organisations, or on the 1980s–1990s generation of groups nationally.

6. Any substantive examination of radical left theory and praxis in regards to the nature of leadership would find an interested and responsive audience on the transformational left. Exploring questions around why people are so hesitant to take leadership, the role of ideology in restraining capacity, and what steps might be taken to develop styles of leadership that are both effectual and ideologically compatible with anarchist, socialist, communist, ecosocialist and tino rangatiratanga groups (together or separately) would make a fascinating study.

7. An examination of the impact of the Christchurch earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 and their aftermath on the practice and evolution of left organisations in the region would make a fascinating study, alongside an analysis of how the left in the rest of New Zealand responded (or failed to respond) to their situation.

8. A comparative study of the barriers to women reaching their full potential within left activist organisations across the generations involved in this study, and consideration of how those barriers might be overcome in future.

9. A serious look from within a left tino rangatiratanga framework at the ways in which a careful selection of organisations or movements have experimented

with tangata whenua/tauiwi relationships in practice, and what that might teach us for future work.

10. A consideration of the role played in left activist work by intelligent, thoughtful people, often of working class origin, who do not necessarily have a university education or consider themselves intellectuals, but who make significant contributions to organisational practice and theoretical development.

11. Intergenerational differences in approach to the use of online tools for left activist purposes, and the exploration of possibilities for future development of more effective web-based organising, research and advocacy, bringing together experiences and learning from across age groups.

Left parties

12. A comprehensive examination of Mana's origins and early years would benefit wānanga and university based researchers and grass roots activists in a number of activist sectors and academic disciplines. It would be particularly fruitful to undertake this as a collaborative project between Māori and tauiwi researchers. As with Occupy, there are many potential entry points.

13. To the best of my knowledge, a full clear history of radical left parties, movements, collectives and tendencies in New Zealand has never been attempted in recent decades, if ever. A study covering the years, for example, 1975–2015 would make an interesting adjunct to this research, as well as adding to the scanty literature.

Nascent left wing think tanks

14. A separate study of AUWRC and Kotare examining their contribution to radical left community based knowledge production in Aotearoa and what might be learned from their experiences would be useful to any transformational left think tank project, to Kotare and other local initiatives, and to the growing body of academic research in this area internationally.

15. Groups like Kotare and any think tank implementation initiatives would benefit from an exploration of the barriers faced by community based organisations

who attempt to develop and carry out autonomous research projects, including issues around ethics approval and other matters relating to the maintenance of academic standards; and from an examination of how such barriers might be overcome without compromising kaupapa or financial viability.

Political activist ethnography: Applied

16. It would be fascinating to undertake a full PAE study of a beneficiary 'impact' such as those organised by AAAP in 2012 and 2013, covering the entire process from the earliest planning and preparation through to the conclusion of all follow up activity. Such a study would benefit from the textual analysis which is usually part of PAE/IE methods, including consideration of non-print texts such as mass and online media, photographs and film.

Community development theory

17. The experience of AUWRC and the Peoples Centres would usefully contribute to a broader examination of the role played by left activists in generating and sustaining community based social and economic enterprises. The importance of this form of activist work remains to a large extent underestimated and unrecognised in Aotearoa.

Left academic

18. An in depth investigation of the attitudes of activists to theory and theorisation, and of the ways in which theory has been used in both praxis and knowledge production among sections of the New Zealand left would be fruitful, and would be deepened if carried out collaboratively between activist and academic researchers.

19. It would be interesting to explore the place of social movement theory at the intersection between academia and activism in New Zealand, considering its current applicability to the actual work of the left and ways in which increased engagement between academics and activists might enhance or reframe the way left social movement academics work with it.

20. Research exploring the application and development of various forms of activist methodology in Aotearoa, including political activist ethnography and other variants would be exciting and useful.

21. Attitudes to framing and language on the left: consideration of this work in practice and an exploration of associated theoretical debates.

22. The role of left academics in the neoliberal universities of 2012 and ensuing years: situation analysis, fears, hopes and possibilities; and detailed consideration of the ways in which the academy might more creatively and productively work with the activist left.

Conclusion

At the time I commenced this research, the question of the lack of a major left wing think tank on our side of the political fence had been simmering away unanswered at the back of my mind for two decades. My ten years in Parliament had taught me that the parties who try to represent left interests there often lacked innovative radical new policies and the courage to advocate for them. The most exciting, forward-looking and progressive concepts arising within the Green and Labour Parties were often wilfully ignored or downright opposed. The weakness of the left's position and the overwhelming power we confronted in any attempt to strengthen our institutions was immense. "Our societies, with the shift to neoliberal capitalism during the last thirty years, seem intent on augmenting inequalities and the powerlessness of most people" (Choudry et al., 2012, p. 2). Nine years of a Labour-led government had resulted in the usual weakening of radical left activist organisation in unions and communities. I decided that a major research project aimed at strengthening the ability of the left to become more thoughtful and more capable of influencing transformational change was possibly the most useful contribution I could make at that point in my life. This thesis is the result. I believe that the original research question "A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa—an impossible dream or a call to action?" has been clearly answered with "Yes, it is a call to action—a call we ignore at our peril."

Research results demonstrated that the lack of any major think tank on the left was not the only institutional absence, but it was a critical one. Participants felt an urgent need for more spaces and opportunities where those on the left could think together,

unrestricted by the colonising agendas of government and the corporate sector, and where those doing the thinking remained connected to activist realities. In moving from a fragmented left to one whose differences are a source of strength rather than weakness, the institutionalisation of our capacity to think together, and to act on that thinking, were seen as imperative. Paul Maunder said "We're in the swamp, we've got the decline of capitalism and that just produces incoherence for a hundred years . . . as something else slowly works through." My profound hope is that this study will help that "something else", in all its variety, beauty and danger, to emerge.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary of Māori words 277
Appendix B: AUT Ethics Committee approval 280
Appendix C: Information sheet provided to research participants 282
Appendix D: Initial pānui sent by email to potential research participants 285
Appendix E: The Peoples Charter 286
Appendix F: Participant list 288
Appendix G: Indicative questions for interviews 290
Appendix H: Nodes list (themes) 292
Appendix I: Sample of two second-tier analytic diagrams 297
Appendix J: Analytic memos—Some examples 299
Appendix K: Indicative timeline 302
Appendix L: Indicative timeline 305
Appendix M: Indicative timeline 307
Appendix N: Indicative timeline 309
Appendix O: Acronyms and abbreviations 313

Appendix A: Glossary of Māori words

Definitions are from *Te Aka Māori* online dictionary (http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/), unless otherwise indicated.

