Jane Kelsey: Transformative Change

This paper was delivered to the Wellington Fabians on 19 March 2025.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sEgtK01UZAGDbdjPoh65tWguey1Tr_u-hlcjNZiSwjk/edit?tab=t.0

Some of you may remember my last book, *The FIRE Economy*, in 2016 had a quote from Antonio Gramsci as its centrepiece. Writing in the 1920s, Gramsci observed that "we have entered an interregnum. The old is dying. We are surrounded by morbid symptoms of its demise. The new is yet to be born."

A similar dynamic is playing out now, especially across western capitalist democracies that have largely been stable since WWII. The economic, political, cultural, and ideological form of the "new" will be heavily contested. The state as we know it will be remade. The eventual outcome could be deeply destructive or it could be progressively transformative, in response to radical disruption and equally radical responses. It will also be driven by factors outside the traditional political calculus, especially the multi-dimensional impacts of the climate emergency.

The turbulence that shapes "the new" is currently being driven by oligarchs and organic intellectuals of capital who are harnessing the levers of political power to serve their interests and ideologies, leaving political parties and economic institutions that remain obeisant to the failing status quo in disarray. Those who seek to disrupt and dismantle have a game plan and abundant resources, even if they have no clear or agreed destination. One prescient reader of my draft questioned whether we are still in the interregnum; another was adamant that we are!

If there is a single takeaway from this talk, it's that this is not a short-term blip. Business-as-usual is no longer tenable. Yet those aligned to the status quo struggle to recognise that and are certainly not preparing for alternatives. The challenge and opportunity for those of us who seek a progressive transformation is to move beyond this sclerotic status quo. Are we, and especially those of you in the Fabians who are aligned to the Labour Party, prepared and preparing to do that as we look to, and beyond, the 2026 election?

My response to this question will necessarily be very selective given the crazy state of the world and Aotearoa and my limited time. As I focus on the state, I'm not going to address in any detail the big issues, like genocidal wars or trade wars, the geopolitics of declining and rising hegemons, the climate emergency, or the relentless assault on Māori and te Tiriti, except as part of the context. So please treat this as a conversation with which to engage.

I have split my analysis into three parts. The **first** is a big picture overview of the collapse of western hegemony of the past 80 years, which centred on industrial and then financialised capitalism and liberal democracy, into a state of anarchy, autocracy and imperialism. The **second** part analyses our home-grown version of neo-colonialism, disruption, destruction and corruption, as we watch this Coalition government build on the calculated and systemic remaking of the state in the 1980s and 1990s. The **conclusion** asks how we confront the short and longer-term challenges these developments pose.

The interregnum and its morbid symptoms

Let's start with the big picture: the interregnum and its morbid symptoms. I will highlight just five. You will identify many more.

First, the hyper-globalisation of the late 1990s celebrated a rapacious form of financialised capitalism; deep transnational integration of capital, production and supply chains; minimalist, pro-market regulation, nationally and globally. The economic, social, political and ecological price were irrelevant.

As some of us predicted, hyper-globalisation is now imploding and taking liberal democracy with it, especially but not only as the US responds to the reality that, while it remains powerful, it is no longer hegemonic – an ironic consequence of hyperglobalisation. That poses a particular crisis for countries, including ours, who have maintained an ostrich-like adherence to that agenda under the guise of an international "rules-based" order that in reality depends on US hegemony and imperialism and from which the US long considered itself exempt.

This implosion is not just a recent product of Trump. We have been tracking this dynamic for years, as wealthy countries, led by the US, sabotaged international institutions they initially created but could no longer control and rewrote the economic model they could no longer dominate. Recent appeals to on-shoring, near-shoring, friend-shoring and punitive tariffs, and recent calls to build supply chain resilience, are all designed to counter China's dominance in key products and regions.

Trump has brought this to a head, exposing the fragility of countries that drank the Kool Aid of free trade, comparative advantage and integrated supply chains. The New Zealand economy, like many others, is simply not structured or equipped to respond to this upheaval and its socio-economic consequences.

A second international trend is the fracturing of traditional political party politics based on centre-right or centre-left positions that have shared an accommodation within the western capitalist hegemonic model. The marginalisation, breakdown and dismantling of state institutions and a purge of the state bureaucracy in many countries has accompanied the rise of autocrats who are determined to by-pass

obstructions within existing political and judicial systems and constitutional arrangements.