ao	world
Aotearoa	Māori name for New Zealand
aroha	love
hapū	kinship group, clan, tribe, sub-tribe
hīkoi	walk, march
hui	gathering
huruhuru	feathers
iwi	extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people
kaitiakitanga	guardianship
katoa	everybody
kaupapa	policy, proposal, agenda, programme
kaupapa Māori	Māori ideology – a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society.
kia ora	cheers! best wishes!
koha	gift, contribution
koutou	you (three or more people)
kupu	word
kura	school
mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu	without feathers the bird can't fly (Mamari Stephens)
mahi	work
mana	authority, power, status
manaakitanga	hospitality, kindness
manu	bird

marae	courtyard – the open area in front of the wharenui (meeting place), where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the marae.
mātauranga	education, wisdom, knowledge
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge – the body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view and perspectives, Māori creativity and cultural practices.
mihi	greeting, acknowledgement
ngā iwi tātou katoa	everybody, all of us (researcher translation)
ngā mihi nui ana au ki a koutou	heartfelt acknowledgements to all of you (researcher translation)
Ngā Tamatoa	Māori activist group
Ngāpuhi	Tribal group of much of Northland.
nui	plentiful, big
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
pānui	announce, advertise, announcement
pou	post, support, pole, pillar
rangatiratanga	sovereignty, right to exercise authority, self-determination, self-management
reo	language
rere	fly
rohe	region, territory
rōpū	group
tangata whenua	local people, indigenous people
taonga	treasure, anything prized – applied to anything considered to be of value
tātou	we, us, you (two or more) and I
tauiwi	foreigners, non-Māori, immigrants

te ao Māori	the Māori world
Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa	Pacific
te reo Māori	Māori language
tikanga	correct procedure, custom, habit, lore, method
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination, sovereignty, domination, rule, control, power
Tiriti o Waitangi	Treaty of Waitangi
wairua	spirit, soul
waka	canoe
wānanga	tertiary institution that caters to Māori learning needs
whaikōrero	to make a formal speech, oratory
whakaaro	thought, opinion, plan, understanding
whakapapa	genealogy, lineage, descent
whānau	extended family, family group
whanaungatanga	relationship, kinship, sense of family connection – a relationship through shared experiences which provides people with a sense of belonging.

Appendix B: AUT Ethics Committee approval

MEMORANDUM

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To: Marilyn Waring
From: Rosemary Godbold Executive Secretary, AUTEC
Date: 7 June 2012
Subject: Ethics Application Number 12/90 **A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa - an impossible dream or a call to action.**

Dear Marilyn

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 30 April 2012 and I have approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 25 June 2012.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 7 June 2015.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 7 June 2015;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 7 June 2015 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all written and verbal correspondence with us. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact me by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 6902. Alternatively you may contact your AUTEC

Faculty Representative (a list with contact details may be found in the Ethics Knowledge Base at http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics).

On behalf of AUTEC and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Godbold
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Susan Bradford sue.bradford@aut.ac.nz

Appendix C: Information sheet provided to research participants

Participant Information Sheet

Monday 8 October 2012

Kia ora ,

AN INVITATION – HE PĀNUI

My name is Sue Bradford. I am currently undertaking doctoral study at the AUT Institute of Public Policy in Auckland, researching and writing a PhD around the question: **" A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa—an impossible dream or a call to action?"**

I am contacting you to see if you would be willing to allow me to interview you for this project, as I believe you have experience and perspectives which would be useful in my consideration of this question. It would be great if you can help out, but it is entirely up to you as to whether you have the time and the inclination – no problems if not. If you do agree to an interview, you can still withdraw from the research project at any time prior to the point at which I finish collecting data.

The product of this research will be my PhD thesis. I also intend to produce several papers and articles from the research, and will make myself available to speak or resource sessions at workshops and hui where people may be interested in exploring this topic further. I will also be sending a short summary report of the research to everyone I interview once my thesis is finished.

What will happen in this research?

The people I am inviting to participate in this research are all left wing activists and/or academics who live in Aotearoa. I am interviewing up to a maximum of 50 people from around the country, all of whom I have identified through my own personal and political networks.

I hope you will be able to give me up to an hour of your time for the interview. There is also a possibility that I might have to get back to you to interview you a second time if it becomes clear that more time with you would be useful, but of course I will only come back to you again if that works for you. The second interview would be for no more than an hour.

I will only be using the material I gather from you for the purposes of my PhD and related publications and presentations, not for other reasons.

How will my privacy be protected?

If you agree to an interview, it is up to you whether you want to be identified by name within the research, or not. If you wish your identity to remain confidential to myself and my academic supervisors, I will use a pseudonym to identify you if and when you are mentioned or quoted in the thesis or in any other related publications.

If you are happy to be identified, I will check any quotes I use or statements about you back with you before including them in the thesis or other written material.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

It would be great if you could get back to me by 23 October to let me know whether you would like to participate in this research. If you are keen, I will liaise with you in terms of the details of a time and place to meet up in Wellington.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you do wish to participate in this research, please fill in and sign the attached Consent Form and get it back to me, either now or when we meet up. Thanks!

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes. Once my thesis is publicly available I will send you an url link so that you can access and read the full work if you choose. I will also provide a summary report which I will send out to you and all participants as soon as practicable after thesis completion. As mentioned earlier, I also plan to make myself available to take part in any gatherings or workshops where there may be an interest in the research results.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Marilyn Waring at marilyn.waring@aut.ac.nz, ph (09) 921 9661.

Concerns regarding the conduct of this research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Dr Rosemary Godbold, rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext 6902.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher contact details:

Sue Bradford: sue.bradford@aut.ac.nz (09) 921 9999 ext 7680 or 027 243 4239.

Project supervisor contact details:

Professor Marilyn Waring: marilyn.waring@aut.ac.nz, ph (09) 921 9661.

Thank you very much for considering this invitation – I look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Nga mihi, Sue Bradford

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 June 2012. AUTEC Reference number 12/90.

Appendix D: Initial pānui sent by email to potential research participants

Sue Bradford

Kia ora *x* (name of participant),

I am currently studying for a PhD at the AUT Institute of Public Policy in Auckland, looking at the question "A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa—an impossible dream or a call to action?"

I am making contact to see if you are happy for me to send you a formal participant information sheet inviting you to allow me to interview you for my research, as I believe you have experience and perspectives relating to this topic which would be really useful.

If you are interested, or have any questions, can you get back to me either at this email address, or by ringing me on (09) 921 9999 ext 7680 (day) or 027 243 4239 by *x* (date 2 weeks away)? Thanks!

If for any reason an interview doesn't suit, no problems – but if you could just let me know, that would be great.

All best wishes for your own current work,

Ngā mihi,

Sue Bradford

Appendix E: The Peoples Charter

Preamble:

We are joined by a common determination to work for a society in which all have the right and ability to take an active part in the political, social and economic structures which affect our lives.

We are committed to the realisation of a society in which the rights of the tangata whenua as embodied in Te Tiriti o Waitangi are recognised.

We are working for a cooperative society which meets the needs of the Earth and all its people by linking with others to develop and support initiatives consistent with the following:

Our vision is that:

- Aotearoa will be fully decolonised. Te Tiriti o Waitangi will form our constitutional base, underpinning democratic, accountable and equitable distribution of power, wealth and information.
- Aotearoa will have mutually beneficial relations with the South Pacific and the rest of the world.
- Individuals and collectives will have the right to determine and be responsible for their own direction. Decision making will include the full consent of those affected.
- The main goals of our economy will be fairness and fulfilment of basic human needs, rather than private profit.
- As part of the delicate balance of the world's ecosystems, we will respect and nurture the Earth, enhancing life in all its diversity.
- We will value cooperation and caring above greed and competition. We will foster spiritual growth which enhances the dignity of all people, recognising a special responsibility for the needs of the powerless, particularly children.
- Women and men will have equal access to and share power in all personal, social and economic aspects of society. Men will support women in their struggle against sexism.
- All people will be free from discrimination and prejudice.
- Every person will have the right to contribute to the common good and to their own development as human beings through meaningful, non-exploitative work. Workers will have the right to bargain collectively.
- Free, appropriate and quality health care and education, decent, secure and affordable housing, and a universal basic income will be available to all as of right.

We commit ourselves to:

- Establishing Te Tiriti o Waitangi as our constitutional base.
- Fostering cultural values which empower people to transform society on a non-sexist, non-racist and non-hierarchical basis.
- Building a political movement that will effect fundamental economic, political and social change from a grass roots base.
- Coordinating the efforts of people working in the community so we can better support each other through effective networks.
- Developing and using economic models that respect the environment, conserve resources and maximise the creative capacities of all people.
- Active peacemaking.

Adopted by the National Peoples Assembly, Porirua, Aotearoa. March 1994.

Appendix F: Participant list

Note: The identifiers used here applied at the time the research interviews were held in the second half of 2012.

Name	Brief identifier
1. Annette Sykes	Lawyer, activist, President of Mana
2. Ariana Paretutanganui-Tamati	Community based researcher, activist
3. Bill Rosenberg	CTU economist
4. Brian Easton	Economist, independent researcher
5. Brian Roper	Academic, activist
6. Bryan Gould	Former Labour MP (UK), academic, researcher
7. Bryce Edwards	Academic, commentator
8. Cathy Casey	City councillor, former academic, activist
9. Chris Trotter	Writer, researcher, commentator
10. Cybèle Locke	Academic, former activist AUWRC, Kotare
11. Daphne Lawless	Self-employed researcher, radical left
12. David Parker	Activist, academic, major involvement Kotare
13. Dennis Maga	Union organiser, focus on work with migrants
14. Gary Cranston	Union organiser, climate justice activist
15. Geoff Todd	(Anonymity requested); young student activist
16. Gordon Campbell	Journalist, former Green Party media advisor
17. Helen Potter	Researcher for Mana in Parliament, activist
18. Jane Stevens	Community development worker, activist
19. Jared Davidson	Young radical activist
20. Joce Jesson	Academic, activist, BJF
21. John Stansfield	Activist, community development worker
22. Karen Davis	Activist, researcher, Kotare/AUWRC
23. Karlo Mila	Academic, poet
24. Kathleen Williams	(Anonymity req); community researcher, activist
25. Kevin Hague	Green Party MP, activist
26. Laila Harré	Former Alliance MP, Green Party issues director
27. Mamari Stephens	Academic; AWWG
28. Marcelo Cooke	(Anonymity req); young activist
29. Maria Bargh	Academic, activist
30. Mark Gosche	Former Labour Party MP, public servant
31. Matt McCarten	Unionist, activist, commentator
32. Mike O'Brien	Academic, AWWG, CPAG
33. Murray Horton	Activist, community based researcher, CAFCA
34. Paul Blair	Welfare activist & advocate
35. Paul Chalmers	Labour Party, union activist, Fabian Society
36. Paul Maunder	Playwright, community development worker
37. Peter Conway	CTU national secretary
38. Pip Duncalf	Philanthropic perspective
39. Rhiannon Thomson	Activist, public servant
40. Robert Reid	General secretary, FIRST union
41. Robert Root	(Anonymity req); philanthropic perspective
42. Ryan Bodman	Activist, student
43. Sandra Grey	Academic, unionist

44.	Sara Jacob	(Anonymity req); academic
45.	Simon Oosterman	Union & community activist
46.	Susan St John	Academic, CPAG
47.	Tim Howard	Community based researcher, activist, Kotare
48.	Tur Borren	Philanthropic perspective
49.	Veronica Tawhai	Academic, activist
50.	Vivian Hutchinson	Cultural activist, community development, JRT
51.	Will ‘Ilolahia	Community development worker, activist

Appendix G: Indicative questions for interviews

Sue Bradford

Research title: A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa—an impossible dream or a call to action?

CHECK: Consent form signed – anon or not?

The concept of 'left' is key to the research I'm carrying out. I've got a preliminary definition here (hand to participant on card),

- What do you think about this definition – what's your first reaction?
- Would you change this definition?
- (If 'yes') How?

Where on the left spectrum do you see yourself? ACTIVIST?

Think tanks – show definition BEFORE asking anything.

For the purposes of this research, I'm defining 'think tank' like this (hand participant definition on card).

- Do you have any thoughts about this definition?
- If has other ideas about definition (eg 'campaigns') – how do you see this working? What would it/they involve?
- ***Have you ever thought about the idea of setting up a left wing think tank in New Zealand? -*** Would you like to see a substantial left wing think tank happen here?
- Can you remember talking with anyone else about this - if 'yes', when the conversation happened, who with, context, what was said
- Even though there are left wing think tanks in other countries, and even though we've got a number of right and centre think tanks here, why do you think a major left wing think tank hasn't developed, so far?

If participant is positive about the idea of setting up a left wing think tank:

- What do you think it would take to set up a major left wing think tank here?
- If we were to start setting up a major left wing think tank tomorrow, do you have any ideas about its kaupapa that you'd like to share with me?
- …do you have any ideas about how funding and resourcing for an organisation like this could be secured?
- ... do you have any ideas about its potential structure? About Maori side?
    - Research – what sort of research can you imagine such an entity usefully carrying out - research already undertaken in academic institutions vs doing own original research?
    - Any particular topics that you think would be useful right now?
- About other activities outlined in definition apart from research?
- Negative connotations to term 'think tank' for people on the left?

What do you think is/are the most critical cutting edge issues strategically for the left in Aotearoa right now?

What is the most important thing we should be doing next? (to build our collective ability to influence public policy)

If participant has played a role in a nascent think tank:

Did you see the group as a think tank or anything like a think tank when it started?