The parallel rise of small extreme right-wing parties, especially in coalitions, has redistributed power to those who have little allegiance to the institutions and procedures of democratic governance and state agencies, or the international "rules based" system. Those with power, especially corporate power, don't need them to survive and calculate they are better off without them. Because the transfer of political power to vested interest private elites cannot easily be reversed, it needs to be resisted in the short term. Small and peripheral countries like ours, with a thin political system, are both extremely vulnerable and in a strong position to resist. Where that fails, long term reconstruction will demand radical thinking out of the box.

A third factor is orchestrated anarchy in the information space. The biases in the mainstream media, both publicly and privately owned, have been identifiable and could be contested through other information pathways, including education, public meetings, publications, etc. Now the control of information, especially data, and the generation of post-human technologies like AI, in the hands of private and unaccountable techno-elites has created echo-chambers that perpetuate misinformation and toxicity, while enabling manipulation for political and commercial ends. Even where that corruption is blatant, the platforms are so ubiquitous that their power is hard to neutralise.

Allied to that is the inversion of progressive concepts and transformative strategies into slogans such as "woke" or "DEI" used to justify their termination with substantive discussion. Again, small countries may be both dependent and fortunate; here Māori AI developers and techpreneurs in the Pacific are showing what can be done as they seek to reassert sovereignty over data and services.

Fourth, the calculated revictimization of Indigenous Peoples, migrants, refugees and workers has applied a new rationale to an old objective to seize and exploit scarce resources to maintain empires. This is taking many forms.

One example is the so-called "green economy" that seeks to capitalise on climate change. China currently dominates the supply chains for critical minerals that are "the new oil" that fuels these technologies. The US and states within its orbit are seeking to shore up US corporate and strategic power over critical minerals and neutralise China, even when that puts them in conflict. The recent Indo-Pacific Economic Framework negotiations and the resulting "critical minerals dialogue" exemplified that. The interface between so-called energy security, supply chain resilience and militarisation is also resurgent, and being used to justify the seizure of territories, and the repression of Indigenous resistance through civilian and paramilitary forces that are supported as required by the state.

My final factor is the systematic destruction of redistributive and social policies that previously stabilised the inequalities of capitalism and secured a sense of social license. Those inequalities of wealth and income have been intensified through the hyperglobalised FIRE economy (finance, insurance and real estate) that I wrote about in my last book. The obscene accumulation of wealth by kleptocracies, the deregulation of profit-making activities to benefit mega-corporations, the transfer of public debt of the state to private debt of households, and their precarious human existence are further symptoms. The institutional, legal and normative tools that were used to achieve and embed hyperglobalisation and the neoliberal agenda remain in place.

That's enough to show where we are now. These are all morbid symptoms of a radically unstable and changing world. To repeat, this is not just a Trump phenomenon. The decline of American capitalism and hegemony has been evident for decades. Trump is literally trying to "make American great again" against all the odds.

The consequences are revolutionary. It is no coincidence that the driving forces are libertarians, whose strategy is to be so disruptive that the state cannot be restored. The status quo ante will not be reinstated after 4 years of Trump. As we are seeing now, the economic impacts are systemically destructive and the politics are contagious.

Bringing this home to Aotearoa

Now let's look at the domestic front. We are experiencing a related crisis of the liberal democratic state and colonial constitutionalism, born of the same failed model, and a familiar strategy by fringe parties seeking to remake both to their agenda.

This audience will remember the 1980s and what Naomi Klein's described as "shock doctrine" Rogernomics under the 4th Labour government, followed by National's Richardson and Shipley. The strategy, celebrated in chapter 10 of Douglas's book *Unfinished business,* had three elements that are all too familiar today:

1. Blitzkrieg: Move as fast as you can on as many fronts as you can so your critics are left trying to understand and respond to last week's announcements as you move forward with the next. I think Brian Easton was the first to apply this term. As someone who wrote 5 submissions over the summer "break" on rushed legislation that was simply justified as implementing a coalition agreement, plus inputs to three Waitangi Tribunal inquiries, I can attest we are definitely in that mode.

2. Scorched earth: Move rapidly and radically to dismantle what you see as problematic, making sure that it can't be simply restored by the next or a future

government. Don't worry about what to replace it with. Where some activities need to continue, hand control to the private sector. Where "the market" isn't interested there clearly is no demand or value. The downsides of destruction are not the state's, or at least the implementing government's, problem.

The combination of bitzkrieg and scorched earth since October 2023 has repealed legislation, stripped Te Tiriti from the public sector and run down the Waitangi Tribunal, sacked thousands of public servants and closed down Crown agencies, terminated research funding and institutions, authorised extractives without environmental or Tiriti protections, terminated social and emergency housing support, and so much more.

3. Kamikaze politics: Popularity of the policies and the party is not what matters. The priority commitment is to the ideology and objectives, not to re-election. So proceed at pace on the assumption you won't be re-elected. It's good fortune if you are, so you can continue. To avoid the political risk of roll-back you need to stack the deck and put in place enough fire alarms to maximise the political cost of subsequent governments trying to undo any of this.

It is staggering how two fringe political parties with less than 9% and 7% of the vote have manipulated a centrist party to bind itself to a coalition agreement that allows them to do all this. That reinforces my long-standing criticism of MMP as party-centric, where traditional parties become inert, focusing on the centre ground, yet captive to back room deals with the fringe. This trend is becoming more extreme, emboldened by similar trends and strategies elsewhere.

As these three elements succeed, old maintream parties can no longer assume a liberal democracy as the status quo.

A further element of radical neoliberalism is critically important, informed by institutional economics. The strategy belongs to the American-led schools of "economic constitutionalism" espoused by James Buchanan, and Law and Economics by Richard Epstein.

The application of institutional economics in Aotearoa is best articulated in a book by Murray Horn, Secretary to the Treasury from 1993-1997 *The Political Economy of Public Administration. Institutional Choice in the Public Sector*. To paraphrase: the system of electoral democracy and political sovereignty poses problems of commitment to the new regime and risks of "political slippage" that radical changes will be undone. Institutional mechanisms need to be put in place that prevent this occurring. As with Ulysses (whom I am told is a rebranded Odysseus), the reforming government needs to tie itself to the mast voluntarily so it, and successive governments, will resist the calls of the sirens that would drive the ship of state onto the rocks.

There is no single institutional design to achieve this. Although the purpose is the

same, the form may differ according to the subject. Often it involves legislation that disciplines governments to abide by selected “principles” that serve neoliberal objectives, and be held accountable if they fail to do so. Couched in normative language, such as “responsibility”, “stability”, “prudent”, governments that fail to comply can be cast as irresponsible, imprudent or fostering instability. The deck is stacked with “independent” oversight bodies whose powers and functions are to safeguard the regime and act as fire alarms. You should easily recognise the core elements of the State-owned Enterprise Act 1986 and consequent privatisations, State Sector Act 1988, Reserve Bank Act 1989, Public Finance Act 1989, Fiscal Responsibility Act 1994, alongside binding and enforceable free trade and investment agreements.

The missing piece was a Regulatory Responsibility Act. Rebranded a Regulatory Standards Bill, that is currently about to make its fourth appearance before the House, having been rejected three times already. This time it aims to bypass similar scrutiny through the backdoor of National and ACT’s Coalition Agreement. Unlike the Treaty Principles Bill, National has agreed to see this Bill into legislation. NZ First’s coalition agreement commits to support the ACT National deal. A Cabinet Directive tells officials their job is to implement the Coalition Agreements.

I don’t intend to explain the Bill in detail; you can find plenty of critical analysis online. I’m more concerned about its systemic intentions and context. It is also an important reminder that inter-locking, hugely well-funded think tanks are still extremely powerful in devising and advancing systemic transformation, in this case the Business Roundtable and its successor the New Zealand Initiative.

In 1998 the Business Roundtable launched a “regulatory statute research project”, led by Bryce Wilkinson and modelled on the Fiscal Responsibility Act 1994. A workshop in 1999 on the concept of a regulatory constitution, featuring US law and economics guru Richard Epstein, was written up as *Towards a Regulatory Constitution* – now available on the New Zealand Initiative website. Bryce Wilkinson followed in 2001 with *Constraining Government Regulation*, to which he annexed a draft Regulatory Responsibility Bill (RRB). Then came *Restraining Leviathan* in 2004 , which reviewed the Fiscal Responsibility Act and attached a draft New Zealand Taxpayer Bill of Rights.

A member’s bill in the name of Rodney Hide, based on Wilkinson’s RRB text, had its first reading in 2007. It went to the Commerce Select committee, which rejected the Bill and recommended a high-level task force to look at regulatory issues, with membership that had no predetermined position. Instead, the National ACT coalition in 2008 appointed Hide as Minister for Regulatory Responsibility and set up a Regulatory Responsibility Taskforce, chaired by former Treasury Secretary Graham Scott and including Bryce Wilkinson. Predictably, its report in 2009 recommended a slightly amended version renamed the Regulatory Standards Bill (RSB). That went

to select committee in 2011, and was strenuously opposed even by Treasury. The Bill lapsed. Seymour made another attempt in 2021; it was defeated by 77 votes at 1st reading.