- Do you think the group played any think tank type roles later on, or now?
- What were/are these roles?
- How effective do you think your group was/is in carrying these out?
- Looking at it today, are there things you think you and your group could have done/could do differently to be more effective in terms of having an impact on public policy in Aotearoa?
- General question re whole nascent think tank list – any thoughts on any of these groups, or others that I may have missed? (list presented)

Is there anything else you'd like to add in relation to the questions we've been talking about today?

Appendix H: Nodes list (themes)

Activities of think tank

- Academics & think tank
- Alternatives, futures, vision, transition
- Campaigns, organising, activists and think tank
- Challenges in research
- 0Debate, workshops, conferences, conversations
- Education, analysis & consciousness raising
- Generative space
- Lobbying and influence
- Media, publications & communications
    - Social media & ICT
- Participatory research
- Policy development
- Quality & nature – research
- Story-telling, culture, giving voice to the voiceless
- Thinking, thought, reflection
- Topics for research

Attitudes of left to 'think tank' and 'left'

- Alternatives to 'think tank', 'left' in name
- Great quote
- Left definition
    - Critique of 'left' definition
    - Debates about left
    - Where sit on left spectrum
- Perceptions, comments & advice in relation to researcher & research
- Support for think tank
    - Gap, absence
    - Nature of support or criticism
    - Participant includes self
    - Potential support of others
    - Thinking about left wing think tank, past and current
- Surprise
- Think tank – definition

Building a think tank – includes barriers vs overcoming barriers

- Anti-intellectualism, intellectuals
- Autonomy, legal, space, geography, names
- Current other initiatives
- External political & economic
- First steps
- Funding
    - Current funding difficulties
    - Politics and funding
    - Securing funding & other resources
        - Businesses, wealthy individuals & philanthropic trusts
        - Church and community groups
        - Contracts, universities, public sector
        - Individuals, members, crowdsourcing
        - International
        - Unions
    - Accountability, mandate, credibility, efficacy
    - Overcoming barriers- strategies for building a left think tank
    - Reform vs transform
- Lack analysis
- Lack of critical mass
- Not focused priority
- Organisational culture
- Participation – structure
- People, management & governance
- Roles in relation to other groups – friends and allies
- Unity vs disunity

Key intersectionalities

- Asian and migrant
- Content, issues - Maori
- Funding - Maori
- GLBTI
- Maori and tauiwi – working together
- Pasifika

Politics – Maori

Women

Feminist identity

Left – building power vs what holds us back

Academic activist relationships

Alternatives, visions, transition

Analysis and consciousness raising

Challenges vs ways forward – activism (NOT broader left)

AAAP

Community sector

Churches

Left sects

Living Wage

Occupy

Parliamentary parties

Green Party

Labour Party

Mana Movement

Students

Unions

Confidence, taking power in our own hands, faith, hope

Feelings

Framing and language

Media role

Organisational seeking

People seeking vs people finding

Priority policy issues for the left now

State of the left now

Theories of change, role of ideology, theory

Varieties of activism

Nascent left wing think tanks

AUWRC

BOOF

Efficacy

- Think tank-like
- AWWG
- Bruce Jesson Foundation
- CAFCA
- CPAG
- Fabian Society
- Jobs Research Trust
- Kotare
  - Culture of group
  - Education incl. analysis
  - Efficacy
  - If think tank developed
  - Research
  - Think tank-like
- Nascent left wing think tanks (other) – past & current

Process

- Ethics
- Interview process
- Journal
- Language
- Methodological journey
  - Methodological May onwards
- NVivo and analysis
- Political journey
  - Political May onwards
- Possibilities for future research
- Reflexive statements
- Researcher assumptions
- Scoping, containment, definition
- Thesis journey
  - Thesis journey May onwards