So this is the 4th attempt at fundamentally the same bill (the proposal for judicial declarations of inconsistency has been replaced by review by a Regulatory Standards Board). The interim Regulatory Impact Statement of 30 october 2024 that was put out for consultation reveals a pre-determination as the Minister insisted the previous bill was the starting point for the analysis. Seymour's own new Ministry of Regulation said legislation wasn't needed. Submissions on the consultation document closed in January. The response I received to an Official Information Act request for the advice provided to Seymour contained just one document - that showed (an anonymised but obvious) Bryce Wilkinson had been directly lobbying officials, and had provided them with Epstein's tract on regulatory takings and an AI generated list of potential questions and responses to Epstein's report.

Let me just highlight a couple of features of this latest version of the Bill.
First, the benign-sounding principles it proposes, such as equality, regulatory stewardship and private property rights, are defined through libertarian ideology.

Second, te Tiriti is not among those principles, meaning it is subordinated and potentially over-ridden by "principles" similar to those that were resoundingly rejected in submissions on the Treaty Principles Bill. If passed, this bill could have a similar de facto effect.

Third, Horne's strategy is to the fore. The Bill combines norm-sounding "principles of good regulatory practice" and confessions of non-compliance, ministerially-determined guidelines, ministerially-defined scope, and a ministerially-appointed Regulatory Standards Board that can receive complaints and initiate inquiries over non-compliance, as well as review existing regulation against the principles.

A **fourth**, critical element, is the protection of wealth and power by importing the US concept of "regulatory takings" championed by Richard Epstein. A "taking" would exist when as-yet undefined forms of regulation "impair" as-yet undefined private property rights, and create a right to as-yet undefined "fair compensation". It is unclear how the takings rules would be implemented, but some of its targets are predictable: measures to address climate change; stronger labour and health and safety protections; reversing the mining, fast track and GMO licenses and permits issued under this government; stronger regulations on gambling or vapes, are just some. But it could also stymie market-based competition measures to break up the supermarket or electricity oligopolies, rein in the usurious banks, or force competition at duty free shops.

It's champions have offered various rationale for the Bill.

Bryce Wilkinson describes it as “a modest transparency measure” based on property, liberty and transparency, which will better inform the public about laws and regulations likely to make New Zealanders worse off. “It will not otherwise stop anything”. That’s not how he has sold it in the past and the OIA document shows he has vigorously lobbied for an Epstein-style regulatory takings rule. It is also deeply ironic, given how this coalition government has rammed through ideologically-driven legislation with no proper scrutiny or analysis, and serious lack of “transparency” - the antithesis of what it considers “best practice regulation”.

Seymour’s argument is different: low productivity can be blamed on poor regulation, so passing the Bill is necessary to boost productivity and wages. Bill Rosenberg debunked the productivity arguments in a New Zealand Herald op ed on 6 February.

Richard Prebble offers a more honest ideological explanation. He argues that the bill is so important for the protection of individual freedoms, above all else, that Seymour should call it the New Zealand Magna Carta. Prebble also quotes Wilkinson’s complaint that many regulations are rushed, badly written, hard to understand, sometimes contradictory and cost more than any benefit. A case of “do as I say, not as I do …”.

The Bill is likely to be introduced in the next couple of months, unless NZ First pulls the plug. New Zealand’s “economic constitution” might then be considered complete. Or maybe its architects are preparing for phase three?

One final point on the strategy of economic constitutionalism. Architects of Rogernomics-style “structural adjustment” describe two phases: radical upheaval needs to be followed by consolidation where the radical reshaping of the state becomes the norm, maybe with some rough edges knocked off.

That’s what we’ve had from successive National and Labour governments over the past forty years, whether the Clark Labour government’s “3rd way” or Key’s Tory centralism. The “economic constitution” became embedded as the norm. They made no pretence of change. Then Jacinda Ardern declared on election night in 2017 that neoliberalism has failed and government intervention is necessary so the market will not dictate matters. Instead, Covid years aside, they tinkered. An emboldened ACT is now taking it to a new level in a strategy that well precedes Trump’s first election, with New Zealand First sailing its own waka and National in a support role. We can expect that the next steps are already being hatched in the cloisters of the NZ Institute, Taxpayers’ Union, Hobson’s Choice or Muriel Newman’s group, and Atlas Foundation.

So what do we do?

This is all pretty daunting. How do those of us who consider ourselves Tiriti

focused and progressive organise to counter this, domestically and internationally?

Two state of the nation speeches in the past month provide a huge contrast. Greens co leaders Chloe Swarbrick and Marama Davidson's State of the Planet speech engaged a number of the issues I raised at the start. Yes, they have the luxury to do so without having to secure a majority. But they are calling for transformation.

Chris Hipkins' State of the Nation speech at the Labour Party conference was pure status quo, and failed to acknowledge that the world has changed forever. The idea of bipartisanship with National and "not dialing back" all the coalition's policies and projects, without indicating what stays and what goes. Even where there is a position there is no advocacy. For example, I'm aware of one statement in the House from Chris Hipkins that Labour will oppose the RSB and a column from Duncan Webb on LinkedIn, its own form of echo chamber. But it has not attempted to build a constituency to oppose the Bill. We are looking down the barrel of a new phase of neoliberalism that gets embedded, and whose advocates get emboldened even further. We are no longer in a place where this kind of bland middle ground politics to secure three years in government can be the goal.

Hipkins said "We will have a new plan going forward." But there is no sign of that plan. Instead, the focus is on health, housing and jobs. Yes, they are pivotal to people's daily lives. Focusing on them might even get Labour past the post at the next election, if the Coalition's fortunes continue to decline. But even if Labour could form a government, those priorities will soon be overwhelmed by external dynamics. We face a very real prospect of a deep systemic financial, as well as economic crisis, born of our narrow dependency on primary exports. That exposes our lack of self-sufficiency and the inadequacy of the international rule-based system to which successive bipartisan governments are wedded. Nor will governments be able to continue sitting on the fence between China and the US. That's before we deal with the climate crisis, including refugees from an increasingly precarious Pacific, that seems too hot for Labour to handle.

Labour also seems to be running away from te Tiriti, as it did when in government when ditching its cautious recognition of rangatiratanga and mana whenua in He Puapua and water. The failure to make brave (or almost any) appointments to the Waitangi Tribunal has allowed the Coalition to white-ant it and Prebble to pull a disingenuous stunt of being appointed and resigning. Again, this position is not sustainable.

Waitangi this year was a powerful statement that Māori intend to set the terms of this debate, and many allies across Aotearoa will be there with them. The Waitangi Tribunal's Constitutional Kaupapa inquiry will pick up steam this year. It won't report in a hurry but it will help galvanise Māori confidence to assert constitutional transformation in the Tiriti space. At the same time, the ACT and NZ First agenda,

enabled by National, has emboldened the peddlers of racism and reinvigorated colonialism, and that continue now into local government.

Being Tiriti-averse in this context is taking sides. The Greens have understood that. Te Pāti Māori has a new lease of life. Both are still stuck in the contradictions of a colonial parliamentary structure, but there is space for and commitment to dialogue.

Where is Labour? Is the anti-Tiriti crusade that has dismantled those incremental steps the Crown has taken over recent decades, part of what Labour won't dial back? We need to know. I was struck by Chris Hikpins one reference that "Toitū Te Tiriti Hikoi showed beyond doubt the pride we have in who we are". But do we know "who we are"? I doubt that my answer is the same as his. I'm not suggesting that political parties of the colonial state are suddenly going to embrace rangatiratanga and lead constitutional transformation. We know, most recently in 1984, that significant political shifts on Te Tiriti are the products of activism and sacrifice. But a government cannot remain agnostic in the face of mounting Māori pressure and rampant racism. Te Tiriti, Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti can't simply be put back in the box to appeal to some middle ground to get elected.

So, in conclusion, what do we need from a progressive coalition government in the next two terms? Let me offer six ideas.

1. Don't hide behind the need to maintain the integrity of liberal democracy intact. It is not intact in Aotearoa or internationally and it will not be again. So take a leaf out of the new book of global and national politics. Make meaningful, radical change that will be hard to undo in the knowledge that you may not get re-elected in another 3 years' time. Adopt embedding mechanisms, stack the decks and install the fire alarms, anticipating the attack strategies that will be used to undermine them. Aggressively build substantial constituencies and coalitions that will provide strong and committed public support and who will defend the gains when the right returns to government (or threatens to).