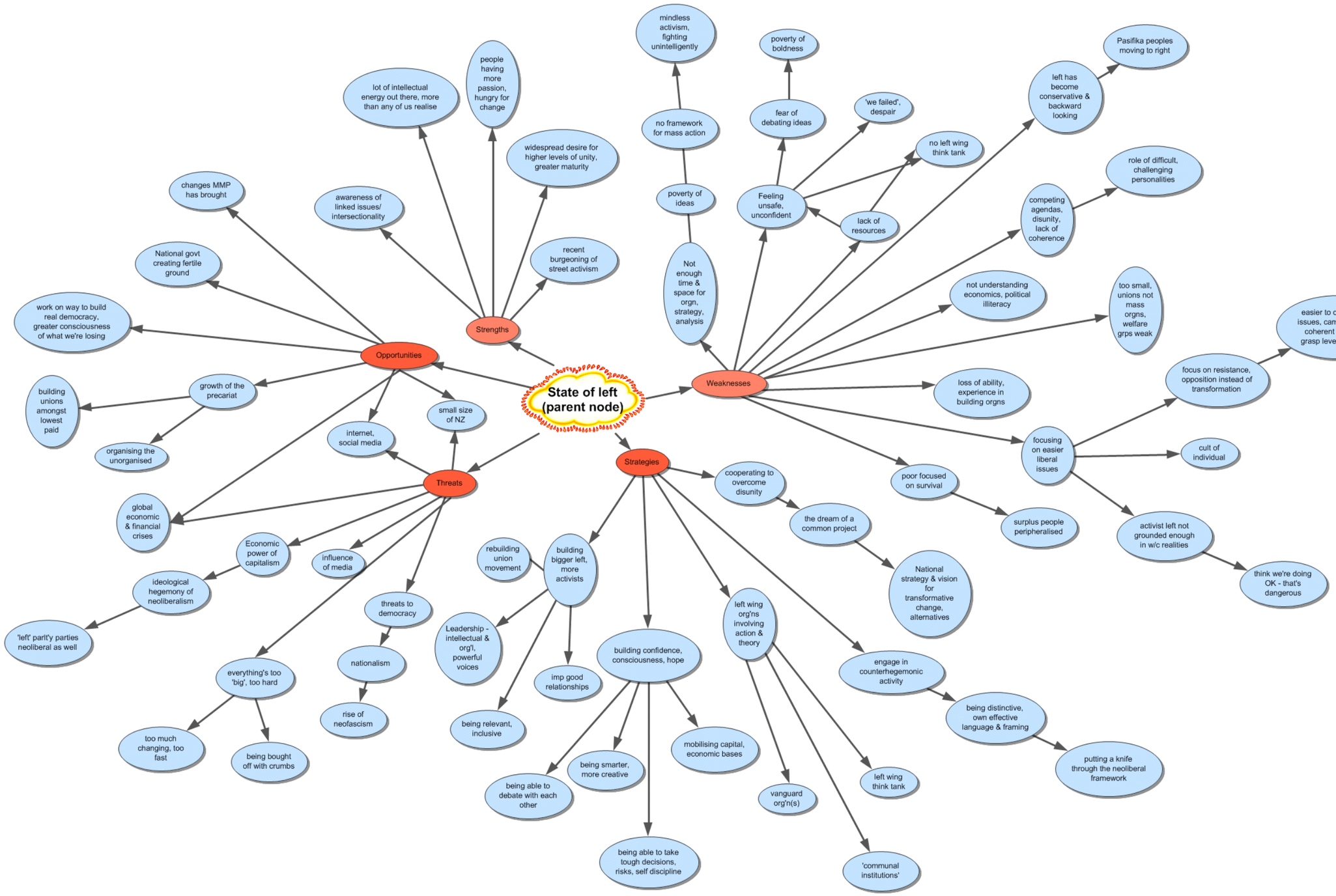
Think tank as project

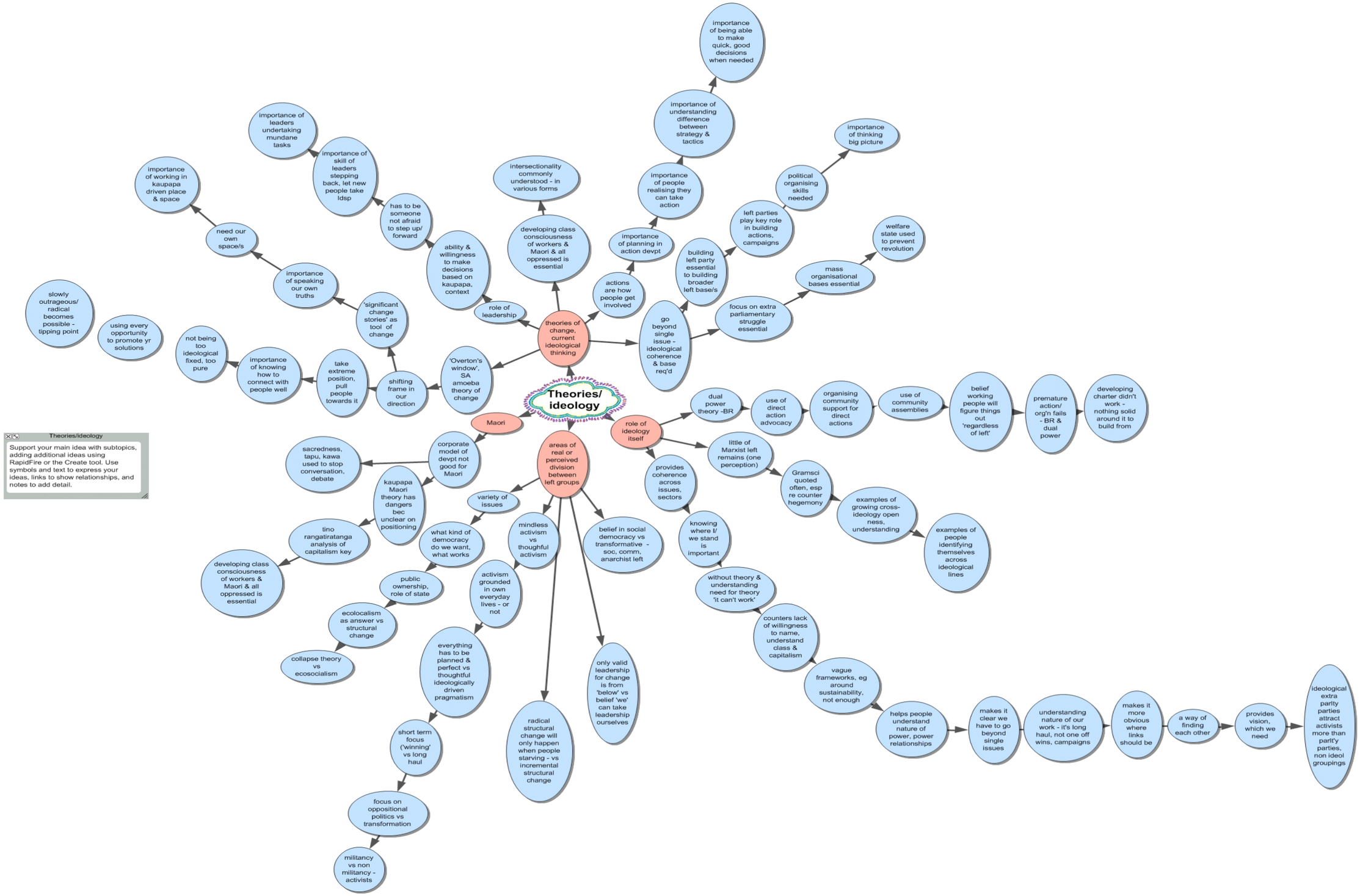
Think tanks, universities, government

- International think tanks – left

UK think tanks
US
International think tanks – right
Right & centre NZ think tanks
Attitudes of left
BRT
Maxim
NZ Initiative & NZ Institute
Universities
Government departments
Research culture
Think tank

Appendix I: Sample of two second-tier analytic diagrams




Theories/ideology
Support your main idea with subtopics, adding additional ideas using RapidFire or the Create tool. Use symbols and text to express your ideas, links to show relationships, and notes to add detail.
Theories/ ideology
theories of change, current ideological thinking
role of leadership
ability & willingness to make decisions based on kaupapa, context
has to be someone not afraid to step up/ forward
importance of skill of leaders stepping back, let new people take ldsp
importance of leaders undertaking mundane tasks
developing class consciousness of workers & Maori & all oppressed is essential
intersectionality commonly understood - in various forms
actions are how people get involved
importance of planning in action devpt
importance of people realising they can take action
importance of understanding difference between strategy & tactics
importance of being able to make quick, good decisions when needed
go beyond single issue - ideological coherence & base req'd
building left party essential to building broader left base/s
left parties play key role in building actions, campaigns
political organising skills needed
importance of thinking big picture
focus on extra parliamentary struggle essential
mass organisational bases essential
welfare state used to prevent revolution
'Overton's window', SA amoeba theory of change
shifting frame in our direction
'significant change stories' as tool of change
importance of speaking our own truths
need our own space/s
importance of working in kaupapa driven place & space
take extreme position, pull people towards it
importance of knowing how to connect with people well
not being too ideological fixed, too pure
using every opportunity to promote yr solutions
slowly outrageous/ radical becomes possible - tipping point
Maori
areas of real or perceived division between left groups
corporate model of devpt not good for Maori
sacredness, tapu, kawa used to stop conversation, debate
kaupapa Maori theory has dangers bec unclear on positioning
tino rangatiratanga analysis of capitalism key
developing class consciousness of workers & Maori & all oppressed is essential
variety of issues
what kind of democracy do we want, what works
public ownership, role of state
ecolocalism as answer vs structural change
collapse theory vs ecosocialism
mindless activism vs thoughful activism
activism grounded in own everyday lives - or not
everything has to be planned & perfect vs thoughtful ideologically driven pragmatism
short term focus ('winning' vs long haul
focus on oppositional politics vs transformation
militancy vs non militancy - activists
radical structural change will only happen when people starving - vs incremental structural change
belief in social democracy vs transformative - soc, comm, anarchist left
only valid leadership for change is from 'below' vs belief 'we' can take leadership ourselves
role of ideology itself
dual power theory -BR
use of direct action advocacy
organising community support for direct actions
use of community assemblies
belief working people will figure things out 'regardless of left'
premature action/ org'n fails - BR & dual power
developing charter didn't work - nothing solid around it to build from
little of Marxist left remains (one perception)
Gramsci quoted often, esp re counter hegemony
examples of growing cross-ideology open ness, understanding
examples of people identifying themselves across ideological lines
provides coherence across issues, sectors
knowing where I/ we stand is important
without theory & understanding need for theory 'it can't work'
counters lack of willingness to name, understand class & capitalism
vague frameworks, eg around sustainability, not enough
helps people understand nature of power, power relationships
makes it clear we have to go beyond single issues
understanding nature of our work - it's long haul, not one off wins, campaigns
makes it more obvious where links should be
a way of finding each other
provides vision, which we need
ideological extra parlty parties attract activists more than parl'y parties, non ideol groupings