2. Start with Te Tiriti. Do not run away from the constitutional dialogue or set in train a process that has barely begun by the time your term ends. There can and should be common ground among progressive coalition political parties, but they are all still part of the kāwanatanga. Recognise that there was no cession of sovereignty and genuinely ask what that means for Aotearoa and the constitutional relationship of rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga. Open the space for dialogue with Māori by working to agree on a 5 point plan to address future constitutional arrangements. Lay those foundations at Waitangi next year.

3. Jettison the blind adherence to free trade and comparative advantage that has

left us vulnerable. Whatever one thought of it before, and I was never a fan, that bus left the station well before Trump. Successive Productivity Commission reports on Frontier Firms (2021) and the Resilience inquiry (2024) provide some principled foundations to build a strategic plan for more self-reliant goods, services and digital technology. Ironically, National's plan for more domestic input to government procurement is a positive start, albeit probably in breach of international trade obligations. And move to terminate the investor protections and investor state dispute mechanisms in agreements with China, Canada, Japan, Singapore and others that would have a similar chilling effect on progressive policies as a regulatory takings rule.

4. Undo or suspend the bad laws the Coalition has introduced, with three priorities. One is the systemic laws and procedures they have instituted, starting with the RSB and proposed financial deregulation if they are passed. Next should be the Fiscal Responsibility Act, exposing its role as the instrument of privatising already relatively low levels of public debt to the benefit of the wealthy and creating inter-generational burdens of private debt on the poor and middle class.

The second priority must be to repeal those laws, regulations and directives that threaten the greatest harm to families, workers, Māori and mana whenua, the environment, people's livelihoods and dignity, migrant communities and those initiatives denigrated as "woke" and "DEI". Many will still be in the process of implementation. Before everything has been dismantled, the easiest approach will be simply to repeal and reinstate, where prior policies were working. That minimises the policy work and can be achieved. But that can only be an interim measure, as those prior policies are too often "lipstick on a neoliberal pig". Systemic changes involve revenue, expenditure and social transformation. The obvious starting point is a capital gains or wealth tax that can address both inequality and revenue.

Third, do not proceed with PPPs, which are well-documented as cash cows for investment capital who receive a guaranteed income stream and first call on public funds, with a long history of failures that result in default and non-delivery. Simon Wilson has an excellent column on this in this week's Herald. There are other low-risk, publicly-oriented options, for example requiring electricity providers to reinvest into the energy infrastructure or creation of a Ministry of Green Works to provide for housing, infrastructure and climate change solutions.

5. Plan how to restore authority and capacity to a dismantled, demoralised and

deskilled state sector. A streamlined public service is not a bad thing, given the expansion of managerialism under neoliberalism. And another massive round of restructuring is not a good thing. Work needs to start now on what capacity, research and mechanisms are important for addressing the critical challenges as they intensify internationally and here, including how to respond to another financial crisis or pandemic. But agencies like Treasury, MFAT and MBIE are so deeply embedded in the neoliberal paradigm they are not capable of confronting the new realities. Ruthless strategies are needed to confront the institutional power of those agencies, albeit akin to shifting the Titanic.

6. Activate and invest in small-p politics outside the state and political parties that is not just activist but builds analysis and strategy. In this "asymmetric democracy" the powerful have been able to dominate through their lobby groups, threats to disinvest, research institutions, news media, ownership of tech platforms and social networks, money to pay lobbyists, influencers and researchers. Those institutions are being reconstituted endlessly.

   Progressive institutions, like unions and community organizations, have never recovered from the direct and systemic attacks of early neoliberalism that became embedded over time. Renewed attacks on resources and public contracts on which communities and their providers came to depend on, Māori especially, have severely depleted the social infrastructure. Public good institutions of media and universities have been reduced to shells and we no longer have strong public intellectuals to bolster resistance. Some of us will invest some "retirement" in mentoring and support but young people have to be motivated inspired. But that requires organising outside the political par3es.

I would like to be confident that we can create the political climate to shift from a supine liberal democracy to play its role in grappling with these challenges. But achieving all this, and much much more, requires a government that is brave and does not exist solely to get re-elected. Business as usual will be politically reckless, negligent, and ineffectual.

Realistically, change won't happen through political parties. It will only happen when people force the issues to the front line. Māori are doing that now. That will continue. But who else is doing what? Transformative change needs high quality analysis and strategies. That requires resources and intellectual grunt that has not really existed in Aotearoa since the early years of Rogernomics. Filling that void is the challenge for those of us here tonight.12