Appendix J: Analytic memos—Some examples

Note: these are reproduced as written at the time and have not been upgraded to reflect standard referencing or grammatical requirements.

Spheres of influence

Would it be useful to look at the spheres of influence of the nascent left wing ttx? – see diagram p 556 Lindquist (1993).

At a minimum probably worth doing with the two case studies.

There are models of systems and spheres of influence.

But note dangers - in so much of the literature, question of how influence is and can be measured and determined in the world of think tanks, and social movements – very difficult to determine, a lot of work, no necessary agreement on methods, markers.

14/7/11

Political identity – think tank

30/11/11

Relationship between think tanks and political parties.

Another lens through which they can be viewed.

Relationships could be on a spectrum from non existent to total.

30/4/12 – reading B. Easton article in latest FCW – he is thinking a lot re lack of research and analysis in relation to health of social democracy, probably in particular the Labour Party.

If feels like a big topic here - around political identity of think tank, attributes relating to politics that could be negative or positive. At the moment will put as a kaupapa child - probably fits with how we'd see this vis a vis Kotare, but I'm not sure. 31/01/2013 2:30 p.m.

Complex genealogy

'Long and complex genealogy'

Idea of nascent left wing think tanks having a 'long and complex genealogy.' (See Lerner, LeHeron, Lewis 2007, p 242).

Not simple histories – the older and more complex the functions, the more interesting and the more is likely to be learned.

See also Finnegan (2009) review of Janet Conway (2006) – example of coalition in Toronto in the 1990s – period of history, experiences, splits – some parallels to 1990s in Auckland.

5 March 2012

Organising nodes – NVivo

Today I undertook the first really big reordering and restructuring of nodes, after the coding of 7 interviews completed. My one big mistake was losing almost all AUWRC child nodes at an early point before I understood what I was doing technically. Undo failed to return them, probably because I'd saved without thinking - will either retrieve them from backup, or cover these off again, in the awareness that some recoding would not necessarily be a bad thing in terms of reclarifying categories.
I think I still have far too many nodes (including child nodes) - around 200, though I keep deleting whenever I feel able.

However, I have managed to organise most categories into 13 major nodes: activism, activities of think tank, attitudes of left to think tank, barriers to think tank, funding, kaupapa, Maori, nascent left wing think tanks, perceptions (grab bag which includes perceptions of researcher by participants, great quotes, and surprises), research, strategies and issues for the left now, structure, think tanks and universities.
Don't have many strays left, hopefully these will fall into place as I go along... plus I'm sure some new reasonably major areas have yet to appear. Hopefully I'll be able to subsume them into existing nodes at some point, though it'll be interesting if they're bigger than that.
The key thing I need to remember when undertaking this sort of exercise is not to let myself be distracted by anything at all. 11/02/2013 12:16 p.m.

Spectrum of support –analysis

Analysing *x* interview, I'm aware that he is probably the most negative of all participants in terms of nature and level of support (or not) for any potential left wing think tank. I need to stay alert to where others are on this, however - especially I don't want to over egg the cake, so to speak, in thinking or suggesting that participants support the idea more than they really do.
Will need to write a section on the spectrum of support and how that rolls out across them all, and note any characteristics in relation to less/more/nature.

Also, I may need to query - why is *x* so negative compared to most -what elements make him this way? It does really stand out. The fact that he is already in a 'revolutionary party' - so doesn't have that sense of yearning for a new coherence, a new organisation? Does the fact that he's in a left sect mean that another 'thinking, research, analysis' organisation is a threat? Is it the fear of reformism, that it won't be revolutionary enough? and more - look closely. 27/02/2013 12:47 p.m.

Multiple identities - theme

I'm noticing today that multiple identities are starting to come through as a really strong theme - in our activist identities and where we sit on left. People often identify themselves in a whole diversity of ways both ideologically and practically. I suspect it's mainly a strength, but in some cases it could also potentially be a confusion like that reflected sometimes in discussions around intersectionality, and/or in the 'organisational seeking' - uncertainty about what they want, know the gap is there but not how it could or should be filled at present. This can relate to the activist - academic interface too, where people are 'activist academic' eg *y*, but not actually doing anything on the ground. 6/03/2013 4:07 p.m.

Organisational seeking and theories of change

I am starting to wonder, as I go through the *z* interview, whether there is an inherent link between the organisational seeking which is going on and the angsting and consciousness among younger activists particularly about theories of change? Their desire to have patterns and templates, everything mapped out ahead of them; the worship of 'victories' etc Is there an issue about wanting completion, perfection before anything can be done, which ends up blocking action, and may also block the development of new organisational forms?

Older generation activists reflect more (see recent conversation with B, R, M) - that we just went ahead and did things, and still do, without a) expecting perfection; b) having a template; with c) the willingness and ability to take risks and make fast decisions.

When young activists look around and see no parliamentary party they can support and no socialist, communist or anarchist organisation with which they feel at home, they end up in a kind of vacuum - means groups like *x* recruit fast, much to the frustration of others; dissipation of energy into mindless activism for some; others give up; long term commitment of core activists in student politics etc is lost, see what's happened with WATU - seems to have disappeared; loss of educational opportunities that come via ideologically centred organisations. 7/03/2013 8:54 a.m.

Appendix K: Indicative timeline

Key dates/events relating to researcher's activist life July 2010 – July 2013

2010

28 July	Invited to help establish the organisation which would become AAAP.
25 Aug	First formal meeting of AAAP formation group at Lifewise homeless centre, central Auckland.
27 Nov	Unite! national delegates' conference, Auckland. Matt McCarten and I both speak from the platform about the possibility of the formation of a new left parliamentary party.
3 Dec	AAAP - first direct action. Picket of Minister Paula Bennett's office in West Auckland, protesting against the government welfare reform programme.

2011

22 Feb	Devastating second round of Christchurch earthquakes occurs.
	Government Welfare Working Group report released; AAAP occupies Bennett's office, with four arrests. Action starts before AAAP aware of earthquakes.
30 April	Mana launched at Te Mahurehure Marae, Auckland. Invited as guest speaker; join party the same day.
3-4 Sept	Speak at four separate selection meetings within 24 hours as prospective general election candidate for Mana: Kaitaia, Kaikohe, Whangarei and Waitakere.
15 Oct	Take part in demonstration to establish Occupy camp at Aotea Square, central Auckland, and participate in first general assembly.
26 Nov	General election. National returns to power with support of ACT, United Future and the Maori Party. Labour, Greens, NZ First and Mana in opposition. Mana returns with just one MP, Hone Harawira.

2012

Jan	Occupy camp in Aotea Square (Auckland) closed down.
Feb	Student activists from WATU become increasingly involved in AAAP following demise of Occupy.

2-3 March	Two-day workshop run by Kotare for AAAP; division within group over role of 'winning' as key theory of change becomes visible.
March	Serious industrial unrest in Auckland with Ports of Auckland and Meatworkers' disputes. AAAP provides frequent support to pickets and marches.
May	Further upsurge in street action. Groups involved include WATU, AAAP, unions, supporters of those convicted of offences related to the Urewera raids in 2007.
1-2 June	Invited as a guest speaker to the Workers Party national conference in Wellington. A representative of the Dunedin-based International Socialist Organisation is also an invited guest.
12 June	Take part in a meeting of people interested in the possibility of forming a national ecosocialist network.
19 Sept	AAAP occupies MSD regional headquarters protesting latest welfare changes; I am arrested along with 5 others after locking on inside the building. First time I have personally used lock-on as part of direct action protest, a tactic passed on by younger generation activists.
Nov	AAAP establishes a physical base for the first time at the former Socialist Worker premises in Onehunga, now known as the Ecosocialist Centre.
10-12 Dec	First three day beneficiary 'impact' run by AAAP and other advocates outside the Onehunga Work & Income office; this launches AAAP's individual beneficiary advocacy service.

2013

7 Feb	Living Wage conference held at AUT; Guy Standing (UK) speaks on the precariat, UBI; I speak for AAAP on the links between welfare and work and the need for a progressive UBI in Aotearoa.
7 March	Hobgoblin, a nascent 'militant socialist' network based in Christchurch, invites my participation.
March	New group called Political Organisation Aotearoa appears online indicating they want to develop a "useful space" for dialogue around long term left strategy while retaining the anonymity of contributors.
26 March	I speak for Mana at the leadership's request at an all-Maori Te Runanga o Nga Kaimahi hui at Whakatane.

14 April	Mana AGM at Tokoroa - strategy for 2014 election discussed; first genuinely engaging inner party policy workshops that I've seen in Mana take place.
21 April	Former Socialist Worker comrades hold difficult internal meeting to decide the future of their former headquarters subsequent to their 2012 organisational demise (Lawless, 2012).
1-2 May	Union-community actions at two Pak'nSave stores organised by FIRST Union and AAAP.
30 May	Hobgoblin network pledges $2000 to support research report back meetings with left activists and academics nationally once my doctoral work is complete.
June-July	AAAP pilots its first eight-part education workshop series *Introduction to economics*.

Appendix L: Indicative timeline

Key dates relating to my life as a researcher July 2010 – July 2013

2010

July	Start methodically keeping thesis journal.
Sept	Enrol as full time PhD student.
Dec	Participate in national research hui as recipient of a Community Researcher Award (Tangata Whenua, Community & Voluntary Sector Research Centre).

2011

Jan – April	Begin to seriously engage with a number of methodologies including political autoethnography, radical community development theory and grounded theory methodology.
Aug – Nov	Take formal leave from study to campaign as a candidate for Mana in the general election.

2012

February	Join grounded theory group at AUT Akoranga campus.
April	Formally present 'D9' application for doctoral candidature and submit application for ethics approval to AUTEC. Research paradigm presented as constructivist grounded theory methodology (GTM).
May	Realise GTM is not appropriate. Start to engage with other possible methodologies, including varieties of ethnography.
June	Ethics application approved. Decide that political activist ethnography will be the methodological framework for the thesis.
15 June	First research interview. Start transcribing interviews as I go.
July	Article about my research published in *Foreign Control Watchdog.* A number of interested people make contact as a result.
June – Nov	51 interviews carried out around New Zealand.

November	Attend CEAD (Contemporary Ethnography Across the Disciplines) conference at Waikato University.
2013	
January	Transcriptions of 51 interviews now complete. Five transcriptions undertaken by a skilled volunteer, the rest I do myself.
Feb - April	Carry out coding of all interview transcripts and the thesis journal using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.
May - June	Second-tier analysis of selected data.
June	Presentation to AUT Postgraduate Student Conference *Exposed! – The fears and joys of keeping a thesis journal.*
July	Finish keeping thesis journal.
	Begin writing thesis proper.

Appendix M: Indicative timeline

Key dates: Auckland Action Against Poverty July 2010 – July 2013

2010

28 July 2010	Church and community leaders meet with me to ask for assistance in establishing a group capable of exposing and opposing the National Government's welfare reform programme.
25 August	First meeting held at Lifewise homeless centre in Airedale St.
3 December	First direct action: picket outside Henderson Work and Income office in protest against likely welfare reforms.

2011

22 February	Occupation of Social Development Minister Paula Bennett's office to oppose recommendations released that day by the Government Welfare Working Group. Coincides with the second round of devastating Christchurch earthquakes.
22 July	Picket of visiting Work and Pensions Minister Iain Duncan Smith, publicly supported by UK welfare and disability advocacy group counterparts.

2012

February	Students from WATU start becoming noticeably active in work of AAAP following the dissolution of the Auckland Occupy camp.
August	As the lead media spokesperson for AAAP from the group's founding until this point, I hand over the role to two young core activists in a deliberate bid to transfer leadership to the next generation.

19 September	AAAP members, including myself, stage a lock-on occupation at the regional headquarters of the Ministry of Social Development protesting the latest welfare changes, resulting in six arrests.
November	For the first time AAAP is able to establish a physical base from which to carry out its operations, at the former Socialist Worker headquarters in Onehunga. This is made possible with the support of groupings which emerged from the demise of that organisation in January 2012.
December	Three day beneficiary 'impact' held outside the Onehunga Work and Income office, launching AAAP's individual beneficiary (as opposed to political) advocacy service.

2013

April – July 2013	AAAP runs its first eight-part economics education workshop series for jobs and welfare activists.

Appendix N: Indicative timeline

Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre 1983-1999

Feb 1983	Public meeting establishes AUWRC in an old dark Methodist church hall just behind Karangahape Rd. Auckland Trades Council sets up its own Auckland Unemployed Workers Union (AUWU) on the same evening, triggering years of factional struggle between autonomous and union controlled groups.
July 1983	AUWRC organises first unemployed march in Auckland since the 1930s Depression, supported strongly by student allies from Auckland University campus.
April 1984	National hui hosted by Wellington Unemployed Workers Union marks beginning of substantial Maori involvement in the work of unemployed groups, including AUWRC.
1984	First AUWRC research project, aimed at identifying true levels of unemployment in several geographically-limited Auckland locations.
1987	Kaitaia hui brings warring factions within the unemployed movement together. AUWRC starts undertaking more extensive research and policy development work, including writing submissions for government processes such as the Royal Commission on Social Policy, and producing its own reports on topical issues.
Dec 1987	I am elected national coordinator of Te Roopu Rawakore o Aotearoa (national unemployed and beneficiaries' movement), while continuing to work locally with AUWRC. I remain in the national role until early 1990.

Oct-Nov 1988	March against Unemployment takes place, a national hīkoi from Te Hapua to Wellington; Job Search Tour carried out by South Island groups at the same time.
Nov 1988	Rival groups AUWRC and AUWU begin an amalgamation process.
1989	AUWRC starts publishing its own magazine *Mean Times*, as well as leading work on establishing the Auckland Region Employment Resource Centre (ARERC), supporting unemployed people and others to enter self-employment, small business or cooperative ventures. First Green Dollar Exchange in Auckland set up by AUWRC.
1990	Regular meetings of the New Vision group begin, carrying out analysis and reflection shared between AUWRC activists and religious friends and allies, mainly from Catholic liberation theology networks. AUWRC and ARERC together set up the first Auckland Peoples Centre, providing medical, hairdressing, chaplaincy, educational and other services for $5 per month per family (later $10) from new premises on the first floor of a semi-derelict building in the downtown central city.
1991	Community Medical Centre Trust established as a separate legal entity to run the medical and dental services. AUWRC plays a major role in organising demonstrations against the National Government's benefit cuts.
1992	Auckland Peoples Centre invaded by police following three days of AUWRC demonstrations outside a government conference promoting foreign investment in New Zealand, with arrests and injuries resulting.

July 1992	AUWRC disaffiliates from Te Roopu Rawakore after a national hui in Christchurch leads the national organisation to splinter into irreconcilable factions.
1993	Second Peoples Centre established in Manurewa.
1993-1994	AUWRC plays coordinating role in the Building our own Future (BOOF) project, a national initiative funded by the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand .
	AUWRC runs a series of *People Centred Economic Development* workshops for Peoples Centre members and others interested in learning about radical left alternatives to the existing current economic and political system.
1994	AUWRC begins to edit and produce a second regular magazine *Common Ground*, circulated among the Peoples Network of individuals and groups who had been involved in BOOF and the wide range of follow up activities generated by the project.
1996-1997	AUWRC undertakes two national Unemployed Roadshow theatre tours with the assistance of community theatre director Paul Maunder, telling in dramatic form stories about unemployment, workers' rights and the impact of globalisation.
1997	AUWRC co-hosts *Beyond Poverty* national conference of academics and activists at Massey University in Albany, in association with Mike O'Brien and others.
1998	Three Peoples Centres now operating in central Auckland, Manurewa and Mangere. AUWRC co-hosts second national conference *Social responsibility: Whose agenda?* at Massey University.
	AUWRC has one year contract to act as organisational base for COMMACT, the local branch of a Commonwealth-wide NGO

working in the field of people-centred community economic development.

Fledgling project to establish a left wing think tank is one product of the *Social Responsibility* conference, but fails to make headway.

1999 AUWRC officially shuts down on 30 June 1999, after four months of intense discussion and reflection. Participation in a pilot Social Audit project 1998-1999 helped lead the group to the decision to close. Several organisations which AUWRC had helped establish and/or maintain continued to operate, for varying periods. Kotare Trust was the only substantial one of these groups still in existence in July 2013.

Appendix O: Acronyms and abbreviations

AAAP	Auckland Action Against Poverty
ARENA	Action, Research and Education Network Aotearoa
ARERC	Auckland Region Employment Resource Centre
ASB	ASB Bank New Zealand
AUT	Auckland University of Technology
AUWRC	Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre
AUWU	Auckland Unemployed Workers Union
AWWG	Alternative Welfare Working Group
BAFNZ	Beneficiary Advocacy Federation of New Zealand
BJF	Bruce Jesson Foundation
BOOF	Building Our Own Future
CAFCA	Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa
CCANZ	Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand
CCPA	Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
COMMACT	Common Wealth Network for People-Centred Development
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPAG	Child Poverty Action Group
CPD	Centre for Policy Development (Australia)
CTU	New Zealand Council of Trade Unions
CWP	Canada Without Poverty
ECA	Employment Contracts Act (1991)
ERA	Employment Relations Act (2000)
FIRST	Finance, Industrial (Textile and Wood), Retail, Stores & Transport
FPP	First Past the Post (voting system)

GLBTI	Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex
GTM	Grounded theory methodology
HART	Halt All Racist Tours
IE	Institutional ethnography
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research (UK)
ISO	International Socialist Organisation
JRF	Jimmy Reid Foundation (Scotland)
JRT	Jobs Research Trust
Kotare	Kotare Research and Education for Social Change in Aotearoa Trust
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
MMP	Mixed Member Proportional (voting system)
MP	Member of Parliament
NAPO	National Anti-Poverty Organization (Canada)
NEF	New Economics Foundation (UK)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NZBRT	New Zealand Business Round Table
PAE	Political activist ethnography
PAR	Participatory action research
PI	Pacific Islander
POA	Political Organisation Aotearoa
RLF	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Germany)
SEARCH	Social Education, Action and Research concerning Humanity Foundation (Australia)
SFWU	Service and Food Workers Union
SLR	*Scottish Left Review*
SUP	Socialist Unity Party
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (analytical planning method)

TOES	The Other Economic Summit
TPPA	Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement
VUW	Victoria University of Wellington
WATU	We Are the University
WISSE	Workers Institute of Scientific Socialist Education
WFF	Working for Families